

Hertfordshire Probation Area

Inspection Report

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Type of provider: Hertfordshire 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

1. Hertfordshire is an affluent county, with a population of just over one million. It is the second most densely populated county in the country. The residents are generally well educated, well paid and healthy and the county is recognised as a safe county in which to live. The local economy is built upon several sectors (including financial and business services, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals). Earnings and qualifications are above the national average. Many people work in London. The recent economic down turn is having a noticeable impact, with the traditionally low unemployment rate increasing. Pockets of unemployment are most noticeable in Broxham, Hertsmere and Stevenage. The proportion of minority ethnic groups in Hertfordshire is below the average for England and Wales apart from in the west of the area. About 89% of offenders are white and 71% are men.
2. Hertfordshire Probation Area (HPA) consists of four centres which are managed as three local delivery units. These are based in Watford, St. Albans, Hertford and Stevenage. The assistant chief officer, responsible for interventions has responsibility for learning and employability skills. He is supported by a half-time project manager and two education, training and employment officers. Temporary arrangements provide cover for a further two vacant education, training and employment officer posts. They are located in each centre. Part of the provision includes centre-based job clubs. The probation area has an annual caseload of about 1000 unpaid work interventions. It was last inspected in March 2007.
3. Information about the offender learning and employability providers:

Lead OLASS providers and their subcontractors	Number of learners on discrete provision	Types of provision
West Herts College	*Offenders in the Watford area **	Initial and diagnostic assessments and literacy and numeracy programmes; opportunities to access other college provision
North Hertfordshire College	*Offenders in the areas of Hertford, St Albans and Stevenage **	Initial and diagnostic assessments and literacy and numeracy programmes; piloting employability skills provision; bricklaying and car maintenance linked to unpaid work; opportunities to access other college provision

Other providers	Number of learners	Type of provision
Oaklands College	Offenders as referred at St Albans and Watford	Learning advice service; opportunities to access other college provision
ASCEND	Offenders as referred at Watford	nextstep subcontractor; adult and community learning provision
SOVA	Attend all centres providing mentors to provide individual learning support	Learning mentors; debt advice, and support for foundation learning tier learners
Hertfordshire Probation Area	*All centres; In the first eight months of 2009/10, about 225 offenders were referred to a job club based on a court order or a supervision order and other offenders attended on a voluntary basis	Job Club – job seeking skills; some short vocational programmes

In addition to these listed organisations, the Hertfordshire Probation Area works with at least six other providers, including Turning Point, the Princes Trust and Paradise Training for a range of Skills for Life, and employability skills courses.

*At any one time Hertfordshire Probation Area was managing an education, training and employment related caseload of over 300 offenders. Most offenders had court orders which were managed through the probation area's job clubs.

** In 2008/09, about 760 offenders were referred to offender learning and skills service providers for an initial assessment of need. This resulted in 231 offenders starting literacy and or numeracy programmes.

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 inadequate
Capacity to improve	Grade inadequate
	Grade descriptor
Quality of provision Assessment and sentence planning Implementation of interventions	inadequate
Achieving and sustaining outcomes	inadequate
Leadership and management Equality and diversity Safeguarding	inadequate satisfactory satisfactory

Overall effectiveness, including capacity to improve

4. HPA made good use of court orders to address offenders' learning and employability needs. Timely information, advice and guidance services were insufficiently available. Offenders' learning needs were insufficiently assessed and were ineffectively linked to sentence planning. Many offenders, referred for an assessment, did not attend. Offenders received good support from volunteers. Offenders made good use of job clubs. HPA made insufficient use of the available provision, and the range of provision was narrow. HPA's use of individual learning plans was poor and progress monitoring was insufficiently effective. Standards of teaching and learning were satisfactory. Offenders' opportunities to develop employability skills through unpaid work were underdeveloped. Offenders' outcomes, linked to employment, were good. Success rates on literacy and numeracy programmes were low. Attendance at learning sessions was poor. HPA worked with a wide range of partners but the coordination of their work was insufficiently clear. Operational management was insufficiently effective. Learning programmes were poorly structured. HPA's quality assurance systems were underdeveloped and progress to improve the provision was inadequate.

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

- provide a range of provision which meets effectively the fully assessed and prioritised needs of offenders through provider and partner services and unpaid work
- improve the use of individual learning plans set within effectively managed sentence plans to improve outcomes for offenders and which are informed by timely information, advice and guidance and assessments
- introduce robust quality assurance procedures to improve the quality of each offender's learning experience.

Offender perspective - learning and employability as confirmed by inspectors.

5. A total of 17 offenders were interviewed as part of the inspection process, individually or in groups. Many offenders recognised the benefits of improving their Skills for Life. They valued the benefits of being able to receive individual support from their tutors and the extra help they received from volunteers. Successful offenders commented that achieving a qualification encouraged them to improve further. Offenders did not find their learning plans helpful.
6. Offenders thought that the job clubs helped them in job-searching and other activities. Some offenders liked attending the job club for more hours than they needed, whilst other offenders felt that they needed more help to find a job. Offenders felt that more vocational training courses should be available. They thought that the community payback schemes they attended were dull and that the schemes did not allow them to develop their skills. Some offenders were unaware that they could use 20% of their hours towards learning and employability related activities. Offenders felt that they were treated with respect by their scheme supervisors. Some offenders thought their offender manager was not interested in what they were achieving on their community payback scheme.

Main inspection report

The quality of provision

Grade: inadequate

Assessment and sentence planning

7. HPA made good use of court orders to ensure offenders addressed their education, training and employment (ETE) needs. In first eight months of 2009/10, these orders accounted for over 60% of 364 orders used by the courts. Some offender managers added ETE orders to offender sentence plans after sentencing. ETE orders were well structured to meet specific needs of offenders.
8. Offenders had insufficient access to information, advice and guidance. Offenders were referred to this service through the job club they attended. Nearly half of offenders who should have benefited from this service did not receive it. For those offenders who received information, advice and guidance, it was not always provided at the start of their sentence. Links between information, advice and guidance, individual learning plans and sentence planning were weak. The unemployment rate amongst offenders was high.
9. HPA had insufficient arrangements to ensure offenders had a thorough assessment of their learning needs. Some 40% of offenders were not screened for their literacy and numeracy needs. This was identified as an area for improvement at the last inspection. Of those who needed support, over 60% did not receive a full and timely diagnostic assessment. Attendance at assessments was poor. Offenders did not have an assessment of their learning styles. HPA's arrangements for the identification and assessment of offenders with specific learning needs, or where English was not their first language, were inadequate.

Implementation of interventions

10. Over 80 SOVA trained volunteers provided good individual support for offenders. This was a strength at the last inspection. Volunteers worked productively, using their wide range of skills and experiences to provide offenders with support across a broad range of ETE related activities, including lessons and job club activities. They also worked effectively with offenders who were foundation learning tier learners and who needed significant support with their literacy and numeracy.
11. Offenders made good use of job clubs at each of HPA's centres. They were provided with opportunities to develop a good range of job-seeking skills and learnt how to manage the disclosure of their offence to potential employers. HPA's education, training and employment officers, working with a number of providers, provided helpful guidance and support and had effective working relations with offender managers.

12. Standards of teaching and learning were satisfactory. Offenders settled quickly, worked enthusiastically and used their time effectively. They had good relations with their teachers and mentors. Offenders had access to a suitable range of resources and facilities. Many learning materials used in the literacy classes were insufficiently contextualised. Some materials consisted of photocopied black and white exercises that had excessive text and small fonts.
13. The available provision of learning and employability skills for offenders was under utilised. In some centres, lessons were less than half full. About half of offenders with a learning need did not attend a learning programme or receive support. Very few offenders accessed available support for specific learning needs or English for speakers of other languages. The range of provision did not address the full needs of offenders.
14. HPA made inadequate use of individual learning plans to support learning. Many offenders were required to attend a job club as part of their court order. Education, training and employment officers assessed their learning needs. These were not set out clearly in a plan which identified their learning objectives or the steps they needed to take to achieve them. Targets in offenders' individual learning plans and to monitor their progress in literacy and numeracy lessons were often too general, lacked challenge and did not enable them to assess the progress they were making. In some plans, targets set by tutors placed insufficient emphasis on improving learning and developing skills. Only 20% of offenders on learning programmes had a learning plan which formed part of their sentence plan. Offender managers did not use individual learning plans effectively to inform sentence planning or to improve the effectiveness of the sequencing of interventions.
15. HPA's use of community payback schemes to develop offenders' employability skills was underdeveloped. Pre-placement inductions in some centres were too short. Offenders improvement in, and development of their employability skills, such as time keeping, following instructions and standards of work, were not recognised or recorded in a way that could be used to support a job application. Few offenders made use of the opportunity to use 20% of their unpaid work order hours for education, training or employment related activities. Many community payback schemes were insufficiently interesting to motivate offenders and did not support the acquisition of new vocational skills. A recently introduced course in bricklaying at one centre had proved to be successful.

Achieving and sustaining outcomes

Grade: inadequate

16. Employment related outcomes for offenders were good. HPA exceeded its national targets for employment in 2008/09. In the first eight months of 2009/10, 180 offenders under supervision found and sustained employment for four weeks against an annual target of 185. Fifty percent of offenders were in employment at termination of their order or licence compared to a target of 40%.

17. In 2008/09, success rates in literacy and numeracy were low at 29%. Inspectors noted evidence of some improvements in 2009/10. Retention rates remained low. This was a strength at the last inspection. Attendance at many learning sessions was poor. This represented poor value for money, especially where providers used small group sizes or where offenders were provided with individual support.

Leadership and management

inadequate

18. A wide range of partners were able to provide offenders with good opportunities to access suitable learning and employability skills related services. Many of these links were informal and had been developed by the education, training and employment officers. Following a period of uncertainty, a recent reorganisation of responsibility for learning and employability at a senior level had provided greater stability. HPA had taken a professional approach to the development of a number of initiatives, which were in the later stages of development. Provision being piloted at the time of inspection was providing good outcomes. Partnership meetings were held more regularly and partners were working with greater determination to identify and seek solutions to common issues. HPA's links with employers were underdeveloped. The probation area was planning a strategy to address this.
19. HPA's operational management was insufficiently effective. Attendance requirements at literacy and numeracy lessons and at job clubs were unsuitable for most offenders. Both HPA's staff and providers interpreted an education, training and employment related court order as a requirement for an offender to attend for one hour each week. This was poor and inefficient use of an offender's time. Unemployed offenders did not have enough time for effective job-search activities or to develop new job-seeking skills. Offenders improving their literacy or numeracy made slower progress than they ought.
20. The contribution each partner made was insufficiently coordinated. This was a strength at the last inspection. Strategies to ensure offenders used the most appropriate services and funding opportunities were insufficiently effective. Many offender managers had insufficient awareness of the Skills for Life provision and other aspects of learning and employability skills that could be used to help reduce re-offending behaviour. For many offenders, their learning and employability skills needs were given a low priority. Communications between offender managers, learning and employability skills providers and unpaid work were weak. Key staff had insufficient training to support them in their role.
21. HPA's quality assurance systems were underdeveloped. HPA's arrangements which enabled them to be assured of the quality of provision were weak. HPA had placed insufficient emphasis on establishing and monitoring standards. They had made insufficient use of targets to support quality improvements in learning and employability skills. HPA made insufficient use of learner feedback to support improvements. They made inadequate use of data to provide an effective overview of provision or to differentiate provider performance. Arrangements to recognise and record progress and achievements in non-accredited learning were

poor. Sharing of good practice across HPA's learning and employability skills service and between its partners were weak.

22. Equality and diversity were satisfactory and safeguarding arrangements to support offenders as vulnerable adults were satisfactory. HPA had a single equality scheme in place which was monitored through an appropriate action plan. In over 70% of cases, offender managers ensured that arrangements for interventions took full account of the offender's diversity issues and that all relevant staff were aware of their offender's diversity needs. Access to provision had improved since the last inspection and was available during days and evenings at most centres. Weekend provision was available at one centre. HPA made insufficient use of data to assess the performance of different groups of offenders. Providers were fully aware of their responsibilities to protect offenders as vulnerable adults. They had carried out enhanced Criminal Record Bureau checks on all their staff coming into contact with offenders and had provided appropriate training. HPA was not fully informed of these arrangements. Offenders felt safe but some were not confident about how to address concerns they may have had for their own safety. Providers received sufficient information to ensure appropriate risk management arrangements were in place. Work practices on some community payback schemes did not always pay sufficient attention to the working conditions.

Information about the inspection

1. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), assisted by Hertfordshire Probation Area's 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), 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 and telephone calls. They also visited learning sessions, job clubs and community payback schemes. Inspectors collected evidence from the range of programmes the provider offers.

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