# The Icelandic National Prison Officers' College
## Background, structure and operations



### I. Introduction

On solemn occasions, when something that is both small and attractive or intriguing is mentioned, people often use expressions like *small is beautiful* or *less is more*. This may be appropriate and catching in certain contexts, but unfortunately it does not apply to developing an educational establishment and training a profession. Only a short experience of working on prison issues within the penal system, or of the training of prison staff, is necessary to understand why it is difficult to agree with these neat phrases. In that context smallness is a distinct drawback.

Here follows an examination of various points in support of this view, involving a wide-ranging survey of the Icelandic National Prison Officers' College in the context of the country's penal system, which must be considered minimalistic in comparison with the situation in larger countries. Hopefully, the reader will also be able to look beyond the limitations imposed by Iceland's smallness and give it credit for having the ambition (and perhaps the stubbornness) to run a prison officers' college at all under these circumstances and model itself on nations that are many times larger.

First comes an account of Iceland's penal system and the position of the prison officers' college within it. Then follows a historical sketch of the college from its establishment; the fourth section examines the current regulations on prison officers' training; then follows a sketch of the future of prison staff training, closing with some thoughts on the proposed collaboration between the college and the National Police College and the effects this might have on prison staff training.

### II. The position of the Prison Officers' College within the penal system

The very fact that Iceland runs a special course of training, and a college, for such a small professional group as its prison officers is itself rather unusual, and this has not always turned out as intended in practice. Iceland is a very small country: its population has only recently passed the 300,000. The number of prisoners is also low, about 40 per 100,000 people, which is one of the smallest figures in the world. Iceland has five prisons; apart from the main one, Litla-Hraun Prison, which has space for 86 prisoners, they are very small, ranging in capacity from 8 to 16 places. Altogether, then, these five prisons can take up to 137 prisoners, and their combined staff – officers, directors and office staff – comes to about 100. With such a small staff, the recruitment rate has not been sufficient to make it possible to run training programmes every year with the minimum number of students.

The Minister of Justice is in overall charge of the prison system, and the Prison and Probation Administration (PPA) supervises the execution of sentences, the running of the prisons and the associated administrative functions, including personnel issues and staff training. Prison officers are civil servants who are appointed to their positions after passing

the required examinations at the National Prison Officers' College. The role of the college is primarily to give prison officers general training pertaining to the role and functions of the prisons and the execution of sentences and refresher training and special training in various aspects of prison work. The PPA engages the college principal; a college board, consisting of the Director of the PPA, a representative of the Ministry of Justice and a representative of the Icelandic Prison Officers' Association, advises the principal on professional matters, internal structure and the selection of students. The principal attends meetings of the board, and has the right to address them but not to vote on issues decided by them. The principal engages the teaching staff of the college in consultation with the board. Most of the teachers are employed in positions within the prison system or the police and their work at the college is done on a part-time basis as a sideline. There have generally been 10-12 teachers at the college.

The college in its earliest form came into being in 1983, following models elsewhere in the Nordic countries. A few years previously, a substantial increase had taken place in consultation and collaboration between Iceland and the other Nordic countries on prison issues, and this had its effect on prison staff as well. For example, the Icelandic Prison Officers' Association, which had been founded in 1973, a decade before the college opened, had become affiliated to the Nordic Prison Officers´ Association (Nordisk Fængselsfunktionærers Union, NFU) and its board regularly attended meetings with its Nordic counterparts. A special office was established in the Ministry of Justice to deal with prison affairs, and this was also responsible for foreign contacts in this field. These developments, reinforced by comparison with colleagues elsewhere in the Nordic countries, put pressure on the government to raise the professional standards and training of Icelandic prison officers to the same level. Thus, to a certain extent, the demands for better staff training was a reflection of the profession's striving for a higher status, better pay and professional recognition.

### III. Origin and history of the college

The beginnings of formal training for prison staff in Iceland go back to 1981, when the Althingi (parliament) passed a resolution on prison officer training, after which the Minister of Justice appointed a task committee to make proposals on the establishment of a college. The committee, which included representatives of the ministry, the Prison Officers' Association and prison officers in employment at the time, submitted its report in 1982. This report took account mainly of developments in this area elsewhere in the Nordic countries and the structure of training for groups such as customs officers and policemen. The measures proposed by the committee were nothing if not ambitious; they went far beyond what was possible to put into practice under the circumstances in Iceland at the time. The main proposals were as follows.

A preliminary course was to be held each May for new recruits (those beginning work as prison officers and those engaged as temporary replacement workers during vacation periods) lasting up to three weeks (120 teaching hours). The main points to be covered were the work of prison officers, an introduction to the prisons, the Penal Code, the rights and obligations of civil servants, psychology, self-defence, First Aid, drug abuse, fire-prevention, body searches, etc.

Thereafter, the main part of the work of the college was to consist of "further courses", lasting 25 weeks (750 teaching hours) in the period October-April. The main subjects in these courses were to be: Icelandic, report writing, Danish, English, prison theory, law, psychology, adolescent psychology and education, criminology, the rights and obligations of civil servants, sociology, physical training, self-defence, hygiene, First Aid, drug abuse, ethics, practical body searches and searches of dwelling places, etc.

In short, these ambitious proposals were never put into practice; instead, they were cut down to a reduced form which then provided the framework of the college for more than a decade. As is mentioned above, the college opened in 1983, at the instigation of the Ministry of Justice, but only part of the task committee's proposals were adopted and the teaching was tacked on to the basic training course given by the Police College. This was done as a

temporary arrangement, partly because regulations were yet to be issued on the engagement and training of prison staff. The preliminary course, which was generally referred to as the "recruits' course" was cut down to four days (32 hours) of introduction to the basics of the penal system and the work of prison officers. The basic course itself then lasted 10-12 weeks, consisting of 350 hours of theoretical and practical training. Thus, when the college began its operations, only part of the teaching proposed by the task committee was actually on offer.

At that time, there were even fewer prison officers in Iceland than there are now. There were probably about 60 compared with about 85 today, so the rate of new recruitment was lower than it is now. During the first years, the work of the college consisted largely of taking 6-8 employed prison officers on three-month courses in which they went over selected topics that were considered appropriate for them, based on the proposals made in the task committee's 1982 report. The college's first premises consisted of a small classroom in the Reykjavík Police Station, and the practical side of the training – physical training, grips and holds, searches for drugs, First Aid, sports, custody on remand, etc. – was left completely up to the teachers in the Police College. However, this dependence on the Police College was soon reduced, with the exception of individual aspects of training, since there are fundamental differences in content and emphasis between the two types of training. The Prison Officers' College moved to the upper floor of an old prison (Hegningarhúsið) in Reykjavík, and courses were held when a minimum of six trainees were ready. This was the pattern for the following years. Trainee numbers ranged between the minimum of six and a high point of 15 in 1988-1989, when a new prison was opened in Kópavogur. From the outset, only the basic course was on offer (in addition to the recruits' course), generally starting at the beginning of October and ending with examinations before mid-December. In some years there were also courses on safety, courses for senior officers and courses for specific prisons.

In 1988 a provision was enacted in the Prisons and Imprisonment Act, No. 48/1988, stating that a regulation was to be issued on the engagement and training of prison staff, but in fact no such regulation was issued until 1996. Only when the Regulation No. 11 of 8 January 1996 was issued was the college's training programme divided into a basic course (12 weeks) and a further training course (10 weeks), separated by a period of practical training on the job under the guidance of experienced prison officers.

In 1991, the Minister of Justice had appointed a committee to make proposals on reforms and future strategy in the prison system. The committee submitted a detailed report in March 1992, which devoted considerable attention (on pages 45-49) to the development of the Prison Officers' College, proposing that it be expanded and upgraded to the same level as its counterparts in the other Nordic countries:

"Whatever measures are adopted to develop the National Prison Officers' College, it is an accepted fact that advances are taking place everywhere in the vocational training of professions such as prison officers, or at least in those countries with which Iceland has the closest contact, and it is not possible to overstate the importance of doing this to a high standard. A better-trained and better-educated workforce means a more effective and competent prison system; without deliberate steps to develop and upgrade training in the profession, the result is stagnation." (p. 49).

Summarising the proposals that the committee was putting to the Minister of Justice, the report contained the following statement regarding desirable changes:

"The committee proposes that the education of the staff of the prison system be upgraded greatly in accordance with the foregoing discussion. Provisions on this shall be issued in regulations. The National Prison Officers' College should be brought under the Prison and Probation Administration." (p. 77).

The minister accepted the committee's proposals in all their main aspects, and submitted to the cabinet an implementation schedule covering improvements to be made in the prison system, which was approved. An important part of the proposals involved ideas on

developing and improving the work of prison officers and taking steps to improve their education and training:

"It is important to make good use of human resources, even though this involves effort and additional education and training. The staff of the prisons play an important role in introducing new methods. Using the talents and abilities of the staff in an all-round manner leads to greater effectiveness and adds dimensions to the work of the prison system. It also contributes towards achievement of the goal of striking a balance between the corrective function of the prisons and the maintenance of internal security. The role of the prison officer is twofold, embracing both custody and treatment ... the work of prison warders in Iceland has undergone a change during the past decade ... The urge to punish has been reduced, while humanitarian viewpoints have gained greater weight, reflecting the policy laid down by the … guidelines … on human dignity in the prisons (European Prison Rules) … and the aims of the code of ethics of the Nordic Prison Officers´ Association. Communication between prison staff and prisoners is a key element in all prison work ... Operating a prison entails influencing people, not just counting prisoners and turning keys. No matter how many new prisons are built, if the well-being of the staff is not taken into consideration, the system will not work. In contemporary prison administration, it is striking, at least in Western countries, how much importance is being attached to personnel issues and ensuring that education, training and professional standards are high. Honesty, humanity and the ability to work with people in a positive way are qualities that are prioritised in new recruitment. It is vital that prison officers have a healthy moral sense and demonstrate human qualities, social competence and communicative skills in their work." (pp. 52-53).

The Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) made its first visit to Iceland in 1993 to examine the country's prisons and investigate their functions and those of other closed institutions. Both then and on its subsequent visits in 1998 and 2004, the committee emphasised strongly the importance of the education and training of prison staff, and in its replies to the committee's questions, the Icelandic government has stressed that these matters receive the same sort of treatment in Iceland as they do in the other Nordic countries. A large part of the teaching materials used in the theoretical and practical teaching in the college are designed to promote inter-personal communication and dynamic security, reduce tension and unnecessary violence, promote humanitarian considerations, ethics, respect for human values, respect for law and order and to prevent drug abuse in the prisons. This reflects the aims that supervisory committees and human rights organisations have emphasised in their dealings with prison authorities all over the world. Staff training aimed at combining security with human dignity is the basis of the work of the Prison Officer College, and makes for a more rational and better penal system.

On 8 March 1995, the Minister of Justice appointed a committee to prepare work on a new regulation on the engagement and training of prison staff. Such a regulation had been awaited since the enactment of the Prisons and Imprisonment Act in 1988, since the act included a provision stating that a regulation was to be issued setting out conditions for the recruitment and training of prison officers. This committee, which consisted of a permanent under-secretary in the Ministry of Justice, a representative of the Prison Officers' Association and the Director of the Prisons in the Metropolitan Area, submitted its proposals in the middle of 1995, and the Minister of Justice issued a new regulation on the recruitment and training of prison staff on 8 January 1996. This regulation stated that the theoretical training of prison officers was to be divided into a recruits' course, a 12-week basic course and a 10-week programme of further studies, in addition to practical training.

At the beginning of 2000 this regulation was revised and re-issued as the Regulation No. 304/2000, which is still in force at present, despite the fact that changes to the college are imminent. Under the regulation, the training period required for prison officers to acquire full professional rights and permanent appointment to their positions comes to nearly one year altogether. In other words, if an individual starts work as a temporary replacement worker in

the spring, this is counted as the beginning of his recruits' course. Then, in autumn of the same year, he begins a 12-week basic course which ends with written examinations, followed by some months of practical training in a prison under the guidance of a qualified officer. The following year he takes a 10-week programme of further studies which also ends with examinations, after passing which he qualifies for permanent appointment as a prison officer.

The revision of the regulation between 1996 and 2000 did not involve any additional expense or lengthening of the college training period; it consisted of a shift in emphasis, with a clearer definition of how officers were to be engaged and trained, the role of the college, what the syllabus is to include and how the functions of the college are to be administered. Obviously, by issuing the regulation, the Ministry of Justice committed itself to ensuring that prison staff training would take the form that it now does, i.e. with total theoretical studies in the Prison Officers' College amounting to 22-23 weeks, in addition to practical training under qualified guidance in the prisons. The change meant that a more natural procedure in engagement and training was adopted and the shortcomings of the original regulation were removed.

What, then, is expected? Why is so much importance attached to the training of prison officers? The key words in answers to these questions are professional development and human values. The work in prisons has changed, and the standards have been raised. The focus has been shifted from being *on guard* to *monitoring* and *communication*. One has only to look at the trend over the past decade or so to find discussion and formulation along these lines on every hand in documents, rules and reports. Specific examples of this include the Icelandic translation of the European Prison Rules (issued by the Ministry of Justice in 1989), the Nordic Prison Officers' Association's code of ethics (which was translated into Icelandic in 1989), the report of the committee on prisons (1992), the report on changes in the Litla-Hraun Prison (1995), the reports following visits to Iceland by the Committee on the Prevention of Torture, etc.

The European Prison Rules include the following statement: " In these rules, renewed emphasis has been placed on the precepts of human dignity, the commitment of prison administrations to humane and positive treatment, the importance of staff roles and effective modern management approaches." (p. 1).

The Nordic code of ethics, which was compiled jointly and approved by the Nordic prison officers' associations, includes this statement: "The job consists first and foremost in the custody and care of the prisoners, and members shall in the course of their work make a priority of humaneness in inter-personal relations. Thus, members must maintain their skills, seek to increase them and at all times have the goal of adding to their knowledge." (p. 8).

Supervision and services in the modern prison should integrate these elements on the basis of humanism, so enhancing both.

It is expected that the prisons be run on rational lines, and that the attitude and working atmosphere be characterised by stability, humanity and an understanding of the framework and nature of the work and the legal authorisations, penal legislation and ethical viewpoints that lie behind it. It is expected that attention be given to the cause and effect of the constraints that must be applied in prison and that natural and ethical boundaries should not be thoughtlessly overstepped. Prison officers and other prison staff are expected to be competent in their work, and to have received the appropriate training, discipline and equipment according to law.

Prison staff training is intended to be the cornerstone of the development of the profession. The standards expected of officers are constantly rising, and it is vital to introduce recognition and rewards into the job. Iceland tends to compare itself with the other Nordic countries. While a lot has been done in recent years as regards recognition of an improved working environment and the need to provide Icelandic prison staff with proper training, there is still a long way to go. For comparison, prison officers in Denmark and Norway undergo more than two years of training, theoretical and practical. In Finland and Sweden, further training programmes for senior staff, following on from the ordinary programmes in their prison officers' colleges, have been developed and large financial

resources are put into refresher training and extension courses. Close collaboration has been established between the Icelandic Prison Officers' College and its counterpart bodies elsewhere in the Nordic countries, which has been to the benefit of prison staff in Iceland, e.g. in the form of the availability of published materials in the field.

It is generally accepted that training and education are the key elements in the development of prison work. With regard to the changes that are unavoidable in the years ahead, it is clear that close attention will have to be given to these issues, with special focus on the training of recruits and refresher and extension courses. Even though this training is relatively expensive due to the necessity to hire replacement staff instead of the officers who are engaged on training courses, there is no alternative if the most important link in the chain, our human resources, are not to stagnate while the environment changes.

## IV. Study and teaching – the regulation on new recruitment and training

As has been outlined above, the scope of the teaching provided by the college has been laid down in a regulation that was first issued in 1996 and revised in 2000. From the outset, the syllabus was modelled on that of other Nordic prison officers' colleges. What distinguished the college in Iceland most from those elsewhere in the Nordic countries, apart from its smallness, was probably the methodology and execution of the teaching. There was a lack of facilities for practical training, a lack of permanently employed and professionally qualified teachers, a lack of money and a lack of interest on the part of the government to make any improvements in the situation. For example, during the early 1990s, the college was still located under the Ministry of Justice and not the Prison and Probation Administration (this did not change until 1996), and the PPA showed a striking lack of interest in its affairs. This changed when the college was brought under the control of the PPA: an employee was detailed to supervise it and a board was appointed to run the college and handle the intake of new recruits and the general training and retraining of prison warders.

At present, studies at the Prison Officers' College can be divided roughly into three categories: 1) General subjects such as Icelandic, English, computer competence, communicative skills, social affairs and ethics. 2) Aspects of the profession, such as prison theory and management, psychology, criminology, law (criminal law), drugs and addiction, human rights and various aspects of internal security. 3) Physical education and training, physical holds, grips and constraints, self-defence, First Aid, fire-fighting, etc. Ever since the first training course given by the Prison Officers' College, in collaboration with the Police College, there has been a considerable amount of collaboration between the two institutions. For example, trainers from the Police College have always been involved in the physical training of police warders, e.g. in the use of handcuffs, self-defence responses and the use of truncheons, to varying extents over the years.

Article 8 of the Regulation No. 304/2000 states that the Prison and Probation Administration, in consultation with the college board, is to decide on the subjects taught in prison staff training, and their aims. In outline, the arrangement is to be as follows:

### Criminology

Aim: That the students acquire a knowledge of penal systems and the evolution of prisons and prison systems. The focus should be on applied criminology, with a bearing on the execution of sentences, the aim being that the students acquire a knowledge of the principle theories in criminology.

### English

Aim: That the students be enabled to communicate with English-speaking prisoners held in the prisons.

### Prison theory

Aim: That the students acquire an insight into the operations and role of the prisons and the PPA, and also a knowledge of the laws and regulations applying to the work and professional obligations of prison officers.

Social assistance to prisoners

Aim: That the students acquire a knowledge of the social assistance available to prisoners, particularly after they have served their prison sentences.

Drugs in the prison

Aim: That the students acquire a knowledge of various types of drugs, their appearance and characteristic properties, the conduct of persons who use them, methods by which they are smuggled into prisons, how to treat prisoners who are under their influence and the treatment options available inside and outside the prisons.

Hygiene and First Aid

Aim: That the students acquire an understanding of the dangers of infection and how diseases are transmitted, and learn methods of avoiding infection, and also that they learn general health-enhancing measures connected with their work. Emphasis is also to be placed on training in general First Aid treatment.

Icelandic

Aim: The students acquire competence in the use of the language, orthography and written expression.

Physical training

Aim: To build up the students' stamina and physical strength. Special focus is to be placed on tackling various situations that arise in prison.

Law

Aim: That the students acquire a knowledge of the legal context of their work, the structure of the governmental system, the principles of administrative law, the rights of prisoners serving sentences and those held on remand, the fundamentals of criminal law, legal procedure and criminal procedure.

Human rights and ethics

Aim: That the students acquire a knowledge of the principles of human rights as applied to prisoners, the human-rights provisions of the Constitution, the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN Declaration on Human Rights, and the provisions of international institutions applying to prisoners.

Psychology

Aim: That the students acquire a knowledge of the role of psychologists in the prisons and methods of dealing with prisoners' psychological and psychiatric problems. Particular attention should be given to the danger of suicide among prisoners and responses to attempted suicides. Students are to be trained in personal communication with prisoners, and in coping with job-related stress.

Report writing

Aim: The students acquire competence in writing simple and clear reports, and be trained in interrogation techniques and the formal requirements applying to report writing.

Computer skills

Aim: That the students learn the basics of computer skills and word-processing.

Security

Aim: That the students acquire a knowledge of prison security and are able to carry out body searches of prisoners and searches of their cells, and be trained in the use of security equipment.

## V. Future structure – proposed collaboration with the National Police College

Work has been in progress in the past few years on planning new emphases in the training of prison staff as part of other changes in focus in the prison system in Iceland. At the beginning of May 2005, the Minister of Justice appointed a committee to examine the training of prison staff and submit proposals on a new training structure, and also to examine the age-spread of prison officers with a view to forecasting the new recruitment requirements. The committee consisted of representatives of the PPA, the Prison Officers' College, the Prison Officers' Association and the Ministry of Justice. It worked quickly, submitting its report in the middle of June 2005. Part of its brief was to review the regulation of 2000 on the engagement and training of prison staff and to submit proposals on the reduction of prison officers' retirement age so as to have the same retirement age apply to prison officers as to policemen, i.e. 65 instead of 67.

The aim of the changes proposed in the structure of the college was to bring the training of prison staff into line with the priorities identified by the PPA in its declaration of 12 October 2004, *Markmið í fangelsismálum og framtíðaruppbygging fangelsanna* ('Aims in the prison system and the future development of the prisons'.). This included the following comments:

"The aim of operating the prisons is to execute criminal sentences in accordance with their contents so that convicts serve the sentences passed by the courts. The Prison and Probation Administration regards the main aim of imprisonment as being to guarantee the security of the puplic under the law, while at the same time acting as a preventive and corrective measure.

The individual returns to society after serving his prison sentence, and it is therefore desirable from a social point of view to reduce the likelihood of recidivism. The Prison and Probation Administration regards it as important to set the aim of ensuring prisoners structured conditions in which to serve their sentences, with the emphasis on respect for the human individual and on providing an environment that encourages prisoners to tackle their problems. To achieve this, it is necessary to draw up an individual programme for each prisoner when he begins serving his sentence. This should include an assessment of the risks involved, his treatment requirements, his ability to study and/or work and the psychological, social and other support that he needs. Work should then proceed with the prisoner according to this programme during the term of his sentence, administered by qualified and competent staff, and the programme should be revised regularly. At the end of the individual's prison term, measures should be taken, in consultation with him, to ensure that he has a fixed abode, is in communication with his family and/or friends and knows how to seek help, so managing to find his way in society." (pp. 1-2).

The main emphasis in the committee's report was in the following section: "...Prison staff training is intended to be the cornerstone of the development of the profession. The standards expected of officers are constantly rising, and it is vital to introduce recognition and rewards into the job.

The committee stresses that attempts should be made to make the job of a prison officer attractive; one method of doing this would be to advertise the training course as a general training course and to highlight officers' security and surveillance function, on the one hand, but to give no less prominence to their role in caring for and communicating with prisoners. It is desirable to increase the proportion of women in the profession. It is generally accepted that training and education are the key elements in the development of prison work. With regard to the changes that are unavoidable in the years ahead, it is clear that close attention will have to be given to these issues, with special focus on the selection of recruits and staff retraining. Prison officers' work based on the integration of security and human

considerations should be the underlying consideration in the work of the Prison Officers' College and would promote a rational and improved penal system.

The committee's principal conclusions are as follows:

- In line with the new emphases in prison strategy, the following points should be given priority in the training of prison officers: Security, care, treatment, guidance, social assistance and communication with the prisoners. The committee's proposals regarding the subjects to be taught in staff training should be taken into consideration in preparing the college syllabus.
- In accordance with the considerations stated in the European Prison Rules, it is important to give particular attention to prison officers' wages, taking into account the fact that their jobs are among the most difficult and most complicated in the public service sector. Attractive wage terms are a prerequisite for being able to engage competent staff.
- Priority should be given to regular refresher courses for all members of staff in the prison system, with special emphasis on the contents and application of the European Prison Rules and other human rights conventions. Extension courses (further training) should also be established with the aim of increasing the competence and skills of staff in the fields of administration, supervision of prisoners, treatment and special responses.
- It is important that the Prison Officers' College should run its courses at the same time as the National Police College so as to make it possible to exploit the synergetic potential.
- Operations of the Prison Officers' College should be better focussed. It should run its programme every year, and advertise vacancies for trainees by application. It is desirable to increase the number of women applying to work as prison officers." (pp. 22-23)

**VI. What lies ahead?**

It is envisaged that the Prison Officers' College and the National Police College begin formal collaboration under a new structure in January 2007. Work is currently in progress on the integration of individual subjects, so that the programme in the Prison Officers' College will follow the time-frame of the Police College during its first semester, i.e. during the basic course which will last from early January to the middle of May next year. A comparison of the syllabus of the Prison Officers' College and that of the Police College shows that it would be possible to merge teaching for both prison officers and policemen in general subjects. Besides physical training, these would include Icelandic, English and computer skills and also selected parts of other subjects such as drug abuse, human rights and law.

It is assumed that about 10 new prison officer recruits, who have already begun work in the prisons, will enter this new training programme. As the basic course in the Police College is considerably longer than the 12 weeks that the basic course for prison staff has taken up to now, it is planned to lengthen the prison officers' basic course accordingly, but to shorten their further training course, since no appreciable overall lengthening of the training period is planned. A final decision on this point has yet to be taken.

The report by the committee on prison staff training and the age-spread of prison officers took particular account of Norwegian and Danish prison officers' colleges as models. While the Icelandic college is obviously not directly comparable in terms of size and scope, an attempt was nevertheless made to examine various aspects of the structure and methods of the training that could be of use in Iceland. These included additional emphasis on Problem

Based Learning, greater integration of theoretical and practical elements, collaboration with other educational institutions and closer connection with the realities of employment in the prison system.

The report also discussed a review of the provisions of the Regulation No. 304/2000 regarding the subjects taught in the college. This examined the provisions one by one: "The committee is of the opinion that the current provisions of Article 8 of the Regulation are inappropriate in many respects, and that to bind the subjects taught at the college in a regulation is not a natural approach. In the opinion of the committee, it would be better to phrase this in more general terms stating ... that a special syllabus is to be compiled for the college, which must be approved by the Prison and Probation Administration. It would be more natural if the college had more leeway in its choice of subjects, compared with the present situation, in order to take account of changing priorities and to prepare prison officers better in order to meet the additional requirements that are being made of them. In view of the current legal environment, the new priorities in the prison system and in society in general, the committee considers that there is a need to change the emphases in the teaching in such a way as to split the training course up into parts or elements that are designed to be of the maximum benefit to prison officers in their work ... divided into theoretical and practical studies. The committee proposes that, in terms of the present working environment of prison officers, the syllabus of the college be divided into the following parts:

***I. Criminology and the penal system***

The emphasis in this part should be on having the students acquire a knowledge of the Icelandic penal system and of punishments and their objectives. The development of the prison system ... and the role of the institutions of the penal system. The following subjects fall under this part of the course:

***Criminology 1 and 2:*** Criminology should be divided into two parts, the first of which being of a general nature ... The focus is deepened in the second part ... with an account of various studies concerning offenders and criminal behaviour, with particular emphasis on those countries with which Iceland tends generally to compare itself in this field.

***Remedies available in the traditional penal system, etc.:*** Here, an account would be given of the various remedies that are available both inside and outside the prison system ... Also, the teaching would cover the placement of prisoners outside the prisons.

***II. Prisoners' rights, foreign nationals and other matters of a legal nature***

It is important that students acquire a knowledge and understanding of the general principles of human rights and the general rights of prisoners ... a knowledge of the legal environment of prison officers, the structure of the executive system, the principles of administrative law, legal procedure, criminal law, the rights of prisoners serving sentences and of remand prisoners, criminal procedure and considerations relating to personal privacy. In view of changes in the composition of the prison population, it is important that students receive teaching in connection with legislation on foreign nationals.

***Law 1:*** A survey of the main principles of law, the sources of law, the judicial structure, the prison authorities and imprisonment, the Civil Servants' Act ... criminal procedure, the rules on remand custody ... administrative law, decisions on disciplinary measures ...

***Law 2:*** This would consist mainly of an examination of criminal law and criminal procedure as relating to the work of prison officers.

***Foreign nationals and the law:*** The aim would be to give students an insight into laws and regulations relating to foreign nationals, including the Schengen scheme ...

***III. Prison theory, professional ethics, conduct and communication with the prisoners***

The part of the course is designed to cover relations between prison staff and prisoners, training in conversation techniques ... response to suicide attempts or the likelihood of suicide attempts in the prisons, training in coping with traumas stress ...

***Professional ethics:*** The aim is to give students an insight into the many ethical problems and questions connected with work in the penal system ...

***Psychology 1 and 2:*** The aim is that the students should gain a knowledge of the role of ... psychologists in the prisons and of methods of dealing with prisoners' psychological problems ... and how to combat mental suffering ...

***Personal services and assistance to prisoners:*** The aim is to raise students' awareness of the professional services available to prisoners in the legal system, and the forms of social assistance to which they have access, particularly after they have served their sentences.

***Conversation techniques:*** The aim is to increase students' ability to reduce confrontations, quarrels, tendencies towards suicide attempts and other risks ... in accordance with the future vision of the PPA regarding a changed strategy on remedies available for prisoners ...

***Conduct and ethics:*** The emphasis in this subject is on professional and ethical responses ... on a discussion of the positive and negative aspects of the use of force ... differences in people's origins and nationality; prejudices, ostracism and victimisation, subcultures ...

***IV. General practical prison issues; security issues***

***English:*** In the light of the fact that the number of foreign prisoners has risen ... it is important to offer special training in English ...

***Icelandic – report-writing – word-processing:*** It is important to integrate teaching in Icelandic with job-related functions ... e.g. the use of computers, report-writing and the compilation and use of written materials ...

***Self-defence techniques::*** Students must be taught the fundamentals of personal safety in prisons ... It is important that they be trained in responses to staged situations of a type that can occur in the prisons ...

***V. Health science, pharmacology and practical preparations***

***First Aid:*** A detailed review of the basics of First Aid that may be of use to officers in their work.

***Drugs and pharmacology:*** The aim is that the students acquire a knowledge of various drugs ... the methods used to smuggle them into prisons; dealing with individuals who are under the influence of drugs. Also an examination of ... addictive drugs and the drugs that are in constant use in prisons ...

***Health science:*** General health-protection measures for employees and methods of avoiding infectious diseases such as hepatitis and HIV.

***Physical education:*** The emphasis is on physical fitness, with training and exercises, and on mental health ..." (pp. 11-15).

Regarding the future of the college, the report states that there is evidently a considerable difference between the training undergone by prison staff in Iceland and by those that were examined for comparative purposes. Basically, this difference lies in the length of the course and the degree of variety: abroad, there is more scope for various types of practical training in a number of prisons, in addition to a wider range of further training and refresher courses. Obviously the environment and facilities available in Iceland are not the same as in larger nations. On the other hand, the committee considers that by bringing the course periods in the Prison Officers' College closer into step with those of the Police College, it will be possible in the future to make more out of certain aspects and to make for greater variety, including more theoretical training and better integration with temporary replacement jobs during the summer vacation period, in which the trainees would go straight from the college into temporary work in the prisons. It would also be possible to lengthen the period of job-related training in Iceland during which the trainees work under the guidance of permanently appointed prison staff.

Regarding the desirable minimum number of students in the college at any given time, the committee regards 10 in each year-class as an appropriate figure. Too few students result in various problems from the point of view of teaching as regards variety, group work and other matters that would take too much space to describe in detail here.

For the future image of the college, it is important that proper attention be given to the retraining and further training of prison officers who are employed as such. This includes refresher courses, particularly focussing on the contents and application of the European Prison Rules and other materials regarding human rights, training in security issues, First Aid, drugs, communication skills and other issues of relevance to their work which need refreshing or revision in terms of rapid changes in the environment. Also, highly-motivated individuals should be given the opportunity of going on further training courses in administration or other specialised areas, such as personal supervision of prisoners, treatment of drug-abusers and other work-related issues.

Under the regulation issued in 2000, which is in force at present, trainee vacancies at the college may be advertised for application by persons who are not currently employed as prison officers; applications for places are to be made to the PPA. They are expected to undertake the first part of the training at their own expense. In practice during the past few years, however, trainee vacancies have not been advertised; instead, the college has been open to individuals who have been employed as temporary replacement officers. In this way it has been possible to see in advance whether they will meet the criteria required of officers; also, a trainee who has already worked on a temporary basis is less likely to abandon the course than someone who has no experience of the job. On the other hand, this arrangement can be criticised for tending to result in a lack of variety in the type of recruit. Open recruit access might be of more benefit to the operation of the college and also raise public awareness of the importance of the work done by prison staff in the service of the community. Open access by application would also do more to encourage competition for the places on offer, so making it possible to select recruits from a broader range than is now the case, and would also probably lead to more women aiming at the profession, as has been the case in the Police College.

The committee is of the opinion that synergetic potentials of various types could be exploited by holding the Prison Officers' College in collaboration with the Police College. The committee proposes that certain subjects in the syllabus of the Police College be taught at the Prison Officers' College: law (procedural law, criminal law and the status of foreign nationals under the law), drugs, security, etc. All the same, allowance must be made for a difference in emphasis in what is taught within each subject. A large part of the law courses taken by police recruits, for example, is devoted to specific statutes that have an important bearing on the work of the police but would be of little relevance to the work of prison officers. Nevertheless the introductory stages in these courses are likely to be similar. In the committee's opinion, it is not possible to compare the contents of the courses until a detailed syllabus for the Prison Officers' College has been prepared, with the number of teaching

hours and the materials for each subject specified. Certainly there is a potential to be exploited here, though there will always be some difference between the syllabus materials because the working environment of the two groups is different.

The committee's report states clearly that it would be to the advantage of the Prison Officers' College to hold its training sessions concurrently with those of the Police College, i.e. starting in January, with graduation in December. It is also seen as important that the Principal of the Prison Officers' College should have quarters in the Police College so as to monitor the training programme on a day-to-day basis.

## VI. Conclusion

A broad outline of the history and content of prison staff training in Iceland has been given above. As will have been clear to the reader, and as was mentioned at the beginning, this training takes a rather different form as compared with that given in larger countries, not least because of the smallness of the population and the tiny number of prison staff. This is among the reasons why a new strategy has been adopted, involving greater collaboration with the National Police College. The committee recommendations of 15 June 2005 focus on sharing facilities and teaching with the Police College in certain subjects, with admissions to the prison officers' training course being by open application at a later date, possibly in 2008. It is difficult to predict how things will develop, but I believe that if the college is to flourish, it will be necessary to take some radical measures to increase the possibility of maintaining continuous operations. A prerequisite for maintaining quality in education, in a professional field or otherwise, is a continuous annual programme, taught by competent teachers who catch students' interest and encourage them to give of their best.

**01.05.06 Guðmundur Gíslason.**

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