

## Half Full and Half Empty



This Bulletin describes the key findings from our thematic inspection, *Half Full and Half Empty, An Inspection of the National Probation Service's substance misuse work with offenders*

### SUMMARY

Although the link between substance misuse and offending is complex, there is little doubt that there is a strong association between the two. The contribution of the National Probation Service towards reducing offending by substance misusing offenders, in partnership with others, is therefore very important.

Over recent years there has been a significant shift in the treatment of drug misusing offenders, from one that focused on the health perspective to one that recognised involvement in the criminal justice system as a legitimate catalyst for treatment. Alongside a general expansion in the volume of drug treatment, the widespread use of treatment as a condition of a court order increased.

This inspection found that the expansion of drug treatment availability had led to all areas now being able to deliver treatment for offenders promptly, with over 14,000 offenders commencing treatment as part of Drug Treatment and Testing Orders (DTTOs)/Drug Rehabilitation Requirements (DRRs) in 2005/2006.

In contrast to these significant changes in the availability of drug treatment, there continues to be a scarcity of treatment for alcohol misusers. The inspection found that, despite considerable evidence of the prevalence of serious alcohol misuse amongst offenders, too few services were available to address their problems.

The inspection therefore concludes that, despite an enormous improvement in the availability of treatment for drug misusing offenders, this has not been matched by an improvement in services for alcohol misusing offenders. In this respect, the glass is truly 'Half Full and Half Empty'.

**Aims and objectives of the inspection**

To inspect the effectiveness of arrangements (formal and informal) which facilitate the access to, and engagement with treatment for offenders with substance misuse problems (at all tiers) for offenders with substance misuse problems.

**Objectives**

- Evaluate the relevant implementation guidance produced by the NPD for the delivery of the Criminal Justice Act (CJA) 2003 that pertains to substance misusing offenders.
- Evaluate the quality of management arrangements that areas have in place for the provision of services for substance misusing offenders.
- Evaluate the partnership arrangements that areas have in place to deliver services.
- Assess the quality of operational work undertaken with substance misusing offenders, through the processes of assessment, interventions and outcomes
- Examine the extent to which diversity issues have been taken into account in the delivery of services.

**Inspection process**

The methodology comprised the gathering of information from seven probation areas, and from a specific Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) area within each area

There were four main elements:

- an analysis of evidence provided by the area.
- an analysis of the work done with substance misusing offenders with a score of four or more for drug or alcohol use on the Offender Assessment System (OASys) assessment.
- interviews with senior managers and relevant staff from the area, and with significant partners from the relevant DAAT.
- an analysis of work undertaken with a sample of offenders with substance misuse problems, who had either recently been sentenced to community orders under the CJA 2003, or been supervised under licence as Prolific & other Priority Offender (PPO) cases.

**The extent of substance misuse**

The table below shows the prevalence and range of substance misuse as a % of a sample of all offender cases in and between the seven areas inspected."

	OASys score of 4+ in OASys section 8 or 9 Drug or alcohol%	OASys score of 4+ in OASys section 9 Alcohol %	OASys score of 4+ in OASys section 8 Drugs %	OASys score of 4+ in OASys section 8 and 9 Drugs and Alcohol %
Average	50	38	21	9
Range	40-59	30-50	16-23	7-14

The overall prevalence of substance misuse ranged from as little as 40% to nearly 60% of cases inspected. Within this overall figure, evidence of

problematic alcohol misuse was found in between 30% and 50% of cases. Problematic drug use was found in as few as 16% of cases in some areas and as many as 23% in others. Due to incomplete OASys assessments, these figures are highly likely to be underestimates.

### Summary of NOMS findings

- Alcohol treatment was scarce in the areas inspected, although senior managers were aware of the level of need as indicated by assessments using OASys.
- In contrast, the provision of treatment for offenders with drug misuse problems was generally readily available.
- The establishment of DTTOs had been accompanied by the setting of a target for starting new orders. The subsequent addition of a target for completing orders had assisted areas in focusing on outcome measures. This framework had been successfully applied to DRRs. However, no such targets existed or were planned for Alcohol Treatment Requirements (ATRs) and, as a consequence, areas were unlikely to prioritise their development.
- Areas reported that the delivery of DRRs had been hampered by an array of complex guidance concerning the introduction of the CJA 2003 and the offender management model. In particular, it had been a key implementation difficulty for areas to reconcile the tensions between offence seriousness, offender management tier and treatment intensity. This had resulted in inconsistency of delivery between areas.
- The acceptance of drug testing as a useful tool in the treatment of substance misusing offenders was found to be widespread. Due to a lack of resources, the potential for the extensive use of this tool had yet to be realised.
- The inspection found that some areas struggled to make available sufficient numbers of appropriate accredited programmes to address substance misuse. Also, where they were included as a requirement of a community order, they often did not start within the time limit set by the national standard.
- Some areas were unable to identify a small sample of PPO cases for inspection purposes. This highlighted difficulties at an area level with management information systems. It also suggested that there were serious problems with the quality of data used to calculate the cash-linked performance measure on assessments of PPOs. There were no National Probation Directorate targets concerning interventions or outcomes for PPOs, leading to a lack of focus on these stages.

### Summary of Area Findings

- There were few cases with ATRs in the areas inspected.
- The ability of probation areas to ensure that DAATs provided the necessary range of drug treatment services varied considerably, and was largely determined by pre-existing treatment provision. Surprisingly, there was not a strong correlation between the quality of area management and appropriate treatment availability.
- The quality of the assessments of the substance misuse sections of OASys was inconsistent. Where there was evidence of a substance misuse problem, as defined by the type of sentence or interventions planned, this was not always indicated in the assessment. This hampered the usefulness of any aggregated data to inform practice and service delivery.
- Some areas had insufficient systems for gathering and using outcome data to inform the improvement of service provision.
- Areas had interpreted the implementation of the offender management model in a variety of ways. Some feared that the expertise of specialist staff working with substance misusers would be diluted. Guidance issued during the inspection fieldwork clarified that areas were not required to abandon their specialist teams. Instead, these could operate as substance misuse teams rather than DTTO/DRR teams.
- Where areas had established co-located multi-disciplinary PPO teams, there was an increased potential for more effective work with offenders.
- Whilst there were significant opportunities for probation areas to work with the Drug Intervention Programme (DIP), the inspection found that in practice these were rarely used to their full potential.

## Recommendations

### **NOMS should ensure that:**

- *more alcohol treatment services are made available in order to meet the identified level of need*
- *simplified guidance on DRRs is issued to help staff reconcile the tensions between offence seriousness, the offender management tier and treatment intensity*
- *consideration is given to the practical implications of managing community orders that contain a DRR without a supervision requirement*
- *consideration is given to whether more newly released offenders might benefit from a drug testing condition in their licence*
- *training is rolled out to enable all areas to deliver the required number of accredited programmes for substance misusing offenders within national standards timescales*
- *PPO data are quality assured, and consideration is given to the introduction of targets for interventions and outcomes.*

### **Boards should ensure that:**

- *their area develops substance misuse strategies that maximise the opportunities for working with local alcohol treatment providers, and consolidates and improves existing arrangements with DAATs*
- *designated senior managers contribute regularly to strategic DAAT meetings, subsequent joint commissioning groups and any local strategic forum concerning the provision of alcohol services*
- *OASys assessments of substance misuse are quality assured, and the results are aggregated to enable the area to use the data to help plan future provision of services*
- *outcome data are collected and used to inform service delivery*
- *areas have fully considered the potential gains of establishing or maintaining co-located multi-disciplinary teams for the offender management of PPOs*
- *areas review their working relationships regarding the operational arrangements for their local DIP, to ensure that the full potential gains of working towards shared objectives are realised.*

The full report of the inspection is published in *Half Full and Half Empty, An Inspection of the National Probation Service's substance misuse work with offenders* available on HMI Probation's website (see below).

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