

Sussex Probation Area

Inspection report

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Type of provider: Sussex Probation Area

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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

Sussex Probation Area (Sussex Probation) encompasses both urban and rural locations within the two counties of East and West Sussex. The area also includes the cosmopolitan city of Brighton and Hove. Sussex Probation employs 500 staff who manage approximately 5000 offenders serving sentences in the community. Offenders carry out over 200,000 hours of unpaid work in the community every year, serving nine magistrates' courts and two crown courts. Two prisons, HMP Lewes, a category B prison, and HMP Ford, an open prison are located within the area. One approved premises is located within the area for offenders released on licence. Sussex Probation produces more than 4,000 reports a year for the courts it serves. Employment rates are generally high in most parts of Sussex; however, there are also a few areas of deprivation. The minority ethnic population for the area is 8.7%. The number of offenders from minority ethnic groups represents 14% of Sussex Probation's caseload. The proportion of women on the caseload represents 13%, in line with the national average. Approximately 64% of offenders were unemployed at the time of sentence.

The strategic lead with overall responsibility and accountability for Offender Employment & Skills is the Director of Interventions who is supported by two Deputy Offender Employment & Skills Managers. The Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) provider, Creating Futures Limited, works on site in each of Sussex Probation's local delivery units. Creating Futures Limited also delivers MATRIX accredited information, advice and guidance under the nextstep contract. The OLASS contract expires at the end of March 2010.

The previous inspection under offender management inspection (OMI) 1 took place in July 2007. Sussex Probation is currently in the process of merging with Surrey Probation Area which was inspected under OMI 2 in February 2010. The two areas will combine to form the Surrey and Sussex Probation Trust.

Information about the offender learning and employability providers:

Lead OLASS providers and their subcontractors	Number of learners on discrete provision	Types of provision
Further education colleges	42	Various vocational courses
Further education colleges	Variable	Skills for Life
Chichester College	10	Painting and decorating

Other providers	Number of learners	Type of provision
Right Choice	21	Food hygiene
Community Learning		Various personal development courses
Progress to Work	32	Employability courses
CITB	35	Construction site certification scheme (CSCS) training
SIGTA	27	Forklift truck and 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	good
Assessment and sentence planning	
Implementation of interventions	
Achieving and sustaining outcomes	satisfactory
Leadership and management	satisfactory
Equality and diversity	satisfactory
Safeguarding	satisfactory

Overall effectiveness, including capacity to improve

Sussex Probation provided good access to information, advice and guidance. Links between education, training and employment workers and offender managers were very effective. Initial assessment of offenders' literacy, numeracy and language needs was not sufficiently thorough.

The management and development of unpaid work were good and provided opportunities for offenders to access a variety of activities. Insufficient Skills for Life provision was available for offenders outside main stream college provision. Opportunities were in place to enable offenders to gain accreditation of work skills

development in some community payback schemes. However, in most accreditation was not available and offenders' skills development needs were not being sufficiently recognised. A mentoring scheme had been introduced which provided very high levels of support for offenders who were able to access this service.

Offenders' developed good work skills on unpaid work projects. Partnership links were very effective. Learning and skills' strategic direction was good. Sussex Probation had made some progress in tackling the areas for improvement, and had maintained and improved the strengths found at the July 2007 inspection. Quality assurance systems were in place, however there was an over reliance on the individual providers' own self-assessment. The overall self-assessment process was not sufficiently developed to provide an accurate assessment of the whole provision. Data were not sufficiently well used to accurately identify offenders' achievement or evaluate the quality of provision across the Sussex Probation area.

What does Sussex Probation Area need to do to improve further?

- Introduce a system to accredit vocational and employability skills developed through unpaid work, to enable offenders to provide evidence of development of these skills.
- Increase discrete Skills for Life provision that more appropriately reflects the first step learning for some offenders.
- Develop an overarching quality assurance and improvement procedure to ensure that all aspects of learning and skills provision meet Sussex Probation's expectations and inform self-assessment.

Offender perspective - learning and employability as confirmed by inspectors.

A total of 54 offenders were seen and spoken to as part of the inspection process, individually or in groups. Offenders valued the prompt information and guidance they received and finding out about options for employment they had previously not considered. Offenders found staff friendly and fair. They felt that they were treated with respect and they valued the support they received. Offenders on unpaid work welcomed the opportunities to develop new skills. They took pride in their work and recognised the benefits to the community, particularly where projects were recognised and celebrated by the community. Offenders enjoyed having the opportunity to improve their literacy skills and could see how this would improve their lives. Offenders wanted more information on how to utilise the 20% of their unpaid work for learning. Offenders sometimes found offender supervisors too busy to provide more detailed explanations about tasks and sometimes there was a lack on continuity between supervisors.

Main inspection report

The quality of provision

Grade: good

Assessment and sentence planning

Access to, and the quality of, information, advice and guidance were good. Both employed and unemployed offenders had access to information, advice and guidance throughout Sussex Probation. Caseworkers were careful to sensitively explore offenders' care and support needs. They skilfully questioned and probed offenders to assess the range and level of barriers to employment and training, to promote their learning and development and to help them achieve their goals. Very effective practical support was available, such as help in accessing outreach provision. Caseworkers had a good local knowledge of training and employment opportunities available to offenders. Communication between caseworkers and offenders was positive and open, supporting the delivery of the offenders' sentence plan objectives. Regular and thorough reviews of progress were completed to re-assess offenders' needs.

Links between offender managers and caseworkers were good. Relationships were long standing and both parties had a good understanding of each others' roles and responsibilities. Staff had developed good communication and informal methods of exchanging information. Caseworkers had a good understanding of the client group. Caseworkers were skilled at ensuring that interventions suggested by offender managers were directed to the appropriate provider and funding stream. Caseworkers were updated continually with different developments in funding streams and providers. There was a high degree of mutual understanding between caseworkers and offender managers in finding the correct intervention for each offender; however a minority of offender managers had little interest in education training and employment.

The initial assessment of offenders' literacy, numeracy and language needs was insufficiently thorough. Sussex Probation used the First Move assessment tool to screen offenders for their literacy, numeracy and language needs and to produce pre-sentence reports. Education, training and employment as a specified activity was not widely used as part of an offender's sentence. Offenders' wider needs, such as their preferred learning styles, were not routinely assessed. Caseworkers sometimes received very limited information on offenders' backgrounds. Assessments of literacy, numeracy and language needs completed in custody were seldom available. A full diagnostic test to establish an offender's literacy, numeracy and language needs was completed only when an offender accessed main stream college or training provision. Testing for dyslexia was not in place.

Implementation of interventions

The range of unpaid work and vocational activities to motivate offenders was good. Probation staff worked effectively in partnership with the Environment Agency to enthuse and help offenders develop land-based skills such as woodland management. A construction project provided offenders with good opportunities to gain carpentry, plumbing and brickwork skills in a workshop environment. Gardening projects on allotments providing garden produce for older people had helped build good community relations with other allotment holders and local residents. At the Whitehawk Estate, community wardens liaised well with probation staff and the tenants' association to provide useful projects to benefit the community such as cleaning graffiti and clearing borders and planting. Placement staff and supervisors provided very good examples of pro-social modelling. Staff developed trusting relationships with offenders. The pre-placement work session was well planned and provided valuable information for offenders in preparation for their work. However, additional training courses offenders could access were insufficiently promoted and some offenders were unaware that they could use 20% of their unpaid work sentence for education and training.

Education, training and employment provision at approved premises was good. Courses on approved premises focussed on personal development. Links to the education, training and employment designated worker and other agencies were good, including very effective links to well risk-assessed volunteering which gave good opportunities for high-risk offenders to develop work skills. Good support was provided for curriculum vitae building, offence disclosure and job applications. The training for the protection of vulnerable adults was good. Some support was available to help develop offenders' literacy and numeracy.

Teaching and coaching were generally satisfactory. A wide range of teaching strategies was used, with a good focus on employability. Tutors were skilled and offered high levels of support to engage offenders. Tutors had a good understanding of individual needs.

Sussex Probation's mentoring programme very effectively supported offenders into employment and training. Staff were well qualified and good training was in place for mentors, including training in safeguarding and protecting vulnerable adults. A thorough assessment of prior attainment was made and good links were in place with a variety of agencies to help support mentors and mentees. A multi-disciplinary approach provided effective support for offenders. Sequencing of interventions was well planned with wider support needs such as accommodation, substance misuse and health issues being met as part of the education training and employment programme. The scheme, which was routinely monitored and evaluated, was linked to improvements in the range of support available to offenders.

The Skills for Life training provision, outside mainstream college sites was insufficient. The move from 'in house' Skills for Life courses to main stream provision had reduced the opportunities for offenders to receive Skills for Life training in a non-traditional environment. Skills for Life was principally provided in mainstream college environments, which was a barrier for some offenders. Efforts had been made to

remedy this and some provision was embedded in many of the employability courses.

The recognition of work skills development was insufficient. Offenders had no evidence to show potential employers of improvements in their wider key skills, such as communication, working with others or problem solving. Most unpaid work projects provided good opportunities to develop employability skills; however this was not sufficiently well recognised by offenders. Offender managers were not sufficiently well informed of the skills offenders developed on unpaid work.

Achieving and sustaining outcomes

Grade: satisfactory

Employability skills development and experience provided through unpaid work was good. Unpaid work supervisors were experienced in a range of skills. Placements were available in charity shops, small community groups, larger environmental projects, furniture restoration and groundwork. Offenders who had not previously been employed developed a good work ethic. Their communication, problem solving and team working skills all improved. Offenders gained confidence in a variety of practical skills such as painting and decorating, carpentry and plumbing. Offenders took pride in their work and could identify how it benefited the community.

The level of referrals to training was high and Sussex Probation was meeting its targets for referrals to courses. However, it was not possible to accurately measure how many offenders achieved qualifications as a result of these referrals as the data were insufficiently robust. Sustainable job outcomes were low. Education, training and employment caseworkers reported that very few offenders achieved sustainable employment lasting for 13 weeks or more although many engaged in casual, short term work. The Progress 2 Work programme exceeded its targets, but the overall number of offenders gaining employment remained low.

Leadership and management

Grade: Satisfactory

Sussex Probation had developed a good strategic plan to develop learning and skills, against a recent background of considerable change. A clear direction had been developed reflecting the merger of two probation areas to form the Surrey and Sussex Probation Trust. The development plan incorporated the significant changes to the funding of learning and skills within the combined trust. A clear management structure was in place to develop the new trust's learning and skills provision.

The planning, management and development of unpaid work by Sussex Probation was good. The strategic development of unpaid work had focused on increasing the range of activities available to offenders. Increased requests from the community to carry out more mundane tasks such as litter and graffiti removal had been successfully linked to more meaningful community projects that provided some

element of training and skills development for offenders. Sussex Probation was mindful of the benefits to offenders of engaging with projects they felt were of value and the links to improved self-esteem. Innovative ways had been developed in one local community to engage both offenders and residents and promote social cohesion. Residents had been carefully selected and trained to supervise offenders within their local community. Offenders took pride in improving their community and residents developed a better understanding of offenders. The development of single placements increased significantly last year providing greater flexible work opportunities for offenders. An accredited customer service course had been successfully linked to offenders working in retail sector placements. A similar programme was linked to a painting and decorating project. The planning and management of unpaid work had effectively responded to the increase in the amount of unpaid work being used as a sentence by the courts. Staff were deployed well to ensure that cancellation of unpaid work sessions were kept to a minimum.

Partnership working was good. Sussex Probation's working relationship with its OLASS provider was good. A good multi-agency approach had been successfully developed with providers to benefit offenders' wider needs. Providers had opportunities to meet together and to share good practice. Partners' understanding of the available services was good. Good systems were in place to facilitate referrals from providers to ensure the right intervention for offenders.

Equality and diversity were satisfactory as were safeguarding arrangements to support offenders as vulnerable adults. Staff offered a number of relevant unpaid work opportunities to women. Offenders of minority ethnic heritage were well integrated into groups. Standards of behaviour were good. Supervisors effectively challenged inappropriate behaviour. A high degree of mutual respect existed between probation staff and offenders. Insufficient provision was available for offenders whose offence prevented access to main stream provision. Sussex Probation had moved from offering provision in probation offices to main stream college provision. Offenders whose conditions of license precluded contact with under 18s were unable to access Skills for Life on probation premises. Some offenders were insufficiently confident to attend main stream college provision. Only a small amount of alternative discrete provision was available. Offenders felt safe and appropriate attention was paid to health and safety on unpaid work schemes visited by inspectors. Risk assessments were effectively shared with providers and partners. Providers and partners working with offenders completed Criminal Record Bureau checks and their staff had received training on working with vulnerable adults. Offenders with additional learning needs received sufficient support to achieve their chosen qualification.

Sussex Probation's overall quality assurance of learning and skills was underdeveloped and an overall self-assessment process was not in place. A high reliance was placed on individual provider's self-assessments. A range of data was available about offenders' performance, but data were not used sufficiently to provide a clear picture of the overall quality of the learning and skills provision for Sussex Probation. Too much focus was placed on achieving referral targets, and not enough focus was placed on what offenders achieved after referral. Sussex Probation

did not produce its own self-assessment and was insufficiently clear of its strengths or areas for improvement.

Information about the inspection

1. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the Sussex Probation Area's Director of Interventions as co-ordinator, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the self-assessment reports produced by providers working with Sussex Probation, development plans, 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. They also visited learning sessions, assessments or progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from a range of programmes.

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