



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

A thematic inspection of the delivery of unpaid work

An inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation
February 2025



HM Inspectorate
of Probation



About us

Our vision

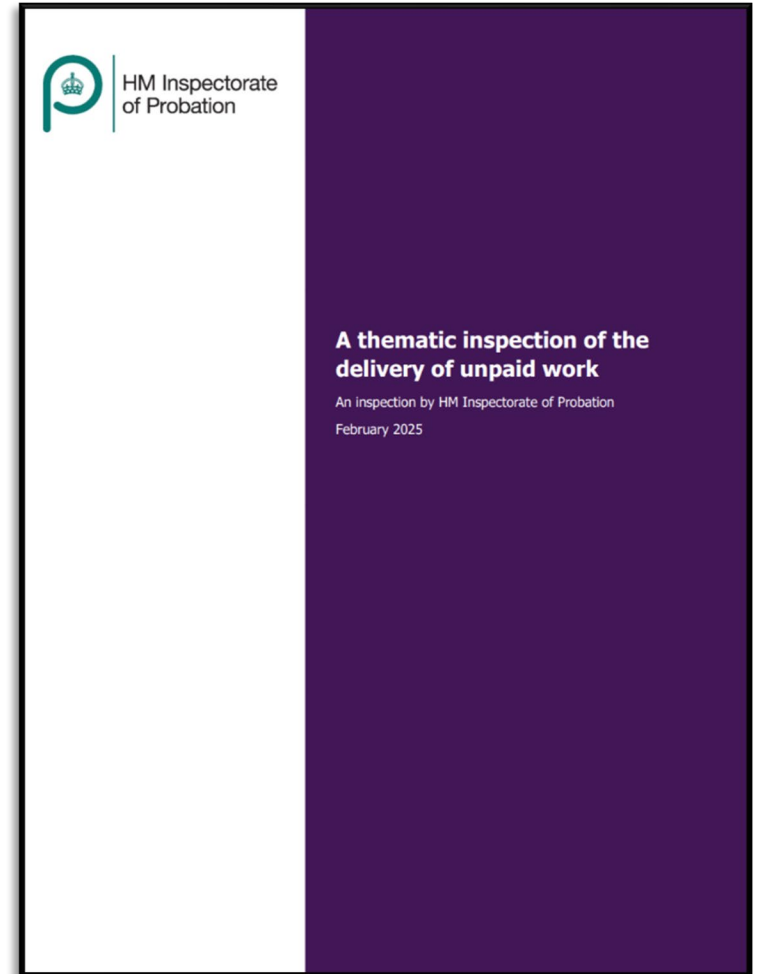
High-quality probation and youth justice services that change people's lives for the better.

Our purpose

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

Why this thematic inspection?

- UPW is the most frequently imposed requirement
- UPW was last inspected 2016
- Post unification / post Covid-19 landscape
- Effectiveness of community penalties





Methodology

- English regions and Wales plus national meetings July-September 2024
- 91 focus groups
- 24 UPW placement observations
- 1020 User Voice survey and focus groups –1020 responses
- 414 staff survey responses
- UPW sample: 90 cases inspected which included both multi-requirement and stand-alone cases. A qualitative approach was undertaken, with an emphasis on understanding issues and illustrating wider findings
- Core inspection data



Contextual Facts

- **6,091,198** - The total number of unpaid work hours imposed from April 2023 to March 2024
- **40,440** - The number of unpaid work requirements being managed on community order and suspended sentence orders on 02 July 2024
- **Nine per cent** - The percentage of the unpaid work caseload who were women
- **95 per cent** - The level of unpaid work delivery against the pre-Covid-19 baseline of delivery
- **Seven per cent** - The percentage of unpaid work requirements in the backlog



Policy, strategy and leadership

- The governance arrangements and the clear strategic direction provided, both nationally and regionally, had driven improved UPW performance
- The UPW backlog had reduced from 30 per cent at its peak in 2022 to seven per cent at the time of this inspection
- Role of the national community payback board and the regional accountability frameworks
- United focus on reducing the backlog and the development of targeted performance criteria and data metrics to effectively support this
- 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.



Policy, strategy and leadership

- The performance of sentence management and standalone UPW teams
- Access to training for UPW staff including supervisors and placement coordinators
- UPW quality assurance arrangements.





Assessment and commencement

- Most unpaid work assessments were completed before the first work session
- Most UPW requirements commenced promptly
- The DAT was often incomplete with risk and personal information often missing
- Most UPW inductions took place before an individual commenced their requirement
- Most inductions took place prior to commencement but their structure and quality varied.



The delivery of unpaid work

- For most cases, the arrangements were sufficient to enable the completion of an UPW requirement
- Enforcement of UPW requirements has improved but inconsistencies remain
- UPW did not consistently support an individual's employability, but it helped them in developing confidence and team-working skills
- The relevant risk information available to UPW supervisors was insufficient and inconsistent
- The potential role of UPW staff in risk management generally was underestimated
- People on probation highly valued their relationships with UPW supervisors



The delivery model

- Regions have different delivery models
- Operational delivery and the working culture between UPW and sentence management had improved
- But continued inconsistent delivery of UPW requirements between UPW standalone teams and sentence management teams managing multi requirement orders
- 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



UPW placements and ETE 1

- Punishment is the primary purpose of UPW
- ETE is appropriate where suitable, given the length of UPW requirements
- Online ETE had helped address the backlog, but must be credible and not undermine the purpose of the UPW
- Community Campus provides some flexibility and is an appropriate vehicle for the delivery of the mandatory UPW courses prior to working on a placement
- Online ETE should be limited, carefully targeted and consistently supervised.



UPW placements and ETE 2

- At regional level, there were some impressive arrangements with local colleges and employers that provided appropriate work-related, practical training but these were not part of a national strategy
- Overall, the potential of UPW to provide skills training to improve employability was not being realised
- There are many excellent UPW placements that were delivering benefits to their beneficiaries and the local community
- These include the work of the rapid deployment teams and the projects developed via the national contracts
- Basic facilities for individuals and staff were not consistently available
- The probation regions have developed some excellent projects for women, and they all provide female-only placements, where necessary
- UPW projects were well managed and well supervised



Recommendations

HM Prison and Probation Service should:

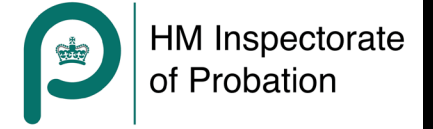
- ✓ ensure all practitioners complete high-quality assessments for unpaid work cases, incorporating a thorough analysis of relevant risk information before making placement decisions.
- ✓ review the operating model to prioritise the delivery of unpaid work within multi-requirement orders, ensuring consistent decision-making in the enforcement of cases
- ✓ ensure that education, training, and employment undertaken as part of an unpaid work requirement is accessible and aimed at building employment-related knowledge and skills
- ✓ increase the number of UPW placements that offer practical vocational training and meaningful employment opportunities
- ✓ ensure that comprehensive and accessible risk information is consistently provided to unpaid work supervisors



Recommendations

HM Prison and Probation Service should:

- ✓ 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
- ✓ review the arrangements for placing lone women in all-male work groups
- ✓ ensure that all UPW placements meet health and safety standards, providing facilities in full compliance with legislation
- ✓ implement the 'human factors approach' adopted for unpaid work delivery in Wales across the English regions.



THE VOICE OF PEOPLE WITH EXPERIENCE OF UNPAID WORK

LAUNCH EVENT

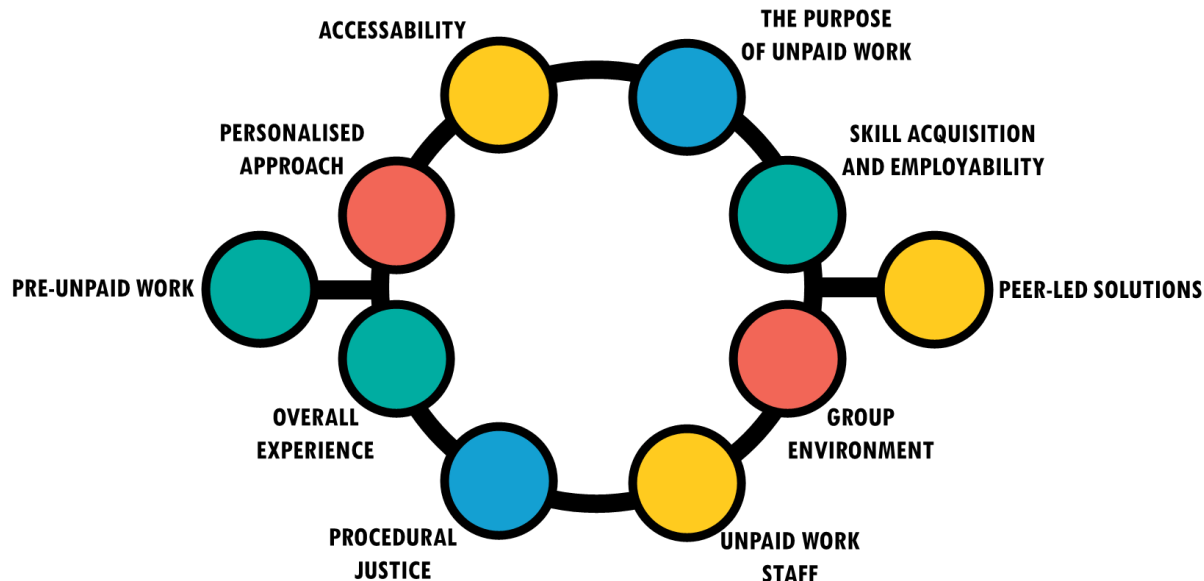
APPROACH

1,020

People had their say via surveys and interviews

THE VOICE OF PEOPLE WITH UNPAID WORK EXPERIENCE

REPORT MAP:



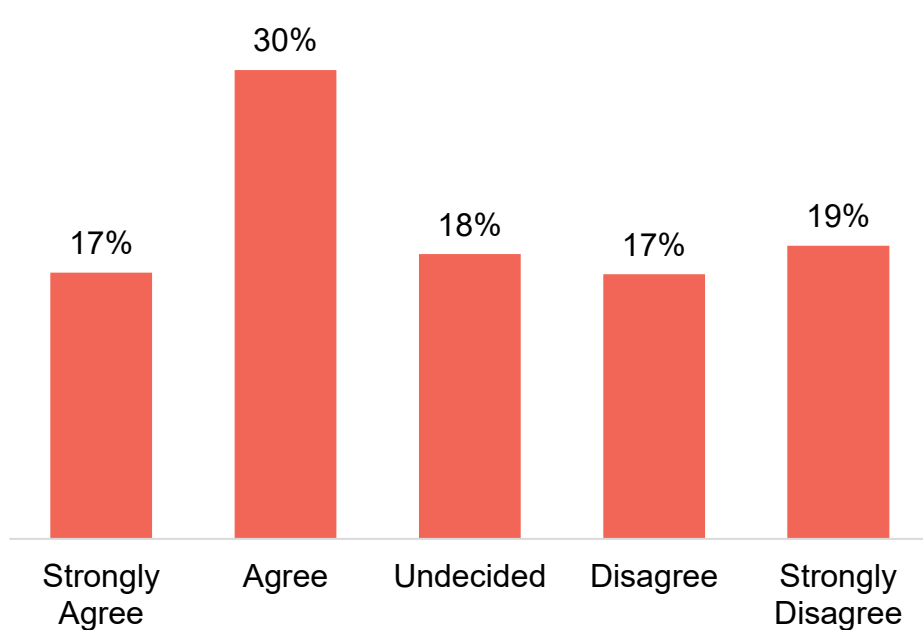
OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the consultation was to better understand people's experience with unpaid work and whether it meets their needs. Furthermore, our objectives were:

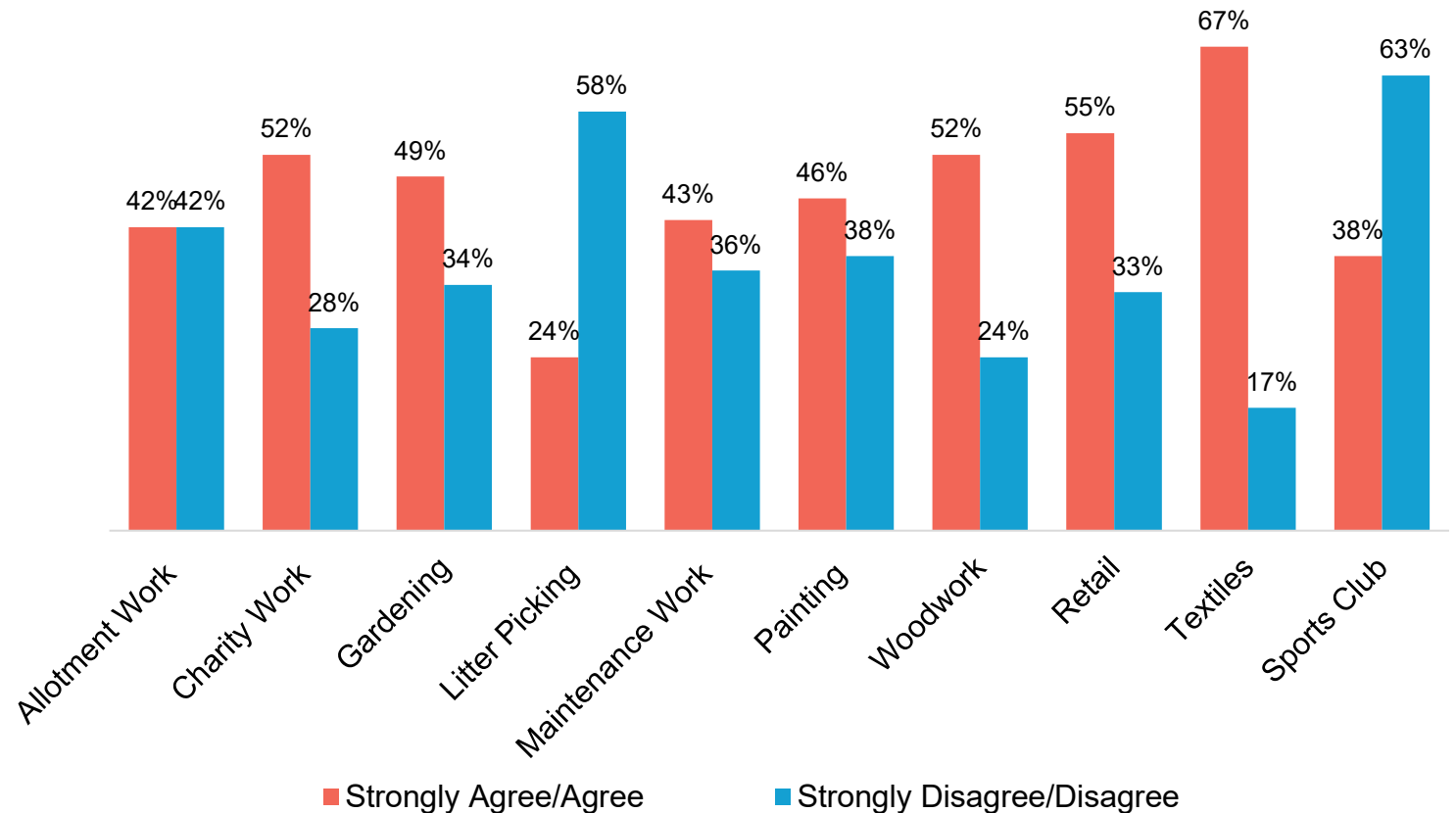
- To understand what support people undertaking unpaid work have, or haven't, had from unpaid work staff.
- To understand whether or not people find their unpaid work to be punitive, rehabilitative and/or reparative.
- To understand if people develop skills or improve their employability/career development whilst undertaking unpaid work.
- To understand how well organised unpaid work activities are.
- To highlight any good practices that could be built upon by the service.

PEOPLE WANT AN INDIVIDUALLY TAILORED APPROACH THAT WORKS ALONGSIDE THEIR INTERESTS, SKILLS AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Q: My unpaid work activity takes into account my skills and interests



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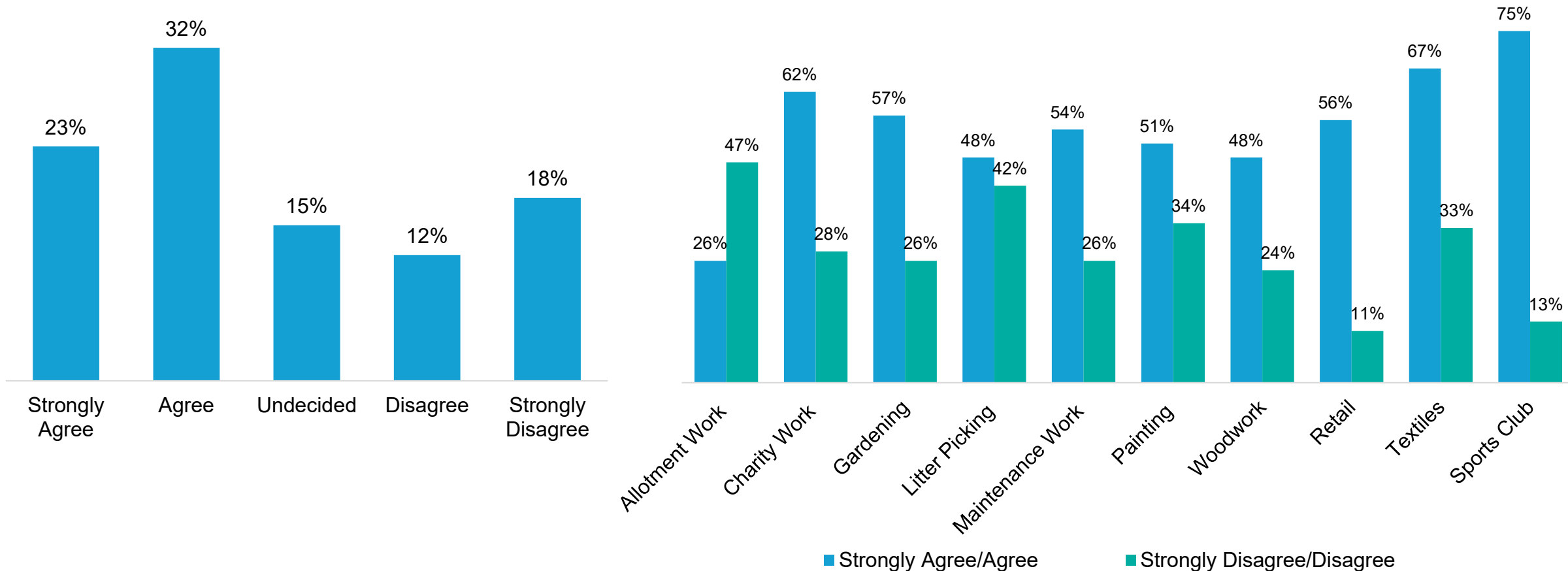
“I have five fractures and I shouldn't be doing manual labour. I should have retired when I was 65 but at 73, they gave me community work, how ridiculous is that? Were out here with big machines working so hard. They don't care.”

“Well, I run a business, and like I said, I see this as a punishment, I do have someone running it for me, I have probation on Friday to do a course, I have two and a half hours, for work life, it's crippling me to do two days a week.”

MOST PEOPLE THINK UNPAID WORK SHOULD FOCUS ON REHABILITATION RATHER THAN PUNISHMENT

Q: My experience with unpaid work helps my rehabilitation

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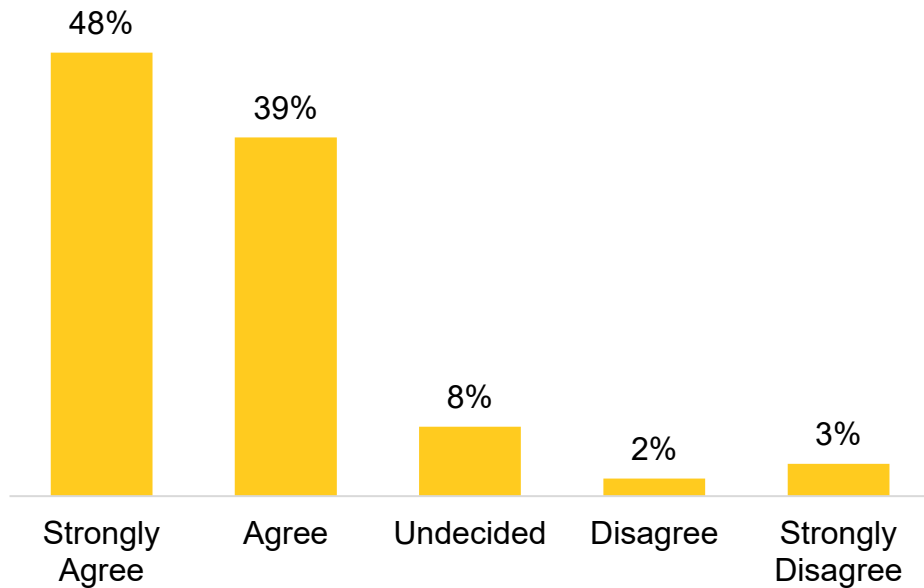


“It should focus on rehabilitation, hundred million percent, because rehabilitation is what makes you not reoffend.”

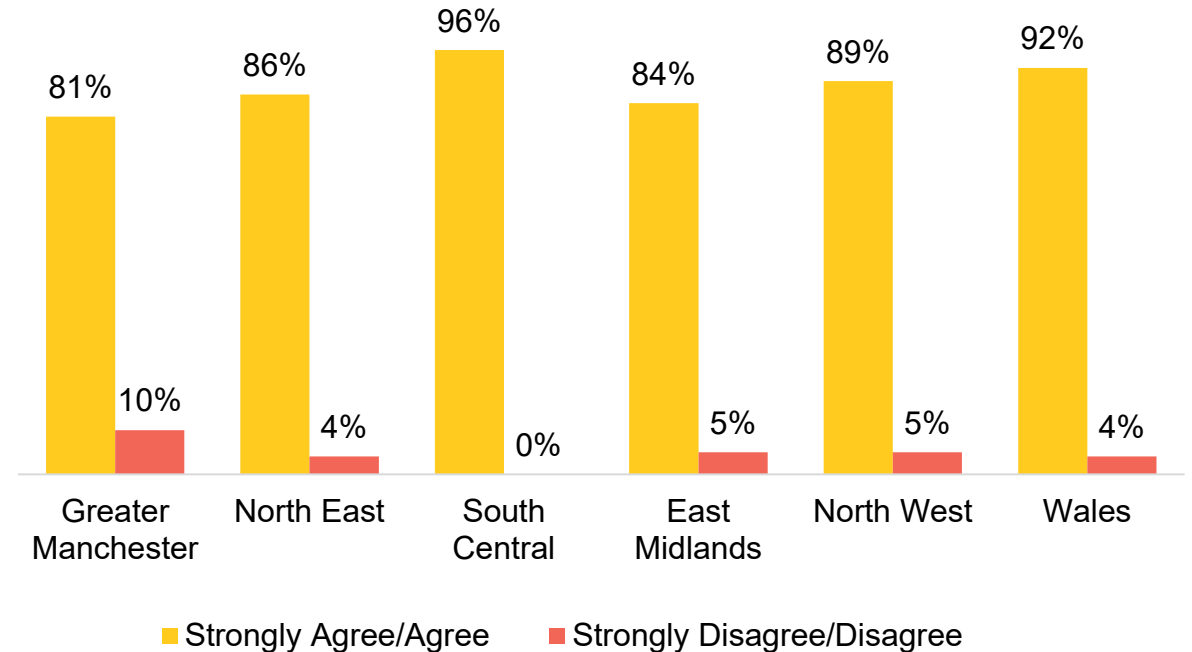
“I actually think it does rehabilitate you. Because if you do something bad you go straight back to prisons, over here you working and busy so it keeps you out of trouble. I think its changed me a little bit.”

ALMOST 9 IN 10 REPORTED A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH UNPAID WORK STAFF

Q: I have a good relationship with the unpaid work staff



Q: I have a good relationship with the unpaid work staff



GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY: SUPPORTIVE MENTORSHIP LEADS TO EMPLOYMENT, A REASON TO GET OUT OF BED, AND A NEW MOTIVATION FOR LIFE

...My supervisor, Pete, he's an amazing guy who got me the job I'm in now. It was weird, one day I realised I was enjoying working for free and when I told him he asked would I do it full-time. I'd never had a full-time job before so to be honest, I didn't really believe he could help. In fact, I actually just didn't think he would want to help me out like he has. No one has before so why would he? But he did and here I am, six months in and about to start a landscaping qualification!..

...I love it, it's my reason for getting out of bed, it's my reason for keeping away from people who had helped get me in trouble. I'm not saying it wasn't my fault I ended up on court, it definitely was, but the fact I was hanging around with people who were committing crimes on a daily basis didn't help. This has helped me get a new set of mates. I'm down the pub with this lot on a Friday instead of what I used to do which is why I landed in court...

OTHER KEY FINDINGS

- **7 in 10** people reported an overall positive experience whilst undertaking unpaid work.
- Those undertaking unpaid work in Wales have a better experience than those in England across all areas of unpaid work.
- People that protected characteristics such as neurodiverse conditions and disabilities generally reported a worse experience across all areas of unpaid work.
- Being picked up in community payback branded vans and branded high visibility jackets are seen as an unnecessary tool to embarrass people.
- Just over half told us that their unpaid work improves their self-esteem. This varied depending on the type of unpaid work activity





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Effective practice guide

Guide contents:

- **Introduction**
- **Background**
- **Our standards:** what we looked for and our expectations
- **Examples of effectiveness including:**
 - Leadership and governance
 - Unpaid work placements
 - Engagement strategies
 - Training for practitioners



Where we see our
standards delivered
well, in practice.



Where we see our standards
delivered well, in practice.



AN HM INSPECTORATE OF PROBATION EFFECTIVE PRACTICE GUIDE



Effective practice guide: **Unpaid work**

Based on a thematic inspection of the delivery of unpaid work

February 2025



Effective practice guide

Finding your way



Tools for practitioners



HM Inspectorate of Probation recorded interview



Useful links



External video



Reflection questions

- Are training and development programmes effective in preparing to work with people on probation with UPW requirements?
- Do UPW placements provide opportunities where appropriate for individuals to acquire skills to improve their employability?
- Where does UPW sit within the working culture of your organisation?





Leadership and governance

Example of effectiveness: Learning organisation, Wales

An adapted human factors model for UPW

- meeting operational complexities of UPW
- managers engage in morning briefings
- UPW supervisors, administrators and placement co-ordinators hold their team meetings in the afternoon, followed by management-protected time.

"The human factors model is very good as we can offload about our day and plan for the following day. Very good for exchanging information - like any equipment issues, van issues. Gives better continuity going into the next day. Also, an opportunity to share successes too."

Self-managing risks and issues, developed leadership skills and strengthened connections with teams.





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Unpaid Work placements



Example of effectiveness:

Therapeutic inclusion at Rhubarb Farm, Nottingham

- therapeutic organic horticulture to develop skills, confidence, employability, and improve health and wellbeing
- individual and group placements for men and women on probation
- encourages volunteers to use and develop their talents (e.g., electricians, welders, photographers).

"I suffer from social anxiety, and everyone is so friendly it feels like a safe space to be."



Example of effectiveness: Contribution to the community at the Pavilion project, Cardiff

- renovated disused and overgrown areas
- manual work, ground maintenance, gardening, and planting.
- strong sense of value and mutual respect among probationers, beneficiaries, and UPW staff.

Effective reparation activities, skill acquisition, and positive social connections for people on probation

"Making something or helping someone makes us proud and other people notice it too. We're doing it [UPW] for a good cause."

Example of effectiveness: Increasing employability for women on probation at The Hub, Greater Manchester

- small groups, supervised by a women
- attentive UPW supervisor fostering strong relationships
- women appreciated the rehabilitative ethos
- city and guilds qualification in food hygiene.

Successful female-only provision meeting needs of women on probation, providing safe space for gaining employment-related qualifications and skills.

"As well as technical skills, I have developed confidence, social inclusion, and motivation to seek paid employment."





Training



Example of effectiveness: Beneficiary training at Snibston Colliery, East Midlands

- need to improve the quality of the work carried out by people on probation at the site
- invited UPW supervisors to an open day and provided training in ground maintenance and gardening
- knowledge and skills passed on to the people on probation

Improving standards and demonstrating an enhanced offer of service.



Example of effectiveness: Risk workshops for unpaid work teams, North East region

- full-day face-to-face sessions delivered to two separate UPW groups.
- address gaps in confidence and knowledge among UPW colleagues, specifically regarding sexual offences
- tailored to be relevant and meaningful for UPW colleagues, providing a broader perspective on risk and practical application
- insights on sex offender registration requirements and specific risk areas, addressing issues at UPW placements

Effectively demonstrated how the head of interventions leveraged staff from distinct parts of the organisation to upskill one another.

"Although I found the whole session to be beneficial, the afternoon when we were able to speak more in depth about registered sex offenders (RSOs) with the relevant people was especially useful as it is a recurring issue throughout our role."



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