

Section 8

Prison Officers and Prison Governors

INTRODUCTION

A prison ... must operate on confidence, trust and mutual respect between all those who make up the prison community—management, staff and prisoners, (Faulkner 2001, p.303)

As this quote correctly points out, a prison consists of a community of people who have to work and live together 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Staff and prisoners form that community and a prisoner's view of a prison is determined by the way he or she is treated by the staff of that prison. An individual member of staff can influence every aspect of a prisoner's life inside from the time of unlock each morning, to their eventual release date. Staff can have a positive, as well as a negative, influence on the prisoners in their charge and can make a real difference to the quality of life for an individual prisoner.

In March 2007 the Prison Service employed 47,747 (down from 48,418 in 2005-6) and spent £1.58 Billion on staff salaries (up from £1.49 Billion in 2005-06) [HM Prison Service AR, 2006-07, p68]. Prison staff includes governors, uniformed officers and operational support grades, administrative and specialist staff such as psychologists, instructors, nurses, doctors and chaplains. In addition to these directly employed staff there are probation officers and teachers whose services are contracted in from the National Probation Service and education providers. Private sector employees also work in prisons, as some prisons have contracted out the provision of catering, healthcare and works/maintenance to private sector companies. The running of offending behaviour courses, and other activities, by the voluntary and community-based sector has also resulted in another type of 'prison worker' being created. Many other people also 'work' in prisons including volunteers such as members of the Independent Monitoring Board and Prison Visitors. Table 1 at the end of this chapter shows the number of staff in the Prison Service.

This section of the handbook describes the two key groups of prison staff: prison officers and governors. It explores their roles and explains the culture and authority issues involving staff. It concludes by suggesting what makes a good officer and governor. Other members of staff mentioned above have an important role in the operation of our prisons and in delivering services to prisoners. Their role and duties are described in a recent book about the work of the Prison Service (*Prisons and the Prisoner: an Introduction to the work of Her Majesty's Prison Service* edited by Shane Bryans

and Rachel Jones, The Stationery Office, 2001). The increasingly important contribution of voluntary and community-based sector staff to the work of prisons is described in *Prisons and the Voluntary Sector: a Bridge into the Community*: edited by Shane Bryans, Clive Martin and Roma Walker.

I PRISON OFFICERS

Prison officials are expected to punish, deter, isolate and rehabilitate offenders while at the same time maintaining order and inmate productivity. (Kauffman, 1988, p.45). Kauffman's statement highlights some of the conflicts inherent in the role (and work) of the prison officer. Yet despite its complexity and fascination there are comparatively few studies—much of the analytical work on prisons focuses on the concept of imprisonment and prisoners. *The Prison Officer* (Liebling and Price, 2001) addresses this deficit and is one of the very few contemporary accounts of prison officers in England and Wales based on research and direct contact with staff.

Numbers and grade structure

Prison officers are the largest staff group and they have the greatest degree of contact with prisoners. In March 2007 there were 33,262 prison officers in the Prison Service. Officers of both genders work in male and female prisons, and perform the same duties with a few exceptions, such as strip-searching. HMPS has acknowledged that it has much work to do to address the issue of ethnic group representation amongst officer grades, as well as wider issues of racism and discrimination. It has launched several high profile initiatives to combat racism in the service as a whole.

In March 2006 the Prison Service carried out a staff ethnicity review whose main findings were:

Key Workforce Statistics

The milestone KPI target of 6% for this year's BME staff representation was not met. Overall BME staff representation at 31 March 2006 stood at 5.73%.

However, BME representation has risen gradually during the year. This increase took place at every grade level except AA-EO (which fell by 0.4 percentage points). Representation of every BME group either increased or remained static.

Also, over the last year, 9 out of the 13 Operational Areas in the Prison Service recruited proportionally more BME staff than live in local

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communities surrounding prison establishments. Recruitment to the Prison Service overall represented a stretch factor of 117% against this BME population.

5 Operational Areas out of 13 achieved their local representation targets for 2005/06.

Leaving rates of BME staff, even after adjusting for length of service and geographical area, were 1.6% higher than White staff. This differential has increased slightly during the year.

The transfers of staff from Headquarters to NOMS in April 2005 and of some healthcare staff to PCTs have had a detrimental impact on BME representation of directly employed staff during the year. If these structural changes to the workforce had not taken place, BME representation at the end of 2005/06 would have stood at 5.88%.

Recent work has shown that the background and employment conditions of prison officers have changed considerably in recent years. In 1987, Stern identified prison officers as having 'a background in the armed forces ... 40% with no educational qualifications, living in prison accommodation' (Stern, 1987, p.80). She also highlighted the results of a staff survey that showed officers had low morale, a poor attitude to management and change and their attitude to rehabilitation was that it was in no way essential to their jobs. Liebling and Price writing in 2001 found that prison officers were more representative of wider society, and highlighted a staff survey that stated 73% were satisfied with their jobs. (Liebling and Price, 2001, p.33). There were problems: notably a high number of racist incidents, but the results evidenced a staff group with a very different response than that given in 1987.

Prison Officers form part of the staff group known as operational grades which also contains governors, operational managers and operational support grades (OSGs). There are three uniformed officer grades: prison officers, who, as we have seen, form the largest group and on whom we are concentrating in this chapter, senior officers who act as first line managers, and principal officers who manage units of accommodation, or tasks such as security and who line manage senior officers. Like their prison officer colleagues there are few studies on the role and performance of senior and principal officers. Arguably, senior officers play a particularly vital role in prisons, shaping and directing the conduct of staff, and it is these first line managers who have the opportunity to directly affect change in working practices, or conversely chose to resist change. There has been some criticism of the senior officer grade, particularly by the Chief Inspector of Prisons, who highlighted what he considered some of the deficiencies in the system including in-house

promotion and lack of first line manager training.

Promotion from officer to senior officer is based on an examination and job simulation assessment centre where candidates take part in a number of role playing management exercises designed to test their first line management skills. There is no longer a restriction on the minimum time that an officer must serve before he or she can apply for promotion, although they must have completed their probationary period. Promotion from senior to principal officer is still based on post specific interviews, but HMPS is currently examining whether to introduce assessment centres for this grade as well.

Recruitment and training

In 2000, HMPS introduced a minimum educational requirement for new entrant prison officers of five GCSEs or equivalent, with a pass in both maths and English, this requirement being similar to that used by police forces around England and Wales. Following the end of national recruitment in the 1980s, the service moved towards recruitment at a local level. In November 2000 it commissioned a review of recruitment and selection practice with the aim of centrally co-ordinating recruitment against agreed national standards. A new recruitment model has been proposed as part of this review that would offer a 'one stop shop' for candidate selection. This would offer fitness and medical assessments, and a Job Simulation Assessment Centre (JSAC) selection process in one day. Each geographical area is responsible for the recruitment and selection of staff for prisons within their respective areas (Prison Service, 2001, p.74). The JSAC consists of a series of work stations involving simulation exercises and a report writing exercise. The exercises test a range of skills including: calming; making a complaint; taking criticism; giving constructive criticism; dealing with a request for help; listening with a purpose and written and analytical skills. If selected candidates will then go on to attend the Prison Officer Entry Level Training course (POELT). Prison officer entry-level training is foundation training designed to give new officers selected essential practical skills and knowledge to prepare them to work under supervision in an establishment. Completion of POELT marks the beginning of the officer's development through the probationary period.

It is an 8-week course that is either delivered at the national Training College or in a number of local sites based near establishments. It consists of two college-based blocks divided by an experiential period in the home establishment. The course is underpinned by National Occupational Standards in Custodial Care. Core subjects such as security, diversity, mental health and professional standards are threaded throughout the course. Other key

officer skills that are covered include interpersonal skills, pro-social modelling, safer custody, the role and authority of a prison officer, searching, radio procedures and health and safety. A comprehensive assessment framework measures the knowledge, skills and attitude of new officers throughout the training, and an acceptable standard must be met to achieve certification.

Following on from POELT new staff are given the opportunity to sign up for a Level 3 Custodial Care NVQ. Continual development and consolidation training opportunities are provided in the work place and at local and national training venues.

Once an officer has completed his or her basic training they will be eligible for further training both at their parent establishment and the national and regional training centres. This training can be refreshers in suicide awareness and race awareness, or training for new skills in dog handling or becoming a PE specialist. In 2002 / 2003 the service delivered 319,376 training days equivalent to 6.8 days per member of staff, including training for 2511 new entrant prison officers (HMPS, 2004, Appendix 2)

Role and authority of the prison officer

A warder is a cross between a soldier and a policeman, he wears a blue black uniform and his pouch and chain indicate his status; the wearer seems to be very proud of his bunch of keys and piece of chain ... I have to thank my own warder for his consideration. His words were few and his kindness great; he was a good disciplinarian and a highly capable drill officer. (Cook, 1910, p.82).

The modern prison officer has moved on from the role of pure disciplinarian and drill instructor described in this quote and can now play a pivotal role in the development of prisons, in the way they are run and heavily influences the life of the prisoner in the long-term and short-term. It has been shown that, despite the deceptively simple tasks of the prison officer (unlocking prisoners, dealing with routine requests, supervising the serving of meals and cleaning and accounting for prisoner numbers) the key role the prison officer plays is in the relationships he or she forms with prisoners (Liebling and Price, 2001, p.39).

The role of the prison officer in recent years has been fundamentally affected by changes and developments in HMPS, from the riots culminating in the Woolf report of the 1980s, to the high security escapes from HMP Parkhurst and HMP Whitemoor in the late 1990s. The agenda of HMPS, focusing on rehabilitation, and then refocusing on security, affected the job of the prison officer, as senior management attempted to deal with competing priorities. As the service has moved into the twenty-first century however

there has been a rationalisation of goals and HMPS now gives the clear definition of its primary goal 'to maintain security and prevent escapes' (HMPS 2001, p.32). This identification of the primary aim of the service has allowed prison officers to become more involved in programmes and work with prisoners while maintaining a focus on the key goal. This allows officers to develop their skills and form better relationships with prisoners, and staff that have a favourable interactive approach towards the prisoner group have a more satisfying occupational experience (Liebling and Price, 2001, p.40).

A small number of studies have attempted to quantify and clarify the role of the prison officer. Some such as Lombardo are based on the perception of prisoners rather than work with officers themselves. Lombardo categorised the work of the prison officer as involving Human Services, Order Maintenance, Security, Supervision and Rule Enforcement (Lombardo, 1989, p.66). Human Services encompasses counselling prisoners on their problems, ensuring food letters and clothing are provided and identifying self-destructive behaviour. Order maintenance represents the policing part of the role, where officers keep order and ensure prisoner safety. Security is the work done in preventing escapes and supervising prisoners to ensure that they are where they are meant to be and carrying out the work and tasks assigned to them. Finally rule enforcement involves the detection of illicit activity and placing prisoners on report. A more recent description of the various roles of prison officers is:

In one day an officer can be a supervisor, custodian, disciplinarian, peacekeeper, administrator, observer, manager, facilitator, mentor, provider, classifier and diplomat. (Liebling and Price, 2001, p.43).

Prison officers spend much of their working day in a structured routine, which in itself is set in the context of a 39-hour weekly shift pattern, that offers predictability for staff. Each prison has a structured day of core activities, starting with a role check where prisoners are counted, and then variously including unlocking prisoners, supervising meals, escorting prisoners to work and education, supervising activities and accounting for prisoner numbers. They also act as personal officers for prisoners, a scheme where each officer is allocated a small group of prisoners. The aim of this scheme is to encourage staff to take the lead on guiding and advising prisoners on how to make the most of their time in prison, as well as providing a familiar face to help resolve problems and issues.

Prison officers may also work delivering programmes to prisoners, supervising visits or the entrance to the prison, searching cells, and attending case conferences. Within any

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