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COLÁISTE Náisúnta na hÉireann

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**THE EVOLUTION OF THE IRISH PRISION SERVICE – AN ANALYSIS OF
IT'S MANAGEMENT STRATEGY IN LIGHT OF BECOMING AN
INDEPENDENT EXECUTIVE AGENCY.**

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE

BACHELOR OF BUSINESS IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

BY

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I hereby declare that this project is entirely my own work, that is has not been submitted as an exercise for a diploma or degree in any other college or university.

Signed Wm D. King

Abstract

In this dissertation project, I detail and document the evolution of the Irish Prison Service, from its origins within the English penitentiary system of the Victorian period, to the present Irish Prison Service. The aim of this dissertation project is to gain an understanding of the management structure of the Irish Prison Service, whilst also gaining insight into its corporate aims and objectives. This dissertation project also explores some of the criticism, which has fallen at the feet of the Irish Prison Service in recent years. These issues are explored, as they are key issues, which are at the core of the management strategy and organisational objectives of the Irish Prison Service. This dissertation project then explores the transition, which will establish the Irish Prisons Service as an Independent Executive Agency. This research project examines the rationale for such a transition, the implications of such a change and how any difficulties with the transition may be abated. This dissertation project endeavours to analyse the significance of the Irish Prison Service becoming an independent executive agency and what implications this has for the management of the service. This project is based on empirical evidence and information obtained through an interview, with an employee within the Irish Prison Service. My interview is documented in this project. This project concludes with a number of recommendations based on research findings.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Chapter 1 – The Evolution of the Irish Prison Service

A Short History

Chapter 2 – The Irish Prison Service Today

Structure, Corporate Aims and Management Strategy

Recent Criticism of the Irish Prison Service

Chapter 3 – Transition to an Independent Agency

Undergoing Change and Managing Human Resources

Chapter 4 – An Interview

An Inside Perspective

Interview with Mr. John Smith

Conclusions / Recommendations

Selected Bibliography

Web Sites

Appendix 1 - Ireland's Prisons

Appendix 2 - Irish Prison Service Organisational Chart

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**The Evolution of the Irish Prison Service –
An Analysis of its Management Strategy in Light of Becoming an Independent
Executive Agency.**

Introduction

In this dissertation I will explore the foundation of Ireland's Prison Service, detailing its evolution as one of this country's oldest public institutions. I will examine its present structure, corporate aims, strategies and objectives. I will outline the reasons for the Irish Prison Service becoming an independent executive agency. This dissertation will, in addition, analyse the significance of the Irish Prison Service becoming an independent executive agency and what implications this has for the management of the service.

Chapter 1

In this chapter, I give a brief history of the Irish Prison Service, tracing the evolution of early forms punishment and retribution into the modern sanction of imprisonment. This chapter details the origins of the Irish Prison Service, its formation and continuation to present day.

Chapter 2

In this chapter, I describe and detail the structure of the Irish Prison Service and the legislative framework in which it operates. I will also explain and discuss the mission statement, corporate aims and management strategy of the service. In addition, this chapter details some of the criticisms, which have been voiced recently regarding issues of overcrowding and poor conditions within the prisons and drug misuse amongst prisoners.

Chapter 3

This chapter details the reasons for the Irish Prison Service becoming an independent executive agency. It examines the significance and implications of such a transition. This chapter examines the differences between the new Independent Prison Agency and the old Prison Service, which functioned as part of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Chapter 4

In this chapter I will give an account of an interview, conducted with Mr. John Smith, an employee within the Irish Prison Service. The rationale for conducting this interview was to gain a greater understanding of the implications to the Prison Service becoming an independent executive agency. In addition, such an interview offers an inside perspective into the changes taking place within the Prison Service.

Conclusions / Recommendations

The conclusions and recommendations are based on my research findings. A number of key issues are identified, which are pertinent to the smooth transition into an independent agency.

Chapter 1

The Evolution of the Irish Prison Service –

A Short History

In this chapter I will document the evolution of the Irish Prison Service. Beginning with its earliest origins to its gradual development into its present structure.

"The mood and temper of the public in regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the most unfailing tests of the civilization of any country."

Winston Churchill – 1910

(www.thehiddenworld.com/quotes_about_prison.html)

In early societies punishment for a crime was carried out by the individual wronged or by that individual's kin, clan or tribe. These punishments were typically extreme, characteristically cruel and by modern standards out of proportion to the crime committed. Torture and capital punishment were commonplace and often publicly viewed. These early forms of punishment evolved largely from old beliefs in retribution, in many circumstances the philosophy of – an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth – was the methodology of carrying out a punishment. With the gradual development of society and the centralization of governments, punitive rights and retribution were taken from the offended party and vested in the state.

In the western world imprisonment became a common punishment for excluding those who had broken the law from society. Since the latter half of the nineteenth century there has been an increasing use of imprisonment as a sanction.

Early penitentiaries were dark, overcrowded and unsanitary. Prisoners were herded together randomly, with no division of men and women, young and old, sane and insane. Victorian prisons were depressingly dismal places with little communication between prisoners. Offenders were supposed to reflect on their crimes in solitary confinement, even daily exercise was taken in absolute silence. Many such Victorian prisons are still in use and are identified by their arrangement of a refractory, a central outlook tower, with wings spreading from it housing prisoners.

The Irish Prison Service originates from the English penitentiary system used during the Victorian Period, which was based on the concept of solitary cells for each prisoner. The Irish Prison Service is one of the oldest public institutions in the country. Its formation can be traced back to 1854 and the establishment of a three-man board, known as the Convict Prison Board who was entrusted with the management of convict prisons in Ireland. The Board's first director and chairman was Sir Walter Crofton and the other two members were Captain Knight and Sir John Lentaigne (www.irishprisons.ie/history.asp). Legislation regarding Irish prisons dates back to the General Prisons Act of 1877 and the Prison Rules of 1947.

The first prisons to be managed by Sir Walton Crofton, Captain Knight and Sir John Lentaigne were Mountjoy Prison (opened in 1850), Spike Island (1847) and Smithfield in Dublin. Prior to the formation of the Convict Prisons Board, prisons in Ireland comprised of county jails, debtor prisons, bridewells and convict prisons (www.irishprisons.ie/history.asp). The burden of maintaining these prisons was great and resulted in immense pressure on central government. This inevitably led to them [the central government] taking on the responsibility of prison administration.

In addition, towards the end of the 19th century marked the emergence of the penal reform pressure group, led by powerful individuals, such as, John Howard and Elizabeth Fry. This pressure group provided the necessary catalysis to provoke change. This change resulted in the centralisation of the administration of prisons in Ireland in 1877 (www.irishprisons.ie/history.asp).

Under the General Prisons Act 1877, the creation of the General Prisons Board marked a desire by the then government to amalgamate under a single statutory board powers that previously were distributed among the Convict Prison Board, an Inspector of local prisons and innumerable local authorities and grand juries. The new General Prisons Board assumed the responsibility for 38 local county prisons, 96 bridewells and four convict prisons (www.irishprisons.ie/history.asp). The General Prisons Board was later dissolved in 1928 under the Transfer of Functions Order (1928); this resulted in the Department of Justice undertaking the functions of the eight prisons and one borstal institution operating in Ireland at the time.

The prisoner population fluctuated over the years and contracted in response to the changing Irish demography, in particular, reflecting low birth rates, high emigration and low levels of reported crime. Due to these factors prisons at Galway, Tralee, Drogheda, Wexford and Kilkenny were closed. In 1956, the Borstal Institution in Clonmel, Co. Tipperary was also closed; its young offenders were transferred to St. Patrick's Institution in Dublin. By the end of 1956 the only functional prisons in use in Ireland were Mountjoy, St. Patrick's Institution, Port Laois and Limerick.

By the late 1960's, emigration began to decline and subsequently the prisoner population in Irish prisons began to steadily increase. According to the Irish Prison Service, in 1960 the daily average number of prisoners in custody was 461, in comparison by 1970 this has increased to 750, within another ten years this had increased to 1,215 (www.irishprisons.ie/history.asp).

Over this period reported crime rates had increased dramatically, on average during the 1960's there were less than 20,000 recorded indictable offences committed each year, however, the average by 1983 was over 100,000 (www.irishprisons.ie/history.asp). Greater pressures were added to the Irish Prison Service at that time due to the outbreak of conflict in Northern Ireland. This brought about the need to make special provision for subversive prisoners. In 1985, the Irish Prison Service added to its estate a new prison, Wheatfield Prison located in Dublin. Wheatfield Prison was Ireland's first purpose-built prison since Mountjoy Prison opened its door in 1850.

Chapter 2

The Irish Prison Service Today – Structure, Corporate Aims and Management Strategy

In this chapter, I will examine the present structure of the Irish Prison Service, its corporate aims and its management strategy. I will detail the legislative framework in which the Prison Service operates, whilst also examining its organisational objectives. I will also highlight some of the recent criticism, which has been voiced regarding the prison service, in particular, overcrowding and poor conditions within the prisons and drug misuse among prisoners.

A nation's prison system is a cultural product, shaped by prevailing social, political, and moral values and attitudes. How a nation defines crime and re-acts to it and, specifically, how it punishes or fails to punish criminals is a question of central importance, which reflects the core values of a society and is definitive of its essential character (O'Mahony, 1998, p.49).

The primary function of the Irish Prison Service is to provide a safe place for the confinement of those who have committed crimes and have been sanctioned lawful detention as their punishment. The Irish Prison Service today is a large organisation of over 3400 staff, with an annual budget exceeding 300 million Euro, operating 16 various prisons / places of detention (see appendix 1), with an average of 3,200 people in custody at any one time (www.irishprisons.ie).

The Irish Prison Service is presently an organisation, which functions under the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform; however, pending the enactment of legislation it is soon to become an independent executive agency (this will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3).

Traditionally, prison systems have been static and hierarchical organisations, where orders have come from above; the Irish Prison Service follows this tradition. The Irish Prison Service is built on a hierarchical structure, consisting of a number of organisational layers (see Appendix 2 for Irish Prison Service Organisational Chart). There are also a number of departments within the Irish Prison Service, such as, Finance, Human Resources, Healthcare, Operations, Regimes, Estates and Corporate Affairs.

These departments are under the direction of the Director General, who in turn reports to the Secretary General of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Prisons Authority Interim Board. Finally the Secretary General and the Prisons Authority Interim Board report to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The Irish Prison Service operates within a statutory framework consisting of (i) the Prisons Acts, (ii) relevant provisions in other statutes such as the Criminal Justice Act 1960, the Criminal Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1997 and the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Act 1995 and 1997; and (iii) the Rules for the Government of Prisons 1947 (Irish Prison Service, Strategy Statement, 2001-03, p.8).

In addition to the statutory framework, which details how the Irish Prison Service is to operate and function, the Prison Service must also take into account the United Nations (UN) and European Conventions on Human Rights, UN Standard Minimum Rules and other such international legislation.

The mission statement of the Prison Service indicates the core values, which guide and direct the delivery of the organisation's services –

The Mission of the Irish Prison Service is to provide safe, secure and humane custody for people who are sent to prison. The Service is committed to managing custodial sentences in a way which encourages and supports prisoners in their endeavouring to live law abiding and purposeful lives as valued members of society (www.irishprisons.ie).

According to the Prisons Authority Interim Board (Irish Prison Service, Strategy Statement, 2001-03), the Irish Prison Service recognises its obligation to serve the community with full respect for the human rights and dignity of every individual, both in custody and within the wider community. In addition, as stated in the mission statement, the Prison Service also recognises its obligation and role in aiding with prisoners leading law-abiding lives upon release. The Prison Service believes in making available to each prisoner conditions and services appropriate to their well-being and personal development (Irish Prison Service, Strategy Statement, 2001-03). The Prison Service also endeavours to help prisoners, where possible and appropriate, to maintain relationships with their families and thus minimising the detrimental effects of imprisonment.

The Prisons Authority Interim Board states, as an organisation the Irish Prison Service values the resources available to it. In particular, all staff working in the prison system, who are 'the most important asset in fulfilling the Service's mission' (Irish Prison Service,

Strategy Statement, 2001-03, p.9). According to its strategy statement (2001-03), the Prison Service commits itself to being courteous and fair in all its dealings, and accepts that it is accountable for its actions. The Prison Service endeavours to demonstrate this accountability in public as stated in its Strategy Statement (2001-03).

The corporate aims of the Irish Prison Service which underpin the organisational objectives and strategies for the service are –

- To keep in safe custody persons committed by the courts and maintain a level of security appropriate to their needs
- To treat those in custody with care, justice, dignity and respect
- To provide and operate within budget and policy guidelines laid down by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law reform an efficient, effective and humane prison system
- To maintain good order and control throughout the prison system
- To make available to those in custody the conditions and services appropriate to their physical and mental well-being
- To help prisoners develop greater sense of personal responsibility to themselves, their families and the community and to help them prepare for release
- To develop appropriate partnerships with agencies in the wider community
- To deliver a quality service which is both expert and professional.

(Irish Prison Service Strategy Statement, 2001-03, p.9)

These aims and objectives are the benchmark, which the Irish Prison Service follows for the successful delivery of its services. The management strategy employed within the Irish Prison Service follows a personnel management tradition. The current structure of the Irish Prison Service limits the flexibility of the organisation; subsequently decisions, action and change are often slow to come into effect. The personnel management approach is generally reactive rather than proactive. The correct procedures and chain of authority must be followed. Much of this is a result of the legal responsibilities, which the Prison Service is bound to within national and international legislation.

The day-to-day management of the Irish Prison Service is the responsibility of the Director General. The Director General manages the Prison Service in accordance with the guidelines and directives within legislation and by those asserted by the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform and the Prison Authority Interim Board. The Prison Service is an unionised workplace, where collective bargaining is used to agree on work related issues and the outcome is the same for everybody. The Irish Prison Service is a complex organisation, much tension can exist between management and staff, especially when clear and decisive management is lacking. Over recent years there has been much tension between Prison Officers and the management of the Irish Prison Service, particularly in relation to over-time pay.

Recent Criticism of the Irish Prison Service

"Building more prisons to address crime, is like building more graveyards to address a fatal disease" – Robert Gangi (www.thehiddenworld.com/about_prisons.html).

In recent years the Irish Prison Service and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform have received much criticism regarding a number of key issues, in particular, over-crowding and poor conditions within the prisons, prevalent drug misuse and overuse of imprisonment as a sanction.

According to O'Mahony (2000) Limerick, Cork, Sr. Patrick's and Mountjoy Prison accommodate the vast majority of prisoners passing through the system; in addition, these prisons have the poorest living conditions. Ireland's prison population has grown rapidly over the last few decades. This increase has had a severe effect in Ireland's penal institutions, mainly overcrowding and unplanned early release due to lack of space. This increase of unplanned early release due to imprisonment is now commonly referred to as the *revolving door syndrome*.

Mountjoy opened in the country's capital in 1850 as a penitentiary. It was initially designed for single cell occupancy. Mountjoy prison was intended to house only 440 prisoners. In 1999, the same accommodation in Mountjoy has on occasion held over 800 prisoners and regularly houses 750 (O'Mahony, 2000, p.12). Substantial endeavours have been made in combating the overcrowding and the *revolving door syndrome*, but these effects have had little effect.

It may be argued that there is an overuse of imprisonment as a sanction and a lack of non-custodial options. None-the-less, work continues apace to update, modernise and expand Ireland's prison estate. Over the past 5 years the Irish Prison Service has commissioned three new prisons – the Dochas Centre a purpose built women's prison, Clover Hill remand prison and the midlands prison a 'state of the art' facility for male prisoners, with a strong emphasis on education and retraining (www.irishprisons.ie).

Drug misuse is currently a problem among prisoners within the Irish prison system. The larger Dublin prisons in particular, have a serious problem with Heroin abuse among prisoners. The majority of prisoners in Mountjoy have had a Heroin addiction, most commonly involving intravenous use (O'Mahony, 2000). Mountjoy is said to be permeated by a hard drug culture, where many prisoners continue to use Heroin in prison.

These high levels of intravenous drug use also create other problems, the widespread predominance of disease, most notably hepatitis. The Training Unit, which is part of the Mountjoy complex, is designated a drug free prison. There the prisoners must agree to remain drug free and are habitually subjected to drug testing.

These issues will be explored further in chapter 4 and in the conclusions/recommendations.

Chapter 3

Transition to an Independent Executive Agency – Undergoing Change and Managing Human Resources

This chapter explores the transition of the Irish Prison Service into an Independent Executive Agency. In this chapter I will give the reasons why the Prison Service is undergoing this change and what outcomes are expected as a result.

In the changing world of today, the need for highly effective management of prisons and other related institutions has never been greater. The effective management of prisons, has been linked, both in theory and practice, to sustained economic development and is a major vehicle through which to develop modern prison management systems and principals. Governments and prison services around the world are undergoing processes of renewal and reform that pose new challenges and opportunities in prison management (www.galilcol.ac.il/Prison.htm).

In 1996, the Irish Government approved the establishment of an Independent Prisons Agency. A small expert group was formed consisting of people outside, as well as, within the Public Service to work out the detailed aspects of the proposed new prison administration. This group published its report in 1997 – *Towards an Independent Prisons Agency*.

According to the expert group, the rationale for the establishment of the Prison Agency is that significant change and development is needed within the prison service and this can be best achieved more effectively and efficiently through an independent agency (Towards an Independent Prisons Agency, 1997).

The role of the agency is to manage the Prison Service efficiently and humanely within the legislative framework as laid down by the Oireachtas and the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The decision to 'establish the prison service as an independent agency has been generally welcomed as a way of freeing the service from undue political interference and setting out a clear direction for the service' (Vaughan, 2001, p.59).

The forthcoming Prison Service Bill will provide for the transfer of power from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to the new Independent Prison Agency. The establishment of the new agency will effectively relieve the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform of the need to be involved in the day-to-day management of the Prison Service.

The terms and conditions of the transfer are currently under negotiation at Departmental Council. Presently it has been agreed that staff of the new service will have civil service status and representation on the statutory Prison Board. According to the Irish Prison Service (Strategy Statement, p.42) 'the formation of the new agency will create a new dynamic in the operation of the prison system'.

The functions of the Agency, as envisioned and outlined by the expert group, should be to provide and operate within budget and policy guidelines laid down by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Towards an Independent Prisons Agency, 1997).

The Agency should provide and operate an efficient and effective humane prison system, in addition to keeping safe and secure in custody those committed to prison by the courts.

According to the expert group the agency should maintain a level of security appropriate to those in custody. In addition the agency must also maintain good order and control throughout the prison system (Towards an Independent Prisons Agency, 1997).

The new Agency must also actively encourage the rehabilitation of prisoners and to prepare them for their release back into the community, while also facilitating prisoners in maintaining linkages with their families and with the general community. Finally the functions of the Agency as detailed by the expert group are to deliver a quality service, which is both efficient and professional (Towards an Independent Prisons Agency, 1997).

The Independent Prisons Agency will operate under the control of a Board, whose members will be appointed by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The establishment of a Board is essential to ensure the Agency is operationally independent in performing its day-to-day functions and activities. The Board will consist of between 7 and 9 individuals, who will be appointed on the basis of their personal qualities, the experience and expertise which they could bring to the task and their commitment to the achievement of the objectives of the Agency (Towards an Independent Prisons Agency, 1997).

The expert group states that there should be a more integrated approach between central and local management levels in the prison system reinforced by some mobility between the those appointed at the two levels. A management team should be established comprising of the Director General, the Director of Functions and two Governors (Towards an Independent Prisons Agency, 1997).

The new management in theory should allow greater authority, responsibility and accountability to the Governors and other senior personnel within the prison system for the managing of their own institutions and services and producing planned results within budget.

The transition into an Independent Prisons Agency will result in changes in powers reserved by the Agency and the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform. In the report, Towards an Independent Prisons Agency, the powers to be retained by the Minister are –

- Designation of places as prisons or places of detention
- Authorisation of transfers of prisoners between jurisdiction under international Conventions on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons commutation/remission of penalties
- Temporary release of long term prisoners
- Issuing of Policy Directives to the Agency subject to certain conditions
- Consideration of Reports and Strategy Statements.

(Towards an Independent Prisons Agency, 1997, p.35)

Changes in the Prison Rules will remain open to both the Minister and the Agency to propose, however, new Prison Rules should be introduced only with the approval of the Minister, or where the Minister initiates the change in rules, such a change will

only be made after consultation with the Agency (Towards an Independent Prisons Agency, 1997).

With the transition into an Independent Prison Agency, the Agency will be delegated powers including –

- Designation of prisons to which the courts commit prisoners
- Authorisation of transfers between institutions
- Removal of prisoners to places other than prison
- Temporary release of short-term prisoners.

(Towards an Independent Prisons Agency, 1997, p.35)

‘The staff of the Prison Service represent the single most significant resource in the prison system’ (Irish Prison Service, Strategy Statement, 2001-03, p.42). In recent years, staff at all levels within the Irish Prison Service demonstrated themselves to be capable of effecting change by coping with substantial expansion within the prison system and adapting to new systems, programmes and procedures. In light of the further changes which lie ahead, the readiness of the staff within the Prison Service to embrace further changes and development will be crucial if the Prison Service is to develop towards its full potential.

Chapter 4

Interview –

An Inside Perspective

In this chapter, I will recount an interview that I conducted with an employee of the Prison Service. The reason for using this research method, was to gain an inside perspective to the Prison Service and the current changes underfoot.

As part of my research for this dissertation topic, I set out to conduct an interview with somebody within an administrative or management position within the Prison Service. Upon approaching the Prison Service, I did make contact with somebody, who was willing to part-take in an interview. However, the interviewee did wish to remain anonymous and for this reason, he will be known as Mr. John Smith, in addition I will not reveal his job title.

I met with Mr. Smith, who has a long career within the Irish Prison Service. He brought me into his modest office to conduct the interview. The interview was recorded using audio tape recorder with Mr. Smith's permission, having shown him the questions I wished to ask. The aim of the interview was to gain a greater understanding of proposed changes for the Prison Service, whilst also gaining an inside perspective on the change. I also wanted to try to establish what organisational obstacles might be encountered for the Prison Service undergoing change and how these obstacles will be overcome. The interview confirmed for me many of the findings from my own research, but also presented me with an inside view on the Irish Prison service, in light of becoming an Independent Executive Agency.

Interview with Mr. John Smith

Wednesday 6th July 2005

1. Why is the Irish Prison Service undergoing transition into an Independent Executive Agency?

The Irish Prison Service is undergoing proposed change in order to become a more flexible and autonomous organisation. Greater powers are being given to the Governors of the Prisons. The change also relieves the Minister of his day-to-day responsibilities of overseeing the management of the Prison Service, this responsibility now falls to the Prisons Interim Board and the Governors.

2. What significance will this change have on the Irish Prison Service?

This change represents a significant shift in the management structure of the Prison Service. Organisationally it means significant structural change, in addition, to changes in organisational policies and procedures. It is a significant change, which is taking place slowly; there is still legislation that is due to be enacted. Another significant change for the Independent Prisons Agency is that it should be theoretically freed from undue political interference.

3. Do you foresee any resistance to change from staff or management within the Prison Service?

There is always some resistance to organisational change, irrespective of how much communication and preparation is made for such change. However, communication, planning and transparency and reassurance can reduce such resistance. Consultation with unions is also important in minimising any resistance to organisational change.

The Prison Officers' Association of Ireland is a very strong and vocal union, so by consultation with the union, any foreseeable difficulties or resistance can be addressed and hopefully resolved.

4. Do you believe that by becoming an Independent Executive Agency the Prison Service will improve organisationally and deliver a better service?

In short, Yes. I believe that it will. Greater autonomy, greater flexibility and achievable targets, should contribute to a better delivery of services. Flatter flexible organisations are generally much more successful, than layered bureaucratic ones. However, the new Independent Executive Prison Agency still remains organisationally complex and layered.

5. What role has staff in contributing to the smooth running of the prison service, in light of organisational change?

Well I suppose that the key to a humane prison service is the role played by its staff. Good quality prison relationships between prisoners and prison officers are essential for the smooth running of the prison service. This relationship must also be reflected within the organisation, good relations are required between management and staff also. There has been much tension in the past particularly between the Prison Officers and Senior Management and the Department of Justice. I imagine that this tension will continue. Particularly with regard to the privatisation of the Prisoner Escort Services and reduction of over-time pay as proposed by the Minister [Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform]. This is a particularly contentious issue; currently the Irish Army are actually on stand by in the event of industrial action by the Prisoner Officers. They [the Army] have received extensive training in the event of such a situation. But hopefully the situation will be resolved.

6. In light of recent criticism regarding the prison service, in particular, issues of overcrowding amongst prisoners, poor conditions in the prisons and tensions between prison officers and management. How does the prison management aim to resolve and abate such issues?

The issue of overcrowding is a long standing one, which has received a lot of media attention in recent years. It is certainly a reoccurring problem, which cannot be solved by simply providing more prison places, it may require a serious re-think into how custodial sentences are used by the courts. It may involve looking at other forms of sanctions, such as, restorative justice. For the management of the [prison] service, this issue has been a problem, which they have tried to address by building more places of detention and early release for certain prisoners, hence, the *revolving door syndrome*. The issue regarding poor conditions within the prisons is an area that the management of the service has endeavoured to change, and they have been relatively successful with this. The conditions have improved, but with some of the older prisons, some work still needs to be done. The tensions that exist between the management of the Prison Service and prison officers are complex. It is very much something that the management wish to solve, and it requires much dialog with the union and its members. I doubt that there is an easy or quick solution to the disagreements.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This project has explored the formation and origins of the Irish Prison Service, to find that it is one of the largest and oldest public institutions in the country. It is an organisation, which has gone through many organisational changes over the years. It is an organisation, which provides a difficult but essential service. The Irish Prison Service has had to adapt and develop to meet with increases in prisoner population, whilst also provide a humane service that fulfils its function. Many of the prisoners within the Prison System are repeat offenders, who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and who present a range of personal problems, ranging from drug-misuse to psychological problems. "There is little doubt that those committed to Irish Penal institutions have life histories characterised by poverty and multiple disadvantage" (O'Donnell and O'Sullivan, 2001, p.31). This only highlights the difficult job undertaken by the staff of the Irish Prison Service.

This project has also explored the structure of the Irish Prison Service, which is both layered and complex. It is a hugely unionised work place, where much tension can and does exist between staff and management. It is a hierarchal and bureaucratic workplace, where unions use collective bargaining to achieve their members wishes. The Irish Prison Service must operate within a legislative framework, both national and international; this greatly contributes to the complexity of the Irish Prison Service and its ability in fulfilling its function.

This project has demonstrated that the management strategy employed within the Irish Prison Service is that of a personnel management tradition. The current structure of the service limits the flexibility of the organisation and slows its decision-making processes. The reactive personnel management approach used by the management is inhibiting and is inadequate for such an organisation. However, with the transition into an independent executive agency the service may be more flexible, more autonomous and more proactive in its management strategy.

The Irish Prison Service has been at the receiving end of much criticism in recent times, particularly, issues of overcrowding, early release and poor conditions within prisons. These issues were discussed in chapter 2 and chapter 4. It is worth noting that the Mountjoy Visiting Committee 2004 observed, that with regard to the kitchens that they “operated to the highest standards in hygiene and service”, however, with regard to the issue of *slopping out* (buckets used as toilets in cells, which are emptied in the mornings) “In the interest of health and safety and welfare of both prisoners and staff we urge you to address this situation without delay” (www.justice.ie). It is clear that the issue of poor conditions appears to remain unsolved and needs attention by management.

The planned transition to an independent executive agency appears to be one, which holds much potential for an improved service. As discussed in chapter 3, it will result in a more flexible and autonomous organisation. Some of the changes in management structure have taken place, most notably the formation of an Interim Prisons Board, however the transition is a slow process. Much debate and consultation is taking

place and the enactment of legislation is pending. An Independent Prison Agency will result in an organisation, that has much more control over its operations, the delivery of its service and the direction and development of the organisation. As this project has demonstrated, it is a complex transition, which involves changes in powers, policies and procedures.

The interview conducted as part of my research, proved most useful and beneficial. The interview confirmed many of my own findings, but also gave me a new understanding and greater insight into this topic. This interview highlighted the importance of communication, planning, transparency and reassurance as key factors for organisations undergoing change. Communication is necessary at all levels within the organisation and must be ongoing throughout the transition. Planning will identify any difficulties and will ensure a smooth transition. Transparency and reassurance is necessary to put at ease staff who may feel anxious or displaced, because of or during the change. These key factors may contribute to successful organisational change, whilst also minimising any resistance to change by employees.

The Irish Prison Service is an interesting organisation, which is faced with many challenges in its future. The planned reform, which has been explored in this dissertation project, is a brave but necessary transition. The success of this transition relies on the Government, the Irish Prison Service and its staff. Due to the fact that this transition is still ongoing, this research project can only document and observe the process thus far. The Irish Prison Service is in a state of metamorphosis, we will have to wait to see what finally appears upon the completion of its transition.

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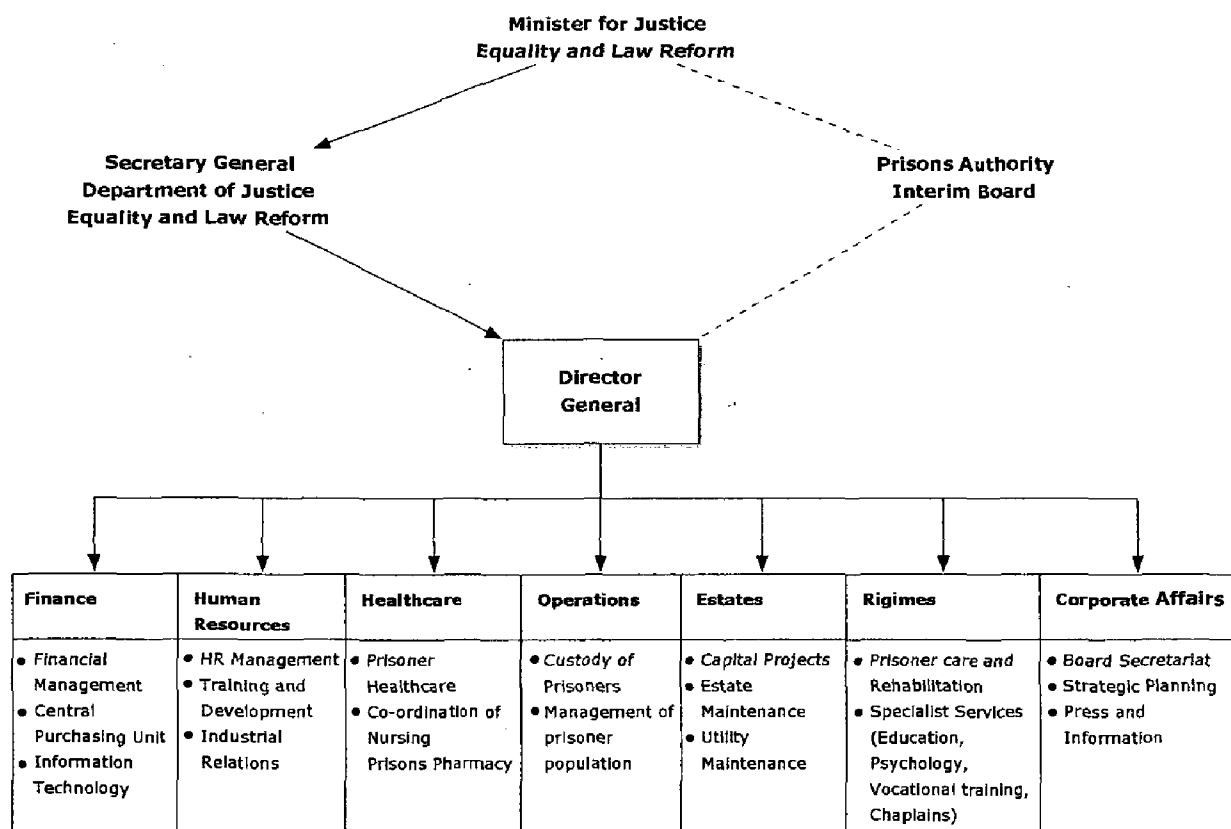
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Ireland's Prisons



Appendix 2

Irish Prison Service Organisational Chart



Institutions

Remand Prison	Open/Semi Open Centres	Committal Prisons Institutions	Prisons	Places of Detention
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cloverhill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loughan House Shelton Abbey Training Unit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Castlereagh Cork Dochas Centre Umerick Mountjoy Portlaoise St. Patrick's Institution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arbour Hill Midlands Wheatfield 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curragh Fort Mitchel

Staff/Logistics Support

Building Services Division Prison Service Training Centre Employee Assistance Programme
