

Training—Staff College and the Crisis

NORMAN A. JEPSON

IN 1946 THE STAFF COLLEGE came into being, as the Imperial Training School, in the midst of a crisis—a crisis which arose, according to the annual report, because “the pressure of increased (prison) population on a seriously diminished and over-strained staff had strained the machine almost to breaking point”. In 1967 the Staff College came of age, appropriately and perhaps significantly during another crisis—the recent crisis precipitated by the escape of Blake. The suspension of large sections of the college’s training programme was not exactly the happiest, although a salutary, way of celebrating its majority. It did, however, provide the opportunity, the challenge, and in part the reason for re-examining the policy of the college. It resulted in some major changes in the Staff College programme, perhaps the most drastic being the loss of the refresher and

senior refresher courses for prison officers. This article is an attempt to outline some of the basic questions which were posed, as immediate and long term problems were faced.

But before examining these, reference might be made to the crucial distinction between short term and long term policies. The former term tends, on balance, to accept the limits of existing resources, as for example the number of college rooms, and to ask how do we allocate these resources among certain needs and/or demands. In concrete terms, the college has 110 rooms, is open at least 46 weeks in a normal year and consequently just over 5,000 students (or room) weeks are available. Such crude figures have the advantage that they allow crucial questions to be phrased bluntly. For instance, with a prison service staff of over 8,000 you might aim to give everyone

an annual short course of less than a week, or, at the other extreme, 100 "key" people a long course of a year. Limited training for all, or extended training for a few? Between the two extremes where should the balance lie and why? Again, the short term decision may be influenced by previous long term commitments—such as the provisions for a staff course and courses for overseas students which in 1965-6 occupied 1,500 room weeks—which leave limited room for manoeuvre. Such an approach may be described, to use an overworked word, as "realistic", but one of the dangers, perhaps, of realism is an over-ready acceptance of the limits of the existing situation. Meanwhile, long term policies, whilst by no means free of limits, may start from needs and demands and indicate the extent and nature of the necessary resources. In the short term, the emphasis is on existing resources affecting the priority of aims, and in the long term, the priority of aims influencing potential resources¹.

Given this distinction, four basic but general questions will be raised. Comments on the questions and indeed the choice of questions themselves may reflect my own personal views and prejudices. It is hoped, however, that they may provide an appropriate framework for communication between the college and the field. Firstly, should

a staff college be *primarily* concerned with initial or post-experience training?²

Secondly, should a staff college aim to provide directly for *all* members of the prison service or only for some, and if for some, for whom?

Thirdly, should a staff college be primarily concerned with the general needs of a uniform prison service, or with the specialised needs of a diversified service?

Fourthly, should a staff college be the centre of, or simply an element in, a comprehensive training programme involving in-service and extra-service resources?

1. INITIAL OR POST-EXPERIENCE TRAINING

The balance between initial (or pre-experience) and post-experience training at the staff college is one which has changed radically during the past four years, and is one which was, in some respects, challenged most acutely by the security crisis. To appreciate this, brief reference must be made to the evolution of the staff college, which may be seen in three stages—stage one, from 1946 to 1958, when all training, outside establishments, was concentrated at the Imperial Training School; stage two, from 1958 to 1962, during which period the I.T.S. became the staff college and the initial training of officers was transferred from the college to

separate accommodation, named the Officers Training School; stage three, from 1963 to 1966, when the college accommodation was significantly expanded, and post-experience training came into its own.

Two significant features of stage one may be mentioned. The opening of the I.T.S. in 1946 was significant not because it started centralised training—centralised training had begun some 50 years previously following the recommendation of the Gladstone committee—but because it moved part of the initial training of officers, at least geographically, out of the prison, out of the work situation. The importance of this wise or unwise move, has perhaps never been fully explored or exploited. This may be because the separation and yet close proximity of the college, training schools and prison, encourage an ambivalent attitude towards the problem. What ought, perhaps, to be examined is the hypothesis that the further the training institution is away from the work situation the more appropriate it is for post-experience training, the less appropriate for initial training. For a college to be described as an ivory tower may be adverse criticism in the latter context, but complementary in the former. The greater the experience, the greater the need to withdraw

periodically from the work situation. The second significant aspect of stage one was that, although the initial training of officers at I.T.S. was of short duration for most of the period, reaching eight weeks only in 1955, and although extremely interesting experiments in post-experience courses were tried, initial training dominated the I.T.S.

Stage two saw initial training of officers transferred to the O.T.S. and an expansion in post-experience training at the Staff College, particularly through the refresher course for prison officers. This course had been planned as far back as 1950, but sacrificed in the financial crisis of the following year. The staff course, however, previously limited to potential A.G.s from the ranks of prison officer, now included, in increasing numbers, direct entrants and was consequently transformed into a primary initial training course. Together with the more formalised and extended course for overseas students, it occupied a significant proportion of the college accommodation and as late as 1962, only a quarter of the accommodation was used for post-experience training.

With the expansion of the college accommodation in 1963 the college entered stage three, during which time post-experience training assumed a dominant position, so

that by 1965-6 it utilised nearly two-thirds of the college resources, as compared with just over one-third for the staff course and overseas courses. Consequently, although service-wise (Staff College and the two O.T.S.s) initial training continued to dominate, the Staff College had emerged as a predominantly, though not exclusively, post-experience training centre. It was under these circumstances that the college staff structure was changed and departments introduced, partly in order to cope more efficiently with the new primary task.

The security crisis, however, and the ensuing Mountbatten report, with its demand for more prison officers and assistant governors, required a new assessment of the balance between initial and post-experience training. At one period, it looked as though the Staff College might return to its original status as a primarily initial training unit. But, by increasing the numbers accommodated at Wakefield (Aberford Road) O.T.S. and Leyhill O.T.S., with attendant strains for staff and students there, the overspill of officer initial training into the Staff College has so far been avoided. The likely increase of the staff course to 50, however, increases the accommodation required at the college for initial training. In the short term, therefore, the balance between pre- and post-experience training

at the Staff College has shifted, but still remains weighted in favour of the latter. It reflects a belief—rightly or wrongly held—in a staff college of this kind and a readiness on the part of staff at the O.T.S. to support it. The long term question of balance remains, however, if for no other reason that the more personnel recruited in 1967, the more personnel will be eligible in the late '60s and early '70s for continued training. This is not a new problem, the increase in staff during the whole of the post-war period has posed the problem, but the possibility of a rapid increase in the post-Mountbatten era underlines it. The case for—and against—post-experience training needs to be fully understood and, if accepted, its status and that of the college clearly defined. The very suspension of much post-experience training during 1966-7 may have reflected in part some uncertainty about its merits. There is, indeed, a danger that continued training courses may be a new manifestation of Parkinson's law, but such training stands or falls on three basic assumptions:

(i) that training is a continuous process, which, like the digestion of food, can best be achieved in relatively small doses rather than in one prolonged session;

(ii) that post-experience training allows for an examination of an

adaption to change, whether the change emanates primarily from the individual, the establishment, the service or society;

(iii) that such training, based as it should be on experience, implies that college staff and members of courses constantly interchange the roles of teacher and student. In such a way each challenges the other and the college gains as much from the field as vice-versa.

2. TRAINING FOR ALL OR TRAINING FOR SOME

Given the appropriate balance between initial and post-experience courses, the inter-related question is for whom? For all or for some? If for some, by what criteria are these selected?

When the policy of the college was considered in the light of extended accommodation in 1963, the emphasis was heavily upon courses for *all*. The initial training of officers at the two schools was ideally to be followed, in *all* cases, by three courses held at varying stages in an officer's career—the development course at the end of one year, the refresher course after five years, the senior refresher after ten. Likewise, the initial training of assistant governors at the Staff College was ideally to be followed, in *all* cases, by three courses, at intervals of two years up to and including the sixth year. Apart from the sixth year course for A.G.s, all the above mentioned

courses were “refresher” courses, in that they aimed primarily to examine experience and change. The cost of such a comprehensive programme, with prevailing resources, was relative superficiality, arising from the shortness of the course duration, but the philosophy underlying it was the desirability of a staff college having direct contact with the *whole* service.

Beyond the tenth year for officers and the sixth year for A.G.s, however, the balance shifted towards a selective basis—to some rather than to all. The selection was based essentially on promotion, in that courses were ideally provided for all who were promoted to principal officer and chief officer, to A.G.I and governor III. The aim of the courses was more specific, in that it reflected the increased managerial responsibility accompanying promotion to the next grade. Also, side by side with these were courses for people assuming, or likely to assume, new roles, as for example the new training principal officer and the new hostel warden.

The overall picture, however, was that the staff college programme was dominated by the “refresher” type course for *all*³.

It was this refresher type of course which was suspended in November 1966. It is this type of course which, in the reconstructed

programme for 1967-8, has suffered most severely. Why?

It had been originally intended that the programme developed in 1963-4 should be reviewed after approximately five years. The crisis of autumn of 1966 prompted an earlier appraisal. It was clearly apparent that the enormity of the task which the college had set itself was proving too much, even for the increased resources which the Prison Service had provided. The additional backlog created by the suspension of training would make the task almost impossible. Officers on the development course were already coming back a year later than originally planned. The drive in 1965-6 to cover, through the senior refresher course, officers up to 15 years remained incomplete. Meanwhile the good recruiting years of the early '60s presented a formidable problem for the five-year refresher course. Given the existing more limited accommodation resources for post-experience courses, reality indicated that the refresher and senior refresher courses could not continue to be part of the resumed programme. The alternative was courses for some rather than courses for all. With the development course, meanwhile, a compromise was achieved, in that whilst many officers would not be able to attend any development course, the course itself should be

resumed, as soon as possible, for officers with one year's experience and, if and when possible, the course should be linked more closely with initial training and the staffs of the O.T.S.s.

Whilst the details of short term planning are possibly important, the implications underlying decisions are more important, in that they may affect long term planning and future resources. The short term policy would seem to imply that the aim of the central training organisation to provide training for *all* may be limited to initial training, including the first recall course, principally the development course for officers⁴. The corollary would be that post-experience courses *at the Staff College* would be for *some* rather than for *all*. If this is so, two issues immediately arise. Firstly, if the selection remains as at present based on those who are facing new responsibilities, does this imply a move towards less general and more specialised courses? Secondly, does this imply that additional training responsibilities are thrown upon the region and upon individual establishments?

3. GENERAL OR SPECIALISED COURSES

The basic assumption underlying the development, refresher

and senior refresher courses, was not only that the Staff College had a direct responsibility to *all*, but that, irrespective of the type of establishment from which an officer came and the nature of his responsibilities, a common course should be provided. These courses were homogeneous with respect to membership of the Prison Service, rank and length of service, heterogeneous regarding type of establishment and type of experience. They reflected a belief in the underlying unity of the Prison Service and the generic qualities of officers' work. On the other hand, there were more specialised courses reflecting the diverse needs of establishments and the specialised needs of particular officers' roles, as for example the courses for hostel wardens. But the balance was clearly with the general course. Should it continue to be so?

The question of the balance between the general and the specialised courses is basically the problem of the balance between uniformity and diversity within the Prison Service. One aspect of this balance was referred to and affected by the Mountbatten report. With respect to the twin aims of the Prison Service, the Mountbatten report stressed unity, in so far it maintained, *vis-a-vis* the role of the prison officer, that "it would be a mistake to create two

classes of prison officers, one concentrating exclusively on security and the other on training and rehabilitation . . .". It stressed specialism, however, by continuing that ". . . but security would be enhanced if it were possible for a small number of senior prison officers or principal officers to take a course in sophisticated security techniques". The creation of the position of "security officer" and the provision of courses for security officers possibly accelerate a shift towards specialisation and diversity. The suggestion that, "there is an increasing body of relevant knowledge (*re* the rehabilitation of prisoners) which it would be an advantage for selected prison officers to have" may, in turn, strengthen the trend.

Again, in terms of establishments, diversity is stressed by the enormous expansion during the post-war years and the changes which have taken place, particularly those emanating from the Criminal Justice Act 1948, with its remand centres and detention centres⁵. Likewise the Mountbatten report, with its recommendations about maximum security prisons and the classification and allocation of prisoners, according to security risk, emphasises diversity of establishments whilst seeking to reaffirm the unified aims of security and rehabilitation.

In the short term, the shift toward diversity and specialisation

is seen not only in the provision of courses for specialist officers, like security officers. It is seen also in the decision to try to ensure that personnel attending "post-promotion" courses are selected so as to form groups more homogeneous in terms of establishments and experience, and to provide more specialised and relevant courses for them.

The emphasis on generality, meanwhile, is retained in the initial training courses, with only a limited amount of streaming. In the long term, however, the balance between uniformity and diversity, between generality and specialisation must rest upon a classification of establishments' primary aims upon a more thorough and detailed appraisal of the roles of officers, assistant governors and specialists in different types of establishments, and upon the responsibility of the Staff College to each.

There is one further aspect of this question which has received some attention. In the main, courses have been recruited from personnel of the same status—all officers, or all P.O.s or all welfare officers or all governors. As such it might be claimed that the college was helping, consciously or unconsciously, to perpetuate the hierarchical structure of the service. In one respect, however, it departed from this—in the case of mixed conferences, at which specific

problems, as for example life imprisonment or the selection of officers, were discussed by prison personnel of different ranks and status. In the immediate programme these have been maintained but not expanded. In the long term, the problems of communication between different levels in the hierarchy, which this question poses, must be re-examined. To bring people together in a staff college for a limited period does not in itself guarantee improved communication within the establishment. Perhaps the crucial problem in this area is one linked with the general question, springing from providing courses at the Staff College for some rather than for all, namely, what is and should be the role of the college in relationship to other resources in the training field?

4. STAFF COLLEGE OR TRAINING IN ESTABLISHMENTS

One of the very clear implications of the shift from initial to post-experienced training, from comprehensive to selective course recruitment, from general to more specialised courses, is that the provision at the Staff College and the training schools must be appraised within the context of the training resources in separate establishments and in the regions, and as a part of the further and higher educational resources of the country. If the refresher and senior refresher courses had any

significance at all, their cancellation adds to the training responsibilities of the establishments and/or the regions. Negatively, the abandonment of these courses may be regarded as a loss; positively, they may be regarded as an important and necessary change in the devolution and decentralisation of training responsibility from the college.

The short term policy has been to try to ensure that the three-week courses for new training P.O.s and the one-week course for more established training P.O.s are retained in the programme. The problem here continues to be that in so many cases the responsibility of the "trainer" in establishments is not matched by appropriate power and resources. Given, however, a clearer picture of the in-service training needs, the demand for resources should have more weight. To this end the 1967-8 programme contains a limited number of conferences for deputy governors or assistant governors in charge of training in establishments. The hope is that the college and the service learn more about the training programme in establishments and more about how establishments see their own role, that of the regions and that of the college in the whole training complex. It could be, that in respect of long term policy, the role of the Staff College should increasingly be that of collector and disseminator

of information about training schemes developed in establishments, and a "trainer" of the "trainers".

Finally, however, the thinking precipitated by the suspension of training was influenced by the place of the Staff College as a part of a system of further and higher education, as well as part of the Prison Service. The expansion of university extra-mural classes for Prison Service staff, the experiment in introducing university and higher education staff to in-service training in establishment, the secondment of prison staff to university full-time courses—all reflect the increasing bond between the Prison Service and the wider educational system. It reflects too, perhaps, an awareness that work within the Prison Service, whilst different, is not unique, and that the Prison Service has something to offer as well as receive from other agencies. The original decision in 1964-5 to structure the college into three departments: management, social studies and technical, was a part of the same process—to facilitate communication with comparable departments in other training and educational establishments, as well as with the experience of the field. Each college department, therefore, must have in any programme courses of sufficient length and specialisation to ensure that personnel of seniority within the Prison Service and within

universities, or other training organisations, can join with the college staff in extending the boundaries of subjects which are relevant to the job situation. This is reflected in short term policy particularly in the medium length management courses for senior personnel. It is also one of the

encouraging features of the new security course, that it provides opportunities for development at this level for technical studies. In the long term, it is perhaps only if the rather longer senior courses develop that the Staff College will become a college in an educational as well as a service sense.

References

¹There may or may not be a conflict between the two, between the framework that is and the framework that ought to be. Usually there is. If the Staff College cannot grapple with this, then indeed it may well be said, "Doctor, heal thyself", for presumably the primary aim of any staff college is to help equip people to administer efficiently what is, but also to analyse critically so as to promote what ought to be.

²The term "post-experience" is used because I understand it is fashionable, but also because it conveys, more than any other phrases, the fact that it is "training" organised after, and on the basis of, some reasonable experience in the work situation.

³It is, perhaps, appropriate to suggest, at this stage, that the alternative model was to be found at the Police

College at Bramhill. There post-experience training is clearly separated from initial, is based on provision for some rather than for all, and is pre-promotion rather than post-promotion.

⁴This in turn raises important questions about the location of officer initial training in relationship to A.G. initial training on the one hand, and to post-experience training on the other. The developing role of the officer in treatment establishments would suggest the desirability of seeing the initial training of officers and A.G.s related to each other.

⁵A survey of the role of the prison officer being carried out at present suggests that his role in certain establishments is so essentially different from that of others, that the whole concept of the prison officer's role is, in reality, thrown in doubt. Presumably the same applies to the role of the assistant governor. Hence the problem of the general course.