

# Suffolk Probation Area

## Inspection Report

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Type of provider: Suffolk 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 from September 2009 and contribute to the inspection frameworks of Her Majesty's Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation.

## Information about the probation area

Suffolk has seven local authority areas, with a population of 669,000, of which 5.1% have a minority ethnic heritage. The area has two approved premises, Lightfoot House and The Cottage, which provide hostel accommodation for offenders released on licence. Four prisons are located in the area: HMPs Edmunds Hill; Highpoint; Hollesley Bay and Blunderston.

Suffolk Probation Area (Suffolk Probation) has a caseload of some 2000 offenders, of which 89% are white, 85% are men and about 53% are unemployed. Overall unemployment in the area is around 5%.

The Assistant Chief Officer, responsible for partnerships, supported by the senior probation officer – partnerships, is responsible for the learning and employability skills provision. All Suffolk Probation's learning and employability services are provided through third party contracted providers apart from a small number of basic skills assessments carried out by local probation staff.

Information about the offender learning and employability providers:

Lead OLASS providers and their subcontractors	Number of learners on discrete provision	Types of provision
Suffolk College – Ipswich	An average of 39 referrals and six starts per month over the last six months; eight learners	Skills for Life – literacy and numeracy
Lowestoft College - Lowestoft	An average of nine referrals and one start per month over the last six months; 12 learners	Skills for Life – literacy, numeracy and information technology
West Suffolk College – Bury St Edmunds	An average of 16 referrals and three starts per month over the last six months; 13 learners	Skills for Life – literacy and numeracy Nextstep services
Other providers		Type of provision
F1 Computer Services and Training – Ipswich	90 referrals for community payback pre-placement work sessions per month and allocations to community payback scheme	learndirect Information, advice and guidance Pre-placement work sessions Job seeking skills Skills for Life and employability skills delivered through community payback scheme including national vocational qualifications

Other providers		Type of provision
Suffolk TAP - Ipswich	Variable	Nextstep services
Shaw Trust - Lowestoft	Variable	Nextstep services
SeeTec – Bury St Edmunds	No data available	Employment training
The Prince's Trust	14 learners in the past six months	Employment 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
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Capacity to improve	Grade: satisfactory
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	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	satisfactory
Safeguarding	satisfactory

## Overall effectiveness, including capacity to improve

Many offenders attended well structured community payback pre-placement work sessions that helped them to identify their learning and employability skills needs effectively. However, these were not available to all offenders and attendance was low. Unemployed offenders received effective information, advice and guidance services. Attendance at Skills for Life initial assessment was poor and the assessment of needs was insufficiently comprehensive.

The range of provision in approved premises was good, as it was for those in Ipswich. However, the range of provision in the north and west of the county was insufficient. Tutors provided good support for individual learning activities. Offenders made good progress in developing skills and knowledge. Attainment on literacy and

numeracy awards was satisfactory and the achievement of health and safety awards was good.

Suffolk Probation used particularly innovative activities to improve offender's chances of employment but its planning for the further development of learning and skills was insufficient. Quality assurance systems were underdeveloped. Progress since the previous inspection was satisfactory.

### What does Suffolk Probation Area need to do to improve further?

- Introduce a planned strategy for improving the learning and skills provision by further developing quality improvement practices and the range of provision for all offenders.
- Improve attendance at the pre-placement and Skills for Life assessment sessions by better promotion of the benefits to offenders and more consistent use of sanctions.
- Improve the use of the 20% of unpaid work hours for all offenders by ensuring that they are all fully aware of this entitlement.

Offender perspective - learning and employability as confirmed by inspectors.

A total of 19 offenders were interviewed as part of the inspection process, individually or in groups. Offenders valued the good and prompt support they received from their tutors, advisers and supervisors. They felt that they were treated with respect. Offenders, who were able to do so, liked the way in which they could use 20% of unpaid work for learning at the start of their court order. Many offenders however, were unaware that they could use 20% of their unpaid work for learning and were not aware of any written plan relating to their unpaid work. Offenders on learning programmes were clear about the progress they were making and what they were trying to achieve and most were familiar with their learning plan. Most offenders discussed their learning with their offender manager, although for some this was perfunctory. Many offenders said that attending learning and skills had given them another chance to change their lives and catch up with learning. Women offenders on community pay-back schemes appreciated the options available to them and that their particular needs were met. Offenders in approved premises appreciated the opportunity to develop their independent living skills and that the regime was not oppressive. A few however, would appreciate the opportunity to study at a higher level.

## Main inspection report

### The quality of provision

Grade: satisfactory

#### Assessment and sentence planning

Offenders in Ipswich were provided with well structured community payback pre-placement work sessions. The induction day, held on a Sunday, introduced the range of programmes comprehensively and identified how offenders could use 20% of their unpaid work for learning. Offenders completed an assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills and were provided with appropriate feedback. They also completed health and safety training which led to a recognised qualification. Offenders who, when tested, were found to be below entry level 3 in literacy and numeracy were referred back to the probation service for referral to a specialist provider. Offenders on the programme were able to make informed choices about their community payback and learning programmes.

Offenders received effective information, advice and guidance. Information, advice and guidance was comprehensive and impartial. Those attending the F1 centre in Ipswich received good advice on the range of unpaid work available, had a choice of activity and were able to access a range of learning programmes. Information, advice and guidance for offenders in other parts of the area was equally effective, providing clear and impartial advice. Communications with offender managers were generally good. However, one provider had not provided sufficient feedback due to a misunderstanding about confidentiality. This had recently been resolved.

Attendance at pre-placement work sessions was poor. The attendance of offenders for the pre-placement work assessment was very low. In the three months preceding the inspection the proportion of offenders referred to the session who turned up had fallen from 40% to just 21%.

The assessment of each offender's learning needs was insufficiently comprehensive. Attendance at Skills for Life assessments was poor. In one Suffolk centre, only 47% of offenders referred by the probation area received an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy in the last six months. Attendance was better in other parts but the overall attendance was below 70%. Few offenders had an assessment of their learning styles. The introduction of assessment for offenders' hidden disabilities was commendable, as was the training offender managers had received to help them identify potential learning difficulties with offenders. However the service was under used and some reports received by offender managers were unhelpful and included inappropriate advice.

## Implementation of interventions

Tutors provided good individual support for learning. Tutors were well prepared and had good knowledge of the offenders in their classes. Classroom management was good and tutors provided a good range of learning activities to stimulate and maintain the interest of offenders. Learning and activities were clearly planned to meet the wide range of abilities of offenders in each session. Offenders were actively encouraged to provide their own solutions to a range of structured problems. Individual learning plans varied considerably; many had very clear and measurable targets but in some the targets were too vague to be helpful. Offenders' progress was well recorded at the end of each session, clearly identifying what had been achieved. Tutors reviewed offenders' progress on a regular basis and updated plans at each review.

Offenders at approved premises received good support to help them improve their literacy and numeracy, job-seeking and independent living skills. The enhanced regime provided a good variety of sessions on independent living including healthy cooking, working with domestic budgets and relationships. Literacy and numeracy sessions were available and offenders were actively, and successfully, encouraged to take part. A job club ran each week and provided opportunities for offenders to produce CVs and to apply for local jobs. Jobcentre Plus staff regularly attended the job club.

Not all offenders had access to a sufficient range of provision to improve their employment prospects. Literacy and numeracy training and qualifications were available from pre-entry to level 2 throughout the area. Information, communications and technology training was available in Ipswich and north Suffolk, but not in west Suffolk. Provision for offenders on community payback was good in Ipswich but this was not available elsewhere. In other parts of the area there was little use of the 20% of unpaid work for learning. Suffolk Probation did not provide a coherent and planned English for speakers of other languages programme for those offenders who required this service. If identified as needing language support, offenders could be placed on the waiting list of a local provider, but would have to wait a significant amount of time.

## Achieving and sustaining outcomes

Grade: Satisfactory

Most offenders who completed their learning plans gained a qualification. For example, 72% of offenders who took the health and safety level 2 background knowledge test as part of their induction, passed. About 65% of offenders who started literacy or numeracy awards were successful in obtaining one or more certificates. Offenders on learning programmes made good progress and demonstrated clear improvements in their skills and knowledge. Attendance was satisfactory. Offender managers were given clear information about who had not attended each week for them to follow up.

## Leadership and management

Grade: Satisfactory

In Ipswich, Suffolk Probation used particularly innovative activities to ensure that learning and skills could be used to improve offenders' chances of employment. This included very effective use of the 20% of unpaid work orders for learning, enabling offenders to complete their learning at the start of their sentence. The development of employability skills had been well integrated into the community payback scheme. Offenders felt safe during their unpaid work activities. They were provided with a range of programmes from which to choose and women offenders could choose the type of training activities that best met their needs. During unpaid work sessions, offenders were provided with correct personal protective equipment; checks and good attention to health and safety were clearly evident. All offenders who attend the pre-placement work induction completed a health and safety qualification. There were clear progression routes for offenders enrolled on programmes at F1 Training including national vocational qualifications at levels 2 and 3. Self-employed offenders received good support to improve their business skills.

Suffolk Probation had insufficient plans for the further development of learning and skills. Although Suffolk Probation had a policy for the delivery of learning and skills, linked to the business plan, it had not produced a detailed plan of how learning and skills would be further developed across the county. Nor had it carried out a robust assessment of offenders' needs on which to base any development. In particular, it had no plans to extend the good range of provision in Ipswich to other areas. Staff were generally unclear about how the provision of learning and skills was planned, or how it might develop in the future.

Suffolk Probation made insufficient use of available information to quality assure provision and over relied on providers to quality assure their own training programmes without the formal involvement of the probation service. If offenders or staff raised concerns, Suffolk Probation responded swiftly, but they did not systematically collect and make use of feedback to support improvements. Suffolk Probation had not produced a self-assessment report or made effective use of the self-assessment activities undertaken by most of its providers. Most providers carried out self-assessment with differing levels of success. Some providers' self-assessment processes gave insufficient attention to provision for offenders. The better report contained detailed analysis of performance and useful evaluative information. Suffolk Probation made insufficient use of targets and comparative data to support quality improvements. However, the new data recording system was providing new opportunities to monitor performance.

Equality and diversity were satisfactory as were safeguarding arrangements to support offenders as vulnerable adults. Suffolk Probation had an up-to-date single equality scheme and action plan with clear policies to address the specific needs of women. The attention to the needs of women on community payback and learning programmes was good. Suffolk Probation's policies recognised the disadvantage some offenders experienced through living in a rural area and had appropriate arrangements in place to help with travel. Access and facilities for people with restricted mobility were satisfactory. Many offender managers had received training

to help them recognise offenders who might have additional learning needs. However, although they were confident to identify needs, the arrangements for the formal assessment of these needs were not sufficiently well used, partly due to some examples of unhelpful and inappropriate feedback being given. Support for offenders with poor English language skills was unsatisfactory. Offenders on benefits could be referred to an external provider but waiting lists were long. Some providers analysed performance by different groups of offenders, but this was not monitored or effectively evaluated by Suffolk Probation. Offenders felt safe and generally well respected. All providers completed an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check for relevant staff. Appropriate policies were in place and staff had received training on risk assessments.



## Information about the inspection

1. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), assisted by the Suffolk Probation's Assistant Chief Officer, responsible for partnerships, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment reports and development plans, comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding bodies, previous inspection reports, reports from the inspectorate's monitoring visit and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
2. Inspectors used a range of methods to gather the views of learners including group and individual interviews. They also visited learning sessions, assessments or progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subjects the provider offered.

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