

Working to make amends



This bulletin describes the key findings from our Thematic Inspection: *Working to Make Amends, an inspection of the Delivery of Enhanced Community Punishment (ECP) and Unpaid Work (UPW) by the National Probation Service (NPS)*. The aim of the inspection was to determine the extent to which the NPS had successfully contributed to the reduction in crime through the management of a satisfactory UPW scheme.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Every area visited had implemented ECP to a point by the autumn of 2003, including the Human Resources (HR) changes and training programme. Some had then continued to develop, but others had failed to do this.
- There were wide variations in the quality of case management.
- We saw a good standard of work being delivered to beneficiaries who were happy with the outcome.
- Not all projects seen provided the positive benefit to the offender intended by ECP, e.g. beneficiary contact or skills development, but they did provide the punishment and indirect reparation that community service and community punishment schemes had offered. We also saw excellent examples of imaginative placements that stretched offenders and improved their skills.
- Because UPW is a popular sentence, most areas had little difficulty in exceeding the national target for order completions. However, we found areas where the target was achieved but this masked the routine need to stand offenders down due to a lack of supervisors. Stand-downs were a severe problem in four of the six areas visited.
- ECP introduced staffing changes which will need further consideration during the transition to offender management. Supervisors have gained through training and improvements in pay and conditions of service but the former community service officer role has diminished and become largely administrative.
- Areas had practical links with Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) but there was a lack of strategic direction around the contribution that UPW could make to their work.
- Few areas had considered the usefulness of UPW in addressing their duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 in relation to staff, offenders and the public. This partly reflected the lack of integration of UPW into the work of the service as a whole and in some areas a lack of investment in project development.
- The inspection underlined the fact that UPW gives probation its best access to the communities it serves, including the opportunity to appoint staff from those communities. Supervisors in particular spend significant amounts of time with both offenders and the public. Managers at all levels have the opportunity to 'sell' the service via this work.

CONTEXT

- The legislation for adult offenders to undertake UPW for the benefit of the community was originally introduced through the Criminal Justice Act 1972. A community service order, as it was then called, required the offender to complete between 40 and 240 hours of work within 12 months of the order being made. The order quickly established itself as an attractive disposal for sentencers, given that it combined elements of both punishment and rehabilitation while also allowing offenders to remain in the community and minimised disruption to their employment and family circumstances. UPW now forms one of the possible requirements of a generic community order and can be up to a maximum of 300 hours.
- ECP was launched in October 2003 and was designed to maximise the rehabilitative potential of UPW while not detracting from its effectiveness or rigour as a sentence that contained elements of both retribution and reparation. Through modelling, reinforcement and guided learning it would teach offenders pro-social attitudes and behaviours, and employment related and problem-solving skills. The high amount of contact time that UPW allowed with probation staff would also facilitate targeting of a number of offenders' key risk factors, such as poor employment-related skills, identification with anti-social role models, and poor self-management and interpersonal skills.

METHODOLOGY

- The inspection was carried out concurrently with the Effective Supervision Inspection programme in six probation areas, Bedfordshire, Humberside, London, Northamptonshire, Warwickshire and West Mercia. The criteria for both inspections were similar and evaluated the quality of management, assessment, interventions and initial outcomes. Cases to be

inspected in the thematic element were drawn from the main sample and in total we looked at work with approximately 260 offenders.

- The majority of work projects visited were group placements supervised by probation staff. There were interviews on site with offenders, supervisors and beneficiaries. Each inspection concluded with a day of meetings with senior and middle managers responsible for UPW, case managers and supervisors. Finally, we interviewed members of the National Probation Directorate (NPD) who had been or were responsible for ECP and UPW.

OVERALL FINDINGS FOR QUALITY OF ECP/UPW MANAGEMENT

Strengths

- All areas had made the HR changes required to implement ECP and had invested in staff training.
- There were positive examples of quality placements in all areas providing benefits to the community and supervised by well-motivated and trained staff.
- Where a positive approach to health and safety procedures was built into the scheme, this added depth and consistency to placement development.
- Some areas worked with CDRPs to consult local people about what projects would be of value in their locality.
- Areas worked in partnership with other agencies to provide a range of placements where offenders could learn new skills.

Areas for improvement

- Investment in UPW staff was insufficient to manage orders consistently to national standards in several areas.
- There was a lack of strategic direction and investment in relation to promoting race equality and other aspects of diversity through UPW.

- A wider and more diverse range of placements was needed to ensure that all sections of the population could benefit and offenders' diversity needs be fully addressed. Local targets should be set and reviewed annually.
- UPW schemes and staff were often not well integrated into the work of the service as a whole and were often perceived by themselves and others as quite separate. The quality of case management suffered as a consequence.
- There was a patchy use of the 20% of hours available for employability linked activity.
- Areas where stand-downs were a problem did not share information with local courts about their ability to manage orders.

OVERALL FINDINGS FOR QUALITY OF ECP/UPW ASSESSMENT

Strengths

- All areas had arrangements in place to assess and supervise offenders safely.
- All offenders were interviewed by UPW staff prior to being allocated to a work placement.

Areas for improvement

- There were examples of offenders being allocated to work without a risk of harm assessment in four out of the six areas inspected.
- Little use was made of the needs analysis in the Placement Quality Matrix in matching offender to placement.
- Few sentence plans were completed in cases where there was not a full OASys.
- There was a fragmentation of the case management of orders in areas where the responsibility of the case manager was reduced to a largely administrative role once supervision commenced.

OVERALL FINDINGS FOR QUALITY OF ECP/UPW INTERVENTIONS

Strengths

- Supervisors had embraced the pro-social modelling agenda and were confident in their engagement with offenders and beneficiaries.
- The introduction of the Pre Placement Work Session had contributed to increasing offenders' understanding of what was expected during supervision.
- Staff observed and interviewed demonstrated a positive and integrated approach to diversity work.
- The small number of Guided Skills Learning placements seen were excellent.

Areas for improvement

- Urgent action was needed to reduce and eliminate stand-downs.
- The management of risk of harm was not sufficient in all cases.
- Managers needed to ensure that enforcement policies were applied fairly and consistently across all requirements of community orders.
- More attention needed to be given to the quality of placements by all areas.
- There should be arrangements for the case manager or equivalent to maintain contact with offenders during the life of the order to sustain their motivation.

OVERALL FINDINGS FOR QUALITY OF ECP/UPW INITIAL OUTCOMES

Strengths

- The majority of offenders had not been convicted of a further offence committed since the start of the order
- Offenders were very positive about the impact of Skills for Life on their confidence and self-esteem.
- Once their order was completed some offenders had continued to work with a project on a voluntary

basis. A number of beneficiaries had offered paid employment to former UPW offenders.

- Exit interviews were routinely done with offenders, with the information used in some areas to develop practice

Areas for improvement

- Areas should make greater use of feedback from offenders to improve practice.
- There should be a regular beneficiary survey with outcomes shared with the Board and staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The NPD should ensure that:

- clarification is issued about procedures and associated training required in the management of UPW
- the national ECPI/UPW performance target is revised to reflect the national standard requirement that areas offer offenders at least six hours work per week
- further consideration is given to staff roles within UPW to prepare for the end-to-end management of offenders
- consistent attention is given to health and safety in the delivery of UPW by all probation areas
- consultation is undertaken within areas and with the Youth Justice Board about the management of 16 and 17 year olds undertaking UPW in order to safeguard their welfare

- guidance is issued about the purpose, timing and content of supervision plans and reviews
- further thought is given to simple outcome measures to demonstrate the effectiveness of UPW
- the time credited for offenders who are stood down from work should be one hour.

Probation Boards should ensure that:

- sufficient staff are in place for UPW to be delivered that meets the requirements of the national standard
- diversity and partnership strategies are reviewed, including meeting the area's responsibilities under the Race Relations and Crime and Disorder legislation
- courts are kept fully informed about any shortfall in the area's ability to manage sentences
- local performance monitoring includes information about the satisfactory completion of assessment of risk of harm
- no offender is allocated to work without a risk of harm assessment being completed
- proper use is made of risk and criminogenic needs analysis in allocating offenders to work
- national standards performance data, including figures on stand-downs, are reported to them on a regular basis
- systems are in place that encourage and enable communication between supervisors and case managers
- training for UPW staff should include risk of harm issues
- evaluation of work on outcomes is published and shared with managers and staff so that lessons can be learned.

The full report of the inspection is published in *Working to Make Amends: An Inspection of the Delivery of Enhanced Community Punishment and Unpaid Work by the National Probation Service* available on HMI Probation's website (see below).

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