



# Report

## Staff Recruitment Workshop

**Gustav Tallving**

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**PROMOTING  
PROFESSIONAL  
PRISON  
PRACTICE**

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## Workshop report – Staff recruitment, Berlin 2019



### Opening

*Kirsten Hawlitschek, EuroPris*

Prison services across Europe face the challenge of attracting new staff. The image of the profession, recruitment, motivation and expectations are all important areas to address. The composition of teams also needs to be considered. For example, if the female staff has been proven to be a de-escalating factor to the prison climate. Staff composition is an important issue also from the perspective of the very diverse backgrounds of prisoners in terms of language and culture. There are so many questions to be asked in this field. And it is important to answer them.

### Overview of Council of Europe Guidelines regarding recruitment, selection, education, training and professional development of prison and probation staff

*Nicola Carr, University of Nottingham*

The guidelines on staff recruitment and training were adopted by the CDPC plenary meeting on 26 April 2019. There are different views from different countries about what would be an adequate level of entry qualification for basic prison staff. As a consequence, in processing the guidelines some people were worried about setting the standards too high – having a disturbing effect on the recruitment of staff. The editors found it important to keep a balance between depth and range in the guidelines to cover all 47 member states.

The human factor is crucial to induce change in offenders, hence recruitment and training becomes very important. Training of prison officers range from 240 hours up to two years in Europe. This makes it difficult to recommend a certain length of training. The differences in

whether prison and probation services are integrated or not is one factor that affects training. Criteria for selection of staff are also included in the guidelines stating that high school education (EQF level 4) should be a requirement for basic staff. For more qualified tasks (psychologists etc.) university degree should be required (EQF level 6). For advertising both the perception of the job as well as general knowledge about prisons are important. In addition to education requirements, assessment and validation of learning objectives should be conducted before somebody is accepted for work. This needs to be combined with practice inside prison.

Induction training is often regulated, professional development is not. Mentoring schemes might be a good way to support professional development. Progression in the professional position is important for job satisfaction, but also to make knowledge transferrable to other sectors.

### Q&A

The organization of on-site visits for newly applying staff was discussed. This will increase the understanding of the job before contracting. However, perception of the job is difficult to present in a realistic way, when media only reports about bad situations in prisons.

One question was whether the guideline makes any recommendation on gender balance rates in prison services. The answer is no, but several countries have a 40 % women/60 % men as a favored balance. One example from Denmark showed that when marketing the job of a prison transport officer with fast cars and blue lights, this was attracting men to a higher degree than women.

### Round table discussion – Why do people want to work in prison?

One aspect that seems important is the uniform and the higher purpose that it represents. Corrections also attract people who want to make a difference, valuing human values and keeping relation with someone. Stability of monthly wearing and early pension is attractive in some countries.

Families working in prisons for generations are seen in a number of countries. In Ireland family links are very strong. Most prisons are situated in rural areas and prisons provide a safe and well paid job. 40 % of the employees have followed the footsteps of their fathers (primarily male staff) choosing to work in prison. Among the older staff alcoholism and cynicism is quite frequent.

### Branding for recruitment

*Ulrika Ohlson, Swedish Prison and Probation Service (SPPS)*

Ulrika presented the Swedish integrated branding and recruiting strategy. It consists of several components departing from the slogan “We break the vicious circle”. It is based on the knowledge that millennials look for a job with a purpose, which make them fit for correctional services. However, the image and knowledge about the prison and probation service was limited some years ago. The strategy was designed to transform the image of the SPPS and the word *Change* has been a core value communicated through all campaigns. For example, SPPS is doing advertising in the metro in Stockholm with the message: “Do you have the ability to make other people change their lives?” These ads were also used for the national summer

job campaign. Posters were sent to universities to show students that a summer job is a good way to start their career the SPPS.

The SPPS website has 4-5 million annual visits. On the website photos and images are showing SPPS staff in a consistent manner but at the same time displaying the diversity of jobs and people within the service. Four blogs are running on different topics, written by SPPS staff and partners outside the agency. This creates professional pride within SPPS staff.

Social media are used extensively, including sponsored advertisement. Social media draws traffic to the website. Public events are important and Ulrika showed examples from one event in Stockholm central station and the SPPS' participation in the Pride parade and on the Pride venue. In events and advertising a FAQ concept called "123 questions" is being used. It consists of answers to questions that have been raised on the SPPS website, for example "Is there wi-fi in prison?".

A trailer containing a display area, a conference area and a replica of a prison cell is used to meet and greet potential recruits in the local setting, on town squares, university campuses etc. In the trailer you can get a round trip in prison using Virtual Reality. The prison staff in the trailer comes from local prisons and attracts the attention of local media.

Finally, a book has been published about the history of the SPPS and the Swedish approach to offenders. The book is an anthology and is used for new staff as well as to increase knowledge among SPPS stakeholders.

## Q&A

How do you control the content of the blogs? The blogs are edited by the SPPS communications department.

In public spaces, were there ever situations where ex-prisoners or others were hostile to SPPS staff? According to Ulrika several ex-prisoners have approached the campaign staff, but with interest and in a positive manner. Some have wanted to verify that what is being displayed is actually realistic, and they think it is.

What challenges have you been facing during this campaign? The most obvious challenge has been internal criticism about spending money on the trailer (10 000 Euro/month incl. driver) and the central station campaign. These voices have now changed into cheers.

Was this strategy primarily a HR or Communications matter? There was an integrated approach involving HR and Coms, but Coms was pushing it.

What about social media, how do you control the staffs' posts on for example Facebook? We have guidelines for social media, apart from that the approach is quite liberal.

You mentioned a campaign to attract summer workers. Do these get any training before entering the prison? Yes, they get an induction, and then they are mixed with more experienced staff.

In your campaign prison and probation clients are not visible? Did you use clients in the trailer for example? No clients are being exposed in the campaign, except from client quotes used in advertising.

## Making recruitment and training of prison officers more attractive – examples from France

*Claudine Beauchemin, National Prison Administration and Cédric Le Bosse, ENAP*

Working in prison in a multidisciplinary profession. The French National Correctional Administration Academy (ENAP) trains all 11 different categories of staff in prison. 7 out of 10 students are to be prison officers. There are several ways into the prison service career and when it comes to recruits suitable as prison officers, competition is hard between governmental agencies (customs, police, army etc.). Therefore, a year ago the Penitentiary Occupation Promotion Unit was installed. The purpose is to define and implement a career promotion approach in the prison service. One of the first activities launched was a one-week practical course at ENAP for high school students interested in the prison professions.

Training for prison officers has been shortened from 8 to 6 month resulting in 3-4 training annual rounds of new prison officers with 600 trainees each. They have accommodation and food for free in the ENAP campus. They have a trainee salary of 1450 Euros. Cultural and leisure activities are regularly arranged on the campus.

Staff already employed have a right to five days of training minimum per year. Sometimes managers have problems to release them for training because of lack of staff and overcrowding.

A campaign that attracted lots of attention was when ENAP invited a you-tuber to reflect on how it is to be a prison officer and to be trained as an officer. The use of a you-tuber was to attract interest of young people.

### Q&A

The video (with the you-tuber) were not showing much of social interaction with prisoners. It was more like an action movie. Do you show the “normal” parts of the work as well? Yes, a few shorter sequences is on the inter-personal part. But it can be further developed.

## Competences and requirements in prison staff recruiting

*Peter Schulte, Training Centre for Correctional Staff in Lower Saxony*

In Lower Saxony the selection procedure starts and finishes in the recruiting prison; in between a number of tests take place: spelling test, fitness test, intelligence test, testing personal and social competences with roleplays and situation analysis. Recruits are between 20-40 years of age and have at least a high school degree.

One challenge is to make the job attractive. The expectations on social skills are not always met. Another issue is the spelling test, it sometimes exclude candidates that have other skills.

To improve the recruitment process there is a possibility to introduce online testing of writing skills as a first selection criteria. The Training Centre is represented at work fairs and they are also looking into the possibilities to make promotional films. It is also important to invest more in social skills

### Q&A

Why do you have an upper age limit when recruiting? Most countries have restrictions in the maximum age. It is partly related to not being allowed to run night shifts after age of 50 but



also to building up pension rights and covering the costs for training by working for a sufficient number of years.

Is a spelling check the best way nowadays and what about prison staff with a foreign background – is there a way around the spelling check for them? It is important to be able to write reports etc. and we do not make exceptions based on the background.

Can foreigners work in Lower Saxony prisons? Yes, for EU nationals that is possible.

Is advertisement being made all over Germany or in one *Bundesland* only? Actually, it is even more small scaled – they put up a vacancy advertisement in Oldenburg prison and then you can only apply in Oldenburg prison.

## Panel discussion – What is the job offer in the prison service?

### What are the reasons for retention of prison staff?

There is certainly a need for continuous training and a program for professional development. In Sweden all employees have a professional development plan which is being revised annually.

In France there is a 3 month trial period. After the first internship recruits may leave the training. After that they are obliged to complete the training and continue working for five years. The training is a big investment for the French state. For continuous training it is sometimes hard for French managers to let staff go for training. Anyhow, continuous training is very important for retention. As is career possibilities. Being a civil servant in France provide such possibilities.

In Germany they see that after three years the first enthusiasm goes down and then there needs to be done some action to keep up the commitment.

Sweden thinks that the new generation will not be working so many years anymore in one place. Sweden has a contract with the armed forces and Germany similar, so they can switch from one Service to the other.

Another job requires another grade or diploma? In Germany there are three career paths. All three depends on the diploma. Prison officers have a high school degree, graduates work with more complex tasks in prison, and managers have a university degree or from applied sciences. Prison officers therefore cannot move upwards becoming managers, unless they achieve a new degree.

### What other benefits do you think can motivate, other than increased paycheck and change of career?

The image of the service is important, to make the job attractive, giving staff the opportunity to be creative within their job; you need to stimulate good staff with innovations and modernization programmes. Experiments, pilots and imported foreign concepts attract innovative staff.

There is a link between demonizing criminal offenders and the public's twisted perception of prison services. Prison services need to consider in their external communication and work on changing both the image of perpetrators and the image of the prison profession.

### What are the criteria for a good prison to work in?

A key rule is that prisons that are popular among inmates are often popular for staff as well. Prisons with certain offers, like vocational training or paid work for prisoners, tend to attract motivated prisoners. This creates a good climate, of course leaving other prisons in a relatively worse situation.

### **What is the procedure for staff who wants to work in another prison?**

In Sweden it is an open national application procedure; in Germany the current prison can decide not to let the staff go to work in another prison.

### **Integration of security and rehabilitation tasks makes profession more attractive?**

A pilot project in France brought positive experiences, making the job more attractive. What they did was that they implemented the Spanish concept *Respect* (promoting a more rehabilitative approach among prison staff) in a few prisons, with positive results on job satisfaction.

Security and rehabilitation are not singularities in modern corrections. They go together to create a good prison climate and a successful release process.

## **Dutch challenges in strategic HR management**

*Robert Josten, DJI*

Strategic human resource management needs support from the top management, realising the fact that in prison services, it all begins with staff. DJI has made a three year journey including change management, strategic staff planning and labour market analysis. Leadership, organisation and processes have also been reviewed and adapted to increase attractiveness and modernize the agency's human resource management.

In the 1980's the DJI made a clearer distinction between prison guards and prison officers, a divide that is still applied. Guards do reception tasks, security searches and handle incidents. Officers are acting as mentors to inmates, they do logistics and planning and handle general security. They also focus on reintegration and resocialization for the period when the prisoner is leaving detention: this requires different staff with a different focus. Prison officers also do most of the reporting tasks, making literacy requirements less important to the prison guards.

DJI operate a MBO model matching tasks to education levels. The big problem in DJI was that training wasn't matched to these MBO levels. This problem was solved making a job qualification inventory containing job descriptions, a skills record and matching EQF levels.

In the coming four years DJI will have 4400 vacancies to fill. A huge undertaking but also a huge opportunity to renew and modernize the agency.

### **Q&A**

How do you motivate the divide between guards and officers? The level of complexity is different for these roles and also the mental state in terms of rehabilitation, communication skills etc.

Do guards and officers have different salaries? Yes, officers are better paid, but guards earn well because of night shifts etc.



How will you guarantee the level 4 diploma (stated in the CoE guidelines but also a DJI standard for prison guards)? The 30% staff that don't have a diploma will not be forced to get one. Turnover will handle this, we need to wait it out.

You mention that your selection process is centralised. How does it work? Firstly recruits are being tested in local facilities by a mobile team from the central administration. Then there is a trainee period working in a selected team.

It has been said that DJI is outsourcing prison services. To what extent is that true? 500 prison guards are currently missing. These are hired by private security companies. It works well and some of them have applied for work in the service.

Do you have the flexibility to refer a candidate to another job if necessary? Yes, the most common case is that a recruit is not qualified for being a prison officer, he/she can then apply to become a guard instead.

## Reducing staff turnover and sickness leave

*Kay Gau, Stralsund Prison*

In Stralsund prison staff turnover and sickness leave are the lowest in the *Bundesland* of Mecklenburg Western Pomerania. There is scientific evidence for the relation between employee absenteeism, health and job satisfaction. Factors of importance for job satisfaction might be skills variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback.

Stralsund prison conducted a job satisfaction survey related to sick days, conflicting tasks etc. The duration and frequency of sickness do not seem to depend on career paths in this population. On an individual level sickness rates are steady over time.

Stralsund prison has the lowest sick leave: it is a small prison, everybody knows each other, there is good leadership with good HR capabilities. In this context prison officers can achieve higher value tasks. The highest sickness rate can be found in the best equipped facility with lowest amount of inmates. This brings you to the question of whether one should talk about burn-out or bore-out.

## Boosting the long-timers

*Eliane Zimmermann, Centre of Expertise in Prison and Probation*

The Swiss Centre of Expertise in Prison and Probation offer basic training, further training and courses for all Swiss cantons. The centre is also elaborating standards for prisons around Switzerland.

Swiss prisons are generally small units with a low turnover and small career opportunities. This urged for a continuous training effort of some kind and an idea of a 50+ booster course was born. The 50+ age reference was soon abolished and they chose to focus on 20+, the staff with more than 20 years in service.

The one week programme is interactive and consist of not only classroom sessions but outdoor activities and hiking. The participants stay in the training centre for the whole week making them more attached and integrated. Some of the modules are personal status reports

(life time line), mapping of changes in the profession/organisation and analysing their role in their team. The participants also get to meet their younger colleagues discussing their expectations. A job interview is also conducted to make them practice to point out their own strengths and values.

The main problems that the staff identified were the relationship between employees and superiors; lack of communication, support and training; lack of appreciation; monotonous work and to not being involved in decision making.

## World Café session

Participants were asked to discuss on the topics of attracting, recruiting and keeping staff.

One main conclusion was that across Europe there is a need to work on the image of corrections. In some countries it is more or less a stigma to be working in prisons. Marketing measures can be used to both increase awareness about the profession but also to improve the impression of prisons in general.

Media coverage is important, especially positive news. In France they made a collaboration with a foundation creating a series for national television. It was followed by an increased interest in working in prisons.

In terms of recruitment there are different strategies in use. To increase the applicant population to get a larger sample is one way to get more recruits. Other strategies are more directed towards specific groups, such as army veterans or students.

To the public it is important to explain that prisons are working places as any other work place, with staff, leadership, organisation etc. Corrections should not be competing with police or other state agencies. Prison work is a proper profession. Someone mentioned it: ¼ Police officer, ¼ teacher, ¼ nurse and ¼ social worker. This is a complex and important profession and it is not for everyone!

To make the job attractive over time it needs to be clarified that specialisation is possible. Being a prison officer is not just one job. Along the journey of the client a large number of specialised skills and sets of knowledge will be needed. This provide a good ground for specialisation and professional development.

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