

Cambridgeshire Probation Area

Inspection report

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Type of provider: Cambridgeshire 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

Cambridgeshire Probation Area (CPA) is one of the smaller probation areas with six local authorities. In 2007/08, the population was 730,000. About 11%, predominantly in Cambridge and Peterborough, are from minority ethnic groups, consisting mainly of workers from Eastern Europe working in the local agricultural industry. In 2008/09, about 89% of offenders were white and 88% were men. On 31 March 2008, CPA's caseload was 3,389 offenders, an increase of 16% over the previous two years. Of this total, over 2500 were offenders on community based orders. The operating budget for the year 2008/09 was £9.1million with a full-time equivalent of about 250 staff.

CPA's four main centres are at Cambridge, Huntingdon, Wisbech and Peterborough. It has an education, training and employment (ETE) specialist team which consists of a team manager and four ETE officers working from the four main offices. Courts are located at Peterborough, Cambridge, Huntingdon, Ely and Wisbech. HMP Littlehey, HMP Peterborough and HMP Whitemoor are located in the Cambridgeshire area. CPA's only approved premise is located in Peterborough.

Information about the offender learning and employability skills providers:

Lead OLASS providers and their subcontractors	Number of offenders on discrete provision in 2008/09	Types of provision
Peterborough College of Adult Education	84	Literacy and numeracy and non-accredited information and communications technology in Peterborough
Bridgegate Drug Advisory Agency (accredited provision through contract with Peterborough College of Adult Education)	84	Literacy and numeracy, information communications technology and drug awareness and non-accredited provision for offenders on drug rehabilitation requirements
Huntingdonshire Regional College	*500	Literacy and numeracy in Huntingdon; wider key skills (working with others, problem solving and improving own learning) and literacy and numeracy through unpaid work
Cambridge Regional College	27	Literacy and numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in Cambridge

College of West Anglia	28	Literacy and numeracy in Wisbech
Other providers	Number of offenders	Type of provision
Cambridgeshire probation area	*350	ETE workshops at four main area offices
NACRO	*350	Referral services and job seeking skills through the ETE workshops
nextstep	*100	Information, advice and guidance services through unpaid work and ETE workshops

* These are approximate volumes

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	good
Assessment and sentence planning	
Implementation of interventions	
Achieving and sustaining outcomes	good
Leadership and management	inadequate
Equality and diversity	satisfactory
Safeguarding	satisfactory

Overall effectiveness, including capacity to improve

Offenders had good access to information, advice and guidance services, but most offenders did not have a full assessment of their learning needs. Offenders developed good employability skills and those attending employability workshops received good support. Many individual learning plans and action plans were too general. ESOL remained underdeveloped and provision during the summer was inadequate. Offenders on unpaid work paid good attention to health and safety and their wider key skills and literacy and numeracy success rates were high. Literacy and numeracy success rates for provision delivered on CPA's premises were low and attendance was poor. CPA's strategic management of learning and employability skills was insufficient. They made insufficient use of data to inform management decisions. Offender managers' commitment to learning and skills was insufficient. CPA's quality assurance arrangements did not effectively include ETE provision. Since the last inspection, the provision had improved. However, for some areas for improvement there had been little progress.

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

- improve the strategic management of learning and employability skills provision based on a comprehensive analysis of need
- make better use of management information to improve the quality of provision and assure the participation of all offenders with identified needs

- introduce robust quality assurance procedures for learning and employability skills provision in line with existing quality improvement arrangements, including processes to assure the quality of externally based services.

Offender perspective - learning and employability as confirmed by inspectors.

Offenders on unpaid work valued the opportunity they had to achieve a qualification and were clear about how incentives had helped motivate them to be successful. Offenders thought that the support they received from tutors, ETE officers and unpaid work supervisors was good and helped them develop new skills and achieve qualifications that they had not thought possible. Offenders like attending learning and skills sessions at their local probation office as it enabled them to have regular and flexible contact with their offender manager. They thought their induction by an ETE officer was helpful. Apart from achieving qualifications, offenders commented that by attending sessions they had become more confident and motivated and had improved their ability to cope with learning. Some offenders felt that there were not enough computers especially when groups were at full size. Others commented that courses were stopped over the summer and this disadvantaged them. Offenders suggested that weekend or evening provision would have helped them deal with their other commitments. Those offenders on unpaid work completing physical outdoor tasks thought that the community benefits of such projects could be clearer.

Main inspection report

The quality of provision

Grade: good

Assessment and sentence planning

Offenders had good access to information, advice and guidance services. Those with a supervision order or with an education, training or employment activity requirement specified by the courts were referred to CPA's ETE officers. Those officers provided information, advice and guidance, referring offenders, as appropriate, to nextstep advisers, CPA's employability workshops or skills for life provision. Further referral services were available through the employability workshops. Offenders on unpaid work only court orders received initial information, advice and guidance from nextstep advisers during their unpaid work induction, with options of additional support. This well organised service supported offenders to identify the plans they needed to put in place to improve their opportunities for employment.

CPA made good use of education, training and employment as a sentence requirement, with about 120 offenders on a requirement at any one time. However, assessments and guidance did not effectively ensure orders were adequately linked to each offender's needs.

Initial and diagnostic assessments for literacy and numeracy were satisfactory and led to appropriate courses. The referral process for Skills for Life training was clear and well used. Learning and skills assessments and achievements of offenders released on licence from prison were not shared effectively with providers, who too often repeated assessments unnecessarily. CPA's arrangements to identify and support offenders with learning difficulties and disabilities were insufficient. Most offenders were not assessed for other barriers to learning. Most ETE officers and tutors were unaware of preferred learning styles and the most appropriate approach to take with offenders. Where assessments of this type were made, these were not shared commonly with ETE officers or offender managers.

Implementation of interventions

Offenders developed good employability skills through unpaid work. Offenders made good use of up to 20% of their unpaid work order for education, training and employment related activities. Many enrolled on wider key skills and literacy and numeracy programmes. These programmes were delivered during community payback sessions available during the working week. Most of the community payback projects provided good vocational training opportunities for offenders. Offenders were supported well by their supervisors.

Offenders received good support from CPA's ETE officers and providers for employment through the employability workshops at CPA's four main offices. Staff supported offenders well in developing their job-seeking skills, including interview techniques, writing their curriculum vitae and managing disclosure. ETE officers held weekly meetings with providers to review cases and monitor progress against agreed actions. Offenders developed good levels of confidence, and were encouraged to use their time productively to seek employment. Where relevant, offenders were referred to other providers for specific training, such as for self-employment and for health and safety related topics.

In Peterborough, offenders made good use of a virtual campus. This was a pilot project linking prisoners and community based offenders with easy-to-use information to improve their access to employment and training opportunities. Offenders also had an opportunity to

agree to an employability compact. This pilot scheme provided hard to reach offenders with access to a Jobcentre Plus adviser and information, advice and guidance services to solve benefit issues and support them in working towards securing employment.

An enhanced regime had been introduced at CPA's approved premises. This included a good range of activities to support personal development, health promotion and social integration skills. Where appropriate, offenders at the approved premises were referred to an employability workshop and Skills for Life provision.

The standards of teaching and learning and assessment practice were satisfactory. Teachers provided good personalised learning programmes, with intensive one-to-one support. Learning assistants were used well to support those offenders with the greatest need and with support they made good progress. Learning materials were well presented and appropriate to the level of courses taken. Facilities were generally satisfactory. Offenders were well motivated, purposefully engaged and challenged by the subject matter presented. Key skills teaching and learning was good and directly linked to the unpaid work activities offenders were doing.

Many of the individual learning plans used by offenders on discrete provision were too general. They were too descriptive and did not help offenders understand clearly what they needed to do to achieve. Better plans used by Cambridgeshire Regional College took account of additional learning needs, learning styles and other identified barriers to learning. Providers' progress monitoring activities did not ensure that offenders could measure their own progress effectively or plan what they needed to do to improve further. Offenders who attended the employability workshops had an agreed action plan. These plans were too general and did not provide sufficiently realistic yet challenging targets linked to finding a job. These plans were insufficiently shared with offender managers and did not effectively inform sentence planning, although information on offenders' progress was available.

ESOL provision, an area for improvement at the time of the last inspection, remained underdeveloped. The provision available to offenders during the summer months was inadequate.

Achieving and sustaining outcomes

Grade: good

Since the last inspection CPA ensured that offenders' wider key skills and literacy and numeracy success rates on unpaid work were high. In 2008/09, 84% of over 450 offenders who started a wider key skills or literacy or numeracy qualification were successful. Many offenders completed more than one qualification. Incentives were used well to encourage participation and successful outcomes. Supervisors ensured offenders paid good attention to health and safety on unpaid work. Appropriate risk assessments were completed. Offenders wore high visibility jackets, protective clothing, and were trained in the safe use of tools and materials to complete their jobs. The promotion of diet and other aspects of health at the approved premises was good.

CPA and its partners held high profile events to celebrate offenders' achievements. Offenders were awarded with their certificates by local celebrities. This improved offenders' confidence and motivation and raised the profile of learning and employability skills provision.

Overall, offenders made satisfactory progress, although for some offenders the time they attended workshops or literacy/numeracy sessions each week was too short and their progress was slow.

In 2008/09, success rates in literacy and numeracy offered at CPA's offices were low. However, there were recent signs of improvements. Attendance was poor, with about 50% of offenders attending regularly.

Leadership and management

Grade: inadequate

Operational management of CPA's learning and employability skills provision was good. Unpaid work supervisors were experienced and competent in supporting offenders in a range of work activities and were able to demonstrate good vocational and work-related skills. Contact between key skills tutors and placement supervisors was good and enabled key skills training to be vocationally contextualised, linking unpaid work activity with the key skills qualification content. In the office based provision, communications between ETE officers, advisers and tutors were good and frequent. They worked well together. Useful information was exchanged. ETE Officers attended the Skills for Life workshops. This useful link enabled them to keep in touch with offenders and offer support in their learning.

CPA's strategic management was insufficient. Their learning and skills strategy identified roles and responsibilities and their delivery partners. It placed insufficient emphasis on objectives or targets to develop the provision based on local, regional and national priorities. Although CPA met individually with each partner to deal with operational issues, they did not meet together to develop practice and improve the co-ordination of partnership services. Elements of learning and employability skills activities operated in isolation. Managers were insufficiently clear of the impact on offenders. Sustained links with employers remained underdeveloped.

CPA's use of data to inform management decisions was insufficient. It was not drawn together effectively to provide aggregated information to report an accurate and clear picture of the performance of different groups of offenders, each provider or across the probation area, or to identify targets for improvement.

Some offender managers' commitment to education, training and employment was insufficient. They were unclear of the options and choices available to the offenders they managed. Thirty percent of offenders were not screened for their literacy and numeracy before being sentenced. Records indicated that the proportion of offenders, referred for an assessment of their learning need, who attended was low, despite this being a requirement. Many offender managers remained unaware of the learning and skills activities undertaken by their offenders or how well they were doing. They were unable to provide sufficient support through motivational interviewing and compliance and enforcement activities.

CPA's quality assurance arrangements were underdeveloped. Current quality assurance practices did not include an effective evaluation of most learning and employability related activities. CPA's arrangements to be assured of the quality of third party contracted provision were weak. Providers did not usually share their own self-assessments of offender learning and skills with CPA. In 2008/09, these self-assessments identified a wide range in the quality of provision. CPA made insufficient use of stakeholder feedback to inform quality improvements. Arrangements to identify and share good practice were underdeveloped.

Equality and diversity were satisfactory and safeguarding arrangements to support offenders as vulnerable adults were satisfactory. Offenders were treated with respect. Staff worked flexibly to meet their needs. CPA had introduced good specialist provision to meet the needs of women offenders at the Cambridge Women's Resource Centre. They also provided specialist individual placements for women offenders. This provision aimed to provide an alternative to custody and was particularly appropriate for more vulnerable women offenders, requiring a safe environment. Satisfactory childcare arrangements in the area were well established. Most of the provision was not available at weekends or in the evenings. Many of the classrooms and learning venues had few posters or displays promoting equality and diversity. Broader equality and diversity themes were not sufficiently reflected in teaching and learning materials. All providers had appropriate policies and procedures, including the completion of enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks for tutors, trainers and advisers in contact with offenders. Offender risk assessments were shared appropriately with partners. Providers' staff had undertaken recent training on the protection of vulnerable adults. Offenders felt safe and health and safety practices were good.

Information about the inspection

1. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), assisted by Cambridgeshire Probation Area Assistant Chief Officer for Interventions, as co-ordinator, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of provider most recent self-assessment reports and development plans, comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding bodies, 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. They looked at questionnaires learners had completed. They also visited learning sessions and employability workshops. Inspectors collected evidence from across the provision offered by Cambridgeshire Probation Area and their partners.

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