



HM Inspectorate of Probation

AUDIT OF ACCREDITED PROGRAMMES

South-East Region of the
National Probation Service for
England and Wales

*Level 3 Follow-up Report on:
Thames Valley Probation Area –
Think First*

April 2003

Acknowledgements:

We are grateful for the cooperation of staff from the Thames Valley Probation Area in completing this follow-up audit.

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Glossary

ACO	Assistant chief officer
CO	Chief officer
HMIP	HM Inspectorate of Probation
IQR	Implementation Quality Rating
N/A	Criteria not assessed
NPD	National Probation Directorate
OASys	Offender Assessment System
OGRS	Offender Group Reconviction Scale
PPIG	Programme Project Implementation Group
PSR	Pre-sentence report

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Scoring Approach:

The criteria for the delivery of accredited programmes have been divided into four sections. These sections, and the overall weighting assigned for each section, are as follows:

Committed leadership and supportive management	20%
Programme management responsibilities	30%
Quality of programme delivery	30%
Case management responsibilities	20%

Each criterion is scored as **Fully Met** (2 marks), **Largely Met** (1 mark) or **Not Met** (0 marks).

The scoring summary sheet at the end of this follow-up report shows the marks awarded for each criterion – for those criteria designated as Mandatory (see Performance Standards Manual) the mark given is doubled. This denotes the critical impact these criteria have on the effective delivery of programmes.

The marks awarded for each section are shown and then expressed as a % by dividing the total number of marks scored by the maximum available, and multiplying by 100. Section B has been divided into seven sub-sections for ease of scoring.

To determine an area's IQR, the scores for each section are multiplied by the appropriate factor to take account of the relevant weightings given above. The % totals for each section are then added together to give the IQR.

For this follow-up audit, those criteria that were fully met on the original audit have not been re-assessed. The marks awarded then have therefore been carried over. The only exception to this relates to those criteria that are informed by video monitoring scores (see C1.1-C1.3). Revised scores have been awarded for these criteria based on up-to-date video monitoring scores.

Overview:

- The original audit in Thames Valley was carried out in March 2002. The area was given an IQR of 39%, which resulted in a level 3 follow-up audit. This was completed in February 2003.
- Follow-up audit arrangements comprised the provision of advance information by the area and a four day visit during which case file reading, site visits and interviews were conducted. Fifty-one case files were read and nine offenders interviewed. The quality of programme delivery was scored by area assessors and was based on 12 videotapes.
- Both the original and follow-up audit focused solely on Think First.
- Only those criteria not fully met at the original audit have been reassessed and new marks awarded. The bullet points under these criteria refer to the progress made since the original audit.

Findings:

The original audit had been undertaken during a period of significant change for Thames Valley, an amalgamated probation area experiencing both reorganisation and changes in senior management. Differences in practice across teams and locations, combined with a dispersed model of programme delivery, were additional factors which had impacted upon the implementation of Think First.

Thames Valley had accepted the audit recommendations and produced a project plan. A PPIG had been established to take the plan forward and whilst there had been progress on most of the action points, a number of strategy and policy documents were still in draft form. There was nevertheless clear evidence of staff commitment to improving performance.

There were 14 recommendations for the Thames Valley Probation Area and one for the NPD. The latter, relating to the provision of training, had been partly met. Seven of the audit recommendations had been fully met, two largely met and five partly or not at all.

Of significance had been the senior management lead to restructure programme delivery, provide designated staff and invest in training, and the area's commitment was reflected in the policy on allocations. Implementation of standardised documentation, particularly the PSR pack (the information/referral forms completed on offenders for whom a PSR is prepared), programme registers and feedback forms had promoted consistent recording and provided the potential for improved monitoring and evaluation. Regular supervision and treatment management had helped to raise the quality of delivery of Think First. Timeliness of commencement and continuity of staff delivering sessions were identified by HMIP as areas for further attention.

Training had improved case management practice and knowledge and there were effective systems for liaison between tutors, PSR writers and case managers. It was positive to find that progress had been made since the original audit. There was, however, significant room for improvement in supervision planning and the integration of learning from Think First during and after programme completion.

Next Steps

Thames Valley Probation Area achieved a revised IQR of **70%**.

This audit follow-up report and the IQR will be received by the Correctional Services Accreditation Panel in Autumn 2003.

SECTION A: COMMITTED LEADERSHIP

Recommendation(s) from the original audit which relate to this section.

The CO should ensure that the area:

- *reviews the responsibilities of its programme manager posts, to achieve consistent practice and improved focus on the operational management of Think First (A1.2);*
- *delivers training events for all staff involved in assessment, case management and support of the programme, so that they are familiar with the rationale for the programme and its methodology (A1.3).*

- ▶▶ **Fully met:** *The responsibilities of programme managers were clearly established with resulting improvements in operational management.*
- ▶▶ **Fully met:** *Thames Valley had implemented a training programme for all staff involved in the assessment, case management and support of Think First, which had resulted in improved programme knowledge.*

A1.1 Committed leadership

2

- Senior managers demonstrated sustained commitment to the delivery of Think First and had all attended an awareness raising event since the original audit.

A1.2 Management structures

2

- Changes in the responsibilities of senior managers had been followed by a restructure with designated programme manager time for Think First.
- The area had created one centrally managed programmes team and implemented consistent procedures and documentation across the area.
- Thames Valley had replaced the core reference group with the PPIG. This had a clear mandate to take forward improvements in the delivery of Think First.
- Designated full-time tutors were now line managed within the programmes team.
- Tutors with split posts had clear job descriptions.

A1.3 Staff ownership of the accredited programme

1

- The CO had launched the Thames Valley allocations policy, with the instruction that all offenders being supervised must be considered for an accredited programme and that notions of discretionary referral must cease.
 - Report writers were required to complete a standard PSR information and referral pack for all offenders appearing before the courts.
 - A short-term training plan had been implemented to increase the proportion of staff and managers trained for Think First. By December 2002 67% of case managers had attended courses.
 - A link officer scheme operated between the programmes and case management teams to provide the latter with support and information.
 - The staff bulletin for Winter 2002 had promoted case management as a critical role in programme effectiveness.
-

- Research into referral patterns across the area had been conducted identifying differential rates for Think First. These were being addressed via the relevant ACO, although there were no established individual or team targets.
- Staff interviewed were committed to the programme, but in five of 17 relevant files read the case manager had not attended the post-programme meeting.

A1.4 Effective communication with sentencers

2

- New programme information cards had been distributed to all sentencers and placed in retiring rooms. Information was also included in the area's bulletin and on its web site.
- The bi-annual Thames Valley sentencing forum, chaired by a Board member, had been used to promote Think First.
- A further survey of magistrates' views was underway to enable a comparison of sentencer data.
- The CO had promoted Think First at a solicitors' forum in the area.

SECTION B: PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Recommendation(s) from the original audit which relate to this section.

The CO should ensure that the area:

- *complies fully with the required standards for resources and facilities (B1.1);*
- *improves recording practice so that information on the offender profile, timeliness, attendance and enforcement are readily accessible (B2.1, B2.3, B7.1);*
- *amends its instructions for the assessment and targeting of offenders and improves referral and completion rates (B2.1, B6.1);*
- *manages staffing arrangements to allow adequate time for preparation and continuity in delivery (B2.2, B2.3);*
- *improves the timeliness of offender commencement on programmes (B2.4);*
- *conforms to the requirement that only those staff meeting the selection criteria deliver the programme (B3.1, B4.1);*
- *arranges pairing for new staff and support for those working outside normal hours (B3.4, B4.2);*
- *provides consistent supervision and ongoing appraisal of performance for all programme staff (B5.1, B5.2).*

The NPD should ensure that the area:

- *is provided with training for treatment managers and for accreditation of tutors (B4.1, B4.3).*

- ▶▶ ***Fully met:** Thames Valley had dealt satisfactorily with all the areas for improvement in relation to resources and facilities.*
 - ▶▶ ***Fully met:** Recording practices had been improved through the introduction of standard registers, session feedback forms and the PSR information and referral pack implemented in September 2002.*
 - ▶▶ ***Fully met:** A policy on programme allocation had been launched resulting in improved referral rates. There had been an increase of over 50% in orders made in the quarter following implementation. The area had also produced a strategy to reduce attrition and strengthen compliance with a view to increasing completions.*
 - ▶▶ ***Partly met:** Reorganisation of the staffing arrangements had improved the availability of preparation and debriefing times but there were still difficulties with staff continuity.*
 - ▶▶ ***Not met:** The overall timeliness of offender commencement on the programme was better than previously but not good enough to meet the criterion.*
 - ▶▶ ***Fully met:** All staff delivering Think First had been properly assessed and trained in line with area instructions.*
 - ▶▶ ***Not met:** Changes in staff and growth in the number of programmes delivered had made it difficult to consistently pair new with experienced staff. Arrangements to support those working outside normal hours had not been revised.*
 - ▶▶ ***Largely met:** Supervision and appraisal arrangements were established in accordance with programme requirements. Appraisals for most tutors were yet to be completed.*
 - ▶▶ ***Partly met:** Treatment managers had been trained but the area was still awaiting national accreditation training for tutors.*
-

B1.1 Resources and facilities

2

- Lockable video storage facilities had been provided at each delivery site and a procedure adopted for their safe transportation and permanent storage in Aylesbury.
- The area had invested in improved camera equipment and videotapes which recorded the full two hour session.
- Seating had been improved and clipboards provided.
- There were difficulties with noise levels at the Reading site: one tape could not be assessed because of this.

B1.2 Provision of information leaflets about the programme

1

- New leaflets and programme information cards had been produced for offenders and sentencers. These were clearly worded and available to offenders in different languages. Staff were aware of this information and said that they were using the leaflet during induction.
- The offender leaflet included details on the complaints procedure but did not address wider diversity issues.
- Programme length was still described differently in both sets of leaflets, i.e. 25 group work sessions for offenders and 22 for sentencers.

B2.1 Managing attendance

1

- The area had introduced a standard attendance register and feedback form for Think First. These clearly identified levels of compliance.
- Satisfactory enforcement practice had been maintained since the original audit.
- An engagement strategy outlined the main issues to be addressed to strengthen offender participation and improve completions. This included collating reasons for offender drop-out from accredited programmes. The strategy was supported by a programmes team compliance policy. Both of these documents were undated and in draft form.

B2.2 Avoidance of cancellation or disruption to sessions

1

- A calendar of proposed programmes for the whole area had been designed and circulated.
- Two programmes had been postponed during the preceding year due to the low number of referrals. Sessions were rarely cancelled.
- Provision of initial evening reception cover had been retained but there had been no arrangements made to cover for crises or other issues whilst the groups were in progress.

B2.3 Catch-up sessions/Attendance

2

- There was good evidence that programme registers and feedback forms clearly recorded catch-up sessions.
- Arrangements were now in place to meet the standard for catch-up integrity checks and these were being implemented.
- Tutors had different understandings of the time allowed for the delivery of these sessions.

B2.4 Timeliness

0

- Timeliness of programme commencement, measured to within three months, had improved during the year.
- There were better systems for scheduling and recording information.
- Nevertheless, commencement within one month of the order had deteriorated: of the 51 case files sampled, 84% (43) had not commenced within one month, compared with 59% last year. Nine cases had appropriate reasons recorded but this still left 67% starting later for other reasons.

B3.1 Staff selection

2

- All tutors delivering Think First had passed the assessment centre and training course.
- The area had produced a draft procedure on deselection in October 2002, completion of which was outstanding. Supervision notes provided evidence of attention to tutor capabilities.
- New tutors confirmed that they had been given comprehensive information about the programme and the selection process.

B3.2 Staff roles and competencies

2

- Staff were clear about their roles and a job description had been written for those with both case management and programme delivery responsibilities.

B3.3 Preparation and debriefing time for tutors

1

- The area specified that tutors should spend a minimum of one hour in preparation and half an hour debriefing for each session of the programme delivered. This was included in the workload allowance for tutors.
- Staff were expected to record time spent in preparation and debriefing on the session review forms, although this was not consistently done.
- Tutors stated that, whilst there were still some difficulties for those who had to travel long distances, preparation time had generally improved. This was particularly the case when working with other full-time tutors.
- The delivery of catch-ups sometimes impeded preparation time especially when only two tutors had been allocated to the programme.

B3.4 Staff continuity

0

- The area aimed to allocate three tutors to each programme but, in practice, it was usually two; relief cover was supplied by the tutor pool or treatment managers. Tutors advised that the arrangements were not always satisfactory and affected planning.
- Planning documents identified up to five tutors involved in the delivery of two programmes. Four offenders had experienced more than three tutors and two commented about lack of consistency.
- Occasionally, and in consultation with the programme manager, sessions had been run with one tutor.

B4.1	Training arrangements for new staff	2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All tutors were required to complete the appropriate training prior to delivering Think First: this was provided through the regional consortium.• The area's training database was incomplete. However, the programme manager provided additional information to confirm that all tutors delivering Think First had been properly trained.• Additional learning needs were identified in performance planning documents.	
B4.2	New staff paired with an experienced colleague when running their first programme	0
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whilst this was still an overall aim, due to the influx of new tutors they had, in practice, been paired with each other. Additional treatment management supervision had been provided to support them.	
B4.3	Training arrangements for experienced staff <i>Criterion not assessed at original audit.</i>	N/A
B4.4	Staff knowledge of the concepts and methods used in the programme	2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The area had provided training for case managers and PSR writers. They demonstrated a sound knowledge of programme methods and concepts.	
B4.5	Staff knowledge of the theoretical and evidential basis of the programme	1
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Programme staff, case managers and PSR writers were knowledgeable about the theory underpinning Think First but less so of the wider evidential base, particularly that published in the last year.	
B4.6	Supporting skills necessary to run programmes <i>Criterion fully met at original audit.</i>	2
B5.1	Staff supervision and quality of practice	2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The appointment of full-time treatment managers, combined with the restructure of the programmes delivery team, had enabled consistent supervision to be conducted at the required frequency.• Video monitoring was used to inform tutor supervision and there had been a significant improvement overall in the quality of delivery.• Treatment manager scores were, on average, slightly higher but close to those awarded by independent HMIP assessors. Tutors indicated that they would be assisted by using the new national guidance.• The area had clarified the meaning of accredited tutor status and established a process to achieve this.	

B5.2 Staff appraisal

1

- A new appraisal system had been introduced for the Thames Valley area.
- Treatment managers were expected to contribute to line manager appraisal of tutors using a designated format and there was evidence of this being done in one case. This was new practice and not yet fully established.
- Supervision notes were routinely copied to the programme manager as well as individual tutors.
- Most tutors had yet to experience the new appraisal system but confirmed that planning documents had been drawn up.

B6.1 Offender selection and assessment

1

- 65% (33/51) of cases fell within the correct OGRS 2 band compared to 63% last year.
- The PSR pack circulated to the area in September 2002 contained Think First targeting criteria and practice guidance on allocation for all programmes.
- An office duty rota had been established by the programmes team to promote referral discussion between tutors and report writers.
- OGRS 2 scores had been entered on a data spreadsheet for programmes delivered from January 2002. However, due to an information analyst vacancy, no reports had yet been drawn from this.
- 20% of the cases sampled (10/51) had OGRS 2 scores above 74% but no additional structured work had been identified. Five had scores of less than 31% placing them below the lower threshold for Think First.

B6.2 Offender knowledge and understanding of the programme requirements

1

- Most offenders interviewed appeared to have understood programme requirements but only half could recall receiving a leaflet.
- 45% of the files read contained two explanations of the programme to offenders: a further 41% recorded only one.

B6.3 Group size

2

Criterion fully met at original audit.

B6.4 Accessibility of group work programmes

2

- The area had produced a draft diversity policy for accredited programmes and practice guidelines for case managers and report writers to promote accessibility.
- Case managers and PSR writers were clear about the options for women, black and Asian offenders and able to describe a range of facilities to support different needs.
- Staff were aware of the availability of mentors but unsure of their potential use within programme sessions.

- The area was shortly to deliver a pathfinder programme to black and Asian offenders and had run a women only Think First group. Offenders retained the choice of attendance at specialist or mixed groups.
- Basic skills advisors had supported offenders in completing psychometric tests.
- A comprehensive transport system provided access to Think First for those in rural areas.

B7.1 Implementation of monitoring and evaluation design

1

- The area's strategy for evaluation and monitoring of group work programmes had been revised. It set out responsibilities and requirements for reporting on performance and research to be undertaken during the coming year.
- A research project on referrals had identified differential patterns at divisional and team level. Routine monitoring of referral rates over time, however, had yet to be established.
- The collection of data had been standardised through the introduction of the Thames Valley PSR pack. Information from these was entered onto a database in the programmes unit. The reporting facility from this was restricted pending the appointment of an information analyst.
- Research findings and information about area performance, e.g. completions, were made available to case managers and report writers through team meetings, link officers and the area magazine. The provision and use of monitoring information, however, had yet to be fully established across all localities.

B7.2 Practice is informed by monitoring and evaluation evidence

2

- Psychometric tests took place routinely and arrangements had been made for their interpretation. The evaluation and monitoring strategy required an annual report on comparative results and individual summaries for case managers.
- Performance information had prompted implementation of the policy on allocations to increase throughput and completions. Similarly, the pre/post-programme contact logs had been introduced to improve work in these areas.
- Information from the research into referral practice and attrition rates had influenced the area's decision to increase its delivery sites in rural communities.
- The area had used monitoring information to make a case for delivering a pathfinder programme to black and Asian offenders and in establishing the women's programme.

SECTION C: QUALITY OF PROGRAMME DELIVERY

Recommendation(s) from the original audit which relate to this section.

The CO should ensure that the area:

- **devises a strategy to promote the skills development of tutor staff and enhance their performance (C1.1, C1.2, C1.3).**

- **Fully met:** *The area had identified the need for a treatment strategy to improve tutor performance. Whilst this was not formalised in documentation, the PPIG was mandated to ensuring the provision of appropriate staff development and training. The restructuring of programme delivery, appointment of dedicated treatment managers and ongoing skills training had clearly impacted on the overall quality of delivery. This had improved from an average rating of 2.7 to 3.2. All 23 criteria scored as satisfactory or good with all but one reaching at least 3.*

C1.1 Adherence to programme manual

1

- Programme adherence had improved from an average score of 2.5 to 3.2 and was particularly strong in the order of delivery and absence of inappropriate additions.
- Tutors checked out offender learning relating to the sessions' aims and objectives.
- Most sessions were delivered for the prescribed length of time.
- Exercises were sometimes rushed or missed altogether. Assessors frequently commented on the need for better explanations.

C1.2 Adherence to treatment style

1

- Adherence to treatment style had improved overall by 0.6 points.
- Tutors demonstrated good skills in encouraging self-motivating statements from offenders.
- There was satisfactory use of open questions and tutors generally listened to group members and allowed them to answer.
- Links were made between exercises and sessions.
- Some opportunities to explore issues in more depth and encourage further validation were lost.
- Tutors needed to be more proactive in challenging anti-social or offence supporting views.

C1.3 Group work skills

1

- Group work skills had improved by 0.3 points since the original audit.
- Tutors spoke clearly and generally used appropriate language.
- Effective co-working and well-conducted handovers were observed.
- Whilst tutors were able to involve all members most of the time, group management was sometimes problematic. There were two occasions when a tutor and an offender left the room to answer the telephone.
- The area had the benefit of some skilled and enthusiastic tutors, whilst some appeared mechanistic or less interested in the programme.

C1.4 Programme delivered addressing race equality and diversity issues

2

Criterion fully met at original audit.

C1.5 Programme integrity checklist

2

- The tutor monitoring form was completed for every session of the programme delivered.
- A standardised session feedback form, which recorded offender attendance and engagement, had been implemented and was sent to the case manager at the end of every session of Think First.
- New monitoring forms from the revised National Management Manual for Accredited Group Work Programmes were in the process of implementation.

C1.6 End of programme summary reports

1

- Post-programme reports were completed in a timely fashion and provided to case managers in advance of the three-way meeting.
- The area had adopted the NPD format for the post-programme report. These did not explicitly provide an assessment of risk or identify relapse scenarios.
- Efforts were being made to provide psychometric performance information, although these were not routinely available to inform the post-programme work.

SECTION D: CASE MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Recommendation(s) from the original audit which relate to this section.

The CO should ensure that the area:

- **improves the quality and consistency of supervision planning, including the setting of SMART objectives (D1.1);**
- **amends case management instructions so as to provide consistent preparation and support for offenders attending the programme (D1.1, D1.3);**
- **runs the required post-programme follow-up sessions with offenders (D1.7).**

- ▶▶ **Not met:** The area had made a decision to retain a dual system for supervision planning pending the implementation of OASys with the intention of then sequencing work to strengthen it. No improvements were yet recorded in the case files read.
- ▶▶ **Largely met:** Instructions on preparation and support for offenders attending programmes had been given to case managers during training and case management tasks were set out in writing. A contact log to record pre- and post-programme work had been instigated but the requirement on case managers to complete these sessions was not explicit in the written area guidance.
- ▶▶ **Partly met:** There was some evidence of post-programme work taking place but this was not consistent: late commencements and a drive to move to monthly reporting following completion of the group work sessions sometimes interfered with this.

D1.1 Initial supervision plan sets relevant objectives for the offender

0

- Thames Valley had retained two sets of supervision planning documentation pending the introduction of OASys, the system used in Berkshire remaining unchanged.
- The overall case file score for this criterion was 0.7.
- Use of assessments in supervision planning was limited to 57% of the cases examined.
- Think First was integrated to some extent into supervision plans in 53% of the case files.
- The majority (61%) of supervision plans did not include SMART objectives.

D1.2 Effective liaison arrangements between the case manager and programme staff

2

- Communication between tutors and case managers had improved. Contact logs contained fuller comments about participation in Think First reflecting the use of the feedback form.
- The implementation of an office duty scheme, combined with the appointment of link officers, had promoted better contact between case managers and programme staff.
- The area had introduced a pre/post-group work contact log for case managers to record their work and copy it to the programmes team. There was some evidence that this was being done.
- 70% of case managers had attended three-way meetings.

D1.3 Supporting the offender through all phases of the programme

1

- Pre-programme work was recorded in most cases, with 39% fully completed.
- Case managers had a clear understanding of the requirements for pre-programme work and were responsive to individual need. They knew that they were required to attend either session 14 or 22, although workload priorities sometimes prevented this.
- Ongoing work to support offenders during the programme was evident in 76% of relevant cases.
- There was little attention given by case managers to reinforcement of learning.

D1.4 Understanding and knowledge of programme methods

2

- The area had implemented a programme to increase the number of staff trained to support the delivery of Think First.
- Case managers interviewed had all been trained and demonstrated a good knowledge of programme methods. Systematic access to programme staff and materials provided the opportunity to enhance this.

D1.5 Monitoring of attendance and enforcement

1

- Programme and other attendance requirements were monitored consistently.
- Enforcement action was promptly taken for most absences, although there were 11 cases where this was not satisfactory.
- Offenders understood the consequences of failing to attend.
- Case managers were clear about their responsibilities for enforcement and those for tutors were written in the programmes team compliance policy. The status of catch-up and suspension letters, however, still required clarification as they were, in some cases, confused with a formal warning letter.

D1.6 Documentation

1

- The majority of files contained all (39%) or most (49%) of the required documentation.
- Files were presented in good order.
- Missing documentation included contracts, targeting matrices, supervision plans and reviews.

D1.7 End of programme review

0

- Some attention had been given to community reintegration issues following programme completion.
- Only one of ten relevant cases had SMART objectives and showed evidence that the post-programme report had influenced the supervision plan review.
- In at least five relevant cases sampled there was no supervision plan review to demonstrate integration of programme issues.

D1.8 Reinforcement and relapse prevention work

N/A

Criterion not assessed at original audit.