



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson

Minister of State for Prisons,
Probation and Reducing
Reoffending

Sir Nic Dakin MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State for Justice

Andy Slaughter MP, Chair
Justice Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

MoJ ref: SUB 122945

8 April 2025

Dear Andy,

HMI PROBATION: ANNUAL REPORT 2024

I am writing to inform you that Martin Jones, HM Chief Inspector of Probation, published his Annual Report on 18 March 2025, I have enclosed a copy for your consideration.

The report highlights serious challenges across the Probation Service. No region or Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) inspected during the reporting period received a 'Good' rating, with all assessed as either 'Requires improvement' or 'Inadequate'. The Chief Inspector also raises concerns around staffing levels and experience, the quality of case supervision and risk management, and the need for more consistent delivery of effective services.

We recognise these findings, and we assure you that we take all the issues raised by HMI Probation very seriously and we are determined to do whatever it takes to respond to these concerns and make improvements in the identified areas to get it right. We have outlined the key actions we are taking to address the report's findings.

Staffing: Recruitment, Training and Retention

Recruitment campaigns have been expanded nationwide to improve consistency and fill key roles. We onboarded 1,057 trainees in 2024/25, exceeding our target of 1,000, with a further 1,300 planned by March 2026. The workforce has grown to 20,911 full-time equivalent staff (FTE) as of December 2024, up from 17,424 in June 2021, reflecting steady progress.

We are also taking targeted action to address staff retention. A dedicated retention oversight process is in place, focusing on sites with the highest attrition rates. This includes analysis of exit trends and research by the Retention Research Team into the key drivers of resignation. These insights are being used to inform local interventions and the development of a revised retention toolkit for Probation Delivery Units.

Work is also underway to support staff wellbeing and strengthen the learning and development offer. A new wellbeing support model has been established across HMPPS, with regional wellbeing plans due to launch in April 2025. An evaluation of the Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP) programme and the Newly Qualified Officer framework will be undertaken in 2025, following the introduction of a revised curriculum in March 2024.

Case Management and Risk

We are also strengthening practitioner skills and tools to improve risk management and case supervision. A new Continuous Professional Development (CPD) learning product will be rolled out in April 2025, and mandatory safeguarding training is in place for all probation officers and managers. Over 4,600 staff have also now completed actuarial risk training, a risk assessment tool to predict the chance of re-offending.

A new low-intensity case management model is also being introduced to improve desistance outcomes and enable practitioners to prioritise higher-risk work. We are also developing the first HMPPS Public Protection Strategy, and the Public Protection Taskforce will relaunch in April 2025 to drive quality and consistency in assessment and planning.

Leadership and Sentencing Review

We also are investing in leadership capability across the service. A development programme for new Senior Probation Officers (SPOs) launched in 2024 and will be expanded to middle management and Assistant Chief Officers this summer. The Senior Operational Leadership Team is reviewing governance and safeguarding oversight to ensure accountability structures support improved delivery.

We also recognise that the Inspectorate's findings come at a time of broader reflection on the future shape of the criminal justice system. The Government is awaiting the outcome of the Sentencing Review, which is examining how custody and community sentences can be better aligned to reduce reoffending and protect the public.

Any reforms that arise must be implemented carefully and sustainably, ensuring that the Probation Service is fully equipped to manage the cases it is responsible for. We remain committed to ensuring that probation plays a central role in a more effective and balanced system.

We hope this provides assurance that we are taking the Inspectorate's findings seriously and are committed to delivering sustained improvement across the Probation Service.



LORD TIMPSON



SIR NIC DAKIN MP



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

2024 Annual Report: inspection of probation services



Contents

Key facts and findings.....	3
Chief Inspector’s foreword	4
Our vision and purpose	6
Overview	7
Leadership	10
Staffing	12
Recruitment	15
Training	16
Retention	16
Services.....	18
Case supervision	21
Risk of harm and public protection	22
Desistance	24
Court work.....	25
Unpaid work.....	27
Resettlement.....	28
Work with victims	29
Needs of people on probation	31
Diversity and inclusion	32
Work with women.....	33
Probation work with young adults	35
Appendix 1: Publications	37
Appendix 2: Inspection standards and ratings	39

Please note that throughout the report the names in the practice examples have been changed to protect the individual’s identity.

© Crown copyright 2025

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence or email psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.
This publication is available for download at:
<https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/>

Published by:

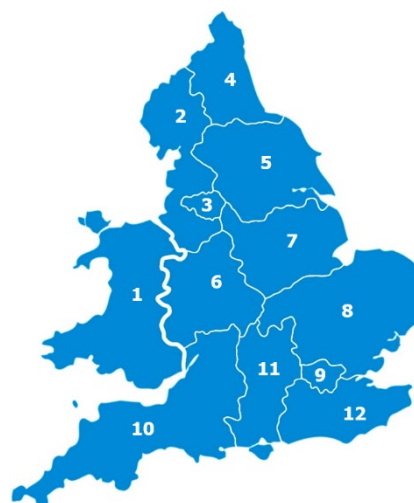
HM Inspectorate of Probation
1st Floor Civil Justice Centre
1 Bridge Street West
Manchester
M3 3FX

Follow us on X [@hmiprobation](https://twitter.com/hmiprobation)

ISBN: 978-1-916621-36-7

Key facts and findings

Probation Service regions	
1	Probation Service – Wales region
2	Probation Service – North West region
3	Probation Service – Greater Manchester region
4	Probation Service – North East region
5	Probation Service – Yorkshire and the Humber region
6	Probation Service – West Midlands region
7	Probation Service – East Midlands region
8	Probation Service – East of England region
9	Probation Service – London region
10	Probation Service – South West region
11	Probation Service – South Central region
12	Probation Service – Kent, Surrey and Sussex region



Between February 2024 and February 2025 the Inspectorate published:	
24	Probation delivery unit (PDU) inspections. 10 PDUs were rated as 'Requires improvement' and 14 as 'Inadequate' overall
3	Regions inspected: Kent, Surrey and Sussex, East of England, and Yorkshire and the Humber. All three were rated as 'Requires improvement' overall
4	Thematic inspections on: the quality of work undertaken with women; young adults in the Probation Service; recruitment, training and retention; and unpaid work
4	Research and analysis bulletins
6	Academic insights
4	Effective practice guides

Key findings	
✗	Staffing challenges, including a shortage of probation officers, high sickness levels, and unmanageable workloads
✗	Significant deficits in the quality of casework in most PDUs inspected
✗	Insufficient work in managing risk of harm and public protection
✗	Issues around obtaining and using information on safeguarding and domestic abuse
✓	Outstanding statutory victim work
✓	A strong vision and positive culture in some PDUs
✓	Committed staff groups
✓	Examples of good partnership working

Chief Inspector's foreword



My term as Chief Inspector began in March 2024 and this annual report marks my first year in post. Over this period, I have seen the dedication and hard work of probation staff, some of whom have performed heroically in the last year to make a difference. I know and the evidence shows, that the work carried out by the Probation Service is of critical importance to changing lives, reducing reoffending and ensuring fewer victims in the future. Some probation staff But I continue to emphasise that the Probation Service currently has too few staff, with too little experience and training, managing too many cases. We have also seen the significant learning and development needs of a newly recruited frontline service. These concerns are reflected in our inspection findings, which are presented throughout this annual report.

It has been positive to see that recruitment efforts by His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) are gradually closing the gap between actual and target staffing numbers in most regions; however, in some regions vacancies are still too high, especially at probation officer grade. More needs to be done to close these gaps, while focusing the finite resources on the cases that matter most.

My main area of concern is the work to manage risk of harm and keep others safe. We have found this to be consistently insufficient across all our inspections, where work undertaken to protect actual or potential victims needs to improve considerably, and I hope to see improvements to this area of work over the coming year. Positively, I would like to call attention to the high standard our inspections saw in the small number of statutory victim cases for the most serious offenses - all three regions have had this work rated as 'Outstanding'.

Looking forward, this year we are planning to begin inspections of approved premises for the first time, and I am excited by the opportunity to shine a light on this vital area of work.

We will continue our probation inspection and thematic inspection programmes, and we will shortly be publishing our national inspection of the Probation Service.

We also now await the outcome of the Sentencing Review, following a call for evidence to which we have responded. If the review follows the evidence, it seems inevitable that it will result in redrawing the boundaries between prison and the community. If implemented carefully, this could ensure we have a more sustainable system with lower reoffending rates. However, to succeed, any sentencing reforms must ensure that the Probation Service is properly resourced to be able to deal with the cases it is required to manage. A service that is under-resourced and overstretched will not be able to provide the effective service that the public and victims need. The evidence shows that if the Probation Service has the right people, and the resources and cross-agency support it needs, then it will be able to make a sustained difference to reducing reoffending and keeping the public safe.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Martin Jones CBE

HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Our vision and purpose

Our vision

High-quality probation and youth justice services that change people's lives for the better.

Our purpose

HM Inspectorate of Probation is the independent inspector of probation and youth justice services in England and Wales. We set the standards that shine a light on the quality and impact of these services. Our inspections, reviews, research and effective practice products provide authoritative and evidence-based judgements and guidance. We use our voice to drive system change, with a focus on inclusion and diversity. Our scrutiny leads to improved outcomes for individuals and communities.

Values

Influential

We care about making a positive impact on the organisations we inspect and the individuals they work with.

Independent

We ensure that the judgements we make are supported by evidence, and are fair and impartial.

Professional

We work in a respectful, transparent, professional way, listening to and sharing learning internally and externally.

Inclusive

We will work as 'One HM Inspectorate of Probation', valuing and respecting each other's viewpoints and skills, so that everyone feels a part of what we do.

Diverse

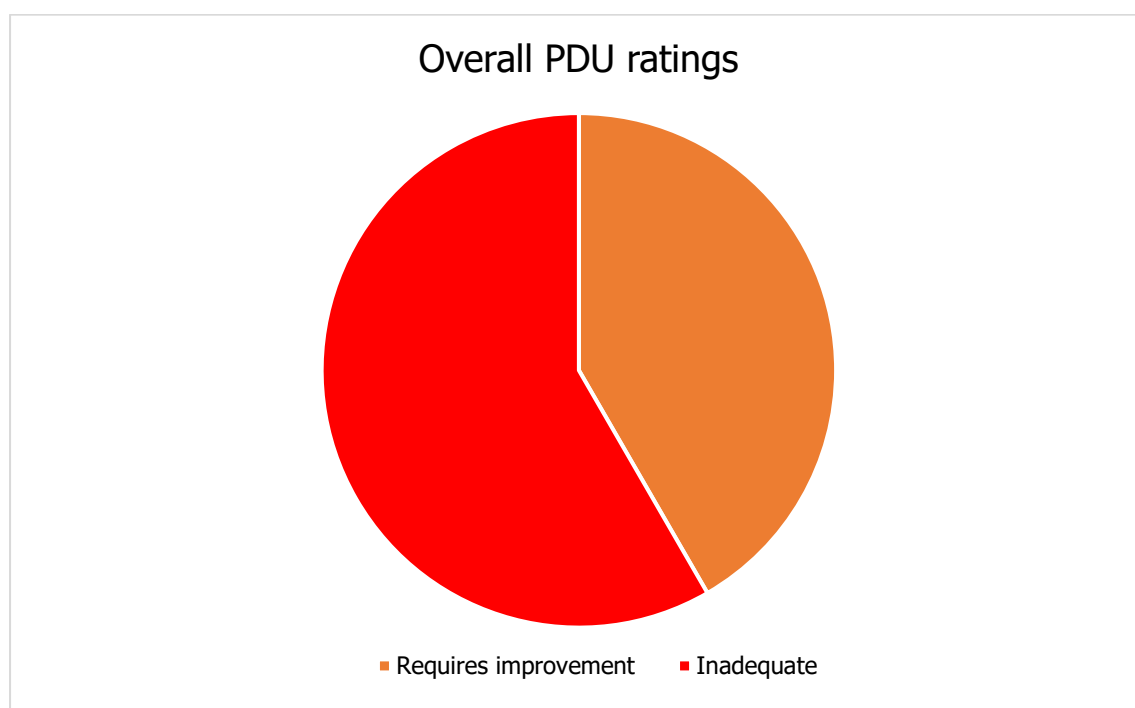
We are passionate about diversity and the value that comes through giving everyone a voice in our inspections and the chance to succeed in our organisation.

Overview

This annual report covers the reporting period of February 2024 to February 2025.

We have set out our findings in this report over the year from the start of our current round of Probation Service inspections. Our previous probation inspection programme ended in August 2023. Fieldwork for our current round of inspections of probation services in England and Wales began in November 2023, and we published our first inspection report for this programme in February 2024. Under our current programme, we are inspecting and rating all probation delivery units (PDUs) and all probation regions across England and Wales. During the reporting period, we completed inspections of three regions (Kent, Surrey and Sussex, East of England, and Yorkshire and the Humber). Across these regions, we have inspected 24 PDUs and rated 10 as 'Requires improvement' and 14 as 'Inadequate'. We have rated all three regions as 'Requires improvement' overall.

Figure 1: Overall PDU ratings



In addition to our core programme, during this time we have completed thematic inspections on: [the quality of work undertaken with women](#), [young adults in the probation service](#), [recruitment, training and retention](#), and [unpaid work](#). We have published four research and analysis bulletins, six academic insights and four effective practice guides highlighting some fantastic examples of probation practice at its best. The findings from these thematic inspections, our research, and effective practice guides can be found throughout this annual report. We also published our [serious further offences \(SFO\) annual report](#) in November 2024.

A full list of our publications can be found in **Appendix 1**.

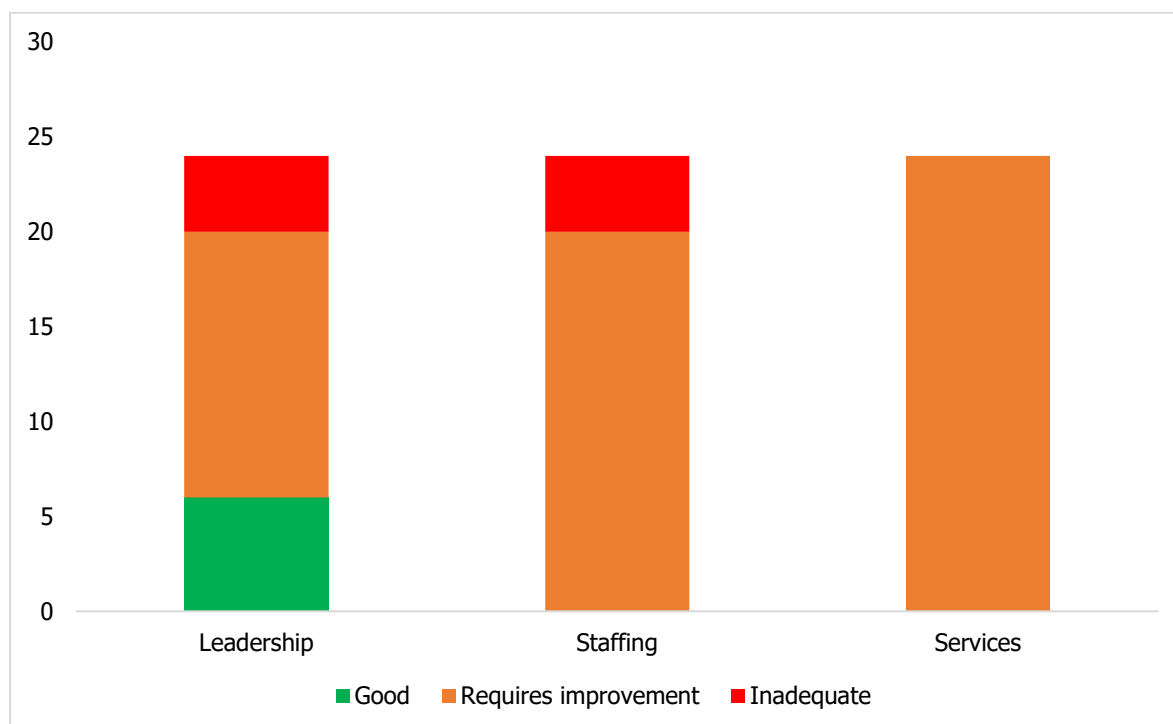
We aim to inspect in a way that is valid, fair, consistent and reliable. We focus on areas that we think are important based on inspection and research evidence, in order to promote improvement and recognise effective practice.

Organisational arrangements and activity

Our standards set out the principles by which we expect PDUs and regions to operate effectively. The standards are split into two parts, which we call domains. The first is domain one, which covers organisational arrangements and activity. At a PDU level, domain one focuses on **leadership, staffing and services**. Over the course of this inspection programme, we have so far awarded the following ratings for each standard:

- leadership: six 'Good', 14 'Requires improvement' and four 'Inadequate'
- staffing: 20 'Requires improvement' and four 'Inadequate'
- services: 24 'Requires improvement'.

Figure 2: PDU ratings against domain one standards



At a regional level, our domain one standard focuses on **leadership and staffing**. All three regions we have inspected so far were rated as 'Requires improvement' against the two domain one standards (leadership and staffing).

We also look at organisational activity through other aspects of our work, including through thematic inspections, SFO reviews and research.

For more detail on our domain one standards please see **Appendix 2**.

Service delivery

Our domain two PDU standards look at case supervision and are based on the ASPIRE model – **Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Delivery, and Reviewing**. The ratings for each of these is based on the proportion of cases where we found sufficient practice had taken place with people on probation. We make judgements on sufficiency with reference to what we know from research and inspection evidence to be the key elements of each of these standards.

Across all the ASPIRE stages of case supervision, inspectors make judgements about the quality of casework against the following three areas of practice:

- a) **engagement**, which means the extent to which probation practitioners consider the individual needs and characteristics of people on probation
- b) **desistance**, which relates to the support and help offered by the Probation Service to people on probation who have problems related to their offending
- c) **keeping people safe**, which is about how effectively the probation service understands and manages the risk posed by people on probation to known victims and potential victims.

Under each of the ASPIRE standards, the rating is determined by the area of practice with the lowest proportion of sufficiency.

Lowest banding (proportion of cases judged to be sufficient at key question level)	Rating (standard)
Minority: <50%	Inadequate
Too few: 50–64%	Requires improvement
Reasonable majority: 65–79%	Good
Large majority: 80%+	Outstanding ☆

In almost all PDUs we have inspected under this programme, keeping people safe has been the least consistent area of practice.

As a result, we rated most PDUs as 'Inadequate' against almost all of our service delivery standards. 'Inadequate' means that less than half of the cases we inspected were sufficient.

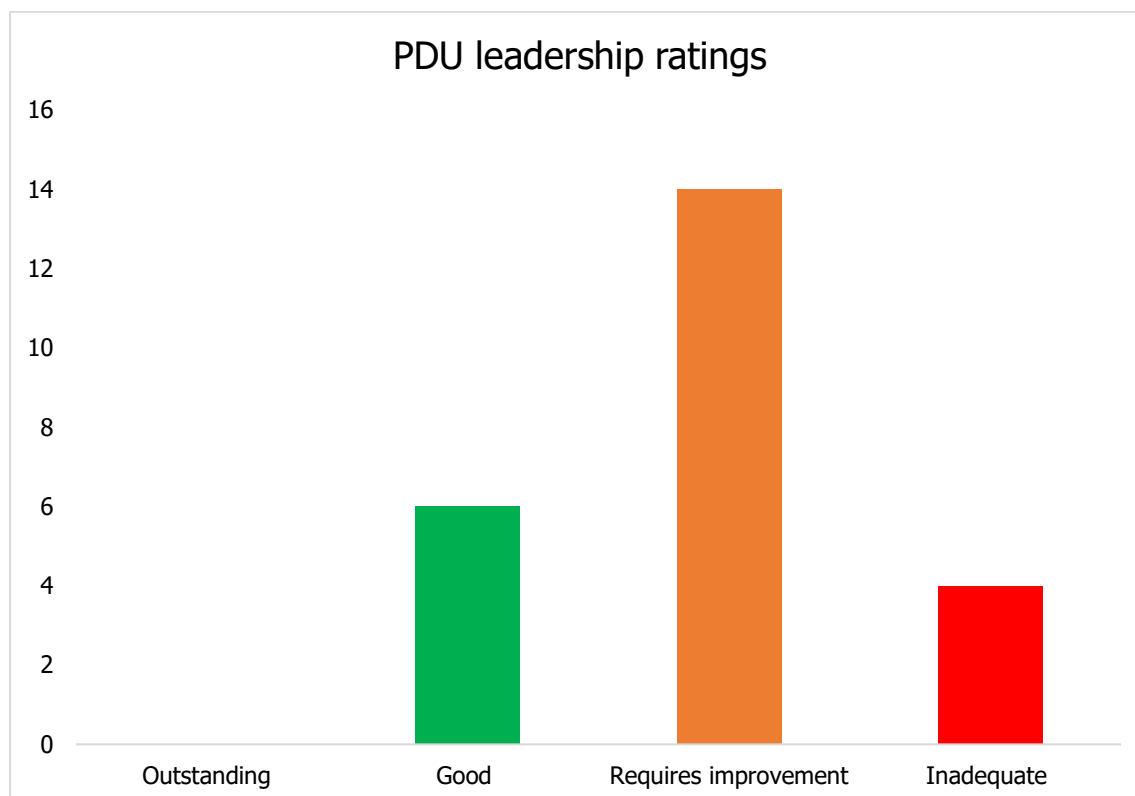
- Assessment – 23 'Inadequate', one 'Requires improvement'
- Planning – 19 'Inadequate', five 'Requires improvement'
- Implementation and delivery – All 24 'Inadequate'
- Reviewing – 22 'Inadequate', two 'Requires improvement'

At a regional level, our domain two standards cover **desistance, public protection, resettlement, unpaid work, court work, and statutory victim work**. Evidence for all these standards except unpaid work and statutory victim work comes from aggregated PDU data. Case inspection during the regional fieldwork looks at the quality of practice in unpaid work and statutory victim contact cases. We awarded 'Outstanding' ratings to all three regions for statutory victim work, but all the remaining standards were rated as 'Inadequate'. As with our inspection findings of PDUs, those ratings were driven by poor-quality work to keep people safe overall.

Leadership

In our core inspections, we rated six PDUs as 'Good', 14 as 'Requires improvement', and four as 'Inadequate' against our leadership standard. In our PDU inspections, leadership was the only area in which we awarded a 'Good' rating for some PDUs. All three regions were rated as 'Requires improvement' against our leadership standard.

Figure 3: Total number of PDUs awarded ratings against our leadership standard



Key findings

We found good examples of leadership in some of the PDUs inspected, with leaders having a clear and strong strategic vision for their PDU. Where leadership was strong, we found good local governance arrangements with clear lines of accountability, motivated and passionate staff, and strong strategic partnerships with agencies involved in supporting people on probation.

Unfortunately, most PDUs inspected faced significant challenges around managing resources effectively and improving the quality of work to keep people safe. This showed that strengths in leadership were not translating positively into service delivery. We also found that oversight of safeguarding work by middle and senior leaders was insufficient in many PDUs.

None of the three regions had taken sufficient action to improve the quality of risk assessment and management plans, and improvements were needed to the quality of casework. We also found some issues with governance arrangements in the regions – with ineffective arrangements to manage organisational risks in the East of England, and overly complex and counterproductive arrangements in Yorkshire and the Humber.

Strategic partnerships

Partnership working was an area of strength across some of our core inspections. We saw impressive examples of this, for example:

West Kent PDU's strategic plans included work to influence key stakeholders, including the local authorities' chief executives, the Kent Criminal Justice Board and the Reducing Reoffending Board.

In Essex South PDU, leaders had used the Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund to pay for projects with partnerships across the PDU. This aimed to strengthen services in specific areas, such as domestic abuse.

Essex North PDU's outward-focused approach ensured its work was closely integrated with partner agencies, especially Essex Police and Essex County Council. This included forums such as the Reducing Reoffending, Criminal Justice, Safeguarding Children and Safeguarding Adults Boards, and the Violence and Vulnerability Round Table and community safety partnerships.

Suffolk PDU had strong relationships with its strategic partners, including the police, youth justice service and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). This helped it to develop structured processes for exchanging information when gaps were identified, and better co-working.

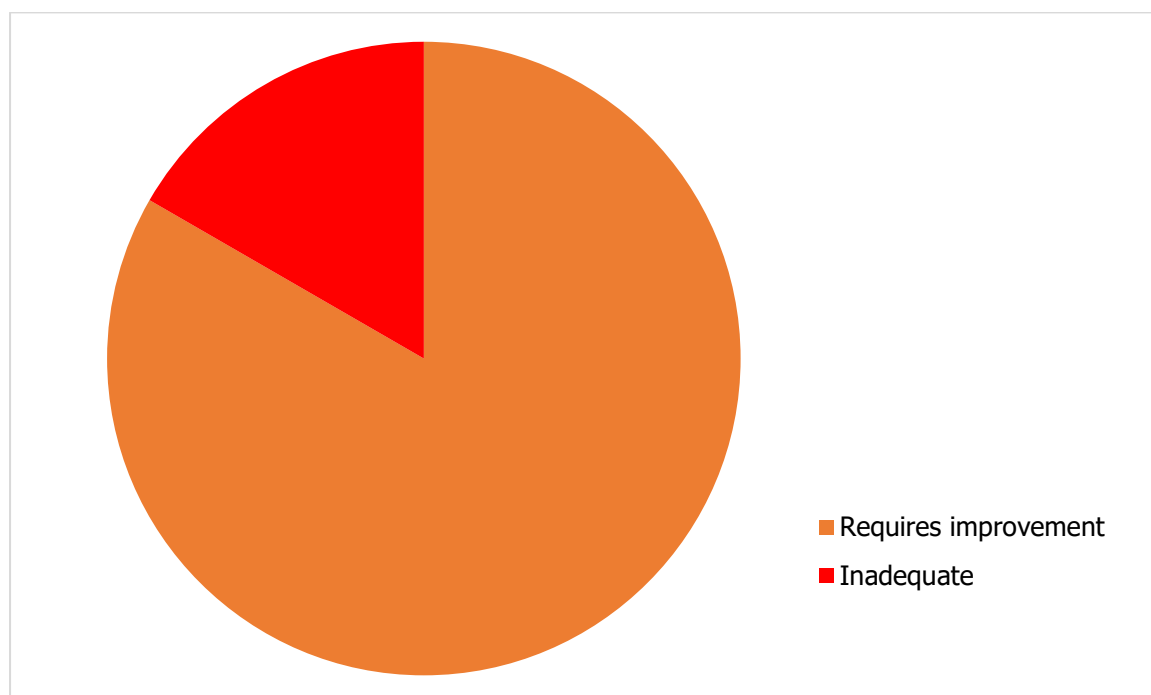
In Wakefield PDU, the head of service and middle managers sat on several boards to improve service delivery for people on probation. These included the Combating Drugs Partnership, Youth Justice Partnership Board and Serious Violence Duty Silver Group.

Staffing

In our core programme, we rated 20 PDUs as 'Requires improvement' and four as 'Inadequate' for staffing. No PDUs were rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' for this standard. We rated all the regions we inspected as 'Requires improvement' for staffing.

Our thematic inspection on [recruitment, training and retention](#) explored this area in more detail. It examined the current policies, strategies and arrangements that drive recruitment, training and retention, to understand how effectively they are supporting the Probation Service in building a stable, capable staff group. Our findings from this thematic inspection are presented throughout this section of the report.

Figure 4: Proportion of PDUs awarded ratings against our staffing standard



Key findings

Since the start of our inspection programme, we have repeatedly found staffing problems across the PDUs we have inspected. This reflects the staffing challenges facing the service nationally. Staff shortages have impacted on the quality of work to support people on probation to change and to protect victims from harm. While we have seen the number of practitioners employed by HMPPS rising overall, and sustained recruitment work by leaders, all three of the regions we inspected continued to face major staff shortages in many areas. This was particularly an issue at probation officer (PO) grade, but also affected other roles, including unpaid work supervisors and facilitators for group work programmes. Staff shortages also impacted on the workloads of practitioners, resulting in high workloads and high sickness levels (see figure 5) in the majority of PDUs we have inspected so far. We found that workloads for senior probation officers (SPOs), in particular, were unreasonable and excessive in many PDUs. SPOs were often overstretched and unable to make the difference they would want. We also found a lack of experienced staff across practitioner grades, along with insufficient training. All of these factors were impacting on the quality of work, individual stress and wellbeing of probation staff.

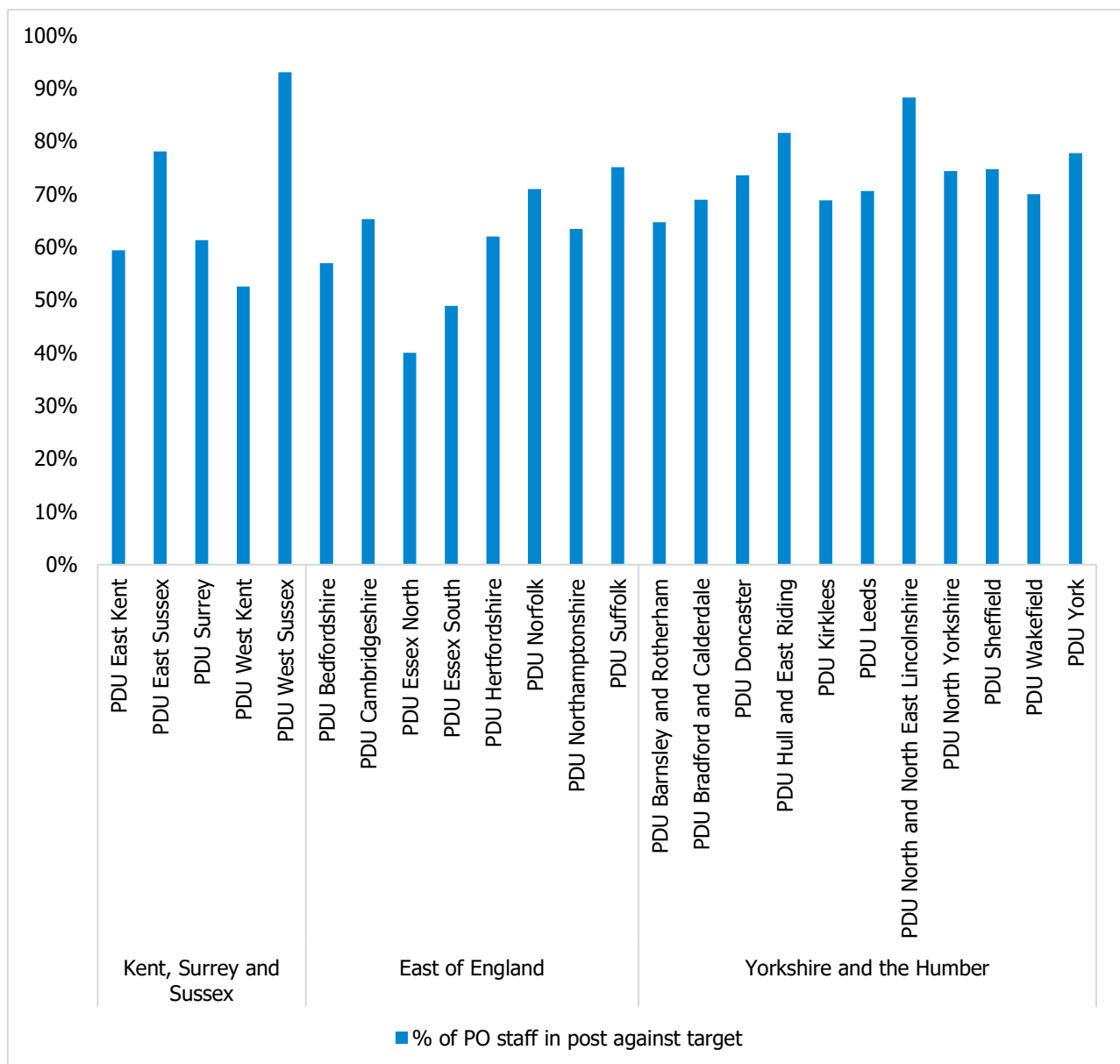
At a regional level, we found a series of significant problems. In Kent, Surrey and Sussex, some 22 per cent of staff had been in post for less than a year and inexperience was commonplace across the other two regions we inspected. PO vacancies were a problem across almost all PDUs within the regions. SPOs were almost always overwhelmed by wide spans of responsibility, which was affecting their ability to oversee the quality of work within their teams. We also found widespread vacancies across unpaid work supervisor roles (East of England and Yorkshire and the Humber), staffing issues in SFO teams due to high levels of staff sickness (Kent, Surrey and Sussex), and challenges in recruitment to case administrator grades (Yorkshire and the Humber).

Probation officer vacancies

A key difficulty for the probation service has been the shortage of POs, which we found in most PDUs. None of the PDUs we inspected had enough POs and in some PDUs the situation was unsustainable. The figures provided in HMPPS's workforce quarterly bulletin (September 2024) show that the average vacancy rate for POs across all the PDUs we inspected is 32 per cent (as at September 2024).¹ PO vacancies were often related to high workloads and sickness attributed to work-related stress. We found that even when workforce initiatives were put in place to try and manage resource shortfalls, workloads were still excessively high. In some PDUs, the shortage of POs had resulted in a lack of sufficient mentoring opportunities for trainee probation officers (Professional Qualification in Probation (PQiP)).

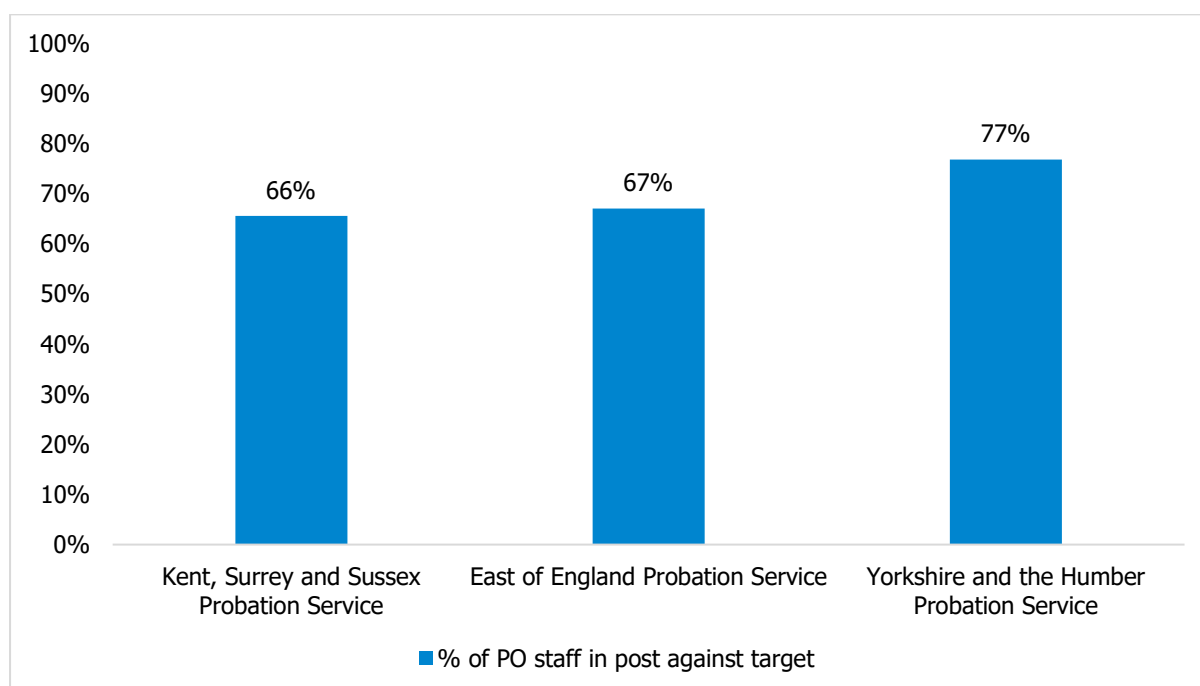
¹ HM Prison and Probation Service Workforce Statistics Bulletin England and Wales, September 2024: [hmpps-workforce-statistics-tables-sep-2024.ods](https://www.hmpps.gov.uk/workforce-statistics-tables-sep-2024.ods)

Figure 5: A breakdown at PDU level of actual staffing rates for probation officers compared to target staffing²



² HM Prison and Probation Service Workforce Statistics Bulletin England and Wales, September 2024: hmpps-workforce-statistics-tables-sep-2024.ods

Figure 6: Difference between staff in post and target staffing at regional level for probation officers³



Recruitment

Our thematic inspection of [recruitment, training and retention](#) found that recruitment efforts are gradually closing the gap between actual and target staffing numbers in most regions, although, in some, the shortfall is still unacceptably high. For probation service officers (PSOs), assessing staffing levels is complicated by including PQiP learners in headcounts, as this does not provide a clear picture of the substantive PSO staff group. Discrepancies between regional and national workforce planning expectations, coupled with outdated IT systems, have also hindered clarity and coordination of recruitment. Improved consultation with regional workforce planning leads is essential for understanding and addressing staffing needs.

While recruitment numbers are encouraging, it is necessary to evaluate whether the right candidates are being selected. Many new recruits lacked a clear understanding of their roles, and while most show promise, managers have raised concerns about some individuals' skills, values and resilience. These issues underscore the importance of robust recruitment processes and ensuring that candidates have realistic expectations of the role. While there is clearly an urgent need to recruit more staff at pace, insights from similar professions, such as social work, show that requiring a higher level of prior experience could help recruits better prepare for their roles. As a result, we recommended that the Probation Service should evaluate its approach to recruiting trainee POs to determine its impact on the long-term retention and performance of appointed staff.

The Probation Service also needs to do more to recruit a diverse workforce. Success rates in the recruitment process were poorer for men and people from ethnic minorities and more attention was needed to address these disparities. We also found that managers were not always given important health-related or other personal information about new recruits early

³ HM Prison and Probation Service Workforce Statistics Bulletin England and Wales, September 2024: hmpps-workforce-statistics-tables-sep-2024.ods

enough to ensure appropriate arrangements were in place to support them in their roles. These processes need to be improved to ensure smoother inductions into the organisation.

Training

Through our thematic inspection, we found the Probation Service's learning and development offer has evolved in response to the surge in new recruits, changing practice demands, and the methods available for providing training. Training programmes have been designed to balance the need to prepare staff for their roles within the available resources. The rapid training pathways – such as the 15-month PO qualification – are intense and demanding, combining academic study, vocational assessments and practical training. Those involved in teaching different components of the training had an inconsistent understanding of the material, and gave mixed messages to learners about priorities. As a result, learners did not always get a fully integrated learning experience, or maximise the opportunities to embed academic learning.

While shorter pathways are an efficient way to address workforce shortages, concerns remain about their adequacy in fully preparing trainees for the demanding roles they are taking on. This makes it essential to provide a period where newly qualified officers (NQOs) continue to receive focused support and development. We did not find these arrangements strong enough to provide sufficient protection, and therefore, we recommended that they be consistently delivered to ensure that NQOs are adequately supported to transition into the PO role. Additionally, longer qualifying pathways provide a training route for applicants who may have valuable, relevant experience but do not have an academic degree. Part-time routes are also available, which helps to build a diverse workforce.

HMPPS's learning and development products are designed to incorporate efficient and flexible methods, such as eLearning and online modules. However, we found that they are less effective for building the relational skills required for face-to-face work with people on probation. Therefore, we recommended face-to-face training when practitioners need to practice skills and build confidence in using them. HMPPS needs to reassess its training methods to ensure that they align with evidence-based approaches and give practitioners opportunities to apply their learning in practical settings. Enhancing the training offered for PSOs and creating more structured reflection opportunities for both PSOs and trainee POs are also crucial.

We found that focusing on developing new practitioners and delivering the PQIP programme, combined with heavy workloads, has limited continuous professional development opportunities for established POs.

Retention

Staff retention has become an increasing concern for the Probation Service, with the overall annual leaving rate reaching 10.4 per cent as of September 2024 (7.8 per cent for POs and 12.1 per cent for PSOs).⁴ While exit interviews are offered, not all departing staff choose to provide feedback on why they are leaving. Guidance on addressing common causes of attrition is available to regional staff to support staff retention. Still, it is not actively used in all regions and its impact is inconsistent.

High workloads and insufficient support are the primary reasons why staff leave. Many practitioners express frustration about their inability to dedicate adequate time to face-to-face work with people on probation. The volume of administrative tasks is often at odds with practitioners' expectations about their roles and further exacerbates dissatisfaction.

⁴ HM Prison and Probation Service Workforce Statistics Bulletin England and Wales, September 2024: [hmpps-workforce-statistics-tables-sep-2024.ods](https://www.hmpps.gov.uk/workforce-statistics-tables-sep-2024.ods)

Practitioners frequently cite pay as another source of discontent; while it is rarely given as the sole reason people leave the service, it is a strong contributory factor. Many staff told us they were better paid in their new roles. Reducing bureaucracy and enabling practitioners to spend more of their time on meaningful work with individuals on probation could help improve retention.

In addition, retention has strong links back to recruitment. Effective recruitment processes that select candidates with the right skills and attributes are vital in developing a sustainable workforce where employees have job satisfaction and feel valued and motivated to stay in their roles for longer.

Services

When inspecting this standard, we look at whether there is a comprehensive range of high-quality services in place that support a tailored and responsive service for all people on probation. The services standard only applies at PDU level and every PDU inspected was rated as 'Requires improvement' against it.

When inspecting against this standard, we look at the delivery of interventions for people on probation. This includes specific programmes to address psychological or behavioural issues, and referrals from probation to community services to help address offending-related needs such as substance misuse, employment, training and education, or accommodation. Probation practitioners can use these services during their supervision of people on probation. They include accredited programmes, structured interventions, probation practitioner toolkits, commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS), and local projects paid for by the Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund.

Our research and analysis bulletin – [the interventions landscape for probation services](#) – considers the strengths and weaknesses of the current system, looking at how well the current interventions landscape works for probation professionals. Findings from this research can be found throughout this section.

Key findings

We found that there was insufficient implementation and delivery of services to support the safety of other people in most of the cases we inspected across every PDU. Practitioners criticised structured interventions for not always being relevant to the needs of the local caseload and for being overly simplistic, unclear in their aims, and too restrictive in terms of their joining criteria.

Many respondents from our research and analysis bulletin on [the interventions landscape for probation services](#) were concerned that practitioners did not have the required training to deliver structured interventions successfully. In our core inspection programme, we found that staff lacked confidence in using toolkits and structured interventions.

Through our research we found that probation practitioners were sceptical about the value of the approved suite of toolkits designed for them. A major barrier for practitioners was having the time to familiarise themselves with the content, and the time to deliver it with the person on probation. Many practitioners wanted training on how to use the toolkits in their work.

In our inspections, we found gaps in access to mental health services and support in some PDUs, and issues in some PDUs with sharing information about child safeguarding and domestic abuse between agencies. Interventions providers told us they faced several problems in providing services to people on probation. At the operational level, the Refer and Monitor system was singled out as the main barrier to communicating with probation staff.

Some PDUs offered an extensive range of services, and we found impressive, albeit limited, examples of service provision for women, drug and alcohol support, housing, and other services in some PDUs. Good practice examples included:



In Barnsley, drug and alcohol services were effective and delivered well. The 'humankind' service was located in the PDU five days a week, and provided a prescribing clinic.



In Doncaster, women on probation were offered the opportunity to work with a female probation practitioner. The women's concentrator probation practitioners were co-located at the CRS provider's premises, which helped women to engage and comply with their sentence. Women could access a wide range of support and activities at the Changing Lives women's centre, as well as specialist services, including outreach support for women involved in sex working and at risk of sexual exploitation.



In Hull and East Riding, we saw excellent work to support homelessness. The probation service had worked in partnership with both the local council and other community agencies for over five years. There was a range of initiatives, including outreach surgeries, to improve support and reduce eviction rates.



In York, the PDU had pathways in place for neurodiversity services. These were provided by the National Autism Society (NAS) and commissioned using the Regional Outcomes and Innovation Fund. The NAS worked with PDU staff on case formulation to support holistic assessments, taking into account the neurodiversity of people on probation. It also carried out direct work, where appropriate, with people on probation.



Brighton and East Sussex PDU had a mentoring service for young adults. This was delivered by lived experience mentors from SPEIL (Self-belief, Perception, Engage, Inspire, Learn), and contracted at a regional level. Practitioners spoke positively about the practical support being offered through this.

Accredited programmes

Across our inspections, we often found that completion rates for accredited programmes were too low, and there were resourcing challenges in some programmes teams. We found limited provision for accredited programmes in some regions, primarily due to staffing shortfalls in the regional team.

Through our research into the [interventions landscape for probation services](#), we highlighted that, while practitioners viewed accredited programmes positively, they had concerns about waiting lists and the ability to access the programmes in a timely manner. This was reflected in our core inspection programme, where we found that waiting times to start accredited programmes in many PDUs were too long.

Commissioned rehabilitative services

Referral rates to CRS in some PDUs were not good enough, which meant there were missed opportunities to support people on probation. The CRS Refer and Monitor system was criticised by both probation staff and third-sector organisation workers for requiring duplicated data entries, being overly bureaucratic, and failing to provide either side with sufficient information to monitor progress safely and effectively.

In our research and analysis bulletin on the [interventions landscape for probation services](#), we reported that many probation professionals found that CRS were not sufficiently responsive to referrals or how well the individual was engaging. The accommodation offer was especially criticised by probation professionals, with many saying it was more efficient to make referrals to housing providers directly.

The demand for CRS accommodation services was high in some PDUs and, for regional leaders, access to stable housing for people on probation was a significant gap in the interventions available. The CRS accommodation provision was seen as an inadequate referral-only service that did not reliably secure housing for people in need. We found that the CRS service for accommodation provided by Interventions Alliance faced significant challenges, with many staff viewing it as ineffective. Staffing for the provider had been a challenge, as had managing the expectations of practitioners in line with the agreed level of service under nationally agreed regional contracts.

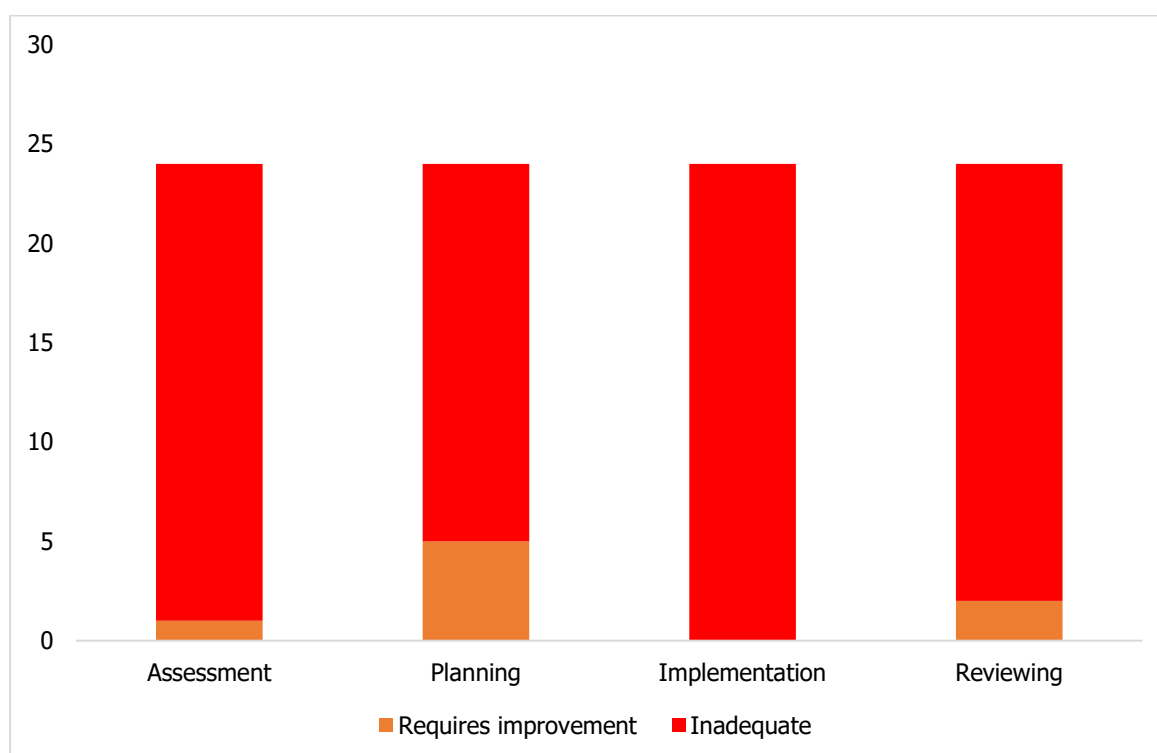
Case supervision

Within our domain two inspection standards, we look at how effectively assessment, planning, implementation and delivery, and reviewing do the following:

- 1. Engage the person on probation**
- 2. Focus on supporting desistance**
- 3. Keep other people safe**

The majority of PDUs inspected were rated as 'Inadequate' against all standards of service delivery, with some rated as 'Requires improvement' against some of the standards. All PDUs were rated as 'Inadequate' for our implementation and delivery standard.

Figure 7: PDU ratings against each domain two standard



All regions were rated as 'Inadequate' against five of our service delivery standards (public protection, desistance, court work, unpaid work, and resettlement). For statutory victim work, we were pleased to award 'Outstanding' ratings for all three regions. We provide more detail on our findings in this section of the report.

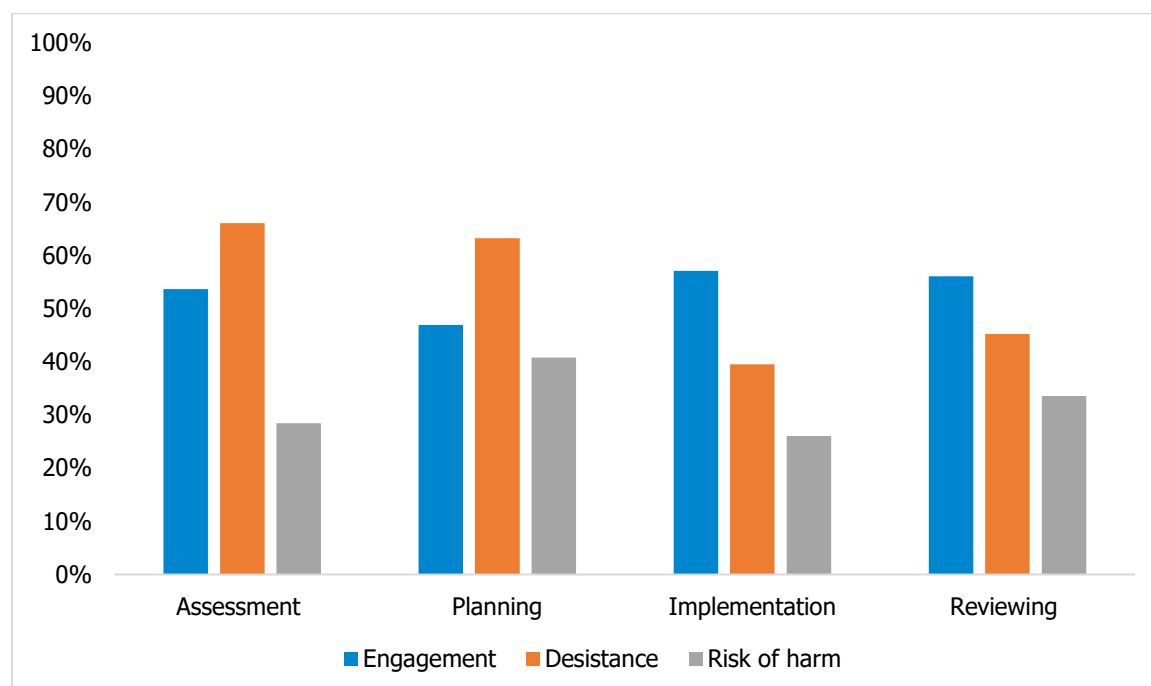
Key findings

Across our three key questions (engagement, desistance, and keeping people safe), we found that risk of harm work was delivered to the lowest level for all stages of case supervision when compared to engagement and desistance (see figure 8). We continued to find issues around obtaining domestic abuse and child safeguarding information; and where information was requested, we found that it was often not routinely used. Overall, we found that there was a lack of professional curiosity, which meant practitioners often knew too little about what was happening in the lives of people on probation and too often were basing assessments on assumptions.

The overall quality of assessment was frequently undermined because the practitioner had carried out little or no analysis of the individual's offending-related factors. This meant there were gaps in the practitioner's knowledge and understanding of the individual's motivation and triggers for offending.

Work on desistance was the strongest area of assessment and planning, with 66 per cent of cases for assessment and 63 per cent for planning focusing sufficiently on reducing reoffending and supporting desistance. Work to engage the person on probation was strongest for implementation and delivery, and reviewing.

Figure 8: Proportion of cases delivered judged to be sufficient at all stages of case supervision



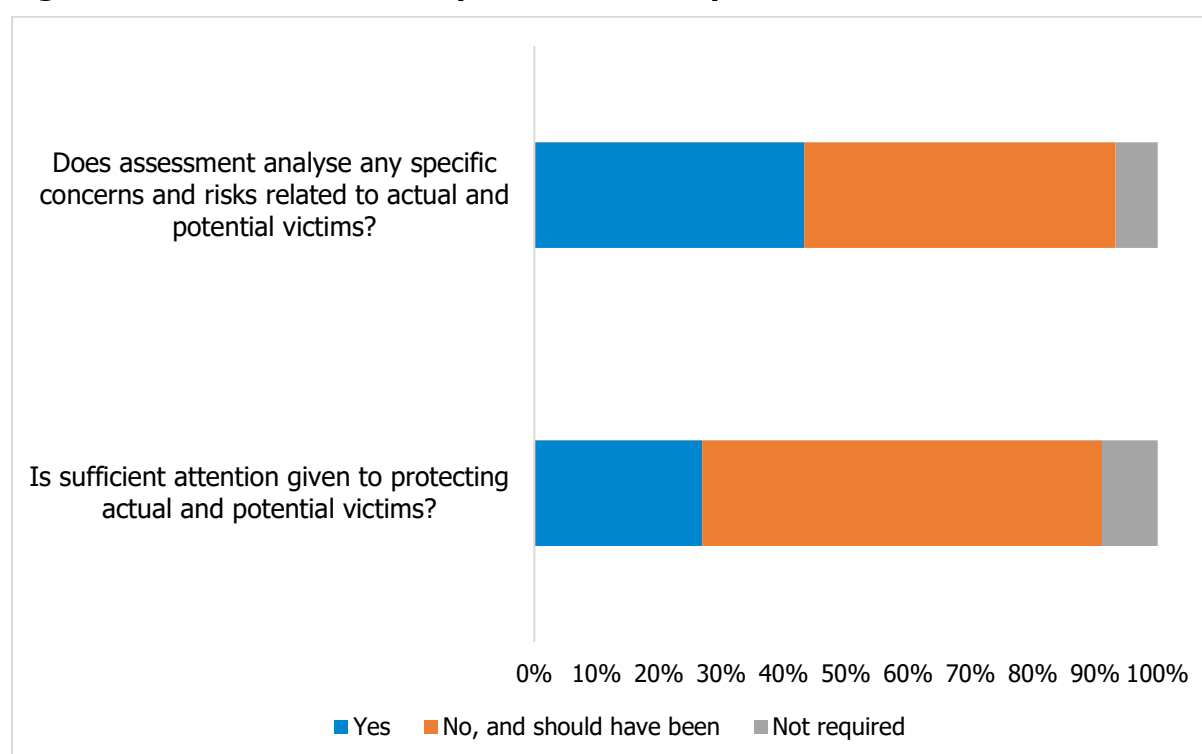
Risk of harm and public protection

In our inspections we assess whether assessment, planning, implementation and delivery, and reviewing focus on and support the safety of others. Across all our inspections, we have found that work to manage risk of harm and keep other people safe has been insufficient. Work to keep others safe has consistently been the least sufficient area of practice at all stages of sentence management.



Across our PDU inspections, we found that work undertaken to protect actual and potential victims needed to improve considerably. In many cases where domestic abuse and child safeguarding concerns were evident, we found limited monitoring of developing or existing relationships to keep people safe.

Figure 9: Work undertaken to protect actual or potential victims



Domestic abuse and child safeguarding information

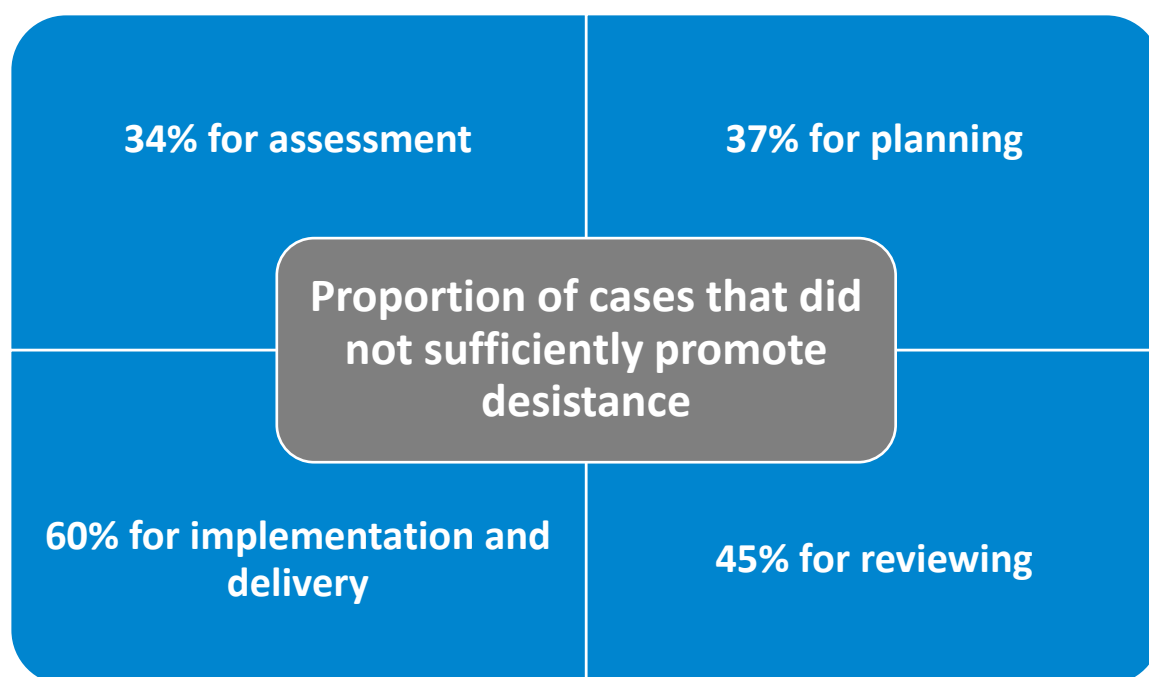
We found that practitioners obtained sufficient information on domestic abuse and child safeguarding in just 65 per cent of cases for domestic abuse, and just 50 per cent for child safeguarding. They used this information when assessing the case in 51 per cent of cases for domestic abuse, and 38 per cent for child safeguarding. Our inspectors reported that current domestic abuse concern were an important factor linked to risk of harm in 59 per

cent of cases, and current child safeguarding concern was an important factor linked to risk of harm in 67 per cent of cases.

We also looked at whether practitioners had obtained and used relevant domestic abuse and child safeguarding information before preparing the court report. Across our PDU inspections, practitioners obtained sufficient information on domestic abuse in 62 per cent of cases before the court report was prepared. They used this information in preparing the court report in just 42 per cent of cases. Practitioners obtained sufficient information on child protection and child safeguarding in 45 per cent of cases before preparing the court report. They used information about child protection and child safeguarding, where relevant, in 30 per cent of cases before preparing the court report.

Desistance

In our inspections we look at whether high-quality, personalised, and responsive services are delivered to promote desistance. At a regional level, we combine all of the PDU inspection casework to form an overall, aggregated proportion of cases where sufficient work had taken place to support people on probation to change. We rated all three regions as 'Inadequate' against this standard.

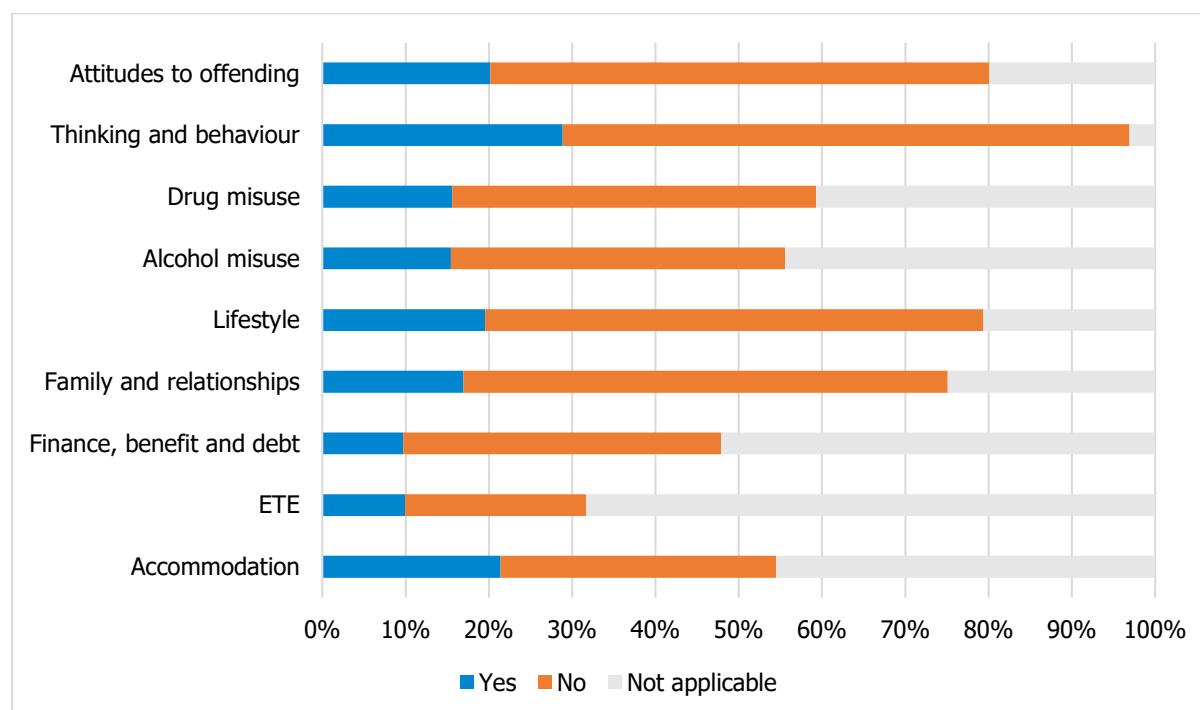


Overall, we found that too many people on probation were not receiving sufficient support for problems linked to their offending (see figure 10). Even when practitioners understood what people on probation needed to reduce further reoffending, the services to provide this were not always available or used appropriately. In some cases, we found that assessments generally focused on analysing factors related to offending, and that planning prioritised offending factors. However, this did not lead to the implementation and delivery of sentences.

We found that issues around accredited programmes and CRS led to deficits in desistance work. In Kent, Surrey and Sussex region, accredited programmes had been affected by staff shortages and one PDU had poor completion rates for general offending programmes. In Yorkshire and the Humber, delivery of accredited programmes was not organised well enough. This meant that not enough people on probation were being required to attend group work when it would have been appropriate. We also found that probation practitioners needed to refer more cases to CRS in order to increase the number of people

accessing support. In the East of England region, waiting lists for primary mental health treatment requirements were too long, although the region had obtained additional funding to provide more capacity.

Figure 10: Percentage of cases where sufficient services were delivered in respect of offending needs



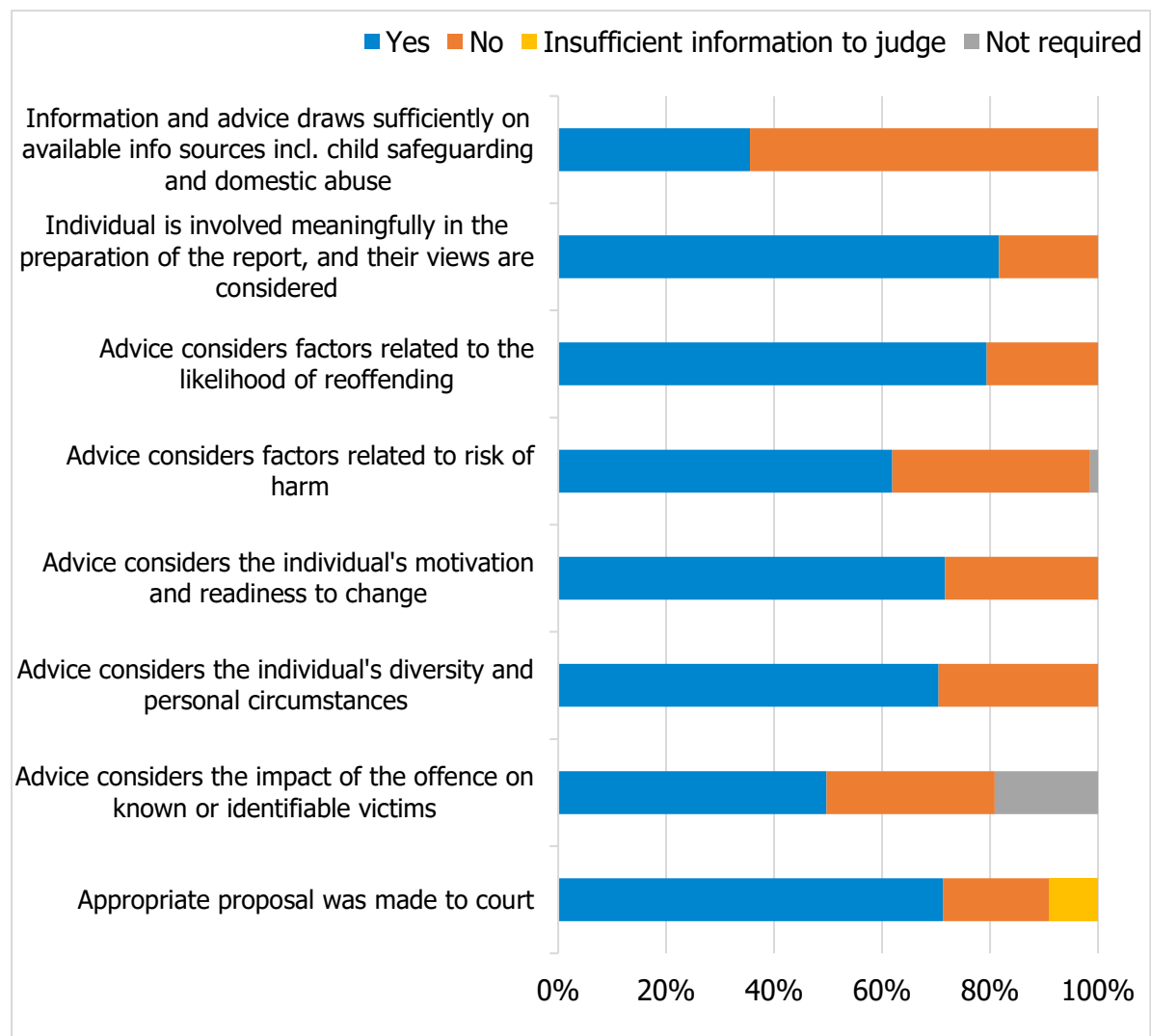
Court work

The Probation Service uses pre-sentence reports (PSRs) to provide information and advice to help judges and magistrates when making sentencing decisions. Probation practitioners in court consider the objectives of public protection and rehabilitation, and aim to advise on safe sentencing options that enable the court to set the best possible conditions for a successful rehabilitative journey. In our inspections, we rate court work at a regional level and we inspect it when a PSR (of any type) has been prepared within the previous 12 months in the inspected Probation Service region.

All three regions were rated as 'Inadequate' against our court work standard. When looking at court work, we judge whether pre-sentence information and advice provided to court is sufficiently analytical and personalised, to support the court's decision. In the majority (70 per cent) of cases, we judged PSRs to be insufficient in that respect. Deficits in the quality of court reports were commonly related to insufficient information on domestic abuse and the risk posed by the person on probation to children.

While our research and analysis bulletin on the [quality of pre-sentence information and advice provided to courts](#) analysed cases from our previous inspection programme (cases in 2022/2023), the findings were similar to some of those we have found in our current core programme. We have continued to find staff shortages for some courts (such as in the Kent, Surrey and Sussex region), with limited levels of experience in some court teams. This has sometimes resulted in a lack of confidence and learning opportunities. We have also continued to find that information about child safeguarding and domestic abuse was not being obtained frequently enough, and where information was gathered this was not used in enough cases.

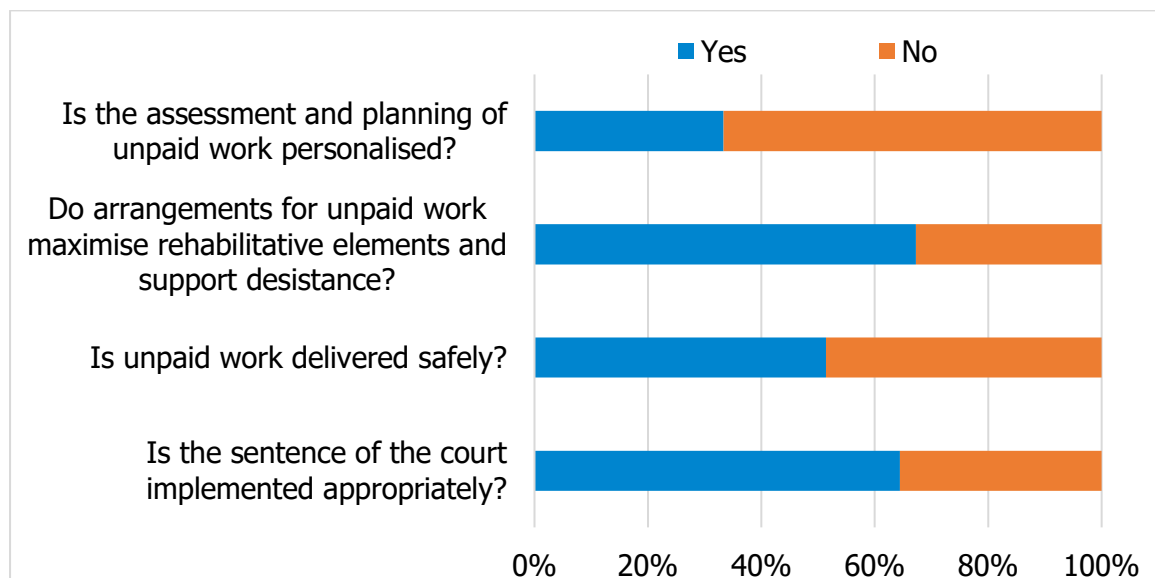
Figure 11: Inspectors' judgements on the quality of pre-sentence information and advice



Unpaid work

In our regional inspections we look at unpaid work (UPW) and whether it is delivered safely and effectively, engaging the person on probation in line with expectations of the court. All three regions were rated as 'Inadequate' against our UPW standard.

Figure 12: Probation regional scores for each UPW key question



Our [thematic inspection of UPW](#) was the first since 2016. During the interim period, significant events had affected the delivery of UPW. The Covid-19 pandemic and the incorporation of UPW into a unified probation service in 2021 had serious implications for the delivery of UPW. Unification also meant that the probation regions took responsibility for the different community rehabilitation company UPW operating models. These operated differently, both across England and Wales and also within regions. The performance of UPW at this stage was of serious concern.

In 2021, recognising the serious issues with UPW delivery, additional funding was allocated for the period April 2022 to March 2025. The community payback recovery board was set up, under the probation reform programme, to oversee spending and improve the delivery of UPW. Probation regions had introduced effective accountability frameworks to monitor performance and address areas for improvement.

Policy, strategy, and leadership

In our thematic inspection, we found that the governance arrangements and the clear strategic direction provided, both nationally and regionally, had improved the performance of UPW. UPW was prioritised across the inspected regions, and managers at all levels understood the need to improve performance.

Delivery of UPW requirements as part of multi-requirement orders in sentence management teams did not match the performance of standalone UPW teams delivering standalone requirements. This was particularly evident in the number of incomplete UPW requirements on suspended sentence orders. Although it was likely that more complex cases would receive multi-requirement orders, this did not account for the contrast in performance. In our view, it highlighted the operational tension in sentence management teams between adopting a proactive approach to public protection in their wider caseload and overseeing the delivery of UPW requirements. To address these issues, a review of the delivery model,

especially the respective operational responsibilities of UPW and sentence management teams, is needed.

Over 500 community payback staff had been recruited in supervisor, placement coordinator, and operational manager roles. However, there remained recruitment and retention challenges in some regions in the south of England, which impeded their delivery of UPW. We also found that the supervisor's role can be challenging and involves the lone supervision of UPW groups. Many supervisors demonstrated excellent practice during the inspection and had established good professional relationships, supported by pro-social behaviour. Supervisors, however, had inconsistent access to training in key areas, such as managing anger and aggression. In view of the profile of the UPW caseload, with 13 per cent assessed as high risk of serious harm, this required urgent review. The training provided for placement coordinators was also inconsistent and did not match the demands of the role. This should also be reviewed.

Delivery of unpaid work

Both personal information and information on risk in the digital assessment tool were often incomplete and insufficient. Assessments were often poor and did not provide sufficient information to make appropriate placement decisions. The arrangements for ensuring UPW supervisors had comprehensive risk information were inadequate. Methods of communication were inconsistent and the information available was frequently insufficient. The potential role of UPW staff in risk management generally was underestimated.

We did find that the enforcement of UPW requirements had improved; however, inconsistencies remained in the acceptance of absences. Again, performance varied between UPW standalone teams and sentence management teams.

While UPW placements did not consistently help people on probation to acquire employment-related skills, people highly valued their relationships with UPW supervisors. One example of effective practice was the adoption of the 'human factors approach' into the delivery of UPW in Wales. This raised staff confidence, helped to develop a more cohesive operational culture, and improved the sharing of key information between staff.

Resettlement

In our regional inspections, we look at whether resettlement was timely, personalised, and coordinated, and whether it addressed the key resettlement needs and supported individuals into the community. We found that this was the case in just 41 per cent of cases across all three regions. All three regions were rated as 'Inadequate' against our resettlement standard.

We found that work to prepare people for release and put risk management plans in place was insufficient. There were issues with the Offender Management in Custody (OMiC) model, often caused by staffing issues. In Kent, Surrey and Sussex region, some prisons had very limited and sometimes no probation staff. This seriously affected the delivery of effective resettlement work and meant that probation services had to rely on the prisons to provide prison offender managers from their staffing group. In the East of England region, practitioners in prisons and the community had too little capacity to dedicate enough time to people in prison before their release. Here we found that the OMiC model for prisoners serving longer sentences did not support robust pre-release planning. In Yorkshire and the Humber region, incomplete restructuring of resettlement functions and vacancies across OMiC structures impacted on the quality of services being delivered in preparation for release.

Despite the 'Inadequate' ratings, we did find some strengths in resettlement work. In Kent, Surrey and Sussex region, we found strong information-sharing between prison-based staff and community practitioners in three PDUs. We also found that relationships with prison staff were positive in this region.

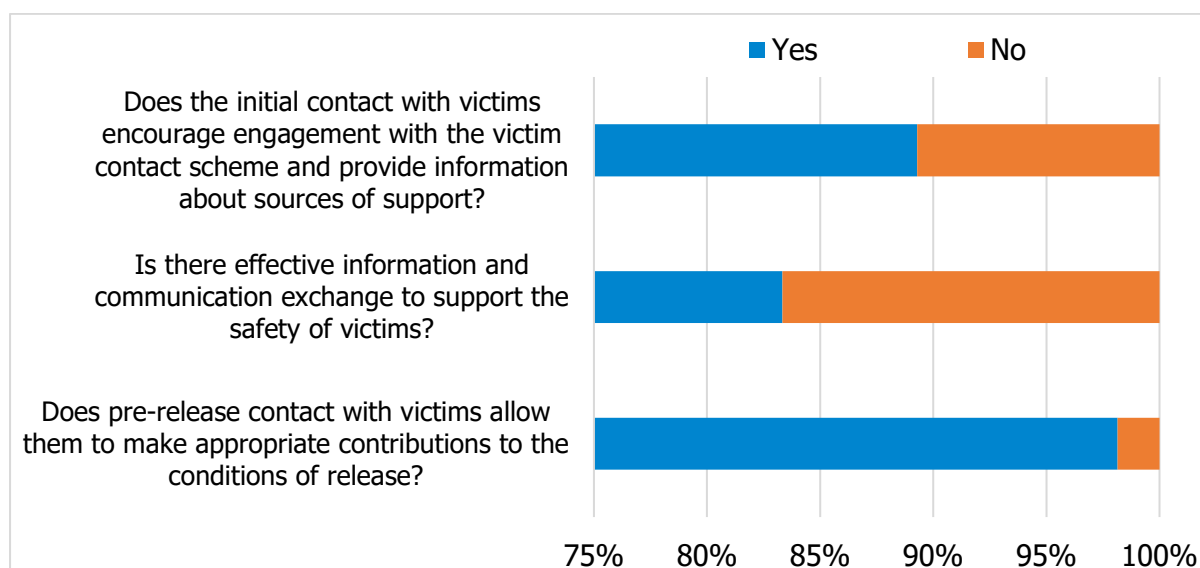
Work with victims

The Victims' Code sets out the services and minimum standard for these services that must be provided for victims in England and Wales, and sets out 12 rights for victims.⁵

The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 gives victims in some circumstances the right to receive information about the person who committed the offence, and to make representations about licence conditions on the person's release from prison. This is known as the Victim Contact Scheme (VCS). Victims can opt into the VCS if: (a) they are the victim of a violent or sexual crime, and (b) the offender is sentenced to 12 months in prison or more. The Probation Service employs victim liaison officers (VLOs) to help victims understand their rights under the VCS, and to make representations about licence conditions on their behalf. When the Probation Service is notified about a qualifying offence and sentence type, regions should allocate a VLO to the victim and take all reasonable steps to contact them and ask about their wishes.

Our statutory victim work standard applies at a regional level and focuses on activity delivered in relation to the VCS. We look at whether relevant and timely information is provided to victims of a serious offence, and whether victims are given the opportunity to contribute their views at key points in the sentence. Overall, we found that a high standard of statutory victim work was delivered across the regions, with all three rated as 'Outstanding' for this standard.

Figure 13: Proportion of cases delivered to expected level for statutory victim contact



⁵ Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales (Victims' Code): [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales \(Victims' Code\) - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674443/Code_of_Practice_for_Victims_of_Crime_in_England_and_Wales_(Victims'_Code).pdf)

Key findings

Across the three regions, we found that VLOs were providing an excellent service to victims involved in the statutory scheme. They made appropriate initial contact with the victim soon after sentence, and considered the timing of contact, in 93 per cent of inspected cases. Kent, Surrey and Sussex region had the highest opt-in rate from victims (81 per cent). Across the three regions there was effective communication between VLOs and probation practitioners. Relevant information about victims had been shared with practitioners by VLOs to inform their risk management planning in every case inspected.

The victim's views were treated appropriately and in accordance with the VCS in every case inspected. The victim was given the opportunity to contribute their views to inform decisions about the offender's release in a timely way, and was supported in doing so, in 98 per cent of inspected cases. Additionally, victims' views were treated with sensitivity and respect.

In one region we did find that victims were not always given advice about what to do if the perpetrator made unwanted contact with them, and support could have been strengthened by providing victims with details of local sources of help more often. This would have widened the support available to victims beyond the help provided by VLOs.

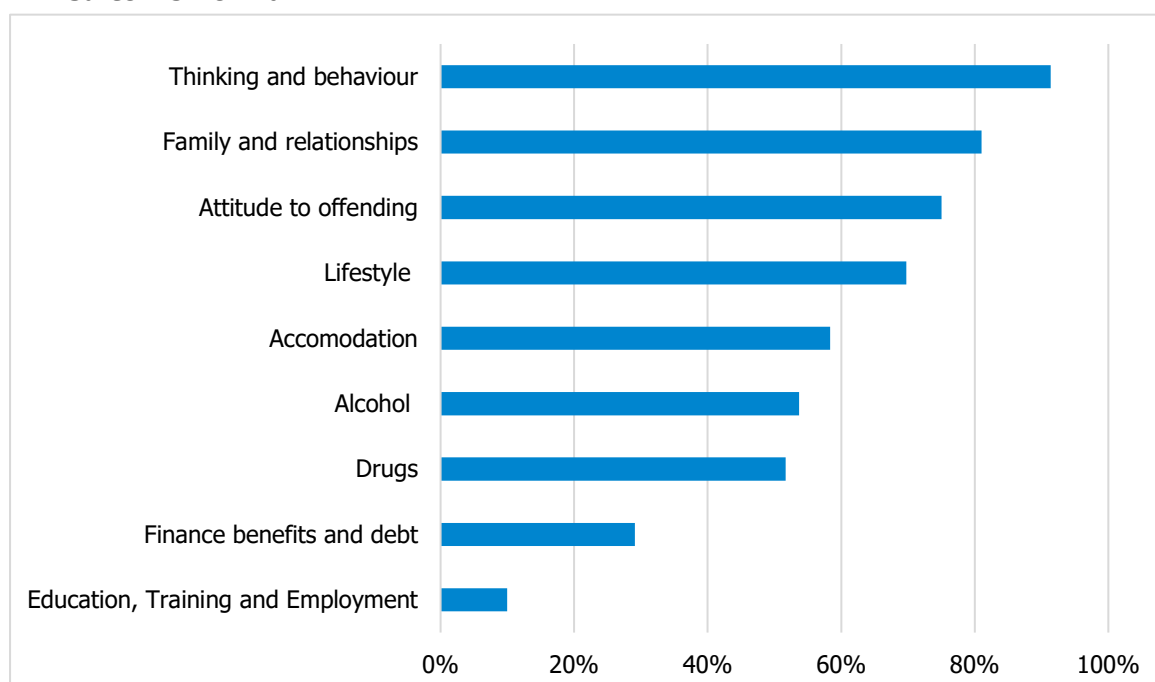
Needs of people on probation

In our inspections we look at the factors most closely linked to offending and how these are addressed through developing strengths and addressing the needs of people on probation. The offending factors that we look at are:



When considering offending factors relating to the risk of harm, our inspections found that thinking and behaviour was the most important factor linked to risk of harm across the cases we inspected, followed by family and relationships (see figure 14).

Figure 14: Proportion of cases where offending factor was an important factor linked to risk of harm



Diversity and inclusion

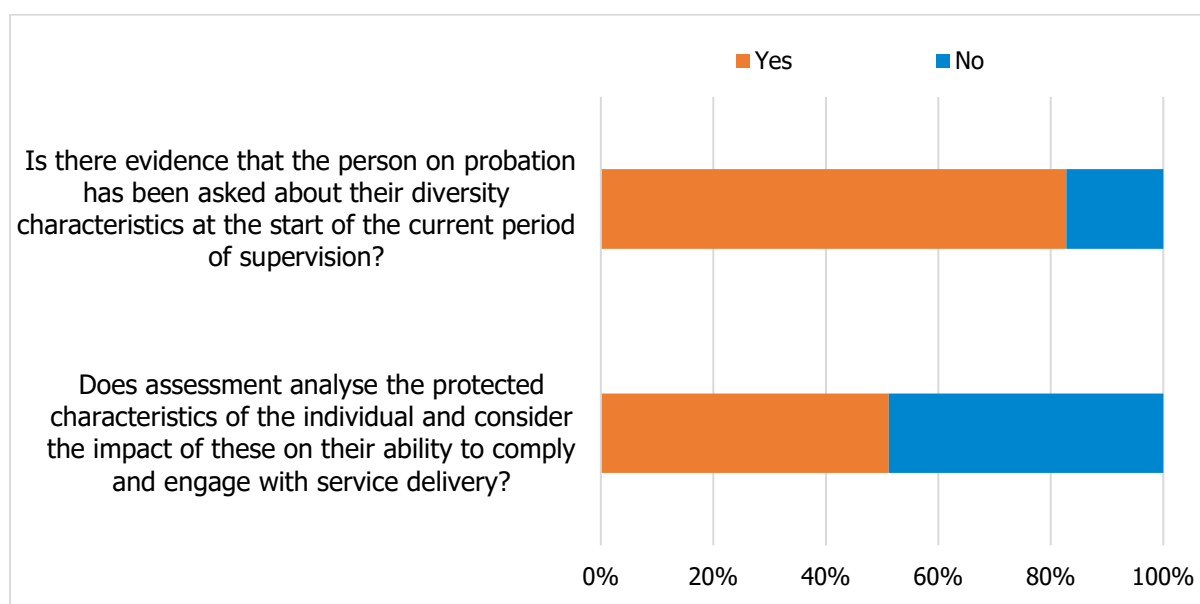
We expect practitioners to take a personalised approach to their work with people on probation. Organisational arrangements and activity should support them in this approach. A personalised approach is one in which services are tailored to meet the needs of individuals, giving them as much choice and control as possible over the support they receive. This personalised approach must take account of issues related to an individual's protected characteristics.

We split our definition of a personalised approach into two parts. First, we consider diversity factors, which we define as the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010. These are race, age, disability, gender, sexuality, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage or civil partnership, and religion or belief. Separate to this, we consider an individual's personal circumstances and how well the needs arising from these are met, for example flexible supervision arrangements for a person on probation who works or is a carer.

Key findings

People on probation were asked about their protected characteristics in 83 per cent of the cases we inspected. However, we saw evidence that practitioners had analysed the potential impact of these factors on individuals' engagement and compliance in just 51 per cent (see figure 15).

Figure 15: Proportion of cases where individuals were asked about their protected characteristics and proportion where the potential impact of these factors on the individual's engagement and compliance was analysed



We did see some effective practice in relation to diversity and inclusion within PDUs, for example:

Bedfordshire PDU had commissioned the Autism Bus to help practitioners to develop their knowledge and understand how to work with people with an autism diagnosis.

West Kent PDU had commissioned Doing What Really Matters and SPEIL (Self-belief, Perception, Engage, Inspire, Learn) to provide coaching and mentoring to people on probation from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic groups.

In Barnsley and Rotherham, the neurodiversity service was delivered by the National Autistic Society. It was well used in the PDU and had one of the highest referral rates in the region. The service worked jointly with practitioners to support people on probation who had a condition related to neurodiversity. It also provided training to upskill staff working with individuals who may have a diagnosed or undiagnosed need.

The PDU culture club in Leeds PDU gave staff access to resources and learning on a range of protected characteristics. This activity was provided by the Equality and Diversity Group.

In Sheffield, children transferring from the youth justice service to the PDU were held by youth practitioners for as long as possible to minimise disruption, including beyond the age of 18 where necessary. Children's maturity was being considered before they formally transferred fully into adult services.

In Essex South, a recently launched mentoring project was in place to support people going through the court process. It worked with those from a minority ethnic background to improve understanding of and engagement with all the court and sentencing process.

Work with women

Seventeen years after the Corston Report called for fundamental changes to improve the experiences of women in the criminal justice system, we revisited the issue in our [thematic inspection of the quality of work undertaken with women](#). This built on our two previous inspections from 2011 and 2016. This inspection was carried out jointly with HM Inspectorate of Prisons. Overall, we found that while earlier inspections found some improvements, services remained inconsistent.

Policy, strategy, and leadership

Compared to our previous inspections, we found a more developed set of policies and guidance available to inform the work of prison and probation services with women. These were rooted in evidence based practices that highlighted effective approaches to addressing the needs of women in the criminal justice system. The [Women's Policy Framework](#) (MOJ, 2021) establishes clear expectations and requirements for prison and probation. It promotes gender-informed practices that address the underlying factors that influence women's offending. However, the [target operating model](#) (TOM) (HMPPS, 2021) for the unified probation service, while acknowledging the distinct needs of women offenders, weakens

some of the critical expectations set out in the policy framework. For example, while the framework mandates that women 'must' be offered the option of a female-only environment, the TOM reduces this to an 'aspiration' and it is not clear which approach takes primacy. In practice, we found that many of the expectations for women are not being consistently met.

While there is strong central direction from the HMPPS Women's Group around working with women, competing priorities and resource constraints within probation regions have led to inconsistent delivery of appropriate support in suitable settings for women.

A range of interventions tailored to women – such as group work and individualised support – are theoretically available; however, their implementation is limited. This means that many women who could benefit from this type of support do not get it. Furthermore, there has been no systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of these interventions or their impact on women's lives. The unified Probation Service model relies on private and voluntary sector providers to deliver rehabilitative services, with contracts awarded to single providers in each Police and Crime Commissioner area. Although this model offers a holistic approach through specialised expertise, the referral process is overly complex and poorly understood by probation practitioners. This results in delays and inefficiencies, undermining the intended benefits of the model. Greater collaboration between probation services and these providers is essential if the potential of these partnerships is to be fully realised.

Community sentence management

Approaches to managing women in the Probation Service varied across England and Wales. Some PDUs had specialist women's teams, often co-located with multi-agency women's centres that provide single sex places for women to access support from various organisations. However, in other areas, women were managed no differently than men, which was unacceptable. While many probation practitioners were dedicated to supporting women and addressing their complex needs, over half reported needing more training. eLearning was the primary training resource for working with women but is insufficient to adequately prepare practitioners to understand effective practice with women.

Since our last thematic inspection, the Probation Service has improved its focus on women's needs in some respects. Each region now has a women's lead at middle manager level, who reports to a senior leader and is tasked with improving practice and services. The effectiveness of these roles varies depending on regional priorities. Court reports for women were generally good, with appropriate gender-informed recommendations. However, staff were not always aware of available interventions that could be added to sentences, which led to missed opportunities to address women's needs.

In most regions, women were automatically allocated to female practitioners, though they were rarely consulted about this preference. Too often women were not meaningfully involved in their assessments or in sentence planning. While significant traumatic life events were typically noted in assessments, there was insufficient analysis to understand their impact on women's lives or offending.

We also found that safety and wellbeing concerns were frequently overlooked, with known risks such as domestic abuse often unaddressed. In some cases, there was inadequate follow-up when vulnerable women disengaged from probation. The quality of court work and assessments was poorer for Black and minority ethnic women, and practitioners were often unaware of specialist services for minoritised groups.

Although a range of interventions and services exist to address women's needs, they remain underused. As a result, little progress was made in addressing women's priority needs in most cases.

Probation work with young adults

In 2024 we published our first [evaluation of services for young adults](#) as a distinct group and focused on the quality of work delivered by the Probation Service. Previous inspections of youth-to-adult transition work (HMI Probation 2012, 2016) highlighted significant deficits in the quality of work to transition individuals from youth justice services to adult probation. Until recently, little attention was paid to the experiences of young adults supervised by probation, but this has shifted in recent years.

The TOM for probation services in England and Wales and the Young Adults Probation Framework (HMPPS, 2022) set out what is required of probation practitioners when working with young adults aged 18 to 25. They demonstrate a growing emphasis on addressing the unique needs of this demographic.

Policy, strategy and leadership

The Young Adults Policy Framework sets out a commitment to address the unique needs of young adults by taking a specific approach to probation services for them. While this is creditable, putting this framework into practice has been challenging for probation services. When the framework was introduced, there was not enough understanding of what was needed to make it work. As a result, while there are some pockets of good work, it is not widespread. To embed the framework into practice, the Probation Service needs to establish better governance structures with clear lines of accountability for delivering it, and sufficient resources allocated.

In our sample, only half of the cases with high levels of identified need benefited from CRS. Of those referred, one-third did not engage with the services. It was good to see that some areas benefited from services specifically tailored to young adults, which were co-commissioned with Police and Crime Commissioners.

Some managers described barriers to accessing age-specific data, for example on referral, engagement and completion rates. However, we were assured by HMPPS strategic leads that this data is available. Informed by this data, the next round of commissioning should now be used to attract specialist services designed to address the specific needs of young adults.

Staff and managers emphasised the complexity and demands of working with young adults. Overall, they had not received sufficient training to implement mandatory aspects of the framework, such as completing maturity assessments. Where resources had been made available, not all staff were aware of them or felt confident in using them. This had proved to be a barrier to embedding the trauma-informed approach advocated in the framework.

Information-sharing, partnerships and services

In almost half of the cases we inspected, the young adult had previous, and often significant, involvement with children's social care. We found that court orders frequently began without all relevant information being received and/or analysed to inform the assessment and interventions. Information was rarely sought from youth justice services, despite many young adults on probation having been previously involved with them. Youth justice services hold a wealth of information on the children they work with. This includes previous out-of-court disposals that may not always appear on police records but can help to explain any patterns of offending. If accessed, this information would provide probation staff with a better understanding of these young people, and their needs and life experience.

The Probation Service has established processes for conducting domestic abuse enquiries with the police domestic abuse unit. This information exchange focuses mainly on situations where a person on probation has been a victim or perpetrator of domestic abuse. However, exposure to domestic abuse – an often significant and sometimes ongoing factor in the lives of many young adults on probation — is typically overlooked. This needs to be considered when assessing risk and safeguarding.

We did note some excellent examples of partnership working in practice, such as the work between probation services and leaving care teams to support young adults who were care experienced. Working in partnership on these cases resulted in better quality assessment and planning, often involving a coordinated approach to delivering interventions and better access to services through shared resources.

Currently, there are no specific targeted approaches for young women, who are often addressed based on gender with limited attention paid to their maturity. To foster a more tailored approach to working with diverse groups, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds, practitioners need to become more aware of available third-sector providers who specialise in engaging young adults from different backgrounds.

Quality of court reports and case supervision

We found that more needs to be done to ensure that the needs of young adults are understood and met, their safety and wellbeing are prioritised, and that where risk issues have been identified, other people are kept safe. Not all young adults who would have benefited from a court report had received one. Where maturity assessments had been completed, they were not consistently informing sentencing proposals. Overall, reports lacked sufficient detail to assist the court in reaching the most appropriate sentencing decision, one that is both achievable for the young adult, and likely to address the identified concerns and reduce any risk issues. To be meaningful, this information must be analysed in the context of their assessed level of maturity.

While we noted examples of good practice, gaps in information and lack of depth in practitioners' understanding of the significance of maturity and development impacted on the quality of most aspects of their work. The quality of services delivered to young adults in custody requires particular attention. This group often faces the most challenges, is vulnerable, and is often assessed as posing a more significant risk to others. Getting it right at the point of release from custody is critical if young adults are to succeed in the community.

Finally, in all aspects of work, practitioners need to focus on the diversity needs of young adults, whether age is their only presenting protected characteristic or they present with multiple complex and diverse needs. This requires a thoughtful and considered approach. Practitioners should be equipped to discuss experiences of discrimination with young adults and offer support where it is required. A more creative approach could involve specialist external services offering ongoing support for those who need it.

Appendix 1: Publications

In this appendix, we include details of every publication covered by this annual report, including links to read and/or download them.

PDU inspection reports

[West Sussex](#)

[Brighton and East Sussex](#)

[Surrey](#)

[East Kent](#)

[West Kent](#)

[Suffolk](#)

[Norfolk](#)

[Hertfordshire](#)

[Northamptonshire](#)

[Cambridge and Peterborough](#)

[Essex South](#)

[Bedfordshire](#)

[Essex North](#)

[Doncaster](#)

[Barnsley and Rotherham](#)

[Sheffield](#)

[Wakefield](#)

[Leeds](#)

[Bradford and Calderdale](#)

[Kirklees](#)

[North Yorkshire](#)

[York](#)

[Hull and East Riding](#)

[North and North East Lincolnshire](#)

Regional inspection reports

[Kent, Surrey and Sussex](#)

[East of England](#)

[Yorkshire and the Humber](#)

Thematic inspection reports

[The quality of work undertaken with women](#)

[The quality of services delivered to young adults in the Probation Service](#)

[A thematic inspection of the recruitment, training and retention of frontline probation practitioners](#)

[Thematic inspection of unpaid work](#)

Research and analysis bulletins

[The links between the quality of supervision and positive outcomes for people on probation](#)

[Frontline leadership in probation and youth justice](#)

[The interventions landscape for probation services: delivery, challenges, and opportunities](#)

[The quality of pre-sentence information and advice provided to courts – 2022 to 2023 inspections](#)

Academic insights

[Realising the rehabilitative potential of approved premises](#)

[The 'Sequential Intercept Model' – a trauma-informed diversionary framework](#)

[Sport and physical activity as an intervention for reintegration and resettlement: key mechanisms for policy and practice](#)

[The '12Cs' Collective Safeguarding Responsibility Model](#)

[Building choice in domestic abuse perpetrator interventions: reflections on what clients, victims and practitioners need](#)

[Inclusive Recovery Cities and the implications for probation practice](#)

Effective practice guides

[Working with women](#)

[Working with young adults](#)

[Recruitment, training, and retention](#)

[Unpaid work](#)

Appendix 2: Inspection standards and ratings

For more information on our domain one and domain two standards, please see our rules and guidance documents:

[Probation Inspection – Domain one rules and guidance, August 2023](#)

[Probation Inspection – Domain two case assessment rules and guidance, December 2024](#)

PDU ratings table

PDU inspection ratings				1. Organisational arrangements and activity			2. Service delivery				
PDU inspected	Overall rating	Published	Composite score (out of 21)	1.1 Leadership	1.2 Staffing	1.3 Services	2.1 Assessment	2.2 Planning	2.3 Implementation and delivery	2.4 Reviewing	Full report
Wakefield PDU (Probation Service – Yorkshire and the Humber region)		24/10/2024	6								Report
Essex South PDU (Probation Service – East of England region)		18/07/2024	5								Report
Bedfordshire PDU (Probation Service – East of England region)		01/08/2024	4								Report

Brighton and East Sussex PDU (Probation Service – Kent, Surrey, and Sussex region)		22/02/2024	4								Report
Essex North PDU (Probation Service – East of England region)		01/08/2024	4								Report
Hertfordshire PDU (Probation Service – East of England region)		16/07/2024	4								Report
Suffolk PDU (Probation Service – East of England region)		16/05/2024	4								Report
West Kent PDU (Probation Service – Kent, Surrey, and Sussex region)		21/03/2024	4								Report
North Yorkshire PDU (Probation Service – Yorkshire and the Humber region)		12/12/2024	4								Report
Hull and East Riding PDU (Probation Service – Yorkshire and the Humber region)		19/12/2024	4								Report
Barnsley and Rotherham PDU (Probation Service – Yorkshire and the Humber region)		10/10/2024	3								Report
Doncaster PDU (Probation Service – Yorkshire and the Humber region)		10/10/2024	3								Report
East Kent PDU (Probation Service – Kent, Surrey, and Sussex region)		21/03/2024	3								Report
Kirklees PDU (Probation Service – Yorkshire and the Humber region)		14/11/2024	3								Report
Leeds PDU (Probation Service – Yorkshire and the Humber region)		24/10/2024	3								Report

North & North East Lincolnshire PDU (Probation Service – Yorkshire and the Humber region)	●	19/12/2024	3	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Report
Sheffield PDU (Probation Service – Yorkshire and the Humber region)	●	24/10/2024	3	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Report
Surrey PDU (Probation Service – Kent, Surrey, and Sussex region)	●	21/03/2024	3	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Report
York PDU (Probation Service – Yorkshire and the Humber region)	●	12/12/2024	3	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Report
Norfolk PDU (Probation Service – East of England region)	●	16/05/2024	2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Report
Northamptonshire PDU (Probation Service – East of England region)	●	16/07/2024	2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Report
West Sussex PDU (Probation Service – Kent, Surrey, and Sussex region)	●	22/02/2024	2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Report
Bradford and Calderdale PDU (Probation Service – Yorkshire and the Humber region)	●	14/11/2024	1	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Report
Cambridge and Peterborough PDU (Probation Service – East of England region)	●	18/07/2024	1	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Report
NA = Not applicable											
NR = Not rated											