

# What have they done to deserve this ?

Ted Bloor

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## WANTED

Enthusiastic and energetic men and women to undertake an exciting role in the management of prison establishments as Head of Management Support Services.

The successful applicants will be those demonstrating competence in the traditional accounting, supply and administration skills whilst being able to expand the role of personnel management and to promote and implement new areas in policy development and monitoring.

The Management Service function is central to the operation of the establishment and is the major liaison point between HQ, Regional Offices and the local establishment as well as between other functions within the establishment. As its Head you will need to have a wide understanding of prison operations and policies and with other Heads of functions will report direct to the Governor and be part of a senior management team providing information and advice to ensure the establishment's efficient operation.

Unfortunately, our policy does not allow payment of a salary comparable with other function Heads, and career prospects are considerably more limited.

We are confident, however, that the challenge of the job is sufficient to attract applications from those with Administration Officer experience, and look forward to receiving them.

Can you imagine ICI or Ford deciding that their personnel managers or accountants should be paid only two-thirds or less of the salaries of their counterparts on the production floor, that company buyers should be less regarded than workshop foremen. If they placed an advertisement like the one above would they be inundated with applications and would the morale and commitment of those appointed be sufficiently high to provide the service required? I doubt it, and yet, this seems to be seen as a reasonable approach by the Prison Service management.

The Executive Staff, headed by the erstwhile Administration Officer now entitled the Head of Management Support Services (HMSS), manage the department which provides for personnel services, including the calculation and payment of locally

paid salaries to Prison Officer and other grades, the supply, storage and distribution of all clothing, furniture, foodstuffs and other stores items, the supply of plant, tools and materials for prison workshops and farms, and the despatch of finished goods or crops, the processing of prisoners' documentation and records including the calculation of discharge dates and the maintenance of court calendars, the calculation and monitoring of the establishment's budget together with the maintenance of accounting records and the authorisation of expenditure and the provision of financial information and guidance to the Governor. Perhaps not a very glamorous role, but one which is essential to the running of the establishment and one which is neither less nor more important than the operational business of the establishment

since the latter cannot operate without the former and there would be no need for the former without the latter.

### The History

For a good many years the Executive grades employed in the Prison Service have been dissatisfied with the way in which they seem less regarded, and are certainly less rewarded, than their colleagues in the senior Prison Officer and Governor grades. In my own experience this has been increasing over the past decade and whereas the differences used to be explained by the long hours worked and amount of contact with prisoners by operational grades; these reasons no longer adequately explain the wide disparity in the treatment between them and administrative grades.

When the Department first prop-

osed the Management Review, which later became the Fresh Start initiative, the Society of Civil and Public Servants, representing the Executive grades, put forward a bold and forward looking suggestion that the Governor grades, senior Prison Officer grades and the Executive grades should be merged to create a new Prison Manager grade. The advantages were many — the traditional rivalries and demarcation between the old grades would disappear, the simmering discontent of the Executive grades over differences in salaries and career prospects would be removed, future governing Governors would have experience and understanding of all the aspects of an establishment, and the Department would have a more versatile management team. Much, if not all, the additional cost would be offset by the saving of posts which would be achieved by that greater versatility and the removal of demarcation lines. There would be a clear opportunity for any member of the Prison Service, of whatever discipline, to reach the very top of the career structure given the necessary ability and desire and there would be clear accountability from top to bottom. Of course there would be transitional difficulties. Former administrators may not take easily to the demands of operational activities, other grades may find difficulty with the concepts of financial management or the efficient deployment of manpower. None-the-less these difficulties could be overcome and would diminish with time. New managers would not be conditioned to concern themselves with only narrow aspects of prison management and eventually each would have the breadth and knowledge of the whole to become better able to manage the whole. No longer would Governors be expected to be personally responsible for the financial management of their establishments but not provided with the necessary training or experience to properly understand it. No longer would one manager make a decision without understanding and having regard for the effect of that decision on his colleagues in other disciplines within the establishment.

### The Present

Regretfully, this vision of the future was not to be. The Fresh Start plans of the Department when issued in July 1986 had nothing to offer the Executive staff, indeed they merited only

the briefest mention in the document. Their ideas have been adopted in part, with the merger of the Chief Officer grades into Governor grades with all Prison Officer and Governor grades becoming unified grades VIII to I with a clear avenue of promotion from the bottom to the top, but they themselves were not to be included in the Prison Service's brave new world. Never have I known such unbridled anger from my colleagues and the Department's managers were subjected to a barrage of protest and criticism from a normally docile group of staff. Whether the reason for the Executive grades' omission was political or financial is a matter for conjecture, but in order to pacify them the Department promised a Fresh Start Phase II, which would be implemented twelve months after what would now be called Fresh Start Phase I. It was argued that to change everyone's job or status overnight would be too disruptive, but that the Department was fully committed to a constructive review of the Executive grades in Phase II and in the meantime their co-operation and commitment to the implementation of Phase I was essential for its success. Such co-operation and commitment would surely not go unnoticed.

Alas, it now seems that, if not unnoticed, it is to go unrewarded. After months of deliberation the Department rejected the claim for the inclusion of the Executive grades into the unified structure but suggested the following ideas for consideration.

- i. That the HMSS post should become an opportunity post open to unified or non-unified grades of appropriate rank. The successful applicant would retain his/her ranking, salary and conditions of service.

What did this offer the Executive grades except the opportunity to lose their posts to other grades? How could it be justified to pay such disparate salaries to staff fulfilling exactly the same role and performing exactly the same duties? What would happen to those who were not successful in retaining the jobs they had?

Clearly this suggestion was unacceptable and, given more than a cursory examination, showed itself to provide no solution to the Department's difficulties.

- ii. That, subject to suitability and selection, existing Heads of MSS should be taken into the unified grades at an appropriate level but that thereafter the HMSS post would remain the sole preserve of the unified grades.

There was an acceptance of the logic that dictates that exclusion of the HMSS from the unified management grades is a nonsense but the proposal begged many questions.

What were the criteria for suitability and selection? What would happen to those not deemed to be suitable nor selected? How could there be justification for the acceptance of one staff member, who happened to be filling a HMSS post, into the unified structure whilst his/her counterpart of equal rank and experience who happen to work to a more senior HMSS would not? What of the career prospects for those who were not fortunate enough to be unified? Where would the future HMSS, taken from the unified grades, gain the necessary knowledge and experience to enable them to fill that role?

The details had not been worked out, admitted the Department, and it acknowledged that there were inherent problems in the suggestion.

The reality is that it is untenable and unworkable.

- iii. That the creation of a new departmental grade for administration staff could provide some recognition for those not included in the unified structure. It must be recognised, however, that such a move would not necessarily have the Department's backing and that the Treasury is very reluctant to create departmental grades, and even more reluctant if increased salary is the result.
- iv. That the HMSS post and their Executive support should remain the preserve of Executive grades and that their enhanced role and responsibilities brought about by Fresh Start may result in the upgradings of some, but by no means all, posts.

However, there is a perceived need for the future gov-

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