



HM Inspectorate of Probation

AUDIT OF ACCREDITED PROGRAMMES

North-West Region of the
National Probation Service for
England and Wales

*Report on:
Merseyside Probation Area – Think First*

July 2001

Acknowledgements:

We are grateful for the cooperation of staff from the Merseyside Probation Area in completing this audit.

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Glossary

ACE	Assessment, Case Recording and Evaluation System
ACO	Assistant Chief Officer
CO	Chief Officer
HMIP	HM Inspectorate of Probation
IAPS	Interim Accredited Programmes Software
IQR	Implementation Quality Rating
JAP	Joint Accreditation Panel
LSI-R	Level of Service Inventory-Revised
N/A	Criteria not assessed
OASys	Offender Assessment System
OGRS	Offender Group Reconviction Scale
PSR	Pre-sentence report
SPO	Senior probation officer

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Context:

Programmes achieving accredited status have undergone a rigorous process of development and scrutiny to ensure they have maximum impact in terms of reducing reoffending. Selecting well – tested programmes is however only part of the picture – without effective implementation by probation areas much of the positive influence on offenders’ behaviour may be lost.

Establishing robust quality assurance systems and independent audit arrangements for accredited programmes is therefore crucial. HMIP is responsible for auditing accredited programmes on behalf of the JAP. Each probation area will be assessed against the delivery criteria given in the Performance Standards Manual June 2001, which also outlines how these criteria are to be met and evidenced.

Scoring Approach:

The criteria for the delivery of accredited programmes have been divided into 4 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 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 7 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.

Overview:

- Merseyside had been delivering the Think First programme at 5 sites since January 2001.
- The audit consisted of 4 main elements: assessing the quality of advance information; interviews with staff and offenders; observation of videotaped programme sessions; and case file reading.
- A wide range of staff involved in the delivery or support of the accredited programme were interviewed, including the ACO with responsibility for Think First, other senior and operational managers, programme tutors, case managers and court personnel. One middle manager was carrying out the roles of both programme manager and treatment manager in the absence of designated treatment managers. Very few operational court staff attended the meeting with auditors, and their views may not therefore have been representative of this staff group as a whole.
- The appointment of treatment managers had been delayed because the area was awaiting the roll-out of national training.
- Two programme delivery sites were visited and in both these locations the accommodation and general facilities conformed to the Estates Standards Manual.
- A total of 9 randomly chosen programme sessions from 3 separate groups were selected for video monitoring purposes, but one of the tapes could not be fully observed due to the absence of sound.
- The case file reading incorporated the records of all those starting the 3 programmes from which the videotapes were selected, as well as a number of records of those who were referred but did not start the programme. Twenty-six files in all were assessed.
- Three of the criteria were not assessed – B4.2, B4.3 and D1.8. This decision was taken because the area was at an early stage of delivery of Think First and so relatively inexperienced tutors were inevitably assigned to run programmes together (B4.2); plans were awaited nationally for ongoing training for experienced tutors (B4.3); and for the accreditation of the cognitive behavioural booster programme to reinforce offender learning (D1.8).
- This audit report refers solely to the quality of delivery of the Think First programme in Merseyside.

Findings:

Merseyside cooperated fully in the audit process, making staff available as required and ensuring that all the advance information was available well before the visit. The interest of senior managers and the dedication and commitment of the staff most closely involved in the delivery of Think First were evident throughout.

The area had invested time and effort in ensuring that all relevant staff were appropriately trained, and supplementary courses had been made available where necessary. Video observation of practice had shown that staff were delivering to a satisfactory standard, and there was recognition of the need to appoint treatment managers so as to increase resources in order to improve practice further.

The main areas for development were: the allocation of appropriate resources to meet the demands of the accredited programmes; improvements in the targeting of offenders; work on the case manager role in order to support offenders better both through and after the programme; and further consideration given to the dissemination and use of evaluation and monitoring data to improve staff understanding and practice.

The area was aware of many of these areas for improvement and was taking steps to tackle them.

Recommendations:

The CO should ensure that the area:

- *better allocates resources to meet the demands presented by Think First;*
- *establishes effective supervision of programme delivery staff and regular assessment of treatment integrity;*
- *appoints treatment managers to carry out these tasks;*
- *develops a policy to support staff who do not pass assessment centre procedures, or who are deselected following unsatisfactory performance;*
- *institutes a review of targeting for Think First, taking account of the demands posed by high-risk offenders, the views of sentencers and the practice of court-based PSR writers, in order to ensure better selection of offenders for accredited programmes and to minimise attrition;*
- *reviews arrangements for tutor back-up, catch-up sessions and preparation and debriefing work;*
- *includes reference to diversity considerations in the leaflets provided for offenders and courts;*
- *takes action to improve the timeliness of starts for women, employed and minority ethnic offenders;*
- *uses monitoring information to improve timeliness of commencements and compliance rates overall;*
- *identifies individual tutor learning objectives, strengths and areas for improvement in session reviews;*
- *develops and implements a strategy for the dissemination of evaluation and monitoring information;*
- *takes steps to increase the contribution made by case managers to offender learning through the programme.*

SECTION A: COMMITTED LEADERSHIP

A1.1 Committed leadership

1

Description: *The senior management of the area should be openly and explicitly committed to the proper running of the programme through policy and public statements.*

Merseyside's senior management support for the Think First programme and for What Works generally was evident in the advance information which, demonstrated that effective practice principles had been fully embraced by senior managers from an early stage.

Strengths:

- Merseyside's Area Plan 2001/2004 identified as a priority the establishment of Think First as its foundation offending behaviour programme. A plan dated July 2000 showed that thought had been given to effective implementation. A What Works Implementation Group, originally set up to carry forward this agenda, had now been reconstituted as the Think First Steering Group.
- All senior managers had played a lead role in context setting days for the accredited programme.
- A comprehensive training programme for all delivery and support staff had equipped them for their different roles.

Areas for improvement:

- Although the allocation of resources to the programme was based on reasonable planning assumptions made during 2000, the area had not been prepared for the large number of orders with a Think First condition which were made from an early stage of the roll-out. It had not acted swiftly enough to meet the staffing demands which arose in the first 6 months of delivery.

A1.2 Management structures

1

Description: *Effective line management structures exist for the proper operation of the programme integrating this within case management structures. Adequate time should be set aside for the effective management of the programme.*

Strengths:

- Merseyside supplied an organisational chart outlining the management structures for the delivery of the programme.
- Staff demonstrated that they understood their role in managing, delivering or supporting the programme.
- Clear competency-based job descriptions existed for programme tutors, treatment managers (though the latter had yet to be appointed) and the accredited programmes SPO.
- Minutes of divisional and functional team meetings showed that Think First issues had been communicated across divisions and functional areas.

Areas for improvement:

- The delay in appointing treatment managers had resulted in one manager taking on the role of both programme and treatment manager. This significantly affected the time which could be allocated to the supervision of delivery staff and assessment of treatment integrity.

- Delays in the roll-out of IAPS had impacted upon decisions regarding administrative support for the Think First programme delivery team. The effect was that team members felt overloaded with administrative tasks.

A1.3 Staff ownership of the accredited programme

1

Description: *There is full ownership of the programme by managers, programme tutors and other relevant staff, e.g. court personnel and case managers.*

70% of Merseyside's referrals for Think First came through the court teams. A policy decision had been made not to refer offenders on licence to the programme.

Strengths:

- Senior and operational managers, programme tutors and case managers confirmed a strong sense of ownership of the programme. Tutors described themselves as the "promoters" of Think First.
- There was evidence of an extensive training programme including context setting, tutor and case manager training.
- Case managers, tutors and court staff were able to articulate the programme's main aims and objectives.
- It appeared from referral data that reasonably consistent use was being made of the programme across each district, once account was taken of the different characteristics of the courts served.

Areas for improvement:

- Court staff appeared sceptical about the use of the targeting matrix when faced with expectations from sentencers. This appeared to have resulted in some inappropriate proposals.

A1.4 Effective communication with sentencers

2

Description: *There is high quality, proactive communication with local sentencers and clerks to the justices about the programme, including written information.*

Strengths:

- Merseyside had been energetic in informing sentencers about developments concerning What Works in general and the Think First programme in particular.
- Between October 2000 and the audit visit, a series of events had been organised for a range of sentencers including Judges and the High Sheriff. Letters of appreciation showed that these had been well received.
- Newsletters had been prepared for courts with timely information about the programme.
- Information leaflets for courts gave a clear explanation of the programme and the expectations placed on offenders.

Areas for improvement:

- Further dialogue with sentencers would have been useful in exploring issues of Think First eligibility/suitability for offenders facing a custodial sentence, at least until a greater range of accredited programmes was available.

SECTION B: PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

B1.1 Resources and facilities

2

Description: *Adequate accommodation consistent with the Estates Standards Manual is available for all sessions of the programme.*

Strengths:

- There was appropriate equipment in each group room, with adequate light and comfortable chairs.
- Video monitoring equipment and sound systems were mostly of a high standard, although there had been difficulties with sound recording in the early days of programme delivery in a number of locations.
- “Break out” rooms for small group discussion/exercises were available at both of the sites assessed.

Areas for improvement:

- The group room at one of the sites was sufficient for the current size of groups but would only, with difficulty, accommodate 12 offenders plus tutors. It was recognised that it would take time to provide rooms of sufficient size throughout the area given the constraints of the buildings used to deliver programmes.
- Secure video storage facilities were not available at one of the sites.

B1.2 Provision of information leaflets about the programme

1

Description: *There should be a set of leaflets for offenders, sentencers and staff clearly describing the programme and its requirements.*

Strengths:

- A set of leaflets had been produced for relevant audiences which explained the programme and its requirements using clear, easily understood language.
- The leaflets set out the conditions of attendance and the consequences of failing to comply.
- The process for registering a complaint was outlined in the offender leaflet, together with a statement that they had the right to be treated fairly and without discrimination.

Areas for improvement:

- Leaflets produced for offenders made no reference to the existence of the Think First group for female offenders, the needs of minority ethnic offenders and how these would be met, or to other wider diversity issues.

B2.1 Managing attendance

1

Description: *Offender attendance and absence are managed to achieve the required National Performance Management target for offender completions. Attendance is managed to achieve coherent delivery with full impact for all undertaking the programme. The maximum number of absences by any one offender is consistent with the requirements of the programme manual for the specific accredited programme.*

Strengths:

- Attention had been paid to national standards enforcement requirements and the service level agreement between the relevant divisions clearly set out the responsibilities of staff.
-

- Case managers were advised within 24 hours by e-mail, using the Lotus Notes system, as to whether or not the offender had attended the programme.
- Attendance registers confirmed that practice in relation to the maximum number of absences permitted by any one offender was consistent with the requirements of the programme manual.
- Compliance information was being collected by the programme manager with a view to informing practice.

Areas for improvement:

- Case file results revealed that enforcement action did not always take place within the agreed national standards timescales.
- Although the area had targets for increased completion rates, there was no written strategy yet to indicate how these were to be achieved.

B2.2 Avoidance of cancellation or disruption to sessions

1

Description: Sessions are not cancelled or disrupted owing to offender crises, high workload or other pressures, and arrangements exist to deal with crises outside of the programme session. Sessions are delivered at the frequency defined in the programme manual.

Discussions with staff revealed that some programmes had been appropriately discontinued when the number fell below 3 participants. However, one session had been cancelled due to tutor difficulties, and one programme abandoned when the behaviour of the participants made continuation inadvisable.

Strengths:

- The area demonstrated that it had the capacity to run programmes without disruption to sessions.
- The offenders interviewed understood the role of case managers in dealing with any potential crises which might occur.

Areas for improvement:

- Arrangements for back-up were insufficient to prevent cancellations at times of unplanned tutor absence.

B2.3 Catch-up sessions/ Attendance

1

Description: Provision is made for catch-up sessions, or a "bus stop" approach, to allow offenders who miss a session to continue with the programme. All offenders missing sessions, who are not excluded from the programme, should attend catch-up sessions, or in the case of a "bus stop" approach be moved onto another programme within 10 working days, to ensure full delivery of the programme. Treatment managers must specify arrangements for monitoring the integrity of catch-up sessions.

Strengths:

- A system had been established to ensure catch-up sessions were scheduled and delivered in each centre.
- Case file reading results confirmed that catch-up sessions undertaken with each offender were recorded on case files.

Areas for improvement:

- The robustness of the arrangements for catch-up needed to be reviewed in light of the demanding programme delivery arrangements. This included revisiting the arrangements made for offenders who missed the morning session only.
- In the absence of national guidance, the area had not produced instructions to staff about the length of catch-up sessions.
- The area was not monitoring the quality of the catch-up sessions it delivered. Probation Circular 92/2001 offers further guidance on monitoring catch-up sessions.
- Case file reading results showed that enforcement action, where offenders had not attended catch-up sessions, was not always clearly recorded.

B2.4 Timeliness

1

Description: *All offenders commence the programme, or specified pre-programme phase, within the first month of the order or within 3 months if other structured pre-programme work is undertaken. Occasionally, the timing may be different to permit other preliminary work to be completed, e.g. a programme of drug detoxification.*

Strengths:

- Systems existed to facilitate the timely commencement of offenders on the programme. For example, psychometric testing sessions were now scheduled regularly and staff were aware of the need for offenders to commence promptly.
- Psychometric testing sessions were clearly documented on case records.

Areas for improvement:

- In 5 of the 20 relevant case records, the offender did not start Think First within one month due to organisational difficulties.
- Case records did not consistently identify where preliminary work needed to be carried out with the offender, prior to commencement of the programme.
- Monitoring information to show whether offenders were commencing the programme within the first month of the order was only just beginning to be collected. It was recognised that this was largely due to the problems associated with the roll- out of IAPS.
- Frequency of evening groups for offenders in employment, and of the women-only programme militated against timely starts for these groups of offenders.

B3.1 Staff selection

1

Description: *A staff selection procedure meeting the requirements of the programme manual is in place and only staff meeting the defined criteria are selected to deliver the programme.*

The area provided detailed information regarding assessment centre procedures. These had been quality assured by an external assessor to ensure consistency of process and assessment.

Strengths:

- Potential tutors were given full information explaining selection procedures, in advance of attending the assessment centres. The What Works Steering Group Newsletter had publicised the process amongst the wider staff group in Merseyside.
- The advance information confirmed that staff selection procedures conformed to programme requirements.
- All staff delivering the programme had successfully completed an assessment centre.

Areas for improvement

- The area had no written policy confirming that only those staff who met the defined criteria could deliver accredited programmes, nor was there documentation to cover the support arrangements for those who might not be selected as tutors.

B3.2 Staff roles and competencies

1

Description: *Differences in role between grades or posts are clearly reflected in job descriptions. A defined set of competencies exist for each staff role involved in the programme, using those specified in the programme manuals and the national management manual.*

Strengths:

- Clear competency-based job descriptions existed for programme staff.
- Staff were able to explain their part in delivering or supporting the delivery of Think First and were clear about how this linked in with their colleagues' roles.
- Person specifications for tutors closely reflected the core competencies set out in the national management manual.

Areas for improvement:

- The job description for the SPO (programme manager) did not give sufficient attention to programme management responsibilities and needed updating.
- A separation between the roles of treatment manager and programme manager merited consideration.

B3.3 Preparation and debriefing time for tutors

1

Description: *Tutors are allowed 1½ hours for preparation and debriefing for each session in addition to the programme delivery time.*

Strengths:

- Programme delivery staff and the programme manager were conscious of the need to allow time for preparation and debriefing.
- The programme manager had arranged training for tutors to assist them with the development of planning skills.
- Post-session reviews recorded on IAPS showed that tutors were completing these.

Areas for improvement:

- In discussion, some tutors said they did not have enough time for preparation where they were covering for an absent colleague. In these cases they said they resorted to planning individually, sometimes outside their working hours.

B3.4 Staff continuity

1

Description: *Three leaders should normally be assigned to each accredited programme to allow for leave, sickness and other contingencies. All sessions of the programmes are delivered by at least 2 of the 3 assigned staff. Continuity is maintained by at least one of the staff members having run the previous session.*

Strengths:

- There was evidence of contingency planning by the programme manager to ensure staff continuity.

- To date, at least one of the original tutors had been able to deliver each session of the programme.

Areas for improvement:

- Only 2 tutors were assigned to each programme, with one tutor acting as back-up over the whole area. Consideration needed to be given to the allocation of 3 tutors per programme to ensure that continuity could be maintained when there were unplanned tutor absences.
- Staffing allocation arrangements presented potential difficulties with out of hours Think First programmes, where obtaining cover for absent staff could be problematic.

B4.1 Training arrangements for new staff

2

Description: *Training courses exist for all grades and roles involved in delivering the programme and all staff newly assigned to the programme receive training before running their first programme. The training delivered follows that defined in the programme training manual.*

Strengths:

- All staff involved in the delivery of Think First had received the required training.
- Evaluations provided in the advance information showed that a high percentage of staff had been very satisfied with the training provided.
- The area had given priority to setting up additional training when it was felt that national arrangements were insufficient. In the case of tutors, further training in supporting skills had been delivered.

Areas for improvement:

- Supervision notes and interviews with tutors suggested that further attention was required to ensure that individual development needs were being sufficiently considered.

B4.2 New staff paired with an experienced colleague when running their first programme

N/A

Description: *Staff newly trained in a programme should be paired with a more experienced colleague when running their first course.*

This criterion has not been assessed as in year 1 it is recognised that relatively inexperienced tutors will be paired together to run programmes.

B4.3 Training arrangements for experienced staff

N/A

Description: *Competency-based booster and developmental training arrangements exist for all staff experienced in delivering the programme. All programme delivery staff are required to attend such training when they have demonstrated their competence to do so. [This will include delivering a stipulated minimum number of courses.]*

This criterion has not been assessed as nationally ongoing training for experienced tutors/treatment managers is still in the planning stage.

B4.4 Staff knowledge of the concepts and methods used in the programme

2

Description: *All relevant staff have a knowledge of the programme model, targeting objectives and methods sufficient for effective delivery of the programme.*

Strengths:

- Relevant staff were assessed as having sufficient knowledge of the main concepts and methods used in the Think First programme.
- Useful material had been prepared for case managers to assist them in understanding their roles, and informative papers written by the effective practice manager were a further source of help and could be distributed more widely.

B4.5 Staff knowledge of the theoretical and evidential basis of the programme

1

Description: *All relevant staff have a knowledge of the programme's theoretical base and evidence, sufficient for effective delivery of the programme.*

Strengths:

- All relevant staff had a reasonable knowledge of the theoretical and evidence base of Think First.
- The evidence base for using cognitive-behavioural approaches with offenders was accepted by both delivery and case management staff.

Areas for improvement:

- Case managers and court PSR writers appeared to have less theoretical knowledge than other colleagues. Further efforts to develop their understanding of cognitive-behavioural approaches could help them both to engage more fully with their roles in relation to Think First and to improve targeting.

B4.6 Supporting skills necessary to run programmes

1

Description: *From interview, observation, appraisal and training audits all relevant staff have supporting skills including core group work skills, presentation skills, case management, etc., sufficient for the effective delivery of the programme.*

Strengths:

- An ambitious programme of training had been provided for programme tutors, including advanced group work skills, dealing with aggression, motivational interviewing, and “Creative delivery of Think First”.
- Appraisals included the assessment of each individual's contribution to the development of What Works.

Areas for improvement:

- While considerable efforts had been made in the early stages of the Think First roll-out to ensure that supervision was provided on a regular and frequent basis, the absence of treatment managers meant that over the previous 6 months staff supervision had been infrequent. For the same reason, observation of practice occurred too seldom for this to inform supervision sessions and this in turn influenced the extent to which supervision could identify staff development needs and inform future training.

B5.1 Staff supervision and quality of practice

1

Description: All staff involved in the programme receive support and supervision at a frequency specified in the national management manual. This will enable tutor skills to be developed and problems resolved within the lifetime of the current programme by supervisors familiar with effectiveness methods and the programme. The manager to have observed staff in the delivery of the programme either directly or through video prior to each supervision session.

The area recognised that since commencing the delivery of Think First, the unexpectedly large number of orders made by the courts had put a strain on the operational management of the programme. The delay in the appointment of treatment managers had also affected the frequency of supervision. The programme/treatment manager acknowledged that she was unable to observe the recommended 10% of videoed sessions.

Strengths:

- The treatment manager had instituted regular practice meetings to discuss common concerns regarding programme delivery. These meetings were taking place fortnightly.

Areas for improvement:

- It was a matter for concern that in recent weeks tutors had received supervision less frequently, and that scheduled supervision sessions were being postponed because of pressure of work.
- The session reviews for the assessment of performance were not yet being used to differentiate the supervision needs of individual tutors, nor did they consistently identify learning objectives for each member of staff.
- Tutors commented that because of the small number of offenders reaching the final part of the programme, they would benefit from discussing the delivery of these sessions in supervision.

B5.2 Staff appraisal

1

Description: All members of staff involved with the programme have their competence to perform their assigned role assessed annually through the appraisal process. Staff whose performance is assessed as below the acceptable standard but making progress should be given further training and other assistance to improve their performance and a date set for review. Staff who are not making progress in achieving the required standard of performance should not take any further part in running the programme.

Staff commented that they had an appraisal system which was used and which enabled their competency to be assessed in the delivery of Think First. It was, however, too early for the area to demonstrate its procedures for raising the standards of underperforming programme staff or to indicate what would happen in practice to tutors who consistently failed to attain the required standard for programme delivery.

Strengths:

- Merseyside's appraisal system provided the framework for ensuring that only competent staff were involved in delivering the programme.

Areas for improvement:

- Monitoring of staff competence to deliver the Think First programme was at an early stage and a strategy had yet to be developed to assist underperforming tutors.
- Tutor strengths and areas for improvement were not being systematically assessed and recorded.

- There was no policy document outlining the procedures for deselecting tutors who do not perform to the required standard after receiving additional support and training.

B6.1 Offender selection and assessment

1

Description: *Routine monitoring results confirm the profile of those entering the programme are consistent with the criminogenic needs addressed by the programme, the level of risk of reoffending and the level of risk of harm/dangerousness.*

Merseyside selected Think First participants from those offenders who fell within 16-33 ACE scores, or who fitted within the 41-74 OGRS 2 band. While case file reading results showed that the majority of offenders selected fell within these scores, research undertaken by the area had revealed a significant number of offenders to be well above the upper score. The most recent figures were for the period January - March 2000, and the senior management team had yet to devise a strategy for tackling the problem. It appeared that the selection of offenders with very high ACE/OGRS scores for Think First was, in part, a response to the likelihood of custody for these offenders. Although the area had adopted a policy of proposing Think First in addition to other programmes in such cases, in line with national guidance, it was noted that there appeared to be adequate numbers of offenders *within* the target range for Merseyside to meet its completion targets. (There was in any case an issue of proper sequencing of interventions in the case of high-risk offenders so as to minimise failure on Think First.)

Strengths:

- The area had produced clear written guidelines on targeting offenders for Think First which had been made available both to PSR writers and case managers.
- Following the research referred to above, the area was taking steps to tackle the issue of targeting through the setting up of a Think First Steering Group.

Areas for improvement:

- Offender selection and assessment did not fully conform to the requirements set out in the Think First management manual. In particular, Merseyside referred a substantial number of offenders to the programme with OGRS scores above the target band.
- PSR writers appeared to believe that the eligibility criteria were established by the programmes team. More work was needed to ensure that the basis for establishing both suitability and eligibility at an early stage was understood. (It was appreciated that the data on offender profiles for the period January-March 2001 applied to a period before most PSR writers had received additional training.)

B6.2 Offender knowledge and understanding of the programme requirements

1

Description: *The requirements of the programme are clearly communicated on at least 2 occasions to each participant verbally and in writing, and there is evidence from signed consent forms, observation and/or interview that offenders know and understand the requirements.*

Strengths:

- A contract letter clearly outlined the responsibilities and rights for programme participants and usefully set out the dates for sessions on the reverse side.
- Interviews with offenders established that they clearly understood the requirements of the programme.

Areas for improvement:

-
- Case file results suggested that offenders were not always supplied with the requirements of Think First in writing. Of the 10 offenders interviewed, only half remembered having seen any written information before the first session. Written feedback completed by offenders at the end of the programme had made the same point.

B6.3 Group size

1

Description: *For group programmes the maximum starting group size during the previous year did not exceed 12 and the minimum was not less than 4.*

Strengths:

- The initial group size for programmes generally conformed to the guidance set out in the Performance Standards Manual.
- The programme manager kept an ongoing record of the numbers referred to each programme and the IAPS database also gave information on those awaiting allocation to specific courses.

Areas for improvement:

- Some groups had rightly been abandoned because of low numbers, and over-allocation to cope with pre-group attrition was being considered. However, the area needed to exercise caution in developing this as a long-term strategy for dealing with drop-out. Probation Circular 92/2001 allows “bus stopping” arrangements, whereby a group that falls below 4 offenders can join an existing group that has reached the same point in the programme. The National Probation Directorate will not permit both catch-up and bus stopping arrangements and the area needs to decide which approach to adopt.

B6.4 Accessibility of group work programmes

2

Description: *If female or minority ethnic offenders are placed in mixed groups there are no singleton placements unless agreed to by the offender. Appropriate support arrangements should be evidenced for these programme participants.*

Strengths:

- There was a clear commitment to maximise the accessibility of the programme for all groups of offenders.
- A Think First programme for women had been set up and written referral instructions existed.
- The area was planning to introduce a mentoring scheme for minority ethnic offenders so that they could be supported within existing groups. The mentoring scheme was also an attempt to address the issue of under-representation of minority ethnic offender on Think First.

Areas for improvement:

- Not all staff were familiar with Merseyside’s current policy on the placement of women offenders in mixed groups.
- The existence of an area-wide, but inevitably infrequent women-only group, had led to difficulties in relation to the timeliness of commencements for women and to the distances they had to travel (see B2.4).

B7.1 Implementation of monitoring and evaluation design

1

Description: Interview and observation show that monitoring and evaluation arrangements are working as intended and are understood and supported by all staff involved. This should include both input and feedback of data to managers and practitioners at local level.

Merseyside had recently begun piloting the IAPS system with staff on 2 sites. Unfortunately, limitations of the current IAPS version, which was outside the area's control, meant that only a very limited number of standard reports were available. This had resulted in the reluctant adoption of a small number of other databases to meet the demands of operational management. The time-consuming nature of the present arrangements was referred to by all grades of staff.

Strengths:

- All programme delivery staff had access to IAPS records.
- Relevant staff entered data and completed the required documentation (such as session reviews).
- The service level agreement set out basic monitoring arrangements for different groups of staff.

Areas for improvement:

- There was no area strategy which gave a clear framework or rationale for providing monitoring and evaluation data in respect of accredited programmes. There was a lack of clarity as to whose responsibility monitoring of offender suitability or exclusion was and on what basis decisions about necessary research were taken.
- Information from IAPS was not yet being used routinely to supply operational managers or staff outside programme delivery with summary report data. This would enable them to evaluate the effectiveness of current delivery of the Think First programme throughout the area. It was hoped that the development of IAPS would permit better information to be distributed in due course.
- The service level agreement needed updating as systems for the collection of data became more sophisticated.

B7.2 Practice is informed by monitoring and evaluation evidence

0

Description: Consistent use is made of evaluation information as it becomes available by those with most direct responsibility, e.g. managers giving regular consideration to attendance and completion information, practitioners to offender feedback and attitude/behaviour change scores. Awareness/knowledge about evaluation results from the same programme operating elsewhere will be relevant.

Strengths:

- The Lotus Notes system had been used to disseminate information quickly to case managers where they did not have access to the IAPS database.
- Senior managers were using recent data on compliance at various stages of the programme to institute research into this area.
- Information from IAPS and other sources was being used to determine the priorities for the work of the recently constituted Think First Steering Group.

Areas for improvement:

- Monitoring and evaluation results were not yet being widely communicated. This meant that opportunities to inform staff about relevant issues such as completion rates had been missed.

The Merseyside Information Centre database seemed not to be used regularly by most staff and the planned review of its purpose was therefore timely.

- PSR writers would have welcomed more information on the performance on the programme of offenders they referred so as to obtain feedback on the effectiveness of their assessments.

SECTION C: QUALITY OF PROGRAMME DELIVERY

C1.1 Adherence to programme manual

1

Description: *All sessions of the programme should be delivered in line with the instructions of the programme manual and demonstrate close adherence to the aims and objectives. There should be evident commitment to follow the intention/purpose of the exercises used, including repetition/reinforcement, where these are designed parts of the programme.*

The observation of delivery by Merseyside tutors suggested they had a thorough understanding of the programme aims and objectives. However, the scores in this section were affected by the introduction of material extraneous to the programme manual.

Strengths:

- Exercises were set up correctly and run in the stipulated order.
- The aims and objectives of the observed sessions were generally met.

Areas for improvement:

- Additional material was introduced into some sessions, reducing the amount of time available for the exercises and, in some cases, resulting in a carry-over of material to the next session. Tutors needed to understand the importance of adhering to the programme manual.
- Programme staff paid insufficient attention as to whether offenders had assimilated the learning from a programme session.

C1.2 Adherence to treatment style

1

Description: *From direct observation or video evidence, programme tutors make competent and appropriate use of the techniques specified. There will be evidence of effective communication of the material, offender understanding and engagement. Pro-social attitudes are skilfully modelled by workers and are predominant in the group. This includes challenging pro-criminal or anti-social attitudes and behaviour.*

Strengths:

- Tutors regularly used open questions to encourage participants' responses.
- There were some good instances of listening and allowing for answers from group participants.

Areas for improvement:

- Programme staff needed to allow offenders more opportunity to explain and validate ideas for themselves.
- Tutors did not often demonstrate awareness of responsivity issues, although in discussion with the auditors they showed that they understood the principles involved.

C1.3 Group work skills

1

Description: *Programme tutors demonstrate effective management of the group, including effective co-working to facilitate learning by offenders and modelling pro-social behaviour. Disruption by participants is minimised.*

The unadjusted score for this section of video monitoring was higher than the other 2 sections, although all scored satisfactorily. Some examples of skilled group work were observed. The overall score was affected by one of the sessions which ended at the break when the group became unmanageable. The treatment manager had arranged for additional group work training for all tutors following this incident in recognition of the fact that better management of the group might have prevented the outcome. It is

worth noting that tutor performance ranged from an average of 2.5 to 3.9. This is not evident when looking at the averaged score for this criterion.

Strengths:

- Handovers between tutors were generally well conducted.
- There were good examples of exercises being well introduced and links being made to earlier sessions of Think First.

Areas for improvement:

- Some co-working arrangements needed attention.
- At times, not all group members were involved in a session and videos needed to be monitored to check levels of offender engagement.
- Consideration needed to be given to ensuring that rules about acceptable behaviour in groups were being implemented consistently with all members.

C1.4 Programme delivered addressing race equality and diversity issues

1

Description: From direct observation or video evidence, issues of racism and sexism are effectively addressed whether arising within programme delivery or offender response. Staff are alert to race equality and diversity issues, they always respond appropriately and show that they have considered and developed strategies for responding, e.g. relevant resources and arguments, clarity about boundaries, approaches that may promote perspective taking.

Merseyside's commitment to ensuring that diversity considerations formed part of service delivery was demonstrated through its involvement in the "Fit for Difference" project which the programmes team was undertaking. There was recognition by senior managers that small numbers of minority ethnic offenders were reaching Think First and the reasons for this were being investigated.

Strengths:

- Tutors and the treatment manager were able to give examples of ways in which consideration had been given to the needs of different offender groups. This included looking at the physical environment (posters, etc.) and giving thought to the personal safety of offenders at some sites.

Areas for improvement:

- Further consideration was required on how to meet the needs of minority ethnic offenders within the predominantly white male groups, how to develop tutor responses to having these offenders in the groups, and adapt programme material appropriately.

C1.5 Programme integrity checklist

1

Description: The programme integrity checklist for each session is completed.

In Merseyside, the programme integrity checklist was being completed by tutors on IAPS (IAP session review).

Strengths:

- Both the treatment manager and tutors were completing reviews in respect of programme sessions. Tutors appeared to be completing these as a matter of course.

Areas for improvement:

- There was evidence of concordance between the tutor assessment of sessions and that of the treatment manager. However, given the generally high scores awarded by both, this raised questions about how effectively session reviews were being used to develop practice. Treatment

managers will be assisted by the national training which is planned on video observation of practice and the scoring of sessions.

- Session reviews completed by the treatment manager could be improved by providing tutors with clear objectives for subsequent sessions.
- Handwritten session review forms were frequently undated.

C1.6 End of programme summary reports

1

Description: *The case record shows that at the end of the programme delivery staff prepare a summary for the case manager indicating:*

- *participation in the programme*
- *progress made*
- *an assessment of risk, including the identification of factors relevant to the individual concerned*
- *an assessment of the offender's coping skills*
- *likely scenarios for relapse, including immediate precursors and triggers which might give prior warning*
- *identification of remaining treatment needs.*

Strengths:

- Some high quality reports, following the recommended format, had been prepared on individual offenders by programme tutors.

Areas for improvement:

- There was no standardised post-programme report.

SECTION D: CASE MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

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

1

Description: *The supervision plan integrates the programme into the overall plan of work for each offender. Specific objectives are set in a sequence appropriate for the offender and are recorded in the initial supervision plan and regularly reviewed. Assessments should be based on OASys when available, or ACE or LSI-R before then.*

Strengths:

- Case records showed that the Think First programme was well integrated in the overall plan of work for the offender.
- Most records looked at during the case file read contained SMART objectives for offenders' supervision.

Areas for improvement:

- There was not always evidence of ACE assessments in the case records.
- Case records did not clearly demonstrate that supervision objectives were regularly reviewed.

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

1

Description: *The case records show, and interviews with selected staff indicate, the existence of effective arrangements for liaison, handover and communication. This should include the 3-way meetings between the case manager, programme staff and the offender at the end of the programme.*

It had been decided to locate tutors at centres throughout the area so as to maximise communication between programme delivery staff and case managers. This had had the advantage of facilitating liaison between them, though it had also created additional pressures for the operational management of a dispersed team.

Strengths:

- In discussion, case managers and programme tutors emphasised the inter-dependence of each other's roles.
- Case managers attended the post-programme review and valued the quality of the reports prepared by the tutors.

Areas for improvement:

- The case records did not always evidence the extent of liaison between programme staff and case managers.
- Merseyside did not have a policy on case manager attendance at session 14 (mid-programme review).

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

1

Description: *The case manager is responsible for preparing and motivating the offender prior to their participation on an accredited programme and for reinforcing learning during the programme.*

Strengths:

- Case managers recognised that they were still developing their skills in motivational interviewing. They felt their task was easier when working with offenders who were already

- known to them (i.e. when they had prepared the PSR as opposed to when working with offenders referred from the court teams).
- They understood their role in relation to exploring obstacles to an offender’s attendance and overcoming these.
- The offenders interviewed generally understood the role of case managers.
- Staff used the “Fresh Start” scheme to motivate unemployed offenders.

Areas for improvement:

- Case records did not always clearly record pre-group work sessions or show how these were contributing to the overall aim of the programme.
- Case management arrangements were not sufficient to ensure the offender was supported during and after the programme. Area guidance on minimum expectations of contact between supervisors and offenders during the programme would assist in ensuring consistency of practice.
- There was little evidence of reinforcement by case managers of offender learning while on the programme, for example through the practice of newly acquired skills.

D1.4 Understanding and knowledge of programme methods

1

Description: *Interviews with case managers demonstrate they have a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the programme and that they either have the requisite skills to undertake reinforcement, follow-up and/or relapse prevention work, or the ability to refer to staff possessing these skills.*

Strengths:

- Case managers had attended the training for the accredited programme and demonstrated a reasonable knowledge of the theory and practice underpinning it.
- These staff appreciated which skills might need developing further (e.g. motivational interviewing, pro-social modelling).
- They had been provided with extensive information on the programme (both paper-based and through the database).

Areas for improvement:

- The area had not fully considered how to enhance the role of case managers while offenders were on the programme, so as to increase their confidence in reinforcement and follow-up work.

D1.5 Monitoring of attendance and enforcement

1

Description: *Responsibility for the monitoring of attendance and the enforcement of orders is clearly defined with appropriate systems in place. There is evidence of effective enforcement in all cases.*

Strengths:

- Case managers received swift communication via e-mail as to whether an offender had attended the programme.
- Effective enforcement practice was being followed in most cases.
- Case managers were clear about their responsibilities in relation to enforcement.

Areas for improvement:

- Although enforcement action was taken by case managers in most instances, this did not always conform to the timescales laid down in national standards.

D1.6 Documentation

1

Description: *The case record shows that all relevant documentation is completed.*

Strengths:

- Case files were well ordered and easy to follow.

Areas for improvement:

- Different descriptions given to the pre-programme work made it difficult to assess if all relevant documentation had been completed. It was anticipated that this issue would be resolved with the full introduction of IAPS.

D1.7 End of programme review

1

Description: *The supervision plan review for each offender shows that at the end of the programme appropriate individual objectives are identified to strengthen and build on the progress made, and to achieve successful community reintegration.*

Post-programme reports were prepared as Word documents because of the limitations of the current IAPS version. These were not seen on the case records read for the audit as they were of offenders who had not completed the programme. Individual post-programme reports were seen, but not together with case managers' supervision plans.

Nonetheless, a number of the offenders interviewed referred to the fact that their case manager had used information from the final review meeting to establish objectives for subsequent supervision sessions.

Strengths:

- Post-programme reports by tutors gave useful information about offenders' progress and areas where further work was required.

Areas for improvement:

- Supervision plan reviews failed to set SMART objectives for offenders.
- A standard post-programme report would ensure consistent practice and better inform supervision plan reviews.

D1.8 Reinforcement and relapse prevention work

N/A

Description: *There are specific arrangements in place to reinforce learning and for relapse prevention work, including booster programmes where required by the programme, delivered by appropriately trained and skilled staff.*

This criterion has not been assessed as the probation area is awaiting the national development of a cognitive-behavioural booster programme designed to reinforce learning.

Next Steps

HMIP will employ a 3-tier follow-up process, depending on a probation area's performance rating:

Level 1 follow-up

A level 1 performing area will have met or exceeded the agreed IQR figure of 70%. (This figure rises to 75% for year 2 and 90% for year 3). The follow-up will normally be conducted within one year of the audit report being received by the probation area, and will usually be limited to a desktop exercise, depending on the advance information received, focusing on the areas for improvement for criteria that were not fully met in the original audit.

Level 2 follow-up

A level 2 area will not have reached the 70% quality rating for programme delivery, but will have attained at least 40%. The follow-up will combine a request for written information and a 1-2 day visit to the probation area with HMIP auditing further videotapes and case files. This will normally take place within one year of the audit report being received by the probation area.

Level 3 follow-up

A level 3 area will have scored less than a 40% IQR. The follow-up will involve a fresh audit of the probation area and will normally be completed within 6 months of the audit report being received by the probation area.

Merseyside Probation Area achieved an IQR of 54% and is a **level 2 area**. A limited follow-up audit will be carried out in one year's time. The area should pay particular attention to mandatory items which have not been fully met.

This report and the IQR will be received by the JAP in March 2002.