HM Inspectorate
of Probation

A thematic inspection of the delivery of unpaid work

An inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation

February 2025

Acknowledgements

This inspection was led by David Miners, supported by a team of inspectors and operations, research, communications, and corporate staff. The manager responsible for this inspection programme is Helen Davies. We would like to thank all those who participated in any way in this inspection. Without their help and cooperation, the inspection would not have been possible. Please note that throughout the report the names in the practice examples have been changed to protect the individual's identity.

Contents

Foreword

Our inspection of the delivery of unpaid work took place during a demanding period for the Probation Service. Probation regions were preparing for the release of prisoners under standard determinate sentence (SDS) 40 arrangements and service delivery was being adjusted in line with the probation reset. Despite these challenges, we found that the Probation Service continued to prioritise unpaid work (UPW), with performance showing significant improvement over the past two years.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic and the unification of the service in 2021, a considerable backlog in UPW delivery had built up, amounting to 14,493 cases, 30 per cent of the caseload, at one point. This backlog had since been reduced and was continuing to fall. At the time of our inspection it stood at 2,625 cases, seven per cent of the caseload. This reduction had been achieved through effective collaboration between the central unpaid work team and probation regions. However, there remain areas that require improvement. For example, too many community and suspended sentence orders terminated without completion of the UPW requirement. In addition, the post-sentence assessment process and the provision of risk information to unpaid work supervisors need to improve.

The main purpose of unpaid work is community punishment, although it has always been recognised that the sentence provides a positive opportunity for employment, training, and rehabilitation. Much of the education, training, and employment (ETE) was delivered online. The inspection identified some concerns about this delivery, in relation to both its targeting and quality. The proportion of UPW that could be completed as ETE online was 30 per cent but, currently, too many of the courses completed were neither accredited nor directly relevant to the individual's situation. To maintain credibility, any online ETE delivery must be carefully monitored and purposeful. As it stood, only one in 10 made full use of the ETE offer.

Most unpaid work was completed outdoors in working groups. We observed many impressive projects which made a significant contribution to the maintenance of schools, parks, and canals. The unpaid work supervisor role was often challenging, and we were impressed by the professionalism we saw during our observations. This included building positive relationships and exercising appropriate authority, both of which were appreciated by those completing the unpaid work. In response to our national survey, three-quarters of respondents said that doing UPW helped them feel they were giving back to society. Some of these placements enabled people on probation to acquire skills, though many involved unskilled labour, such as litter picking. We recognise that there needs to be a range of placements to suit the different requirements of the individuals undertaking UPW. This should, however, include work placements where, as well as making reparation, people on probation can acquire skills to enhance their future employment prospects.

Currently, the management of UPW cases was shared between sentence management and UPW teams. This had contributed to inconsistent delivery, primarily because sentence management teams, rightly, focused on public protection practice. To ensure that UPW delivery is also consistently prioritised, these arrangements should be reviewed.

A sentencing review is currently under way and the role of UPW will be considered.[1] We know from published data that those serving community sentences are less likely to reoffend than those serving short custodial sentences. However, despite this the number of community sentences imposed by the courts had more than halved since 2012.[2] The building of renewed confidence in UPW will be crucial to delivering effective punishment and making a positive impact on individuals'

---

[1] Ministry of Justice. (2024). *Independent Sentencing Review 2024 to 2025*: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/independent-sentencing-review-2024-to-2025

[2] Ministry of Justice. (2024). *Sentence types - Criminal justice system statistics - Justice Data*: https://data.justice.gov.uk/cjs-statistics/cjs-sentence-types#chart-tab-cjs-offenders-sentenced-community-sentence

lives, both directly through skills training and indirectly by fostering essential life skills. While recent improvements in its delivery were encouraging, its full potential has yet to be realised.

We have made nine recommendations designed to further improve the delivery of UPW and fully utilise its potential as a community sentence that both punishes and supports rehabilitation.

Martin Jones CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

February 2025

Contextual information

Unpaid work – key statistics

33,140	The number of community orders with an unpaid work requirement imposed April 2023 to March 2024.[3]
17,859	The number of suspended sentence orders with an unpaid work requirement imposed April 2023 to March 2024.[3]
6,091,198	The total number of unpaid work hours imposed April 2023 to March 2024.[3]
4,668,285	The number of unpaid hours worked April 2023 to March 2024.[3]
40,440	The number of unpaid work requirements being managed on community order and suspended sentence orders on 02 July 2024. This was 35 per cent of the total number of community orders and suspended sentence orders being managed on this date (114,615).[3]
69%	The percentage of terminated stand-alone community and suspended sentence orders with unpaid work requirements with all hours completed in August 2024.[3]
54%	The percentage of terminated multi-requirement community and suspended sentence orders with unpaid work requirements with all hours completed in August 2024.[3]
95%	The level of unpaid work delivery against the pre-Covid-19 baseline of delivery. (The pre-Covid baseline was 98,605 hours per week.).[3]
7%	The percentage of unpaid work requirements in the backlog. A case is in the backlog if it is over 12 months into the order, there is no active extension in place, and it is not currently subject to a warrant or in breach.[3]
9%	The percentage of the unpaid work caseload who were women.[3]
23%	The percentage of the unpaid work caseload who were aged under 25.[3]
15%	The national average leaving rate for band 3 unpaid work supervisors, 2023-2024.[3]

Survey of individuals subject to unpaid work requirements – key statistics

68%	believed their experience of unpaid work was mainly a form of punishment.[4]
74%	believed that unpaid work helped them give back to society.[4]
72%	believed that unpaid work was organised well.[4]
87%	reported having a good relationship with unpaid work staff.[4]
33%	believed that unpaid work improved their employability.[4]

---

[3] Unpublished data supplied by HMPPS; as such, this has not been subject to the assurance process applied to published data.
[4] User Voice survey of 1,020 individuals subject to an unpaid work requirement, July 2024. This survey was undertaken as part of the inspection.

Executive summary

Context

The Covid-19 pandemic and the incorporation of unpaid work (UPW) into a unified probation service in 2021 had serious implications for the delivery of UPW. Covid-19 had inevitably restricted the operation of UPW work groups. Unification also meant that the probation regions took responsibility for the different community rehabilitation company (CRC) UPW operating models. These operated differently, both across England and Wales but also within regions. UPW performance at this stage was of serious concern. By early 2022, the backlog of UPW cases that remained incomplete after 12 months accounted for 30 per cent of the caseload.

In 2021, recognising the serious issues with UPW delivery, an application was made to the Treasury for additional funding. This was agreed and a further £93 million 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 the spending and to improve UPW delivery.

Methodology

Our fieldwork inspected the work of six regions in delivering UPW and was completed between July 2024 and September 2024, followed by a further week of fieldwork to review arrangements nationally. We held meetings in each region with probation managers and staff groups. In addition, we met with sentencers and the beneficiaries of UPW placements. We also observed UPW placements, both during the working week and at weekends. A national survey of UPW staff was also undertaken; this received 414 responses.

We inspected 90 cases with UPW requirements from across the inspected regions. These cases were made up of 60 UPW requirements attached to single requirement orders and 30 managed as part of multi-requirement orders. Our focus was on the quality of delivery. The cases had all completed at least 20 hours of UPW, and in 45 cases, the UPW requirement had been completed.

We commissioned User Voice, the ex-offender-led charity, to obtain the views of individuals who had been on orders with UPW requirements. It circulated a national survey and undertook focus groups in the inspected regions. In total, it spoke to or received responses from 1,020 individuals.

A detailed breakdown of our methodology can be found in Annexe 2.

Policy strategy and leadership

The governance arrangements and the clear strategic direction provided, both nationally and regionally, had driven improved UPW performance. UPW was prioritised across the inspected regions and managers at all levels understood the need to improve performance. The focus had, understandably, been on reducing the backlog which had gone down from 30 per cent at its peak in 2022 to seven per cent at the time of this inspection. Contributing to this improvement were the efforts of the community payback recovery board and the national team, which had developed targeted performance criteria and data metrics. Effective interface meetings between the national team and the regions had strengthened these efforts.

Probation regions had introduced effective accountability frameworks to monitor performance and address areas for improvement. These frameworks included the use of the 'seven critical factors' performance data, introduced by the national team. The dormant caseload data, in particular, helped regions target underperformance. The focus on improving performance in the regions included the establishment of regular sentence management and UPW meetings. These were most effective where senior managers from the probation delivery units (PDUs) were involved.

Despite the improved focus on UPW in sentence management teams, its delivery as part of multi-requirement orders did not match that in standalone teams. This was particularly evident in the number of incomplete UPW requirements on suspended sentence orders (SSOs). Although it

was likely that more complex cases received multi-requirement orders, this did not account for the contrast in performance. Similarly, we do not believe it was the result of capability issues or an absence of management oversight. In our view, it highlighted the operational tension in sentence management teams between adopting a proactive approach to public protection on their wider caseload and overseeing the delivery of UPW requirements.

Increasing the level of UPW staffing had been an integral part of the drive to improve UPW performance. This had been successful in the placement coordinator role. Over 500 community payback staff had been recruited in supervisor, placement coordinator, and operational manager roles, but there remained recruitment and retention challenges in some regions in the south of England, which impeded their delivery of UPW. 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 the management of 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.

The necessary prioritisation of performance had led to the marginalisation of quality assurance in UPW. Aspects of UPW delivery, such as structure of the working day, were under review to support effective staff supervision and quality assurance. Quality assurance should be a core component of UPW delivery, embedded within both management practices and the operational structure of UPW.

The delivery of unpaid work

The service level target mandates that UPW requirements should commence within 15 working days of sentence. To facilitate this, a digital assessment tool (DAT) had been introduced for completion by probation practitioners (PPs). Both the risk and personal information on the DAT were often incomplete and insufficient. These often-poor assessments did not provide sufficient information to make appropriate placement decisions.

UPW inductions normally took place before an individual commenced their requirement. Induction methods varied in different regions. The most effective inductions involved active engagement, the clear communication of expectations, and details of the first work session.

People on probation highly valued their relationships with UPW supervisors. Findings from the User Voice survey strongly indicated that UPW requirements can have a positive impact on soft skills, such as teamwork, and on an individual's confidence and self-esteem. Unpaid work placements did not, however, consistently support the acquisition of employment-related skills.

The enforcement of UPW requirements had improved; however, inconsistencies remained in the acceptance of absences. Again, performance varied between UPW stand-alone teams and sentence management teams. To address these issues, a review of the delivery model, especially the respective operational responsibilities of UPW and sentence management teams, was needed. Where auto enforcement of absence by UPW teams had been introduced, this resulted in greater consistency.[5] There was also evidence that this had significantly improved compliance in some areas.

The arrangements for ensuring UPW supervisors had comprehensive risk information were inadequate. The communication methods were inconsistent and the information available frequently insufficient. The potential role of UPW staff in risk management generally was underestimated.

---

[5] The auto enforcement of UPW absences involves the prompt and immediate initiation of the breach process following an individual's failure to attend a UPW placement.

The adoption of the 'human factors approach' into the delivery of UPW in Wales had made a positive impact. It raised staff confidence, helped develop a more cohesive operational culture, and improved the sharing of key information between staff.

Education, training, and employment, and unpaid work placements

Sentencers, UPW staff, and the people on probation were clear that UPW was primarily a punishment. However, it was also recognised that, in many cases, UPW provided an opportunity to intervene and to reduce an individual's reoffending. Up to a maximum of 30 per cent of an individual's requirement can be completed by undertaking education, training, and employment (ETE) activities, through practical courses or online learning. The use of online learning for UPW was introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic and continued to be a part of UPW delivery. In 2023, a three-year national ETE strategy was introduced to standardise access to vocational training and qualifications as part of UPW. Apart from online learning, this had so far had little impact.

Community Campus became the only online ETE platform approved for UPW in 2023. This electronic portal offered a range of vocational courses in 10 languages, but participants do not receive a valid, useable certificate after course completion. Feedback from the User Voice surveys and focus groups was also negative, with most people feeling the courses were not useful. Only one in 10 people on probation completed 30 per cent of their hours through ETE activities.

The shortcomings of the online ETE arrangements were recognised nationally and there are plans to address this when the contract comes up for renewal in August 2025. Currently, the use of online learning was not sufficiently targeted and too often used simply as a means of completing hours. Its use should be limited and carefully supervised. At regional level, there were some impressive arrangements with local colleges and employers that provided appropriate work-related, practical training. These, however, were not part of a national strategy. As a result, the potential of UPW to provide skills training to improve employability was not being realised.

There were many excellent UPW placements that were delivering benefits to their beneficiaries and the local community. These included the work of the rapid deployment teams and the projects developed via the national contracts. Overall, UPW projects were well managed and well supervised. The probation regions had developed some excellent projects for women, and they all provided female-only placements, where necessary. However, the arrangements for placing lone women, with their consent, to work in all-male groups should be reviewed.

Recommendations

HM Prison and Probation Service should:

1. ensure all practitioners complete high-quality assessments for unpaid work cases, incorporating a thorough analysis of relevant risk information before making placement decisions

2. review the operating model to prioritise the delivery of unpaid work within multi-requirement orders, ensuring consistent decision-making in the enforcement of cases

3. ensure that education, training, and employment undertaken as part of an unpaid work requirement are accessible and aimed at building employment-related knowledge and skills

4. increase the number of UPW placements that offer practical vocational training and meaningful employment opportunities

5. ensure that comprehensive and accessible risk information is consistently provided to unpaid work supervisors

6. design and implement a comprehensive training and professional development programme for unpaid work supervisors and placement coordinators, which includes risk assessment, risk management, and techniques for managing anger and aggression

7. review the arrangements for placing lone women in all-male work groups

8. ensure that all UPW placements meet health and safety standards, providing facilities in full compliance with legislation

9. implement the 'human factors approach' adopted for unpaid work delivery in Wales across the English regions.

1. Introduction

1.1. Why this thematic?

Unpaid work is the most frequently imposed requirement of a community sentence. Since our last thematic inspection of unpaid work delivery in 2016 (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2016), the order had continued to evolve, and the Probation Service had undergone significant changes, including the unification of the probation service in Wales in 2019 and England in 2021. These changes, along with the renewed emphasis on community sentences due to prison overcrowding, supported the case for reviewing unpaid work — specifically, whether there was the structure, confidence, and capacity to meet demand.

1.2. Background

January 2023 marked the 50th anniversary of the first community service order made in the United Kingdom. Different forms of these original orders were subsequently introduced, but the central tenet of convicted individuals undertaking unpaid work as a court sentence remained. It continues to be the community-based requirement most visible to the public. Unpaid work (UPW) requirements as part of community or suspended sentence orders (SSOs) are the current version of this community sentence. During the 50 years that unpaid work has been a part of community sentences there have been different views both on its purpose and its place within the overall sentencing framework. UPW's potential for rehabilitation and as a means of restorative justice had been recognised, but its primary purpose was community punishment.

Undertaking unpaid work as part of a community-based sentence evolved through various legislative changes since it was introduced as community service in the *Criminal Justice Act 1972*. Rolled out nationally in 1975, it was originally a stand-alone sentence called a community service order. In its various iterations, it was subsequently called community punishment, unpaid work, and community payback. Community payback and unpaid work are the current terminology, although the terms frequently get conflated. Community payback is used to refer to any work done as part of an UPW requirement on a community order or SSO. Community payback also refers to the organisational structures required to deliver the UPW requirement in the community. It is also used to describe teams or units on websites and in any promotional material. The sentence of the court remains an UPW requirement imposed as part of a court order. It is only available as part of community-based sentences and cannot be included as a licence condition following release from a prison sentence. For ease, in this report we use 'unpaid work' to refer to the sentence of the court and the delivery structures.

Until the *Criminal Justice Act 2003*, UPW could be undertaken as part of two defined court orders, a community punishment order or a community punishment and rehabilitation order. Following the act, UPW became one of 12 requirements that could be imposed as part of a community order. The legislation was implemented in 2005 and introduced both the new community order and the SSO. The 12 requirements, including UPW, could be imposed as part of either community-based sentence. The act stipulated that the work performed under an unpaid work requirement should be completed within 12 months of the sentence. The courts were responsible for setting the number of hours that had to be worked, ranging between 40 and 300 hours. This legislation clarified that the primary purpose of an unpaid work requirement was punishment. The Probation Service was also required to ensure that UPW was more visible and met the needs of local communities. As a result, from 2005 individuals undertaking UPW requirements were required to wear branded high-visibility tabards in most circumstances.

The *Crime and Courts Act 2013* introduced further legislative changes with the aim of increasing public confidence in community sentences. This act required sentencers to impose one punitive requirement as part of any community order enforced. Although this could be a fine, UPW was also identified as a punitive requirement.

Following the introduction of the *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme, from 2014 unpaid work was delivered in each of 21 contract package areas by community rehabilitation companies (CRCs) before moving to private ownership in 2015. Since the full unification of probation services across England and Wales in June 2021, UPW has been delivered by the unified Probation Service.

The management and delivery framework for UPW requirements has two elements. After a community order or SSO is made at court, a probation practitioner (PP) holds the case and has overall responsibility for the order. For orders with requirements in addition to UPW, multi-requirement orders, the PPs will sit in sentence management (SM) teams within a probation delivery unit (PDU). For orders consisting only of an UPW requirement, in most regions the PP will sit in a stand-alone UPW team, accountable to the region's UPW manager. In some regions and Wales, stand-alone requirements also sit with PPs in SM teams. In our inspection, only Wales had this model.

Unpaid work units are responsible for delivering the requirement. This includes the UPW induction, the allocation of the placement, the supervision of the placement, and communicating with the sentence manager about any breaches of the UPW requirement. The staffing of UPW units normally consists of the head of UPW with overall responsibility, a business manager, UPW operations managers, placement coordinators, UPW supervisors, a health and safety officer, and an UPW administration team.

Our inspection focused on the delivery of UPW and therefore the work of the UPW units. However, given the interface with SM, we also considered their role in the effectiveness and delivery of UPW.

The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 adversely affected UPW performance over a sustained period. Although it precipitated some innovative projects, it inevitably reduced the capacity of UPW teams to deliver UPW placements. A backlog caused by delays in commencement and completion of requirements inevitably developed.[6] National UPW leaders recognised that, as well as a drive to improve performance, a reduction in the backlog would also require significant investment. This included increased numbers of UPW staff and the need to address practical issues, such as a revamp of the aged fleet of minibuses used to transport individuals to projects. An application was subsequently made to the Treasury for additional UPW funding in the 2021 spending review. This was successful and £93 million was allocated to be spent over a three-year period, commencing in April 2022 and ending in March 2025.

The purpose of unpaid work

The debate on whether UPW should primarily be viewed as punishment or rehabilitation had been ongoing since its introduction in 1973. Prior to the *Criminal Justice Act 2003*, the Home Office launched a series of 'Pathfinder' projects to establish which elements of unpaid work appeared to have the greatest impact.[7] Three main elements were identified. These were pro-social modelling, skills accreditation, and tackling offending-related needs (Rex *et al.*, 2003). However, the 2003 act made clear that the emphasis of UPW should be on punishment and the Pathfinder projects were subsequently discontinued. This emphasis on punishment was reinforced by the *Crime and Courts Act 2013*.

This emphasis on UPW as a punishment was, in part, driven by the need to ensure community sentences were robust, demanding, and had public confidence. Hand in hand with the tough language, however, there was also a recognition that UPW would be utilised as part of a rehabilitative intervention. The *Criminal Justice Act 2003* recognised this by allowing the requirement to sit alongside more overtly rehabilitative requirements, such as programme interventions. More recently, the *Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022* (implemented

---

[6] An UPW case is considered in the backlog if it is over 12 months into the order, there is no active extension in place, and it is not currently subject to a warrant or in breach.
[7] The evaluation of community service Pathfinder projects was undertaken as part of a crime reduction programme that reported to the Home Office in 2002.

October 2023) stated that while community sentencing should offer an appropriate level of punishment, it should also address the underlying drivers of offending and provide interventions early to deflect people away from future offending. This act also required the Probation Service to consult key local stakeholders on the delivery of UPW, ensuring community projects were responsive to local need. UPW also had a key role in the Home Office's *2021 Beating crime plan*. This identified UPW as one of the top government priorities for tackling crime and set out a different emphasis for UPW with 'visibility' as a central feature. Similarly, UPW was also included in the *2023 Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan* supporting local authorities in cleaning up streets through litter picking, clearing fly tipping, and removing graffiti.

The potential of UPW to play a rehabilitative role allied to its primary purpose of community punishment is recognised by the allowance of up to 30 per cent of hours to be completed in the form of education, training, and employment (ETE), where applicable. This potential for ETE to make a positive contribution to employability and, thereby, rehabilitation was supported by research evidence. A meta-analysis of a subset of the most methodologically robust studies found that vocational training and employment programmes were associated with nine per cent fewer programme participants reoffending when compared with non-participants. The studies, conducted in the UK, were associated with six per cent fewer programme participants reoffending (Fox *et al.*, 2021). In addition, many other studies have established a significant relationship between stable employment and the reduction of criminal behaviour (Skardhamar and Telle, 2012; Ministry of Justice, 2013). ETE is therefore, potentially a crucial determinant in facilitating rehabilitation from criminal behaviour; it provides financial stability, encourages pro-social behaviour, and assists individuals in cultivating new identities apart from criminality.

As highlighted by Carr and Neimantas (2022), the delivery of unpaid work must therefore meet different expectations. Its primary purpose, as laid down in legislation, is to provide punishment to an individual and reparation to the community. However, there was also a clear expectation in acts of parliament and policy documents that unpaid work would contribute to rehabilitation. In achieving these aims, it must also balance the needs and perceptions of the public (including victims), sentencers, UPW staff, and the individuals subject to UPW requirements.

1.3. Previous unpaid work inspections

In 2016, HM Inspectorate of Probation undertook its previous thematic inspection of the delivery of unpaid work. It identified some work placements and training opportunities, but raised concerns about the inconsistent practice and performance between CRCs. Unpaid work was also inspected as part of our core inspection programmes. In the 2021-2023 programme, unpaid work requirements were reviewed as part of the overall file inspection of the case sample. Our analysis of 500 cases concluded that UPW requirements did not affect the overall quality of probation supervision. The inspection programme highlighted the backlogs built up during the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges faced by the regions in reducing them. High staff vacancy rates were noted, along with inconsistent enforcement practice (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023).

The 2024-2025 programme is still to be completed but recognises that regions have taken positive steps to improve consistency in the enforcement of requirements and to improve unpaid work performance in line with the national directives. However, this programme also identified the impact of unpaid work supervisor shortages on service delivery, and concerns about the quality of assessment and risk management practice.

1.4. Aims and objectives.

The inspection sought to answer the following questions:

- Does the leadership support and promote the delivery of a high-quality, personalised, and responsive approach to unpaid work?
- Do the operational structure and arrangements for unpaid work enable the delivery of an effective service?
- Do the training and supervision of unpaid work staff support high-quality delivery and professional development?
- How well does unpaid work deliver ETE provisions to support, train, and provide opportunities to the person on probation?
- Are unpaid work placements personalised, and are they responsive to diverse groups and bespoke needs?
- How effective is unpaid work in keeping people safe?

1.5. Report outline

Chapter	Content
2. Policy, strategy, and leadership	In this chapter, we consider the impact of policy, strategy, staffing, and quality assurance on the delivery of UPW.
3. The delivery of unpaid work	In this chapter, we consider the assessment of and planning for individuals subject to UPW requirements. We also review the effectiveness of delivery in induction, enforcement, and public protection. Finally, we consider the effectiveness of the UPW delivery models
4. Education, training, and employment, and unpaid work placements	In this chapter, we review the role of education, training, and employment (ETE) in UPW and consider the quality of UPW placements. We look at whether the placements meet the stated purpose of punishment and their contribution to local communities. We also evaluate their impact on the individuals attending them, and whether they meet the needs of women.

2. Policy, strategy, and leadership

In this chapter, we consider the impact of policy, strategy, staffing, and quality assurance on the delivery of UPW.

2.1 Policy and strategy

National leadership

The UPW operational arrangements following unification were set out in the target operating model (HMPPS, 2021). In the aftermath of unification, however, it was recognised that additional support to the regions from the central UPW team was necessary to address UPW performance concerns. The size and scope of what had formerly been a small central UPW team were, therefore, increased. Its responsibilities now included strategic leadership, the provision of guidance on operational delivery, the development of targeted performance data, and guidance for probation staff. It was also responsible for oversight and guidance on new initiatives and ministerial priorities, such as the rapid deployment project, national projects, and the spring and autumn 'cleans'.[8] Following the successful application for additional funding in the 2021 spending review, the central team assumed responsibility for developing and driving policy initiatives and projects to ensure the primary goals of the funding were achieved. These were to reduce UPW cases in the backlog to less than two per cent of the caseload by March 2025, and to increase the number of UPW requirements completed within 12 months to 75 per cent.

The strategic priority accorded by the Probation Service nationally to improving the delivery of unpaid work was further emphasised by the setting up of the community payback recovery board in January 2023. This was chaired by the director of the probation reform programme and attended by representatives from across HMPPS, including the central UPW team and senior managers from the regions. Its stated aims were the setting of strategic direction for UPW, and to enable UPW to be delivered across English regions and Wales within a unified operating model. It was also the primary decision-making forum for the £93 million agreed in the 2021 spending review. Its overriding priority was the reduction in the UPW backlog.

The target operating model (TOM) sets out that the probation regions are responsible for the operational delivery of UPW, although they have flexibility in deciding their operational framework. Regions are not directly accountable to the central team, but the governance structures set out clear arrangements for how they should work together. Since 2023, quarterly strategic and monthly operational meetings have been held involving senior managers in the regions and senior policy leads from the centre. The primary focus is on performance, but these interface meetings are also used for the communication and explanation of central policy initiatives. Working groups with specific responsibilities, such as ETE and recruitment, were also set up with representatives from the regions and the centre.

It was evident during the inspection that the clear strategic direction and the governance arrangements for UPW implemented since unification had been effective and were having a significant impact on delivery. UPW was prioritised across all regions and managers at all levels understood the need to improve performance. However, there were different perceptions in the regions about the role of the central team. Some managers believed that there had been too many guidance documents and that the focus of delivery was too centralised. A senior manager in one region commented:

---

[8] The rapid deployment project was set up as a pilot in 2023 as part of the cross-government antisocial behaviour action plan. The autumn and spring cleans are part of the Keep Britain Tidy's spring and autumn initiatives.

"I would like to be asked more about what we're doing rather than being told what to do. Operational senior leaders should be consulted more … UPW is best when it's delivered at a local level."

However, the predominant view was positive. Senior and operational managers recognised the strategic direction that had been provided, along with the positive impact of the practice guidance and performance information that had been developed and communicated. One senior manager stated:

"I have had a very positive experience of working with them and the guidance and datasets have helped us identify what to focus on in the last two years … They are responsive. They track our data and give us a heads-up where problems are emerging."

Not all central team policy and practice initiatives had been implemented in the regions and some of the initiatives, such as the provision of a new fleet of minibuses, stalled because of practical issues relating to load capacity. Nonetheless, it was evident during the inspection that the central team had played a significant role in driving improvement and focusing attention on UPW.

Regional leadership

The task facing regional leaders in the aftermath of unification should not be underestimated. As well as the significant operational and performance concerns, they were faced with the practical necessity of implementing a unified delivery model and developing a cohesive UPW working culture. In some regions, the unification involved more than one legacy CRC. It was evident that regions were still dealing with the consequences of this legacy, both in terms of the residual working culture and the variations in staff contracts and working patterns.

The focus on improving UPW performance, however, was evident in all of the inspected regions. Senior managers from UPW and sentence management attended either accountability or operational delivery boards in each region where the performance of UPW was scrutinised. For example, in Greater Manchester the monthly operational delivery group held overall responsibility for delivery across the region and senior UPW managers made presentations to the board who were held accountable for delivery. UPW cases of concern were given a 'RAG' rating as part of the focus on reducing the UPW backlog.[9]

Regions had also established regular PDU and UPW meetings to improve both performance and the working relationships between the units. These meetings took place at senior and operational level. In some regions, the PDU actions were delegated to senior probation officers. The interface meetings were most effective where senior managers from the PDU were responsible for driving performance. The South Central region set out clear terms of reference for collaboration between UPW and SM PDUs. These included the identification of responsibilities in relation to the UPW backlog, training, and effective practice. These interface meetings were often supported by the proactive approach of UPW case administrators and business managers, who played a significant role in containing and reducing the UPW backlog.

2.2   Unpaid work performance

Six months after the reunification of the probation service in January 2022, the UPW backlog nationally stood at 28 per cent, a total of 14,059 cases. In October 2024, this had been reduced to seven per cent of the caseload, 2,625 cases. There were inevitably variations in regional performance, but this demonstrated significant commendable progress. The target of a backlog of less than two per cent of cases in March 2025 might not be achieved, but it was evident that the figure, on current performance trajectory, would be very close.

---

[9] A RAG (red-amber-green) rating system is a visual reporting system that uses colours to summarise the status of a target. Green is positive, amber neutral, and red negative.

The development of the seven critical success factors to improve UPW performance was one of the central team's initiatives introduced in 2022 (HMPPS, 2024a). The factors, alongside performance targets, were drawn up following consultation with senior managers in the regions. The factors identified included: maximising UPW individual placements; utilising ETE with appropriate individuals subject to UPW; and analysing caseloads to identify 'dormant' cases (those where there had been no activity over a four-week period). The central team developed monthly datasets to track regional performance against these factors, and these were reviewed in the interface meetings. In June 2023, the central team also introduced a prioritisation framework, identifying the action that should be taken for five different cohorts of the UPW caseload (HMPPS, 2023a). Cases close to the 12-month mark were a key priority. The Probation Service must apply to the court for an extension of the order if an UPW requirement extends beyond 12 months.

Performance against the critical factors varied across the inspected regions. Senior managers, however, recognised the effectiveness of this performance information in reducing the backlog. Some of the targets set for the factors were, nevertheless, seen as unrealistic. These included the targets for UPW undertaken as ETE and the proposed group subscription rate. However, the definition of, and focus on, dormant cases was viewed very positively by all regions. This enabled regional managers to identify cases for immediate action and decision-making. One UPW manager stated:

"I would not have found the dormant cases without the central team. We have moved from 571 cases last June (2023) to the current 137 cases (August 2024) thanks to the central team focus. They also required task force meetings to be set up … their focus is the critical success factors with a specific focus on dormant and tip-in cases."

UPW requirements nearing the 12-month mark were a focus for the regional performance meetings. These cases had been identified and tracked; actions were set to avoid them joining the backlog.

Good practice example

In the North West region, the establishment of monthly performance meetings in each PDU attended by SM and UPW managers ensured that UPW requirements were prioritised. Actions from the meetings included: the introduction of fitness-to-work reviews of cases; UPW staff utilised to support SM staff in the delivery of UPW cases; and the establishment of the Merseyside breach pilot, which resulted in significantly improved compliance rates.

This proactive management of UPW requirements contributed to improved levels of enforcement and the reduction of the backlog. At four per cent in September 2024, this had reduced from 15 per cent in October 2022. The prioritisation of UPW was supported by the effective and routine use of data to analyse performance and to highlight cases requiring focus. The commitment and coordination of UPW administration, UPW operational, and SM at all levels contributed to improved performance and delivery.

Seventy per cent of UPW requirements were managed as part of multi-requirement orders in SM teams, but there was evidence in all the inspected regions that stand-alone UPW teams managing single requirement orders performed better in ensuring orders were completed within 12 months. For example, in one region between May and July 2024, 35 UPW requirements managed in stand-alone teams went past the 12-month mark, compared with 192 UPW requirements in SM teams. The cases of people on probation subject to multi-requirement orders were potentially more complex and challenging. In addition, our core inspections highlighted the workload pressures SM teams faced. However, these factors on their own did not explain the performance gap. The role of sentence management in the delivery of UPW and the overall delivery model is considered further in chapter three.

The HMPPS service level targets for unpaid work include assessment, commencement of the requirement, and the completion of the UPW requirement within 12 months. This latter target was

prioritised following the allocation of the spending review money and was set at 75 per cent; the current national figure was 62 per cent. So far only Wales had managed to meet this target. Performance varied between 58 per cent and 76 per cent, but this did represent a significant improvement. In July 2022, the national figure was 45 per cent, and one region's performance was at seven per cent. The principal reason for a 12-month target was that completion within this period was laid down in legislation. For most cases, achieving this target depended on a prompt start to the requirement and the timely completion of the set number of hours. This allowed little flexibility to consider individual circumstances, such as age and maturity, and their potential impact on compliance. Indeed, the combined service level targets demanded that UPW was delivered almost uniformly, and at pace. We recognise that sentencer confidence, and to some extent individual compliance with an UPW requirement, was dependent on its efficient and prompt delivery. However, this could have implications for other areas of probation practice, such as the availability of key information and risk management.

2.3   Staffing and training

Following the unification of the probation service in 2021, it was evident that there were significant shortfalls in UPW staffing levels. This inevitably contributed to the performance levels. Increasing staffing levels, particularly for UPW supervisors, was therefore included in the application for spending review money in 2021. Following the allocation of the money, the target was to recruit 500 additional UPW staff. Since that target was set, as of October 2024, over 500 staff had been recruited to roles in UPW. Despite this level of recruitment, however, regional labour market pressures and attrition from the roles led to uneven staffing and some regions, particularly in the South of England, continued to have shortages. For example, during the inspection, South Central had only 50 per cent of its target number of supervisors in post, while Wales had 95 per cent. The level of staff attrition, particularly in the UPW supervisor role, was also a concern; the national attrition rate in 2023-2024 was 15 per cent. Again, there were significant variations; the rate in the East Midlands was 26 per cent compared with nine per cent in Wales.

The inconsistent level of staffing and high attrition rate, inevitably, affected UPW delivery. Even so, in South Central, the worst hit of the regions we inspected, the UPW managers focused on maintaining UPW delivery. In May 2024, despite their evident staffing problems, they still achieved 94 per cent of delivery hours completed against the national delivery target of 129 per cent of the pre-Covid level.

To address the staff shortages, there had been 13 rounds of national recruitment. However, at regional level there were concerns about the national recruitment process. Regional managers reported that some of the recruited staff did not understand the role, or what their responsibilities would be. A variety of success profiles application methods have been trialled in consultation with the regional working group, including behaviours, situational judgement tests, and statements of suitability, to see if this improved the conversion rates of applicants into starters. Some of these methods have been viewed as partly to blame. As a result, some regions are now undertaking their own recruitment.

UPW supervisors

The UPW supervisor role involved an individual supervising groups of people on UPW placements, for up to seven hours, on their own. This included inducting them on the site, allocating and demonstrating tasks, and managing behaviour. The size of the groups varied but there could be as many as 10 people working on a placement. The frequent complexity of the individuals and the problems which they often faced could make the role demanding. One UPW supervisor said about the role:

"As a supervisor you sometimes have to be their social worker, mental health worker or teacher as well as UPW supervisor … it's a very difficult job."

No member of probation staff spent more face-to-face time with people on probation than a UPW supervisor. In the main, we were impressed by the approach and professionalism of the supervisors we met and observed. The importance of the role in terms of pro-social modelling behaviour and setting appropriate boundaries should not be underestimated. In the User Voice survey, 87 per cent of individuals said they had a good relationship with their supervisor. Respondents particularly highlighted the guidance, respect, and support they received from supervisors. This demonstrated both the importance and potential of the role. Men made up 91 per cent of the UPW caseload and 73 per cent of supervisors were male. It was evident that for many men on probation UPW supervisors were providing positive male role models.

However, the role also carried some risks. Between March and May 2024, there were eight reports of physical assault on UPW staff. In addition, there were 115 reported incidents of abuse and threatening behaviour. In recognition of this risk, all supervisors used people-safe alarm devices, which had direct links to the police. However, we found examples of group placements in remote locations where there was no signal to activate the alarm. Some supervisors were also not clear about the potential response should the alarm be activated, and did not have confidence in the efficacy of the equipment. In our view, the safety arrangements for UPW supervisors should be reviewed.

The induction arrangements for UPW supervisors in the inspected regions were a combination of the mandatory national online training, observations of placements, and joint working with a mentor. A new supervisor had to complete these before they were allowed to supervise a placement on their own. The most effective processes involved new supervisors being allocated a mentor and then following four phases of induction, including shadowing sessions and joint working opportunities. Mentors provided feedback and operational managers were responsible for confirming the supervisor was ready to oversee a placement.

The central team launched learning packs for UPW staff in 2022, which have evolved into the current community payback learning requirements detailed on the staff intranet site (HMPPS, 2024b). Training was a mixture of online and in-person learning. For UPW supervisors, mandated training included domestic abuse and child safeguarding. Required training, i.e. training essential to the role, included managing violence and aggression.

The learning resources by role framework was implemented in 2022 and it was, therefore, surprising that we found completion of the training to be inconsistent. The level of vacancies and high staff turnover could undermine training delivery, but we were concerned to meet supervisors who were not aware of the training expectations. Some experienced supervisors had not undertaken any training in the management of violence and aggression. While sex offender awareness training was identified as required in the learning requirements, very few supervisors had completed it. Both managers and supervisors recognised the value of some of the online training. However, given the challenges and risks of the supervisor role, there was concern that online training was not sufficient in areas such as the management of conflict. In the South Central and North West regions, managers had approached HMPPS colleagues working in prisons to arrange face-to-face training in this area. Similarly, in some regions, programmes teams had been used to deliver pro-social modelling training for UPW staff. The Greater Manchester region held a training day for UPW staff every six weeks. These were positive initiatives but, on their own, would not fill the very concerning gaps in training.

In our national survey of UPW staff, dissatisfaction with access to and the quality of training were repeated themes. Over two-thirds of respondents were dissatisfied with the training they had received for their role. One respondent recorded:

"We get little training on our job role. Other staff members in the team have to train people when they have their own tasks to do. There are no standard guidelines or training that is the same across the board. Training is done by a colleague in the same job as you and the same pay … the only learning and training managers promote is the My Learn portal for your required learning."

Placement coordinators

Recruitment to the placement coordinator role had been more successful. Nationally, 98 per cent of posts were filled. UPW placement coordinators were responsible for the allocation of suitable UPW placements. Probation practitioners (PPs) completed the digital assessment tool (DAT), which was then reviewed by the placement coordinator to allocate the work placement. It included sections on risk factors, protective characteristics, and work experience. We found that DAT assessments were inconsistent in quality, often with minimal risk and personal information. This was confirmed in our meetings with placement coordinators, who said they routinely undertook their own interrogation of the nDelius case management system and key documents to ensure they had all the relevant information to consider and decide placements. One stated:

"I don't rely on the DAT; I do my own assessment. The information is just not there often and there is no analysis of pattern or seriousness … for example, it is important to have the background information to offences like assault of a PC."

Thirteen per cent of the individuals subject to UPW requirements were assessed as high risk of serious harm. Violent offences featured as the most common index offence, and there were a significant number of registered sex offenders. It was, therefore, important that placement coordinators had a good understanding of risk assessment. One placement coordinator stated:

"My risk training is minimal and a lot of it is self-taught … I have relied on informal relationships with colleagues. The training I have had has not been directly relevant."

The current training arrangements for placement coordinators were inconsistent. Risk awareness and risk management featured in the generic UPW staff learning packs. However, risk assessment was not identified as either mandatory or required training, for placement coordinators in the learning requirements document. This should be reviewed.

Case administration staff

Induction and training arrangements for case administration staff primarily focused on IT learning and shadowing arrangements. Case administration staff within the UPW units felt valued and that there were opportunities for professional development. They had a clear understanding of UPW priorities, in terms of the backlog and the seven critical factors, and their work was often focused on this. Indeed, in most regions, business managers played a key role in driving the actions on cases that emanated from UPW and PDU reviews.

2.4 Quality assurance

Following the launch of the revised core quality management framework (CQMF) in April 2023 (HMPPS, 2023b), the outline of quality assurance activities in UPW was issued. These directed that UPW operational managers should annually undertake two observations of supervisors working on placements. These observations should be followed up by reflective discussion between the operational manager and the supervisor. The revised CQMF also produced a revised regional case audit tool (RCAT), which included bespoke questions for cases with UPW requirements.

The introduction of the quality assurance activities was accompanied by presentations to managers and staff in the regions by the central team policy leads. However, the implementation of the supervision and quality assurance activities had been mixed. There was evidence of operational managers holding regular meetings with supervisors but very limited indication of the biannual observation of practice. In Wales, designated quality development officers undertook regular placement visits to review its operation with beneficiaries and the supervisor. In other regions, the quality assurance activities were the responsibility of operational managers. The Greater Manchester region planned to undertake three annual observations of supervisors, but this policy was in its infancy. In most regions, it was clear that the prioritisation of performance activity had adversely affected the focus on quality. One operational manager stated:

"My day is spent focusing on identifying cases and maximising placements. Performance issues dominate and I am no longer able to undertake the placement visits I used to."

This picture was recognised by both national and regional leaders. They accepted that quality assurance was inconsistent and that the focus had necessarily been on performance. They were clear that now performance levels had improved, this focus must include the quality of delivery.

There was also evidence that the working arrangements and rotas did not always enable formal meetings and feedback sessions between managers and staff. We heard accounts of operational managers meeting supervisors on park benches or during the supervision of placements. Given the responsibilities of the role, this was not appropriate. UPW delivery should be structured to enable the effective management of its staff.

RCATs were the responsibility of either regional quality development officers or senior probation officers (SPOs) managing SM teams, and these were being completed. Their primary focus, however, was on providing feedback to individual practitioners rather than on broader practice development or process improvement.

Good practice example

In South Central region the quality development team completed RCATs on a random sample of 10 stand-alone cases each month. It ensured that the cases, where possible, come from different PPs. The feedback was always provided face to face, and the region had brought in a 'right to reply' section for the PP to make their own comments in response to any criticism. The information from these RCATS was collated and reported to the head of UPW. The reports highlighted key themes and learning and made recommendations. Areas highlighted included compliance and engagement.

2.5 Conclusions and implications

Following the unification of the Probation Service, UPW faced considerable difficulties with backlogs of requirements and the different inherited models for delivering UPW. Consequently, the focus of national and regional leaders had been on improving performance and reducing the backlog. Significant progress had been made, and the Probation Service will be close to hitting the target of a backlog of less than two per cent of the caseload in March 2025.

The role of the community payback recovery board and the central team helped enable this progress. This included the development of effective datasets focused on areas such as dormant cases. The strong governance arrangements, both between the central team and the regions and within regions, also supported this reduction. Additionally, the oversight and operational boards established in probation regions ensured that UPW requirements were prioritised for action and completion.

As a result of the necessary focus on performance, UPW quality assurance activities had been marginalised. It was also evident that certain aspects of UPW delivery, such as the structure of the working day, needed to be reviewed if staff supervision and quality assurance were to be effective. Quality assurance should be central to UPW and incorporated into both management practices and the overall structure of UPW operations.

As part of the drive for improvements, there had been ongoing campaigns to recruit more UPW staff, particularly supervisors. This had been successful in Wales and some regions, but for some areas significant vacancies remained. High supervisor attrition rates were also a problem in some regions.

The UPW supervisor role was essential to effective delivery and could be highly challenging. The current training arrangements were inconsistent and should be strengthened. Similarly, the placement coordinator role was central to UPW delivery, tasked with the swift and safe allocation of

placements by gathering and assessing key information. However, necessary risk assessment training was currently lacking. This gap needed to be addressed to align with the operational realities of the present delivery model.

3 The delivery of unpaid work

In this chapter, we consider the assessment and planning for individuals subject to UPW requirements. We also review the effectiveness of delivery in induction, enforcement, and public protection. Finally, we consider the effectiveness of the UPW delivery models.

3.1 Assessment and planning

As part of the inspection, we reviewed 90 cases with UPW requirements from Wales and the five inspected English regions. These were targeted cases, divided between 60 single unpaid work requirement orders and 30 UPW requirements managed as part of multi-requirement orders. Our focus was on quality of delivery, so for all the cases at least 20 hours of UPW had been completed. In 45 cases, the UPW requirement had been completed in its entirety.

The parameters of the inspection did not include court work. However, in the 60 cases inspected where UPW had been proposed in the pre-sentence report, we did consider the appropriateness of the proposal. In almost all the cases, our judgement was that the proposal was appropriate.

The UPW performance targets dictate that the first work session must take place within 15 days of sentence and that an assessment should be completed beforehand. PPs complete an OASys (offender assessment system) assessment on all probation cases. Unless a case is assessed as high risk of serious harm, this must be completed within 15 working days.[10] High risk OASys assessments are completed in five working days. This timescale did not reliably ensure that an assessment was available to facilitate the timely commencement of UPW.

The digital assessment tool (DAT) was introduced in 2022 to enable UPW to meet its commencement target. This tool was online and tailored to the needs of UPW. Nearly all of the inspected cases had a DAT completed in a timely manner, but in many cases the quality was poor. In some cases, this was because relevant information, such as the results of safeguarding inquiries, was not available at the time of completion.

Concerns about the UPW assessment and planning process are not new and were highlighted in the Operations and Systems Assurance Group (OSAG) thematic report in 2023 (HMPPS, 2023c). A prompt start to UPW requirements promoted compliance and reassured sentencers. However, the current arrangements for UPW result in PPs completing both a DAT and an OASys following the commencement of the order. This was inefficient and ineffective. There was little evidence of cross-referencing between the two assessment tools. Combining the availability of all relevant information with a swift start to a requirement was challenging and might require a more dynamic and flexible approach to the acquisition, analysis, and sharing of information. National and regional leaders recognised that the current UPW assessment process did not consistently support the safe placement of individuals. The current process and practice arrangements required review.

Poor practice example

Rob was convicted of possession of an offensive weapon. He had been removed from a pub due to being heavily intoxicated, but later returned with a claw hammer when he was restrained by staff and members of the public. During his arrest, Rob made various threats to those present. He was subsequently sentenced, without a pre-sentence report, to a 12-month community order with 40 hours of UPW. Police checks and children's social care checks completed post sentence identified serious concern in relation to domestic abuse. A previous referral to children's social

---

[10] The offender assessment system, OASys, is used in England and Wales by the Probation Service to measure the risks and needs of offenders under supervision. For individuals assessed as high or very high risk of serious harm, they must be completed within five days of sentence. For medium and low risk of serious harm cases, the timescale for completion is within 15 days of sentence.

care from the police detailed incidents where Rob had threatened previous partners. This information was not incorporated into the UPW assessment, which focused on the most recent conviction and did not consider the wider behaviours, including the threats made by Rob during his arrest. Rob was placed on a group UPW placement. There was no consideration of his use of a tool in the index offence, and his potential risk to UPW staff. In addition, the information on domestic abuse was not shared with Rob's UPW supervisor.

3.2 Sentence delivery

Induction and delivery

UPW inductions should be scheduled to take place before an individual's first work session. This induction should include the rules and requirements of UPW, details of ETE access, health and safety, and the consequences of failing to comply with the UPW requirement. UPW inductions can be delivered by placement coordinators or UPW supervisors and are usually undertaken in groups. It was deemed good practice if work instructions were issued to individuals as part of the induction.

In most of the inspected cases, either a group or individual induction took place before the first work session. In many cases, the allocated placement following the induction was appropriate. The inspection also included the observation of four induction sessions. These were all group inductions and their quality varied. A PowerPoint presentation was used in all the inductions to explain UPW expectations and share details of the types of placements. The best inductions had engaging presentations, with clear professional boundaries. Inductions should be responsive to the needs of the individuals present; this was not always the case. In one induction, the lack of advance information available to the supervisors about an individual with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) meant there was no plan to manage them. This had negative consequences for other attendees, and the supervisors struggled to set boundaries. In two of the inductions, a single woman was present. Although inspectors were told that the women had consented to this in advance, in one case this contradicted what the woman told us on site. All inductions included information about the accessing of online ETE learning.

Good practice example

In Wales, the three-hour group induction included a presentation that covered health and safety, UPW placements, expectations about behaviour, and ETE arrangements. It also covered information on the people-safe alarm devices worn by staff, and the risks of sharing personal information on site. Laptops were provided to the attendees to enable them to set up their ETE account. The material was delivered enthusiastically, and at several points it reinforced the positive aspects of UPW. The supervisor also invited feedback from the individuals at different stages, encouraging engagement where possible. Throughout the presentation, pro-social language, humour, and praise were used appropriately.

Following the presentation, the supervisor held a one-to-one meeting with each attendee. The areas covered included the placements, barriers to attendance, health needs, and the first work session. This allowed further information to be gathered to inform the allocation of placements. Following the induction, where appropriate, attendees were taken to the work placement to complete the first three hours of their requirement.

> **Poor practice example**
>
> In one region, UPW inductions took place on site at the first work placement, following an initial appointment with the PP. Supervisors undertook the inductions, in addition to their responsibility of supervising the group. Some attendees had not seen the induction video in advance and supervisors allowed them to watch the film on their work phone. These arrangements were unacceptable as they undermined the supervision of the group and were a potential data security risk.

The UPW cases inspected had either completed or had made progress on their UPW requirement. It may, therefore, not be surprising that, in most cases, the arrangements to enable completion were sufficient. However, in most cases, inspectors found that UPW requirements did not directly support the acquisition of employment-related skills. The User Voice survey had similar feedback from people on UPW; only a third of respondents thought that UPW improved their chances of employment. There were, however, positive findings in this survey about the impact of UPW. Over half of respondents felt that UPW gave them a sense of purpose, and the same proportion said it improved their self-esteem. Aligned to the findings on the positive relationships experienced with supervisors, this demonstrated that UPW could have a positive impact on soft skills, such as collaborative working, and help develop self-confidence. In view of the difficult backgrounds people subject to UPW often come from, this impact should not be underestimated. For community orders and suspended sentence orders (SSOs) terminating between 01 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, the reconviction rate during the order was 10 per cent. In comparison, 17 per cent of people subject to an accredited programme were further convicted, as were 15 per cent of those subject to a rehabilitation activity requirement.

To maximise the number of UPW requirements completed within 12 months, one of the seven critical factors introduced was the target to increase to 120 per cent the subscription to group placements. This overallocation of individuals to placements was based on the underuse of UPW capacity resulting from individuals failing to report for work. To support the decision-making on this, the central team developed a project utilisation tool. Some regional managers were positive about its potential, but the use of the tool was inconsistent in the regions. The drive to maximise the numbers on placements was evident but, in some cases, this had adverse consequences. In one region, we heard that when a placement became oversubscribed individuals were taken to an alternative placement, without the necessary risk assessments. This resulted in conflict within the group. The weight limitations on the new minibuses also undermined the use of the prioritisation tool and had implications for oversubscription to placements. Individuals had on occasions been stood down from UPW as no places were available on the minibus.

Reducing the number of such stand-downs had been a key focus in the drive to improve UPW performance. The inspection of cases revealed some variations between regions. Unsurprisingly, we found a higher rate of stand-downs in the regions with significant supervisor shortages. Nationally, the number of stand-downs in relation to work instructions issued was less than two per cent. For example, the rate in the East Midlands region in the six months to July 2024 was 0.8 per cent, with 7,755 work instructions sent out and individuals stood down from their placement on 64 occasions.

To minimise the number of cases going beyond 12 months and falling into the backlog, six- and nine-month reviews of cases with UPW requirements had been introduced. Our inspection of cases found that most reviews at six months were completed; just less than half of the reviews were completed at nine months.

Enforcement

In nearly three-quarters of the inspected cases, the UPW requirement had been enforced appropriately. The main issue in the other cases was the handling of missed appointments. For example, in one case an inspector recorded:

"Enforcement action was insufficient in this case. The person on probation received several final warnings and six unacceptable absences were recorded before breach was finally instigated. The rationale for this delay was not clear."

The inconsistencies in enforcement practice had been recognised both nationally and regionally. SM performance had been of particular concern. In addition to the scrutiny of highlighted cases at the regional accountability boards, actions had included a direction that PPs must have management approval to accept three or more absences without taking breach action. There had also been changes to the operational model in some regions. These had seen UPW teams taking responsibility for the enforcement of all UPW requirements, and the automatic sending of breach letters following an individual's absence from a work placement. Some SM PPs expressed concerns about the automatic enforcement of absence taking place without their agreement, but, on the whole, these changes were mainly viewed positively. There had been significant improvements in some areas linked to these actions. For example, in the North West region, compliance rates for UPW in North Liverpool improved by 10 per cent in the first six months of 2024 following the introduction of the auto enforcement process.

In Greater Manchester and Wales, there had been work to analyse disproportionate outcomes for UPW cases. In Greater Manchester, there had been analysis of sentencing, compliance, and enforcement trends in relation to age and gender. In Wales, a disproportionality taskforce was established and this used the HMPPS equality monitoring tool to analyse outcomes and hold UPW leaders to account. The average national enforcement rates for different protected characteristics varied: the average for people from a white background in June 2024 was 16 per cent, which was higher than the rate of 13 per cent for individuals from a Black, Asian, and minority ethnic background. Similarly, the national average breach rate for women was four per cent lower than for men. HM Inspectorate of Probation's thematic inspection of the quality of services delivered to young adults in the Probation Service highlighted the high breach rates for young adults subject to UPW (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2024). In June 2024, the average national breach rate for an individual under 25 was four per cent higher than for someone over 25. The report made recommendations on criteria, induction, and placement to address these concerns.

The average national breach rate for UPW requirements was 16 per cent and there was still some significant variation between regions.[11] Decision-making on absences was inconsistent and could be expedient due to operational pressures. The changes in operational structure and the automatic breach practice introduced by the regions were positive steps.

Managing the risk of serious harm

In our case sample, 35 cases were assessed as low risk of serious harm, 52 cases as medium risk, and two cases as high risk. Thirty-two per cent of the UPW requirements had been imposed following offences of violent behaviour. In most of the cases, inspectors judged that the arrangements were sufficient to manage the risk of serious of harm. For example, for a Welsh case, one inspector recorded:

"The UPW assessment highlighted risks both to the public and to individuals. Appropriate safeguarding checks were completed and recorded. There was evidence of good information exchange throughout the order and effective management oversight. There was also evidence of liaison with the local MOSOVO team.[12]The risk management plan also made reference to UPW supervisors and their potential role in monitoring behaviour and exchanging information."

---

[11] The breach rate refers to the number of cases on the UPW caseload where enforcement action had been taken in the preceding 12 months.

[12] Management of sexual offenders and violent offender teams are set up by the police to manage these cohorts of offenders.

In a third of the cases, however, inspectors had some concerns. These included the sharing of information between staff, and the apparent lack of response when significant incidents occurred or concerning information came to light. These concerns were echoed in our meetings with staff. One recurring theme across the regions was the inconsistent communication of risk information to UPW supervisors. Most regions communicated information via a system of codes, which were legacies from the CRCs. However, the systems were different in each region, and it was evident that many of the supervisors did not understand them. This was acknowledged by a senior manager:

> *"The risk codes for UPW are different across the board. I am not confident that all staff look at them, they are outdated, and understanding by supervisors is not consistent. We have tested this with staff and only a couple of them had full understanding. It is something we know we need to change and develop."*

The inconsistent understanding and use of code systems to communicate risk information was unacceptable. Codes were introduced to enable supervisors to check information securely while on placement. However, the codes provided minimal content, so key information could be missed. For example, we heard of a case where an individual who was a risk to female staff worked in a group supervised by a female. This inadequate communication method was further exacerbated by the inconsistent training and access that supervisors had to the nDelius management information system. In our view, all supervisors should have access.

Another key issue which affected the quality of public protection work was the different supervisor work patterns. Again, this was a legacy CRC issue. Some supervisors worked nine hours per day over four days and others 7.25 hours over five. As group placements last seven hours, supervisors working the five-day pattern had very little time for reviewing or checking information. The management of different working pattens could be very difficult. However, it was important that, whatever arrangements were in place, they enabled supervisors to acquire the necessary information to carry out their challenging role.

UPW staff spent significant time with people on probation, but they were currently underutilised in probation's public protection work. In our review of cases, UPW was rarely referenced in risk management plans, and UPW staff were rarely proactively updated on potentially relevant information by PPs. The complexity and risk of UPW cases has already been detailed. Inevitably, some of these cases fall within the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).[13] It was clear, however, that UPW staff had minimal involvement with MAPPA and were unable to confirm which individuals they supervised fell within the arrangements. UPW staff should be aware of them and should also contribute to any reviews or multi-agency meetings.

3.3 Unpaid work delivery model

The focus on UPW performance since unification had demonstrated a significant difference in performance between stand-alone UPW teams managing single UPW requirement orders and SM teams managing multi-requirement orders. For example, in the Greater Manchester region between March and August 2024, 416 UPW requirements progressed beyond the 12-month mark, and 332 of the cases were multi-requirement orders managed by SM teams. Similarly, of the 32 SSO UPW requirements which expired without completion, 27 came from SM teams. This was not an isolated picture. In the East Midlands region in the 12 months to August 2024, a total of 140 SSO UPW requirements expired incomplete; of these, 119 were multi-requirement orders managed by SM teams. The national figure for SSOs with UPW requirements that expired incomplete in 2023-2024 was 2,668, most of which were sitting in sentence management teams. This was clearly of serious concern and recognised by the central team. SSO completion was identified as one of the five priority cohorts in the prioritisation framework. However, the figures demonstrated that further

---

[13] Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements are the statutory arrangements under which the police, probation, and prison service manage violent and sexual offenders.

progress was required in ensuring all UPW requirements in the priority cohorts were either completed or enforced.

The difference in performance between stand-alone UPW and SM teams was linked to both workload and organisational culture. Sentence management teams were responsible for nearly all probation-managed cases. The workload included both prison licence cases and those subject to community orders. The primary probation responsibility, of public protection, was exercised by PPs in these teams, whose responsibilities included the enforcement of licences, the proactive management of the risk of serious harm, and responding to immediate crises and risk information. UPW requirements were recognised as a key responsibility, but the sentence managers we met were very clear that the demands of their caseload meant that this was not always a priority. One PP stated:

"When things go wrong with a case you have to focus on the risk issues and deal with things like housing and concerns about victims … it is not always possible to prioritise unpaid work … you are always worried about serious further offences."

UPW's place in probation organisational culture was also a factor in performance. UPW staff often felt undervalued by the Probation Service and that the delivery of UPW was deemed less important than SM. For some UPW staff, this perception explained why SM teams did not prioritise UPW requirements. This perception that UPW was undervalued in the Probation Service was not new and was highlighted in the 2024 UPW process review (MoJ, 2024).

Regional managers had recognised this divisive culture. On the back of the focus on UPW performance, they led the drive to develop a more cohesive and unified culture. This drive was evident in the communication of priorities, as well as the joint operational structures. During the inspection, it was apparent that in some regions this had improved the operational culture. One operational UPW manager stated:

"It used to be a lesser priority, but no longer. The culture has changed. I have seen a shift in terms of where UPW sits in the organisation. We have been [at] the forefront of what the public see, but we are now at the forefront for staff. It's led from the top."

Despite the indications of improved communication and organisational culture, the question remained about whether the predominant operational model was the best one for delivering UPW requirements effectively. Some regions had already changed their model. These changes included UPW teams taking responsibility for the automatic enforcement of absences, and the deployment of probation officers into stand-alone teams to manage high risk of harm cases. Some of these changes met with performance improvements, as highlighted in North Liverpool. Some regions now intended moving to a model where UPW staff oversaw all UPW requirements, with SM PPs only involved in any final breach decision.

In Wales, where SM teams held all the requirements, UPW performance was strong, both in terms of the backlog and completions within 12 months. A 'shared mental' model project on UPW had been completed in 2023 with the aim of developing a more cohesive working culture, both within the UPW unit and with PDUs (HMPPS, 2023). During the inspection, this was still at an early stage of implementation, but it was evident that some positive arrangements had been developed and there had been improvements to the working culture. However, we still found some concerns in both UPW and SM teams in relation to capacity and delivery.

It was the consistent view of UPW staff that, due to the demands of the sentence management workload, the performance in Wales was primarily driven by UPW staff. The framework in place to improve performance had clearly been effective. However, it depended heavily on the activity of UPW staff to drive the improvement. The repeated view was that without this activity UPW performance would decline. The managers and staff we met during the inspection mainly favoured a model where UPW teams were responsible for overseeing all UPW requirements. One SM PP stated:

"SM PPs have 'too many balls to juggle' in terms of requirements, so UPW is never going to be seen as a priority. For stand-alone PPs, it is the priority and I think that is reflected in the outcomes. The evidence suggests that a specialist approach would give better outcomes as it would be more proactive."

While a senior UPW manager stated:

"Trying to improve the practice of PPs in sentence management is an uphill struggle. Small stand-alone teams would manage the UPW requirements much better."

The operational framework evolved to improve UPW performance had been successful and relied on interface meetings between UPW and SM. However, it was resource-intensive, and it was questionable how sustainable this would be over a continuous period. Despite this framework, stand-alone teams' UPW delivery continued to be stronger than SMs. The inability of SM teams to prioritise UPW consistently was not a new concern for the Probation Service. In our view the delivery model should be reviewed.

'Human factors' approach

Following on from the work on the shared mental model in Wales, the 'human factors' approach was introduced to UPW teams.[14] It drew on the approach previously introduced to sentence management teams. The check-ins for supervisors, for example, were held three times a week at the end of the working day. Management-protected time was also built into this arrangement. The introduction of the human factors approach was welcomed across management, operational, and administrative staff groups. The approach helped to improve communication, day-to-day decision-making, and enhanced a team ethos.

Good practice example: Wales

The human factors check-in meeting was held three times per week at 4pm. Holding a meeting on Wednesday ensured that supervisors working over the weekend were involved. The agreed questions were followed at each meeting, covering personal wellbeing, immediate work concerns, and any information that needed to be shared. This effective meeting included the opportunity for risk concerns or risk information to be shared between supervisors. The response from supervisors was universally positive. One supervisor commented to an inspector: "it is very good for exchanging information on practical things like vans, but also any successes. It gives us better continuity." Another supervisor stated: "it is especially good if someone has had a difficult day. The problems are shared and not taken into the following day."

3.4 Conclusions and implications

Most unpaid work assessments were completed before the first work session, but the overall quality was poor. The DAT, introduced to expedite the assessment process, was often incomplete, did not align with the OASys assessment process, and had minimal cross-referencing between the two assessments. UPW inductions routinely took place, although their structure and quality were inconsistent. However, for most cases, there were arrangements to enable the completion of an UPW requirement. UPW did not consistently support an individual's employability, but it could help them in developing confidence and team-working skills.

The arrangements for operational delivery and the working culture between UPW and SM had improved, but there remained concerns about the SM's role in UPW delivery. Automatic breach

---

[14] Human factors is part of a learning organisation approach adopted in Wales to improve operational culture and to improve service delivery. It is one of five strands of the model. The others are a shared mental model; culture measurement; culture enquiry; and leadership and team development.

procedures had improved UPW enforcement but remained inconsistent across regions. The arrangements for managing the risk of serious harm for UPW cases required review. The information available to supervisors was inadequate and there was inconsistency in the procedures, with legacy CRC systems still in use. UPW performance had improved, but concerns remained in key areas, such as the completion of SSO requirements. The delivery model, including the operational relationship between SM and UPW, should be reviewed.

The human factors model had been adapted for UPW in Wales and was starting to be embedded in the working culture. It was acknowledged that UPW had different working demands and culture to SM, and this was recognised in the model's adaptation. The implementation and commitment to the model were impressive and had a positive impact on staff confidence, staff wellbeing, and information exchange. This included the exchange of key risk information within UPW and with sentence management.

4 Education, training, and employment, and unpaid work placements

In this chapter, we review the role of education, training, and employment (ETE) in UPW and consider the quality of UPW placements. We look at whether the placements meet the stated purpose of punishment and their contribution to local communities. We also evaluate their impact on the individuals attending them, and whether they meet the needs of women.

4.1 Education, training, and employment

The primary purpose of UPW as a punishment was recognised by sentencers, probation staff, and the individuals subject to the requirements. Regions used ETE activity to meet the secondary purpose laid out in legislation, that UPW should be constructive and facilitate rehabilitation. Online learning via Community Campus was the main vehicle used by regions to provide ETE. A three-year unpaid work ETE strategy was introduced by the national team in 2023 (HMPPS, 2023b). This included ambitions to improve access to the online learning, collaborate with employers to provide employment, and to offer National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) assessor qualifications to UPW staff to enable them to train individuals subject to UPW. Apart from the use of the Community Campus portal, and some regional initiatives in relation to employment, we found little evidence that this strategy was being realised in the regions.

An individual is eligible to have up to 30 per cent of their hours credited by undertaking ETE if they are not in work or training, are at risk of losing their employment or are seeking to develop their employment options. On average, only 10 per cent of people undertook 30 per cent of their UPW requirement as ETE. A target of 20 per cent for this was set as one of the seven critical factors, but performance in the inspected regions ranged from seven per cent in the North West to 13 per cent in South Central. The consistent view of UPW managers and staff was that the target was unrealistic.

ETE was, in any case, not appropriate for everyone subject to UPW requirements; many were in work or already undertaking employment training. All individuals subject to UPW were, however, expected to undertake three mandatory online courses - in health and safety, manual handling, and first aid - prior to working on a placement unless they were assessed as exempt by their PP (e.g. because of neurodiverse issues or literacy levels). This was explained during the UPW inductions where, in some areas, individuals could set up their online account. Laptops were given to regions out of central funding to enable access for all individuals. We found that supervised ETE sessions took place inconsistently, and only in a few locations. Most people were expected to undertake the mandatory online courses on their own devices. Failure to complete these courses could result in the breach of the requirement. There were, however, no examples during the inspection of enforcement for such a failure. This would seem in line with the principles of procedural justice, given that not everyone will have had appropriate devices for accessing the portal. In addition, we heard of accessibility problems on some networks. Some supervisors also raised concerns about the potential unfairness to people with hidden disabilities:

"People aren't on the same level in terms of their IT knowledge. They don't always have the confidence or the knowledge. There also people with problems like dyslexia and autism. This can exclude them from access."

This unequal access was recognised at national level. Since October 2024, UPW has been included in the HMPPS Creating Future Opportunities (CFO) contract. This offers face-to-face, tailored support and this has been made accessible for individuals with UPW requirements in the English regions. This was a positive step, but accessibility was still an issue, as there were not CFO hubs in every area.

Community Campus had been the only online portal approved for UPW since 2023; prior to this, several websites were used. The decision to use only one provider was welcomed in the regions. One senior manager stated:

"It's a good online resource. We can track number of hours. We were not confident in other providers as we could not track completions adequately. Community Campus enable us to know what is being delivered and the number of hours that have been completed."

Community Campus offered a range of vocational courses and was accessible in 10 languages. However, during the inspection both UPW staff and people on probation questioned the quality of the courses available. The feedback from the User Voice surveys and focus groups was also negative, with most people stating the courses were not useful. A recurring theme was that the courses did not provide participants with a valid, useable certificate after completion. This was recognised by national leaders as a significant deficit, which they intend addressing when the contract comes up for renewal in August 2025.

Some sentencers during the inspection also questioned the appropriateness of online ETE being used for UPW. Their view was that the online ETE arrangements contrasted sharply with the perception of UPW as community reparation and punishment. Some were also concerned that they did not have sufficient information about the use of online ETE.

To maintain sentencer and public confidence, it is important that UPW continues to be viewed primarily as a punishment. However, there was good evidence that employment and skills training reduced reoffending. Given the opportunity for constructive input that UPW provided, it was appropriate that ETE was part of delivery. Online courses were now embedded in skills training, so these could also be appropriate. However, these should be limited and carefully supervised; currently, this was not always the case. In 59 of the cases we reviewed, ETE had been credited as part of the UPW requirement. However, in many of these, the courses undertaken had not been targeted and appeared to have been taken only as a means of completing UPW hours. This was an unacceptable use of ETE and undermined the credibility of community sentences.

The opportunity UPW had to improve the employability of people on probation was recognised within the regions. UPW managers had developed some positive local relationships with training providers. In the North West and Greater Manchester regions, links had been made with Myerscough College to deliver a City and Guilds qualification in ground maintenance. Wales region was working with Active Learning Wales to deliver basic qualifications. In some regions, there were arrangements for UPW to be undertaken as part of employment training with Railtrack, with a view to potential employment. Some regional leaders, however, were frustrated that they did not have the budget to develop these initiatives further. They would have liked, for example, to upskill supervisors with NVQ assessor training and to provide more skills based UPW workshop sessions. National leaders had identified ETE as an area for development now that the backlog was reducing. They recognised the limitations of the current ETE arrangements and the unfulfilled potential of UPW in providing skills training to improve employability.

4.2   Unpaid work placements

During the inspection, we visited 24 placements in six inspected regions. These were all group placements and included observations at the weekend - a significant proportion of UPW takes place at weekends and in some regions, this exceeds 50 per cent of the work undertaken. Most of the placements involved outside manual work; this included painting, vegetation management, and the maintenance of footpaths. The teams were well organised, and the supervisors kept impressive control of the groups. Following a placement observation in South Central, one inspector recorded:

"The supervisor had a good rapport with a group of young people on probation in attendance. When appropriate, the supervisor gave instructions to people on probation in respect of health and safety following lapses in concentration i.e. not wearing masks when spray-painting. The supervisor encouraged the group and used supportive language and praise appropriately. Overall, the

supervisor was professional, supportive, and empathetic to the individuals in relation to their wider concerns and situations. Effective boundaries were maintained throughout the session, and it was evident the people on probation held the supervisor in high regard."

The work undertaken on these placements made a positive contribution to local sports clubs, community footpaths, and public parks. This was recognised by passers-by, who frequently expressed their thanks and appreciation to the working parties. Many of the placements did not equip attendees with specific skills, but they did provide them with the opportunity to gain experience in using equipment such as grass strimmers and mechanised tools.

Across all the inspected regions, the beneficiaries were positive about the work delivered by the UPW teams. Many stated that their projects and parks depended on the work undertaken, and highlighted the financial savings delivered. They also had confidence in the UPW managers and the supervisors overseeing the groups. Inevitably, there had been some incidents of poor behaviour, but where problems had arisen, these had been resolved promptly and satisfactorily. In the regions with staffing issues, however, there were some concerns about the resilience of UPW delivery.

Good practice example: UPW project at a primary school in South Central

Up to eight people attended this weekend placement based in a primary school. It had been running for over 10 years. The work undertaken was wide-ranging and included landscape gardening and carpentry. Work competed by UPW teams during the years of the placement had included the installation of display boards, a hand-dug bark pit, and various decking and playground projects. People on probation had also built and installed an outdoor teaching area and helped with plumbing, including the installation of outdoor taps.

The site manager at the school had a trade background, and this had clearly helped the development of the project. He reported that since UPW became involved with the school, it had not once had to use a professional painter and decorator. He estimated that the school had received over £1 million of added value in the work completed over the period of the placement.

Rapid deployment projects

Rapid deployment projects were introduced in 2023 as part of the government's antisocial behaviour plan. The purpose of the projects is for local authorities to use UPW teams at short notice to clean up areas affected by antisocial behaviour; this could include the removal of graffiti or litter. Pilot schemes were introduced in 2023. During the inspection, we observed two of the projects. One was the clearance of an overgrown path in a residential area to make it lighter and less intimidating for residents. The other project involved the clearance of rubbish from beneath a motorway bridge. Both projects were supervised effectively, but we had some concerns about the facilities available for the people working on the placement. The seating capacity of the welfare van (equipped with a toilet) was not used for the first project, as this would restrict the number in the group. As a result, the supervisor was tasked with driving the team to local public conveniences at regular intervals during the day. Facilities were similarly limited at the second project, where the council supplied the minibus. Here, the toilets at a shopping centre were being used. From all angles, not least health and safety, these arrangements were not acceptable.

The uptake of rapid deployment by local councils could be inconsistent. Some were positive about the initiative, but we also heard about others taking a much more cautious approach. It was also evident that even where the relationships were in place, the demand for deployment of the UPW teams could fluctuate.

National UPW contracts

Since 2021, the central UPW team had been working on the development of national UPW projects. The purpose of these projects was, in part, to support regions in developing their placements and to provide consistency in the delivery model. The aim was also to alert national organisations to the

potential of UPW to support their organisation. The organisations involved included the Canal & Rivers Trust (CRT), Forestry England, National Highways, the Guinness Partnership, and Network Rail. There were also agreements with some national charities, such as Marie Curie, to provide individual placements. The national projects were supported by a detailed memorandum of understanding (MOU), subsequently implemented for use on all regionally arranged projects. This had ensured that all projects met the necessary legal requirements and provided a consistent framework for UPW delivery. However, the predominant view of UPW managers was that the MOUs were overly bureaucratic and had over-complicated arrangements with local placement providers. In some cases, this resulted in the loss of placements.

We observed a CRT placement underpinned by a national contract. This involved maintenance work and vegetation management on a busy cycle and walking route next to a canal. This was low-skilled work, but it was clearly visible and making a positive contribution to the local community. The officers of the CRT were very positive about the work undertaken and the impact it was having. They stated that the budgetary pressures on the CRT meant that it relied on UPW teams to undertake vital maintenance work to the canal network. Currently, there were 30 UPW projects involved nationally with CRT, and collectively they had an ambition to complete 300,000 hours of work over three years. They estimated the added value of the work so far undertaken at £2.5 million.

UPW placements for women

Nine per cent of the UPW caseload were women, and in July 2024 the central team introduced a women's strategy for UPW. Our inspection took place while this strategy was being implemented, so we were unable to make judgement on its impact. However, all the inspected regions already had bespoke arrangements for the management of women. These included the provision of women-only placements and offering flexible placement times for women with caring responsibilities. We also heard that, where necessary, women were transported to suitable placements if they were not local to where they lived. The relatively small number of women subject to UPW requirements made it difficult for regions to routinely offer women-only group placements. In some regions, we observed single women working in all-male groups. In each case, the women involved indicated that they had been given a choice about their attendance on the placement. However, we did have some concerns about single women working in all-male groups, particularly where the supervisor was male. Given the potential vulnerability of women on probation, this should not be routine practice. As with our concerns about induction, it is important that women do not feel pressurised.

Good practice example: Greater Manchester

The implementation of a women's UPW strategy in Greater Manchester had led to the link up with eight women's centres in the region to provide placements for women. Where possible, all-women groups were run. All women were offered women-only placements.

The women's UPW placement at the Westhoughton hub provided free food to the local community. The women placed there undertook food preparation and service. The centre offered a funded level 2 City and Guilds food hygiene certificate for women who demonstrated the appropriate commitment and motivation. Women were also able to continue volunteering once their hours were complete.

Centre managers were keen to provide an inclusive and non-judgemental environment. One woman stated that, as well as technical skills, she had developed confidence, felt valued, and now had the motivation to seek paid employment. Another woman praised her placement at the centre and viewed UPW as rehabilitative. She described it as responsive and supportive, and credited the supervisor with signposting her to additional support that she otherwise would not have accessed.

On average, the breach rate for women subject to UPW was five per cent lower than for men.

4.3 Conclusions and implications

Punishment is the primary purpose of UPW but, given the length of UPW requirements, it was appropriate that ETE was incorporated where suitable. The Community Campus portal was used to provide online courses for UPW. This provided some flexibility and was an appropriate vehicle for the delivery of the mandatory UPW courses prior to working on a placement. However, the vocational courses accessed via the portal were not accredited, and there was minimal evidence that they contributed to increased employability. Online ETE had helped address the backlog, but for it to be credible, and not to undermine the purpose of the UPW, it should be targeted with the purpose of improving employability.

Some regions had developed positive links with local employers and colleges to deliver accredited vocational training as part of the UPW requirements. However, the potential for UPW to deliver meaningful and practical ETE to help reduce the level of reoffending was not maximised.

Unpaid work projects were making a significant contribution to the community. There were many very impressive projects, which were well managed and well supervised. These included the rapid deployment projects and those developed under the national contracts. However, basic facilities for individuals and staff were not consistently available. This was a breach of health and safety guidance and the 1992 code of practice, and was unacceptable (HSE, 2013).

There were bespoke arrangements for the delivery of UPW to women, with some excellent placements. However, the policy of allowing lone women, with their consent, to work in all-male groups should be reviewed.

References

Carr, N. and Neimantas, L. (2002). *Community Service and Rehabilitation, Untapped Potential*. London: Routledge.

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and Home Office. (2023). *Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan*. London: DLUHC and Home Office. www.gov.uk/government/publications/anti-social-behaviour-action-plan

Fox *et al.* (2021). 'A Rapid Evidence Assessment to Assess the Outcomes of Community and Custody Delivered Vocational Training and Employment Programmes on Reoffending', *British Journal of Community Justice*, 17 (1).

Gwasanaeth Carchardai a Phrawlf EM, HM Prison and Probation Service. (2023). *Shared Mental Model Project - Unpaid Work Wales*. Cardiff: HMPPS.

Health and Safety Executive. (2013). *Workplace Health, Safety and Welfare. Regulation 20. Approved Code of Practice and Guidance*. HSE. https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/l24.pdf

Home Office. (2021). *Beating Crime Plan*. London: Home Office

HM Inspectorate of Probation (2016). *A Thematic Inspection of the Delivery of Unpaid Work*. Manchester: HM Inspectorate of Probation.

HM Inspectorate of Probation (2024). *The Quality of Services Delivered to Young Adults*. Manchester: HM Inspectorate of Probation.

HM Prison and Probation Service. (2024a). *Community Payback Report*. London: HMPPS.

HM Prison and Probation Service. (2024b). *Community Payback Learning Requirements*. London: HMPPS.

HM Prison and Probation Service. (2023a). *Community Payback Workstream Regional Priorities*. London: HMPPS.

HM Prison and Probation Service. (2023b). *Core Quality Management Framework*. London: HMPPS.

HM Prison and Probation Service. (2023c). *Operations and Systems Assurance Group. Unpaid Work Thematic report*. London: HMPPS.

HM Prison and Probation Service. (2023d). *Outline of Quality Assurance Activities for Community Payback*. London: HMPPS.

HM Prison and Probation Service. (2023e). *Unpaid Work Education, Training and Employment (ETE) Strategy 2023 -2026*. London: HMPPS.

HM Prison and Probation Service. (2021). *The Target Operating Model for Probation Services in England and Wales*. London: HMPPS.

Ministry of Justice. (2013). *Analysis of the impact of employment on re-offending following release from custody, using Propensity Score Matching.* London: MoJ. https://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/statistics/ad-hoc/impact-employment-reoffending.pdf

Ministry of Justice. (2024). *Sentence types - Criminal justice system statistics - Justice Data. London: MoJ.* https://data.justice.gov.uk/cjs-statistics/cjs-sentence-types#chart-tab-cjs-offenders-sentenced-community-sentence

Ministry of Justice. (2024a). *Unpaid Work Process Evaluation*. London: MoJ.

Rex, S. *et al.* (2003). *Crime Reduction Programme. An evaluation of Community Service Pathfinder Projects. Final report 2002*. London: Home Office.

Skardhamer, T., Telle, K. (2012). 'Post-release employment and recidivism in Norway', *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 28, pp.629-649.

Annexe 1: Glossary

CP	Community payback
CRC	Community rehabilitation company (abolished with the unification of probation services in 2021)
DAT	Digital assessment tool
ETE	Education, training and employment: work to improve an individual's learning, and to increase their employment prospects
HMPPS	HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS): the single agency responsible for both prisons and probation services
MAPPA	Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements: where probation, police, prison and other agencies work together locally to manage offenders who pose a higher risk of harm to others. Level 1 is ordinary agency management where the risks posed by the offender can be managed by the agency responsible for the supervision or case management of the offender. This compares with Levels 2 and 3, which require active multi-agency management.
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MOSOVO	Management of sexual offenders and violent offenders
nDelius	National Delius: the approved case management system used by the Probation Service
Human factors	Human factors is part of a learning organisation approach adopted in Wales to improve operational culture and service delivery. It is one of five strands of the model. The others are: a shared mental model; culture measurement; culture enquiry; and leadership and team development. Implementation of the model has now commenced in South Central and South West regions.
National Probation Service	A single national service which existed between June 2014 and June 2021. Its role was to deliver services to courts and to manage specific groups of offenders, including those presenting a high or very high risk of serious harm and those subject to MAPPA.
OASys	Offender assessment system currently used in England and Wales by the Probation Service to measure the risks and needs of offenders under supervision
OSAG	Operational and system assurance group, now known as Performance, Assurance, Risk Group (PAR)
PSR	Pre-sentence report. This refers to any report prepared for a court, whether delivered orally or in a written format
PDU	Probation delivery unit
PP	Probation practitioner. This is the term used for both probation officers and probation service officers. Probation officers have all

	completed a professional probation qualification and they manage cases at all risk levels. PSOs do not have the probation qualification and do not manage high or very high risk of serious harm cases.
Probation officer	This is the term for a 'qualified' responsible officer who has undertaken a higher education-based course and achieved the relevant qualification. The name of the qualification and content of the training varies, depending on when it was undertaken. They manage more complex cases.
Probation services officer (PSO)	This is the term for a responsible officer who was originally recruited with no qualification. They may access locally determined training to 'qualify' as a probation services officer or to build on this to qualify as a probation officer. They may manage all but the most complex cases depending on their level of training and experience. Some PSOs work within the court setting, where their duties include the writing of pre-sentence reports.
SDS40	Standard determinate sentence 40
SFO	Serious further offence. These are serious offences committed by people being managed by the Probation Service and are then subject to an internal review
SPO	Senior probation officer
SSO	Suspended sentence order
UPW	Unpaid work

Annexe 2: Methodology

The inspection sought to answer the following questions:

Does the leadership support and promote the delivery of a high-quality, personalised, and responsive approach to unpaid work?

- Is there an effective governance framework for unpaid work and clear delivery plans that ensure the vision and strategy are translated into practice?
- Is strategic decision-making effective in relation to demands such as the Covid-19 backlog and the increased demand for community orders?
- Is there an effective strategy to promote UPW in local communities and with sentencers?
- Is the purpose of unpaid work understood across staff groups, sentencers, and the person on probation?
- Is unpaid work understood and prioritised in sentence management?

Do the operational structure and arrangements for unpaid work enable the delivery of an effective service?

- Do the arrangements for UPW enable the prompt commencement of requirements?
- Do operational staff work effectively with placement providers?
- Are individuals allocated to work placements appropriately?
- Has unpaid work delivery recovered from the pandemic?
- Are UPW requirements consistently enforced?
- Has the delivery of UPW been impacted by Probation Service unification?
- Are the plans for monitoring, assurance, and evaluation of unpaid work sufficient?

Do the training and supervision of unpaid work staff support high-quality delivery and professional development?

- Are practitioners provided with the right oversight, guidance, development, and support to competently manage unpaid work cases?
- Are supervisors provided with appropriate training and oversight to deliver projects and placements?
- Do staffing and workload levels support the delivery of high-quality unpaid work?
- Do staff have the necessary skills and qualification to deliver education and training?
- Are unpaid work cases allocated to placements by staff with the right level of knowledge and skill?
- Is sufficient focus given to staff safety and wellbeing?
- Do staff have the right knowledge and skills to procure appropriate UPW projects?

How well does unpaid work deliver ETE provisions to support, train, and provide opportunities to the person on probation?

- Is appropriate ETE provision available for completion as part of an UPW requirement?
- Are ETE placements being consistently used as part of UPW requirements?
- Is enough attention given to understanding the individual's employability needs?
- Do the people on probation have access to the necessary IT equipment to participate in ETE provision?

Are unpaid work placements personalised, and are they responsive to diverse groups and bespoke needs?

- Do unpaid work assessments address the individual's needs and strengths?
- Are there appropriate placements available to cater for the diverse needs of the people on probation?
- Do placements provide reasonable adjustments to support diverse needs?
- Do individuals subject to unpaid work understand the rules and expectations?
- Are intensive working schedules offered where applicable?

How effective is unpaid work in keeping people safe?

- Is the individual's risk of serious harm routinely identified in the allocation of placements?
- Are supervisors given sufficient information to manage the risk of serious harm of the individuals on placement and to implement any agreed contingency planning?
- Does the relationship between unpaid work operational teams and sentence management teams enable the effective management of the risk of serious harm?
- Is sufficient focus and attention given to those identified as a risk to staff?
- Do practitioners work effectively with placement providers to protect and support victims, and aid the desistance of the person on probation?

Fieldwork

Case inspection

The inspection of cases took place remotely during the first week of the inspection. We inspected 15 cases from each fieldwork area. They included:

- five cases where the multi-requirement court order started six to seven months before our fieldwork, with an unpaid work requirement attached
- 10 cases where the court order started six to seven months before our fieldwork, with a stand-alone unpaid work requirement to complete.

This was a qualitative sample, used to inspect the quality and execution of unpaid work delivery across stand-alone and multi-requirement orders, utilising case studies to draw out themes.

In all sample cases, we considered: the management of the sentence; quality of assessment; planning for risk, need, and suitability for the UPW requirement; the role of the probation practitioner in enabling unpaid work activity; and the impact of all activity on the person on probation.

Probation regions inspected

We undertook fieldwork in:

- South Central region
- North West region
- East Midlands region
- North East region
- Greater Manchester region
- Wales

In each fieldwork area we held the following meetings with individuals and focus groups:

- regional probation director/head of operations
- head of interventions
- head of unpaid work
- sentence management SPOs
- stand-alone unpaid work SPOs/unpaid work operations managers
- probation practitioners (sentence management)
- probation practitioners (unpaid work)
- unpaid work business managers
- unpaid work case administrators
- unpaid work placement coordinators
- unpaid work supervisors
- local sentencers
- unpaid work beneficiaries.

We also undertook four onsite observations of group unpaid work placements. These included both weekday and weekend placements.

National fieldwork week

We undertook a series of meetings with national leaders in HMPPS to review strategy, performance, and the process and outcome evaluations.

National survey

Prior to the fieldwork weeks, a national survey of all unpaid work interventions staff was circulated. This covered areas such as workload, training, support, implementation of policy, relationships, and working culture. This received 414 responses.

User Voice

User Voice conducted a series of focus groups and circulated a survey to individuals who were, or had been, subject to unpaid work requirements. In total, they spoke to or received responses from 1,020 people. A separate report containing an analysis of this information will also be published.