



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

A thematic inspection of the recruitment, training, and retention of frontline probation practitioners

An inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation



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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.

Welcome and introduction





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Training
Teams

SPOs

PSO
<12
months

PSO
1-5
years

QDO

HRBPs

NQOs

PDU
Heads

HEIs

PSO
>5
years

PQiP

Heads of
Corporate
Services

PTAs

PO >5
years

PO 1-5
years

Methodology



Call for evidence



Five fieldwork weeks



12 probation regions



150 focus groups/554 staff



30 interviews with leavers



Staff survey – 1,204 responses



13 observations of learning and development events

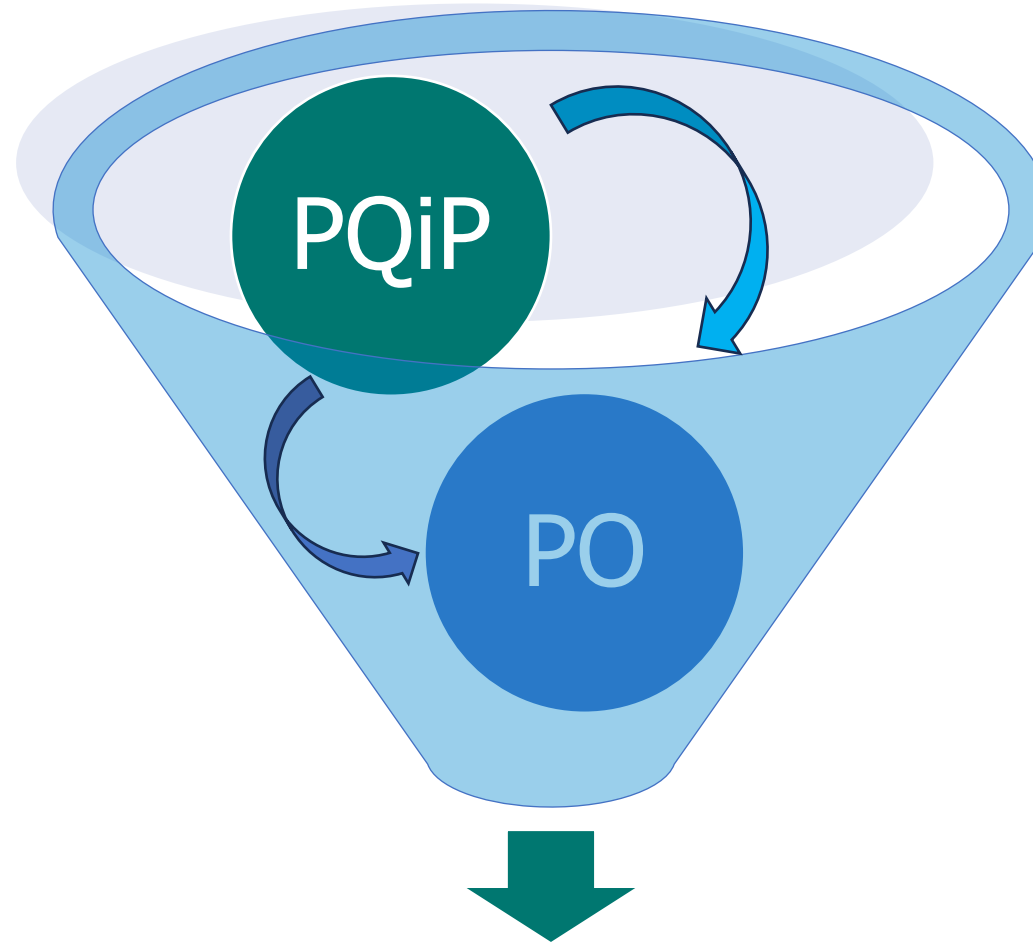


National fieldwork week



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Recruitment – PO and PQiP



Target Staffing



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Recruitment – PQiP



Range of qualifying routes



Advertising and application process not sufficiently preparing candidates for the role



The operational understanding of recruiters is unclear



PSO progress to PQiP is inconsistent and candidates felt it lacked transparency.

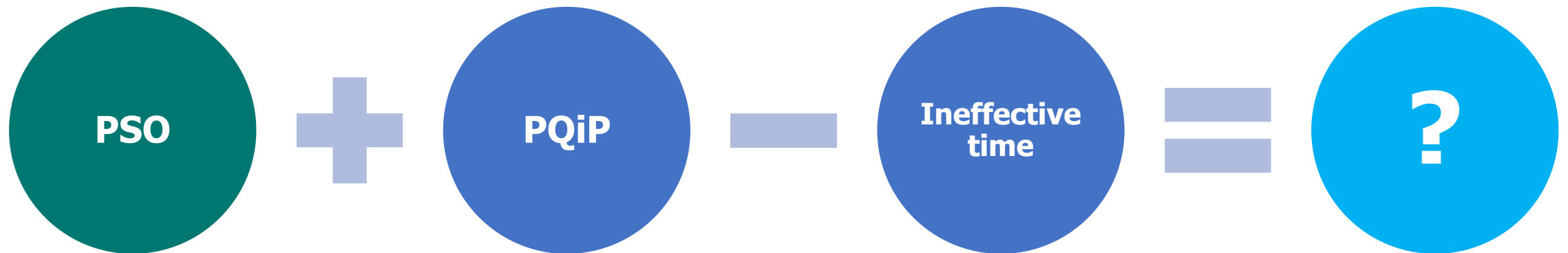
“I thought it would be more person centred than admin centred. Job adverts pushed the working with people element but when in the role, that seems to be squeezed by everything else you have got to do.”

“It’s nothing like I thought it would be. From talking to more experienced colleagues, it sounds as if the job I thought I was applying for was more like what it used to be in the past – helping and supporting people. I had no idea about level of admin work. I thought would be more face to face.”



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Recruitment – PSO





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Recruitment – general



Processes can be slow with insufficient communication, but improving



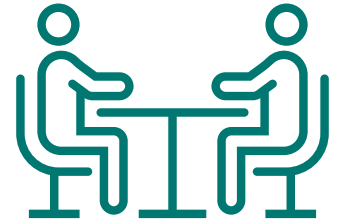
Managers do not always receive important information early enough to make appropriate arrangements for new starters



Disproportionate outcomes for men and people from ethnic minorities through the recruitment processes



Are the right people being selected?





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Training



Mandatory learning is seen as a 'tick box' process



Evaluation process are in place for learning products, but response rates are low for some products. The views we gathered differed from that feedback.



Courses are not always delivered as planned and skills practice is not adequately used



Training methods did not always suit the subject matter



“Training is pretty much online now, it is not conducive with being a reflective practitioner or building relational skills.”



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Training - PQiP



Some PSOs completed VQ3 and found this positive, if offered at the right time.



For PQiP learners, early PTA allocation supported their development



There needs to be better coordination and understanding of the PQiP components by managers and PTAs to better support learners.



The NQO period is crucial and protections should be consistently delivered to support longer term development and retention.

“I feel that I've been given so much complex information in such a short space of time. I started in January 2023 and so much of the online training was at the beginning, with no time to embed it in so information simply went into my head and straight out again! Then the shock of having to complete the L5 and L6 within the last nine months – it's too much! We're supposed to have one university day and a VQ day in each week but there's been too many times when I've had to cancel these due to workload pressures.”



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Training



Recently recruited PSOs were more positive about their training experiences



Some PSO are offered the chance to complete vocational qualifications



Both PSO and PQiP learners described training was not consistently followed up to check understanding or impact.



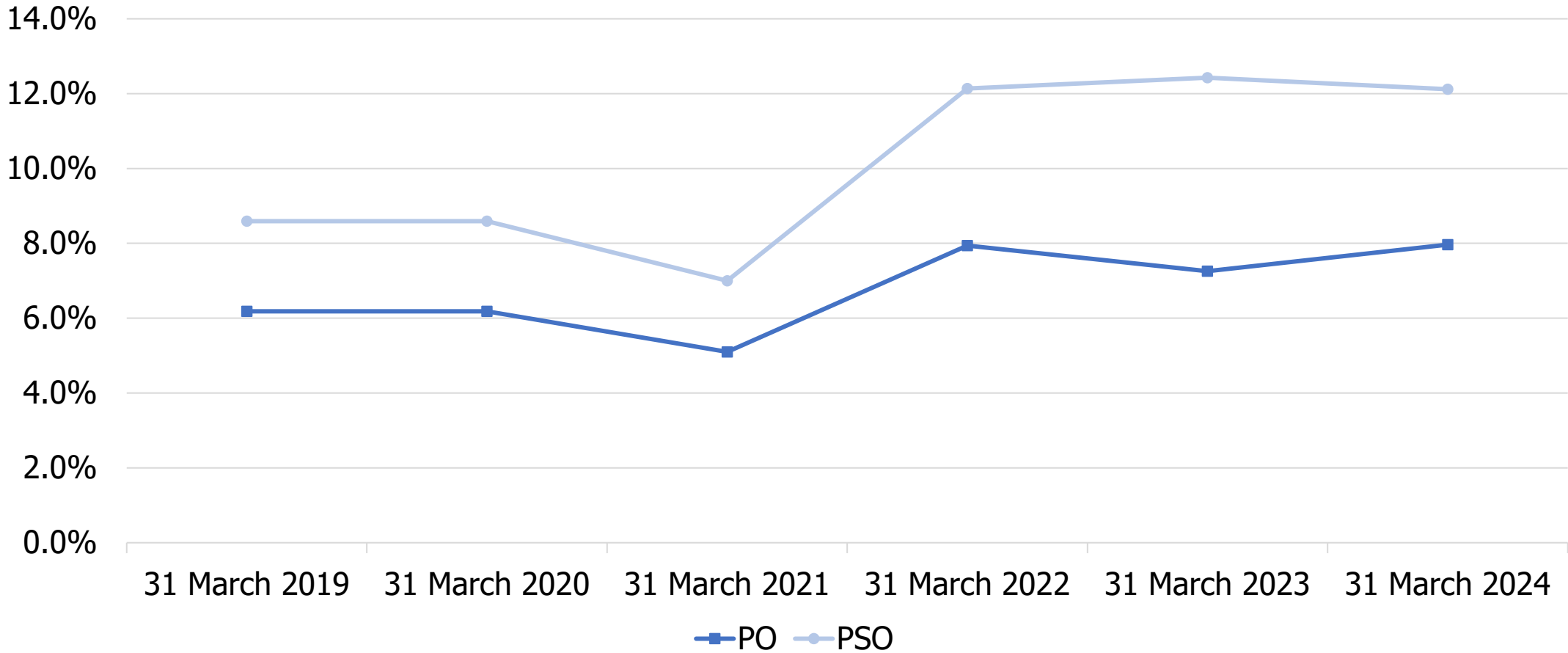
CPD opportunities are limited

“As a frontline practitioner I feel stuck – there is no room for development or progression – and for that reason I am left with no option but to look outside of the organisation – an organisation that I once felt passionate and proud to be a part of and thought it would be my lifelong career.”



Retention

Leaving rates for POs and PSOs





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Retention



Comparable roles outside of the Probation Service have a higher maximum salary within the main grade pay band.



Managers felt they had little to offer to encourage people to stay.



Workloads, work related stress, feeling undervalued and unable to work in line with service values are key themes in why staff consider leaving.

“Workloads are the major reason for people leaving. I am a buddy to a PQiP who qualifies this year (and she is very good) and she is already looking for another job. She feels her family are suffering due to the pressures of the job.”

Eight recommendations



| MoJ | HMPPS |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure pay reflects the role and is sufficient to attract and retain staff• With HMPPS, evaluate recruitment processes to understand disproportionate outcomes• Evaluate PQiP campaigns by cohort to understand links between marketing, selection, outcomes and longer-term retention | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consult with regions and provide regions with user friendly workforce planning tools• Ensure candidates are supported to disclose health-related needs and other information which may impact on their placement and ensure managers are aware of their needs at the earliest opportunity• Ensure face-to-face delivery methods are used to deliver training that relates to skills development and that candidates have sufficient opportunities to practice these skills• Strengthen mechanisms to follow up training and development to ensure learning is translated into practice• Ensure that support and protection for NQOs are consistently delivered as intended. |



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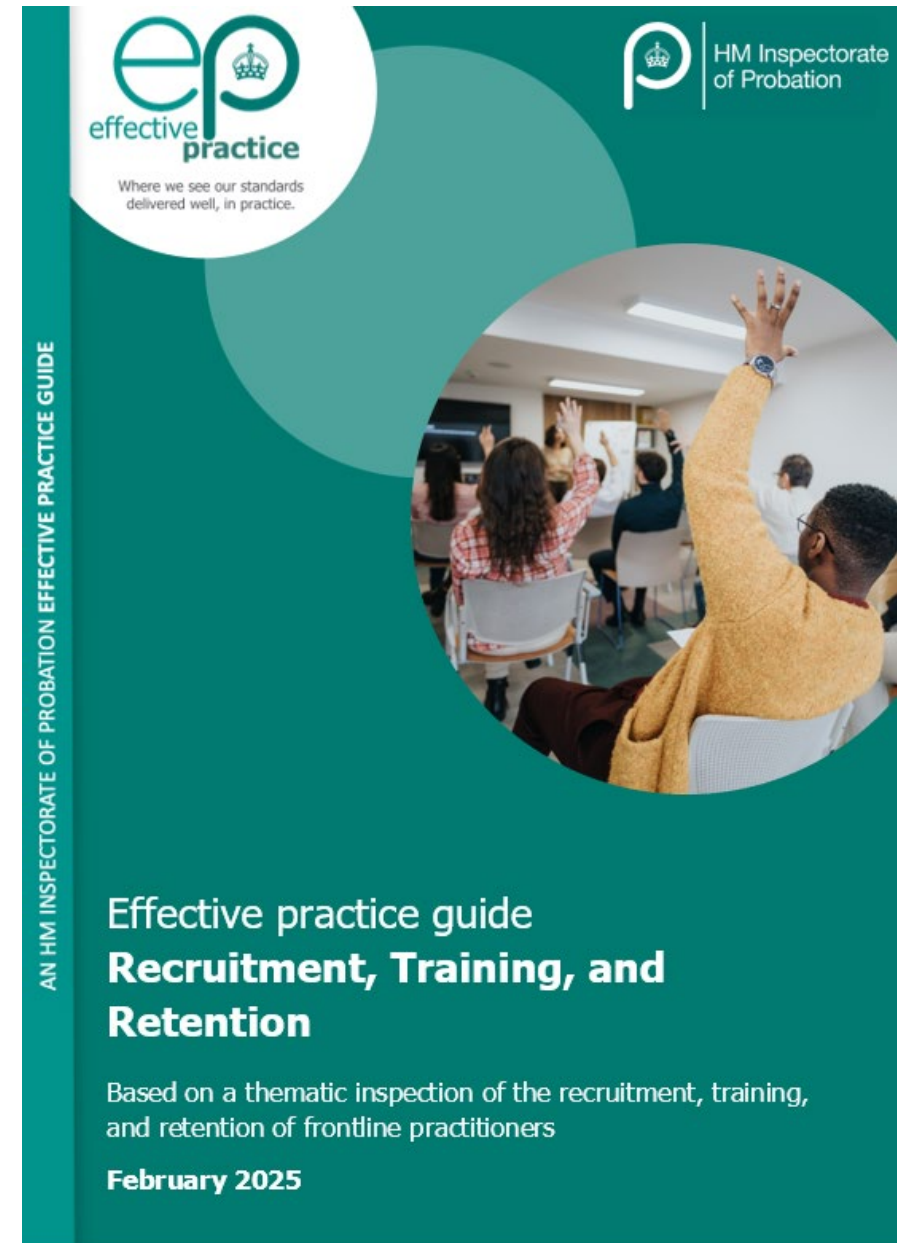
Effective practice guide

Guide contents:

- **Introduction**
- **Background**
- **Our standards:** what we looked for and our expectations
- **Examples of effectiveness including:**
 - **Recruitment**
 - Workforce planning
 - Recruitment processes
 - Addressing disproportionality in recruitment
 - **Training**
 - Probation service officer (PSO) support
 - Initiatives for PQIP learners
 - Supporting newly qualified officers
 - **Retention**
 - Positive organisational culture
 - Reward and recognition



Where we see our
standards delivered
well, in practice.





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Effective practice guide

Finding your way



Tools for practitioners



HM Inspectorate of Probation recorded interview



Useful links



External video



Reflection questions

- What more can be done to help candidates understand the roles they are applying for?
- What opportunities exist for practitioners to practise skills and receive developmental feedback which further improves their practice?
- Are the drivers of attrition in your region or PDU fully understood?



Recruitment

Example of effectiveness: MyPDU, Yorkshire and the Humber

Key features:

- Data insights
- Forecasting
- Real-time updates
- Customisable views

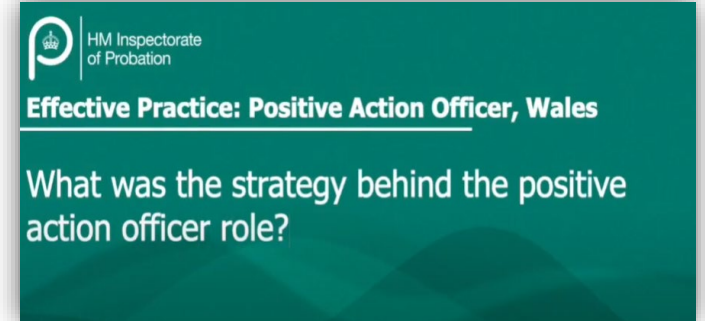


"I use MyPDU to review the FTE figures for each month remaining in the year, gain a more accurate view of attrition - including real known recruitment which was forecast based on planned start dates..."

"I find MyPDU to be a fantastic resource for a PDU head. I can access information at the touch of a button to assist me in WFP, wellbeing, learning and development, and inclusion."

Example of effectiveness: Positive action officer, Wales

- Enhance outreach and engagement
- Better representation in the Probation Service of the communities it serves
- Addressing common barriers



Working in partnership with ethnic minorities youth support team, increased community confidence and awareness of career opportunities within HMPPS Wales.

Recruitment - key take aways:

Successful recruitment requires:



analytical use of data to understand staffing needs and profile, with longer term analysis to track the success of different approaches to recruitment to fully understand what works



supporting candidates to fully understand the roles they are applying for to support job satisfaction and retention



close monitoring of how **candidates with protected characteristics** progress through the recruitment process and actions to address disproportionality



rigorous assessment of applicants' skills and abilities to determine suitability for role, including their resilience and potential to work in an emotionally demanding position.



Training

Learning and Delivery Methods

Examples of effectiveness:

Action learning journals, East Midlands

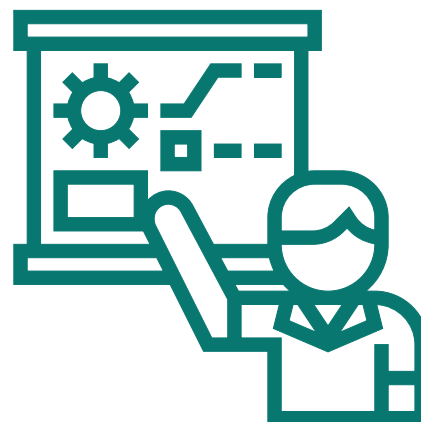
Mock oral hearings, East Midlands

Face to face SARA training, East of England

Risk assessment workshops, North East

Neurodiversity friendly training pilot, Greater Manchester

polices,
strategies, and
arrangements for
learning and
development
equip frontline
practitioners to
provide high-
quality services



Embedding learning in to practice

Example of effectiveness:

Learning development log pilot, Greater Manchester

Protected development time

Example of effectiveness:

Performance and quality development days, North East



Training continued...

Probation Service Officer Support

Example of effectiveness: Pre vocational qualification support, South Central

"This has had a positive impact on retention. I'm working with a PSO who previously joined [the Probation Service] and left and has now rejoined. It has been positive to hear how she has found the experience a second time round, having left due to lack of support originally, and how supported she feels this time. It feels like it is having a positive impact."

Initiatives to support PQIP learners

Example of effectiveness: The Academy, London

"The court and prison placements gave me a much broader understanding of how the probation service works."

"I think the programme is great; between the placements, and university, and the PTAs, you leave the programme having received guidance from a lot of smart people."

Supporting newly qualified officers

Example of effectiveness: Post qualification NQO support, West Midlands

"My PTA has the knowledge of my learning journey so far, which my manager does not, which helps with the transition into the new role, and means I have someone supporting me who understands my learning style. I have joint meetings with my PTA and SPO to talk about progress, which is really helpful."

Training - key take aways:

Successful learning and development should:



be an intrinsic part of working life, with support in place to allow training to be prioritised and undertaken in appropriate environments



be clear, with structured training pathways that are well supported by PTAs and managers to ensure learning is absorbed and embedded into practice



utilise a diverse array of training methods to maintain learner interest and engagement. Ensure that the delivery methods are appropriate for the subject matter. For skills development training, provide ample opportunities for learners to practise their skills and receive constructive feedback to facilitate continuous improvement.

Retention

Example of effectiveness: Senior leader engagement with PQiP cohorts, Wales

- maximise a sense of organisational belonging
- build relationships and enable senior managers and staff to feel more connected
- improve communication
- devised a model in which a senior manager adopted a cohort of PQiP learners

"I wanted to align myself to a PQiP cohort so that they could ask questions of me, but also understand the wider business. I joined their induction and ... regular interfaces ...to hear how their learning experience is going. This allows me to assure them that they are on track and are supported."

Example of effectiveness: Staff led reward and recognition, North East





"celebrating the work of the PDU in a meaningful way"

1. North Tyneside staff member of the year
2. Northumberland staff member of the year
3. PDU staff member of the year
4. Special recognition award
5. Going above and beyond award
6. Best team player award.

Aligned with engaging people on probation service user awards. Staff were invited to nominate someone they felt had made significant progress in their lives for one of three 'inspiration awards.

Retention - key take aways:

Retention of the workforce requires:

-  **positive recruitment processes** by ensuring those applying for roles understand the culture and values of the service and nature of the role they are applying for
-  **staff to feel valued by senior leaders and managers**, which will make them more likely to stay, even when the work is demanding
-  **investment and encouragement of staff development** to motivate practitioners to feel engaged in their role and have an improved sense of job satisfaction
-  **reward and recognition to take many forms**, from thanking staff sincerely for their work to providing forms of reward, all of which are important and valued by staff.



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