

<i>To:</i>	Morgan Bronwen, Chair of Ceredigion YJS Management Board
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<i>From:</i>	Helen Mercer, Assistant Chief Inspector (Youth Justice)
<i>Publication date:</i>	26 August 2015

Report of Short Quality Screening (SQS) of youth offending work in Ceredigion

The inspection was conducted from 13-15 July 2015 as part of our programme of inspection of youth offending work. This report is published on the HMI Probation website. A copy will be provided to partner inspectorates to inform their inspections, and to the Youth Justice Board (YJB).

Context

The aim of the youth justice system is to prevent offending by children and young people. Good quality assessment and planning at the start of a sentence is critical to increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes. We examined 12 cases of children and young people who commenced supervision between 7 January 2014 and 15 May 2015 and were supervised by Ceredigion Youth Justice Service (YJS). Wherever possible, this was undertaken in conjunction with the allocated case manager, thereby offering a learning opportunity for staff.

Summary

The published reoffending rate¹ for Ceredigion was 33.0%. This was better than the previous year of 33.1% and better than the England and Wales average of 36.6%.

Overall, we found that the performance of the Ceredigion YJS showed an improvement in the findings from our previous inspection in 2010. Staff were well supported in their work. They engaged positively with children and young people, their parents/carers and partner organisations. They used this engagement to come to a good understanding of the priority issues in cases. We found that many children and young people participated well in the supervision process and had made progress against factors linked to their offending. The YJS could improve the quality of practice further by ensuring that reviews of work are undertaken in all cases, and address vulnerability issues specifically when relevant.

Commentary on the inspection in Ceredigion

1. Reducing reoffending

- 1.1. The local quality assurance process was used to ensure that reports were of a good enough quality. The bulk of the cases we reviewed included referral orders and we found that good quality reports had been provided to referral order panels in all cases. A pre-sentence report (PSR) had been produced in two cases and both of these were of good quality.

¹ Published April 2015 based on binary reoffending rates after 12 months for the July 2012 – June 2013 cohort. Source: Ministry of Justice

- 1.2. Assessments and plans form the bedrock of service delivery. In all 12 cases reviewed, the assessment of what was likely to make a child or young person offend, and the identification of what may help to reduce future offending, were of good quality. The assessments fed into the plans of work and all but one of these had also been done to a good standard. The combination of good quality assessments and plans meant that the scope and focus of the work promoted the potential of positive outcomes being achieved with children and young people. We noted that assessment and planning was an aspect of practice that the case managers generally did well.
- 1.3. The family and personal circumstances of children and young people can change quickly and can show the need for a change of direction in supervision. As a result, assessments and plans to address offending issues need to be reviewed in order that they keep pace with case developments. All ten of the assessments that had been reviewed had been done well enough and this was mirrored in the reviews of the associated plans.
- 1.4. The following case example helps to illustrate the work of the YJS in helping to reduce reoffending: *"Lewis² received a four-month referral order for assaulting a young person. There were ongoing tensions between the two young people and Lewis had a previous final warning for assaulting the same victim. Lewis and his family's initial position was that the matter should not have gone to court and that the two young people should just sort things out on the street. By the end of the referral order Lewis could identify how alcohol, along with his attitudes and his decision making, might lead to further offences. Lewis showed insight into the victim's feelings and he wrote a letter of apology. The young people lived in a small community where they would regularly come into contact with each other. Lewis demonstrated that he was able to avoid ongoing conflict with the victim. Lewis was also supported in accessing services to help with employment. He found a job and there had been no further offending almost a year after the order had ended."*

2. Protecting the public

- 2.1. A good quality assessment of risk of harm to others was seen in all of the cases we reviewed. Where a child or young person may pose a risk of harm to others, we expect to see a plan to minimise the likelihood of this happening. In six out of seven of such cases, including a custodial case, this was evident. We noted that all four relevant cases had specific planning to address the risk to identifiable victims.
- 2.2. Reviews of risk management plans are important as they ensure the work continues to minimise the risk of harm posed to others. In all of the relevant cases, plans to address the risk of harm to others had been reviewed satisfactorily.
- 2.3. We heard from staff that management oversight of risk of harm work was routinely provided in relevant cases, and we saw how this contributed positively to the work in most cases.

3. Protecting the child or young person

- 3.1. In 10 of the 12 cases, safeguarding and vulnerability needs had been assessed sufficiently at the initial stage and this had been reviewed satisfactorily in all but one of the nine relevant cases. Staff routinely assessed the potential safeguarding or vulnerability issues arising from physical, emotional or mental health issues, substance misuse (alcohol and drugs), employment, training and education issues or care arrangements.
- 3.2. An inspector noted in one case: *"There were a lot of professionals involved with Byron. He was a Looked After Child (LAC) and had been placed out of county at a young age."*

² The names in this report have been changed to protect the identity of the child or young person

Some years later, Byron appeared in court out of county and, following this, Ceredigion YJS took the lead in the case. Byron's behaviour was such that no care home would take him and he was placed in a secure unit. The YJS case manager and mental health worker visited Byron weekly, to promote good behaviour and help him to reflect on incidents of aggression and violence. Risk and vulnerability issues were managed through the auspices of the YJS Risk Management Meeting (RMM), which was chaired by the YJS operational manager. A comprehensive risk management plan was devised in this meeting and this encompassed risk of harm and vulnerabilities. The case manager attended LAC reviews and the social worker attended the YJS RMM. Coordination of the multi-agency work was sound."

- 3.3. Planning for work to manage and reduce vulnerability was of good quality in only 7 of the 11 relevant cases. In those that were not, not producing a plan (three cases) or the planned response not being clear (one case) were the issues that undermined the quality of the work. We found that the terms used in the team around the concept of 'risk' could have been more precise and this might help to ensure all aspects of risk are specifically addressed in case planning. For example, plans may benefit from a clear differentiation of risk related to: causing harm; reoffending; safeguarding and vulnerability issues, or some combination of the three.
- 3.4. In eight out of the ten relevant cases, we found adequate reviews, throughout the sentence, of plans to address safeguarding and vulnerability needs.
- 3.5. In 11 of the 12 cases, sufficient attention had been given to addressing the health and well-being needs of the child or young person.
- 3.6. There was evidence of effective management oversight of work to address safeguarding and vulnerability in almost all of the cases.

4. Ensuring that the sentence is served

- 4.1. The majority of assessments of diversity factors and barriers to engagement were sufficient and appropriate attention had been given to these issues in PSRs and referral order panel reports. An example of this in practice was that case managers routinely offered children and young people a learning styles assessment. We found that case managers used the results from this assessment to inform the way they worked with children and young people. This illustrated the importance of addressing diversity issues and how it can help to form effective working relationships between the children and young people and their case managers.
- 4.2. The children and young people, or their parents/carers, were involved in the preparation of all of the PSRs and referral order panel reports. We also found that there had been good engagement to carry out further assessments and plans. Attention had been paid, in most plans, to diversity factors and to potential barriers to engagement. This underpinned the ability of case managers to work towards achieving positive change with children and young people.
- 4.3. Levels of contact with the children and young people subject to supervision maintained a good balance between promoting compliance, providing interventions to help achieve positive change for the individual and holding them to account. Eight of the children and young people fully met the requirements of their sentence. In all cases where the child or young person had not cooperated as required, the response of the YJS was appropriate. Four cases saw the need for work by the case manager to secure compliance and this led to the children and young people either re-engaging with the work (three cases) or, in one instance, the case being returned to court for breach proceedings. One inspector noted: "*In the majority of cases I have reviewed, the children and young people have not*

reoffended and they have made good progress on issues linked to their offending. The ability of staff to form productive working relationships with the children and young people, and with their parents/carers, was evident. This, combined with a good understanding of the issues faced by children and young people living in small communities, seemed to be central to helping them to benefit from their work with the YJS."

Operational management

We found that the YJS had responded to the previous inspection in 2010 by implementing a range of measures aimed at improving the quality of their work. This included establishing a quality assurance process to help improve a number of practice areas. In 2012 the YJS established a risk management meeting, which brought together a range of professionals to coordinate their actions in complex cases. We saw both of these being used to good effect in the work we reviewed. Practitioners welcomed these and other practice developments and had incorporated them into their work. In the period leading up to the inspection the YJS had embarked on a major change process to shift their focus towards engaging with children and young people on a preventative basis, thus reducing the need to work with children and young people who had been sentenced by the courts. The YJS had made considerable progress in this respect and were addressing the practice issues that went with this shift in focus.

Case managers valued management oversight of their practice. They described countersigning and management oversight of work as an effective process. We judged that staff supervision and quality assurance arrangements had made a positive contribution to the quality of work undertaken. In general, staff said they received effective supervision and that they were supported in their efforts to improve the quality of their work.

Most staff reported having received recent training to enable them to do their current job, but not all felt they had had enough training in delivering interventions or addressing diversity issues. We found that practitioners understood how their work contributed to the priorities of the organisation. They demonstrated an awareness of the principles of effective practice and local policies and procedures to address compliance, vulnerability and risk of harm practice issues.

Key strengths

- Case managers had clearly contributed to the positive progress that many of the children and young people had made in relation to factors linked to the risk of reoffending.
- The quality of reports produced for courts and referral order panels.
- The engagement of children and young people and parents/carers in assessments and plans.
- Addressing positively compliance and non-engagement issues.

Areas requiring improvement

- Ensure all relevant cases have a clear plan to address safeguarding and vulnerability issues.

We are grateful for the support that we received from staff in the YJS to facilitate and engage with this inspection. Please pass on our thanks, and ensure that they are made fully aware of these inspection findings.

If you have any further questions about the inspection please contact the lead inspector, who was Joseph Simpson. He can be contacted at joe.simpson@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk or on 07917 084764.

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Note 1: As an independent inspectorate, HMI Probation provides assurance to Ministers and the public on the effectiveness of work with those who have offended or are likely to offend, promotes continuous improvement by the organisations that we inspect and contributes to the effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

Note 2: We gather evidence against the SQS criteria, which are available on the HMI Probation website - <http://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation>.

Note 3: To request a paper copy of this report, please contact HMI Probation Communications at communications@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk or on 0161 240 5336.