

Perceptions of the Head of Management Support Services Role at HM Prison, Channings Wood

(Category C, Medium and Long-Term Training Prison)

Gerry Keen

In the late fifties, the title of **STEWARD** changed to **ADMINISTRATION OFFICER**. This move was apparently made to bring the nomenclature into the modern age. In no way did it alter the job or change tasks, neither did it increase the status of the job holder within the establishment. The introduction of 'Fresh Start' is a very different matter, not only has the name changed to **HEAD OF MANAGEMENT SUPPORT SERVICES** but it has increased tasks in four major areas, and if carried out correctly, should certainly increase the status of the postholder. The new roles are producing management information, financial information, supporting line managers in functions such as personnel management, staff training, health and safety. Also, the Head of MSS provides administrative support in all areas and responsibility under the Governor for co-ordinating the development of the establishment.

At Channings Wood the Governor has totally supported the new role of Head of Management Support Services and it is acknowledged that I am already carrying out all of the increased tasks. Obviously this has meant that some of the more traditional tasks have been passed down to Executive Grades. As Head of MSS I have direct oversight of a Principal Officer (Grade 6) and write his annual report. Together we are developing his personnel role within the establishment. I am totally involved with co-ordinating staff training of all grades; and during the next month take on the added task of arranging training for new entrant Prison Officers. I am Chairman of the

Health and Safety Committee and responsible for co-ordinating Health and Safety matters.

I regularly support the Governor with management and financial information. Since 'Fresh Start' I have been tasked to carry out investigations into incidents and even an allegation by an inmate against staff.

Recently I have co-ordinated the production of the Functions and Targets document 1988-89 and will be responsible for monitoring targets throughout the year. I am responsible for producing the Establishment Review document and briefing the Governor on all Financial matters.

In my opinion all these tasks are at Senior Management level and in all respects comparable with tasks allocated to senior unified grades. I work as part of the Senior Management Team, and see myself as equal to my Grade 4 colleagues.

I am seriously concerned about the level and quality of training being given to carry out the new functions of the role. We do need modular type training in Personnel Management, Presentational Skills and Management of Information Systems. The training should be professional and convey exactly what is required in an establishment. Also a national policy for the job description of the Grade 6 Personnel/Staff Training Officer should be drawn up as soon as possible.

All members of the Management Support Services Group wish to carry out their new tasks in a far more professional manner. I am absolutely certain that the way forward in these areas is the immediate use of new

technology.

On the credit side. I consider the whole ethos of 'Fresh Start' to be excellent, and a positive move for the betterment of the Prison Service. However, it appears that the Department has dealt with a major problem in complete isolation. The failure to unify all grades into a modern Prison Service has left many staff totally disillusioned. Instead of unifying the Prison Service-it has become split into two separate parts-one the unified grades, the other-all other grades. The running of prisons is about people and unless goodwill is abundant they will become more and more difficult to manage.

At the Malvern Conference, Administration Officers expressed their willingness to Mr Caines in accepting the challenge of the new tasks of Management Services. In return the Department undertook to bestow significant benefits upon us. In my opinion, Administration Officers on 'Fresh Start' are carrying out the additional tasks asked of us and we now expect our just reward.

It is pleasing to know that many Governors and other Prison Service staff as well as members of Boards of Visitors support our contention that our proper place is within the unified structure and we can only hope that their views can influence the Department where ours have failed.

I, for one, enjoy the challenge of my new role and this is only tainted by the knowledge that I could be more effective if recognised as an integral and equal member of the management team. ■