

June 2009



Peer Review and Development (PRD) in probation: Two probation areas and their OLASS providers work together to jointly review and develop their learning and skills provision

This case study examines how two probation areas and their OLASS providers formed a PRD group, planned and delivered a review and used the findings to improve the way they engage and motivate offenders to become involved in learning and skills.

It will support leaders and managers by describing the PRD cycle and by giving practical advice on how to form a PRD group and carry out PRD activities effectively.

Group Details

Kent and London Improvement Group (KALIG)

- Kent Probation
- London Probation
- City and Islington College
- Justonestep
- West Kent College

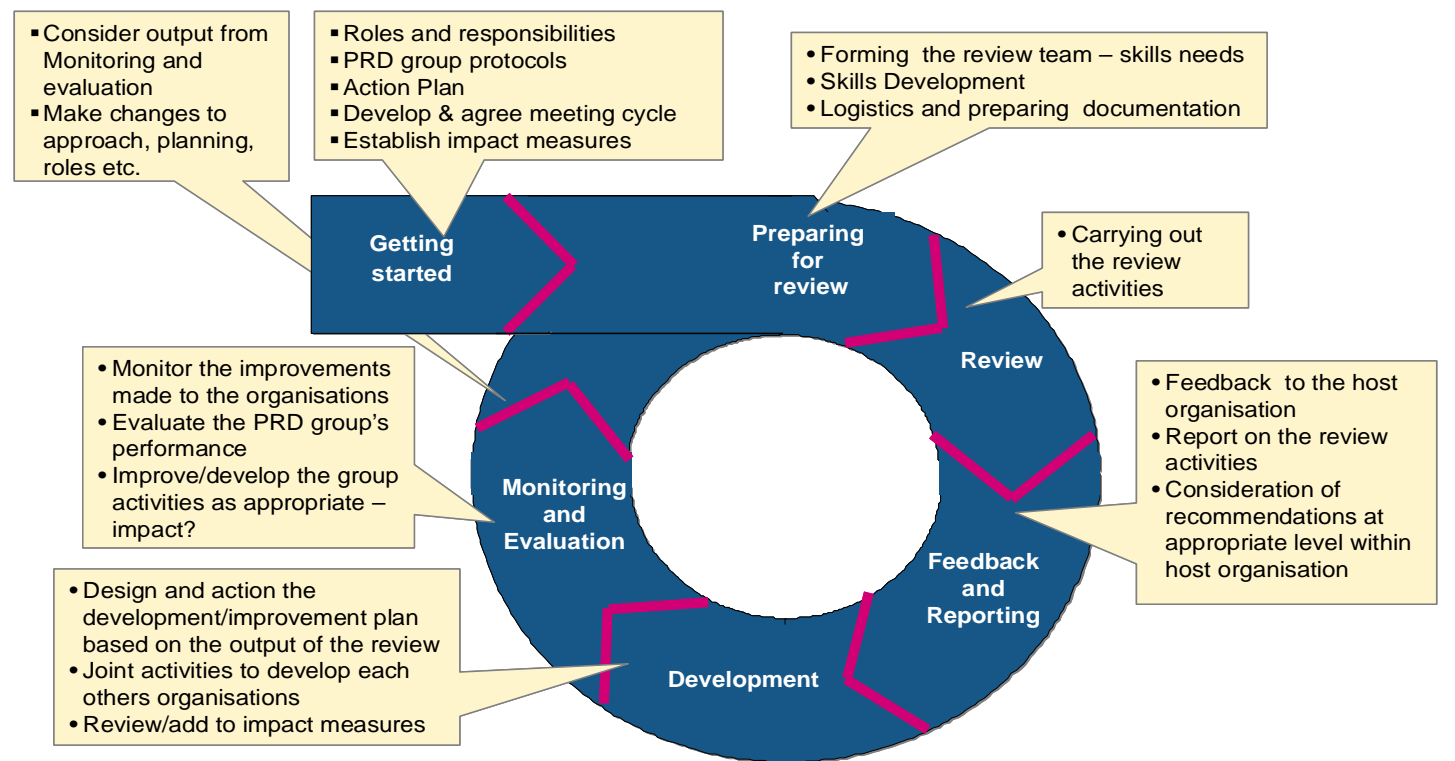
“PRD has helped us work together across organisations and regions. It’s given insight into other organisations and the realisation that other people share the same issues.”

Background and context

Peer Review and Development (PRD)

PRD is a collaborative quality improvement activity involving a group of organisations working together to review each other’s capacity for self-improvement.

PRD has both an assessment function (review) including benchmarking and the validation of self-assessment judgments, and an improvement function (development), including joint action planning and support in the sharing and transfer of good practice.



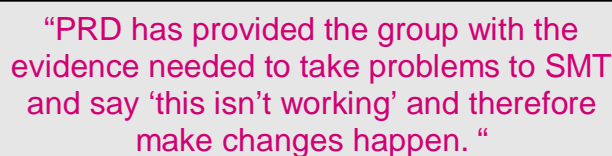
KALIG

The group was brought together by LSIS and is made up of two sets of community partners. Justonestep and West Kent College deliver learning and skills to offenders managed by Kent Probation. City and Islington College delivered learning and skills to offenders managed by London Probation. The two sets of partners had not met before the group was formed.

All of the members thought that it would be valuable to compare their processes with another area. London Probation is very large and they were keen to gain a different perspective from a smaller probation service and to have the opportunity to 'think outside the box' when approaching issues. The members felt that there is often an emphasis in offender learning (OL) on custody, so this provided a forum to focus on improving learning and skills provision in probation.

Useful tips

- Join up with organisations who work in a different environment to your own
- Develop a good, honest, open relationship from the start
- Jointly develop an understanding of the concept of 'critical friend'
- Jointly agree an action plan and group protocols at the start



“PRD has provided the group with the evidence needed to take problems to SMT and say ‘this isn’t working’ and therefore make changes happen. “

Approach

Overview

The group met, formed, carried out two reviews, gave feedback and jointly developed action plans over a four month period.

The five members of the group and two other colleagues met twice to set up their group and plan the reviews. The reviews took one day each and a further meeting was held to develop plans.

First review and feedback

The group chose the engagement and motivation of offenders to become involved in learning and skills as the review theme. They thought this was a significant challenge and one that they were struggling to address. The group decided to carry out two similar reviews at both probation areas within the first review cycle. They thought this would develop a better understanding of problems and potential solutions as they would be able to compare the findings.

They held one planning meeting to explore the theme and establish a methodology for the review. Documents were developed and shared online prior to the reviews.

There were six people in the review team; all were core members of the group. Each one had relevant experience and the capability to make changes and have an impact within their organisations. On the day the review team worked in pairs. Staff at the host organisations were briefed about the purpose of the reviews.

Each of the two reviews took one day. A third day was used to reflect on findings and make recommendations. The review teams observed the induction of offenders; including the introduction to unpaid work and learning and skills. Offenders were interviewed about their expectations and Offender Managers were interviewed about the referral process. The review team used pre-designed templates to record their findings. During lunch they discussed the initial findings and issues. This meant they could focus the afternoon activities on gaps or uncertainties.

Following the reviews, findings were collated and circulated and later discussed at the feedback meeting.

Useful tips

- Consider carrying out two reviews close together as the ability to compare and contrast can stimulate ideas
- Learn how to deliver and receive constructive criticism
- Choose a sample that is big enough to compare and contrast and that can provide a true reflection, yet is small enough to be manageable
- Use a pre-designed template to record findings

" PRD has been a very useful process; it's given us the time and opportunity to step back and look at how we do things, and how this could be improved."

Next steps

Following the review the group held a joint development session where they reflected on their findings in more detail, considered areas for improvement and agreed development plans.

The group made recommendations for improvements and both London and Kent Probation are developing their own action plan for improving their induction and pre placement work session (PPWS). This will be presented to their SMT in order to implement the changes required.

The group will conduct a second review on the same theme (engagement and motivation of offenders to become involved in learning and skills) but this time focusing on how they do this in the area of unpaid work. They intend to use the same approach as the first review, i.e. conduct a review of unpaid work at both London and Kent probation in order to compare the findings and jointly consider how best to improve and develop.

Results/ Impact

PRD has had an impact on each of the group members. Some of these impacts include:

- increased confidence to approach SMT regarding issues relating to induction
- re-design of the induction process so it better engages and motivates offenders to access learning and skills
- review of the materials and resources used in induction
- additional training for those delivering induction
- raised awareness of the role of induction in engaging and motivating offenders
- recognition that opportunities for recording achievements were being missed in workshops.

Lessons learnt

About PRD

- PRD has helped the two probation areas reflect on the way induction engaged and motivated offenders to become involved in learning and skills
- The members have valued meeting colleagues who face the same challenges
- Working with others has given all the members ideas for improvement
- PRD is a great staff development opportunity

About engaging and motivating offenders

The hosts identified that although most Offender Managers knew about the benefits of learning and

skills and the process for referring offenders into provision and recognised their role in the process and were actively encouraging offenders to take part:

- induction was often too long and contained information that would have been better delivered to individuals on site
- opportunities to engage offenders in learning and skills were missed
- offenders were generally treated with respect but where offenders had individual needs such as difficulty reading or speaking English, their needs were not always acknowledged and support was not always offered or supplied.

“All group members feel that they have learnt a lot and gained skills as well as forming relationships when conducting PRD.”

Advice for those new to PRD

- Keep the scope of the review tight. Drill down and look at something specific
- Be aware of the time commitment involved in the preparation, review and implementation of development activities
- Be clear that the group is mutually supportive – it is not a competition
- Choose a topic for the review which you know you have the power to change and improve

Further sources of information

For more information about PRD go to the SfE Resource Centre on the LSIS Excellence Gateway <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=resourcecentre>