

Kent Probation Area

Inspection report

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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

Kent Probation is the twelfth largest probation area in England, and acquired Trust status in April 2010. It operates within 14 local authorities and has a caseload of over 6000 offenders, of which 93% are white and 90% are men. In 2007, the minority ethnic population in Kent of 3.1% was significantly lower than the England and Wales average of 8.7%. Kent Probation's data analysis indicates that about 5400 offenders were under supervision in 2008/9. Over half had an education, training and employment need. In 1338 cases this was directly linked to offending behaviour. In any given week, around 1000 offenders carry out nearly 6,000 hours of unpaid work.

Kent Probation has three local delivery units which focus on offender management. A fourth, centrally based delivery unit, is responsible for interventions in the local delivery units. Education training and employment is part of interventions and is managed by an Operational Manager and a team of education, training and employment officers (officers). Kent Probation has a nextstep contact for the delivery of information, advice and guidance.

Kent Probation serves 10 Magistrates' Courts and two Crown Courts, at Canterbury and Maidstone. It has a 25-bed approved premises. Nine prisons are located in the Kent area: Blantyre House; Canterbury; Cookham Wood; East Sutton Park; Maidstone; Rochester; Sheppey Cluster (Elmley, Standford Hill and Swaleside) and the Dover Immigration Removal Centre.

Information about the offender learning and employability providers:

Lead provider	Approximate number of learners on discrete provision	Types of provision
West Kent College in collaboration with Kent Probation	475	Mainly literacy and numeracy at levels 1 & 2 (New Skills New Lives)
Kent Probation - Nextstep subcontractor	600	Information, advice and guidance
Kent Probation and the Prison Service	40	Preparation for employment (Transit to Work)
Other providers	450	Wide range of programmes, mainly short-duration health and safety related and lift-truck training

The following text is Ofsted's contribution to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation's offender management inspection 2 report. A copy of the published inspection report can be found on

www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprobation/inspect_reports/

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness, including capacity to improve

The number of education, training and employment court orders was high. Report writers and sentencers received insufficient guidance to ensure these orders were used effectively. Assessments of offenders' learning needs were insufficiently thorough. Education, training and employment officers provided strong proactive support to high priority offenders.

Peer tutors, who delivered literacy and numeracy, had good development opportunities. Learning and employability had been effectively integrated into the approved premises' regime. Provision for priority offenders at level 1 and above was satisfactory. Access to learning and skills provision was insufficient. Offenders, who needed provision below level 1, those with additional learning needs and low risk offenders who were unemployed, were given insufficient support. Offenders' learning plans were used insufficiently within sentence planning. Key elements of these plans were shared insufficiently with key workers. Opportunities to use community payback schemes to develop offenders' employability skills were insufficient.

Achievements on the preparation for employment programme were high, but overall, achievement rates were low. Management of punctuality and attendance was insufficiently effective.

Kent Probation had a clear strategy for the delivery of learning and employability provision. Education, training and employment officers were well qualified and experienced. Kent Probation's use of data to effectively monitor and manage provision was weak. Their use of self-assessment was underdeveloped. Progress since the last inspection was satisfactory. Equality and diversity were inadequate and

safeguarding arrangements to support offenders as vulnerable adults was satisfactory.

What does Kent Probation need to do to improve further?

- Improve the use of individualised information, advice and guidance action plans and learning plans as integral to sentence planning.
- Considerably improve access to programmes below level 1 and effective learning support arrangements.
- Develop a data set to provide management information to monitor the performance of all provision closely and to promote quality improvements.

Offender perspective - learning and employability as confirmed by inspectors.

A total of 23 offenders were interviewed as part of the inspection process, individually or in groups. Some offenders commented that they had to wait around for things to happen at the probation office and that the pace of induction was slow. Offenders appreciated the support they got from staff. They said they responded better when staff showed interest in their needs and they valued the respect they received. Many offenders liked tasks which stretched them and from which they got a sense of purpose, a sense of responsibility and pride in their work. Having some independence in the way they did their work gave offenders a sense of control and achievement. What they did not like was doing repetitive and seemingly pointless activities and not being able to contribute to decisions that affect them. Many offenders appreciated the 'reasonable' approach of their offender managers. On community payback schemes offenders liked placements with a variety of activities and the opportunity to gain qualifications. Other commented that they disliked the limitation on the hours they could work on some placements. Many offenders commented that there were limited opportunities for vocational training. Some enjoyed supporting others and being part of a team.

Main inspection report

The quality of provision

Grade: satisfactory

Assessment and sentence planning

Kent Probation's use of court orders for education, training and employment activities was high. In 2008 to 2010, over 1,150 orders were used. Orders were mostly used for high priority offenders, based on their risk of harm, likelihood of reoffending and employment record. These priority groups had good access to Kent Probation's education, training and employment officers who ensured that they had been screened for their Skills for Life needs. The officers provided them with information, advice and guidance and ensured that referral arrangements to provision were in place. Other offenders in need had insufficient access to similar services.

Kent Probation provided insufficient guidance for report writers and sentencers to ensure education, training and employment court orders were appropriate and were clearly linked to need. For some offenders, officers and providers were unclear how they should meet the court's requirements. For other offenders, these orders restricted their opportunity to benefit from other more appropriate interventions.

Assessments of offenders' learning needs were insufficiently thorough. Offenders referred to New Skills New Lives provision, based on Kent Probation's premises, received an effective initial and diagnostic assessment of their literacy and numeracy needs. Other offenders did not have suitable access to these assessments. Arrangements for the assessment for offenders with learning difficulties and disabilities were inadequate, as were the arrangements for the assessment of other barriers to learning and learning styles. Kent Probation's access to records of offenders released from custody was inconsistent.

Implementation of interventions

Education, training and employment officers provided priority offenders with strong and proactive support. They had a good rapport with them, improving their motivation to engage in activities. Officers agreed effective action plans, based on the information, advice and guidance they had provided. This helped offenders achieve their short-term targets. These plans were subject to regular review at which new or revise short-term actions were agreed. They often helped offenders improve their job-seeking skills on an individual or small group basis, but this did not always make effective use of their time.

Offenders and ex-offenders were used effectively as peer tutors to deliver New Skills New Lives provision through e learning. As peer-tutors, they brought relevance and experiences to the classroom, helping to engage learners and break down barriers to learning. Offenders responded well. Volunteer mentors brought a wide range of experiences and skills which they used well to support offenders. Kent Probation had

been able to use these skills effectively. However relevant expertise was not consistently available.

Kent Probation's development of the provision of learning and employability in approved premises was good. Units of learning were used well to support offenders prepare to move-on, improve their health and develop their social and life skills. Kent Probation was well supported in these activities by agencies and learning and skills providers.

Teaching and learning were satisfactory. In better sessions, tutors were well prepared, understood the needs of offenders and the context for the programme being delivered. They made timely and appropriate interventions and ensured sessions were summarised and learning re-enforced. In weaker lessons, too much time was spent giving out information. Tutors made insufficient use of effective questioning techniques. A modern and well-resourced New Skills New Lives mobile classroom benefited offenders living in rural areas and those finding travel to other locations difficult.

The range of provision available to offenders was satisfactory. Officers primarily supported offenders with education, training and employment court orders. Lower-risk offenders and those without such an order were signposted or referred to community-based provision. Referral rates to vocational training were good. In 2009/10, over 400 offenders were referred to local community-based providers and a further 50 referred to further education colleges. In 2009/10, some 500 offenders were referred to New Skills New Lives for literacy and numeracy at levels 1 and 2. A small number of offenders benefited from a helpful course on preparation for employment which was delivered in both prisons and the community.

Provision for priority offenders with specified court orders at level 1 and above was satisfactory. Access to learning and employability provision was insufficient. Offenders, who needed provision below level 1 or with additional learning difficulties and disabilities, were given insufficient support. Low risk offenders who were unemployed or in receipt of job seekers allowance did not automatically qualify for referral to learning and skills provision. Kent Probation gave insufficient attention to follow up referrals to learning and skills provision or to provide support for offenders who were reluctant to access provision. At the time of the inspection, New Skills New Lives provision was underutilised by low priority offenders. Recently introduced referral arrangements were insufficiently established and offender managers understanding of how to access available provision was insufficient.

Kent Probation made insufficient use of information, advice and guidance action plans and learning plans as integral to sentence planning. Officers supported offenders on education, training and employment orders to complete a good, short-term action plan. Although available to offender managers, their use within sentence planning was variable. Learning plans were not shared with offender managers. Offenders made insufficient use of medium and long-term target setting that established a plan for the duration of their sentence. Where targets were identified they tended to capture learners' expressed needs and were not challenging or realistic. Key elements of these plans and other data were shared insufficiently with

key workers. Progress reviews were insufficiently timed to coincide with key events in the sentence plan.

Opportunities to use community payback schemes to support offenders develop their employability skills were insufficient. New allocation arrangements to community payback were insufficiently effective across the service. Offenders make insufficient use of the opportunity to use 20% of their community payback for education, training and employment related activities. Structured arrangements for the training of offenders on agency placements, which account for about 50% of allocations, were insufficient. Where offenders improved their employability skills, their skills were insufficiently recorded in a way that could support an application for employment.

Achieving and sustaining outcomes

Grade: inadequate

Achievements on the preparation for employment programme were high. Offenders attending New Skills New Lives provision improved their confidence and motivation well. They made satisfactory progress. The proportion of offenders in employment on termination of their order was satisfactory.

Kent Probation had some very good examples of community payback schemes which enabled offenders to develop good personal and employability skills. Vocational training was well integrated into an exciting range of activities. The small number of learners were very enthusiastic about their work and the development of their skills.

Peer tutors grew in self confidence and self esteem through the trust shown in them. They took their work seriously, conducted themselves in a thoroughly professional manner and were keen to improve themselves further. They benefited from good development opportunities. They received well structured and suitable training and had very good opportunities to gain employment.

Outcomes were low. Only 15% of offenders referred to learning and skills provision achieved an accredited outcome. Retention rates, at 42% for New Skills New Lives provision, were low, but most offenders who completed their programme passed and many achieved more than one qualification. Management of punctuality and attendance was insufficiently effective.

Leadership and management

Grade : satisfactory

Kent Probation had a clear strategy for the delivery of learning and skills provision. This was effectively set out in the probation's delivery plan. This plan was well supported by a useful needs analysis which identified offenders' education, training and employment needs linked to reoffending behaviour. However, the plan contained insufficient links to offenders' individual learning needs, local labour market information or how learning and skills interventions could benefit other re-offending pathways.

Partnership working was satisfactory. A small number of large employers were working effectively with Kent Probation to develop a strategy to effectively engage with employers. Kent Probation's partnership with West Kent College was productive.

Education, training and employment officers were enthusiastic about their work and were well qualified and experienced. They were well supported by their managers. Teams met regularly. Staff, who worked with offenders, had good access to training. Kent Probation had provided staff, working with offenders with additional learning needs, with a useful training resource. The number of community payback placements with agencies had significantly increased. Kent Probation provided agencies with a useful handbook, containing clear information.

Kent Probation's use of data at all levels to effectively monitor and manage the provision was weak. They made insufficient use of targets to evaluate performance and improve provision or use data to analyse the performance of different groups of offenders. Arrangements to obtain feedback on offenders' progress and learning outcomes, from providers who supported them through signposting or referral arrangements, were inadequate.

Kent Probation's use of self-assessment to evaluate the quality of provision or identify actions for improvement was underdeveloped. The education, training and employment team had made some small steps towards self-assessment, including the identification of key strengths and areas for improvement, sharing of good practice at team meetings and some observations of information, advice and guidance sessions. Kent Probation did not have effective arrangements to be assured of the quality of externally based provision. Aggregated stakeholder data was insufficiently used to improve the quality of provision.

Equality and diversity were inadequate and safeguarding arrangements to support offenders as vulnerable adults was satisfactory. A single equality scheme and action plan was in place and appropriate equality impact assessments had been undertaken. Arrangements to identify and support offenders with significant learning needs were inadequate, particularly for those who needed provision below level 1. Outcomes for offenders were low. Some offenders' prior achievements were not always taken sufficiently taken into account before accessing specialist vocational provision, requiring them to take inappropriate qualifications. Employed offenders had limited access to discrete provision in the evenings and none was available at weekends. Some staff were slow to embrace the role of peer tutors fully, which risked undermining the programme and the self confidence of tutors. Staff have had appropriate training in safeguarding and child protection. Supervisors paid appropriate attention to offenders' offending behaviour and the community payback placement they attended. Kent Probation had taken positive action to ensure agency placements complied with their duties when working with offenders as vulnerable adults, but arrangements to be assured about this within other education, training and employment providers were underdeveloped.

Information about the inspection

1. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by Kent Probation's Director of Interventions, Commissioning & Partnerships as co-ordinator, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of most recent self-assessment reports and development plans, previous inspection reports, and data on offenders 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, assessments or progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from a range of programmes used by offenders.

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