

Embargoed for publication until 20 February 2006

For the Attention of the Under Secretary of State MOD

**Annual Report of the
Independent Board of Visitors to the
Military Corrective Training Centre Colchester
December 2005**

Introduction

This report follows on from the Interim Report published in May 2005 which specifically responded to comments made by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons following her Inspection in 2004. The report is now produced in an annual cycle using the calendar year as its base

The IBOV has a maximum membership of 12 members who give of their time voluntarily only receiving travel & subsistence expenses to enable them to fulfill their role. They have right of access to the MCTC and to all Service Persons under Sentence (S.U.S.) in private at any time as well as to inspect the premises and facilities of the MCTC.

Two members of the Board retired – namely Mrs. J Baldock and Mr. R Jacklin – their help and support is valued. A further member Mr. L Roman did not attend any meetings or visits during the period and his name was removed from membership on recommendation of the Chairman by the Under Secretary of State.

A recruitment process is underway with interviews due in March 2006.

The Board is pleased to advise that the appointment of a Clerk to the Board on a part time basis has made a significant contribution to the administration of our work and we are extremely grateful for the support given to us by Linda Frost.

This Annual Report has been produced following a review of our reporting procedures to coincide with the end of the calendar year. During the year the Board has met on four occasions as an entire Board and individual members have made a total of 22 separate visits to the establishment – either unannounced or in response to requests from a S.U.S.

During the year the Board has reviewed its operation and introduced systems to monitor the types and frequency of representations made to the Board and these are reported on separately (Table A). The last meeting of the whole Board used a pattern similar to that of the Inspection Visits by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). On this occasion we met with focus groups of particular S.U.S. – from each Company and Stage with and varying lengths of time spent at the MCTC.

The exercise was considered worthwhile by all Board Members and will form part of future full Board visits.

There follows a report on areas of specific interest.

Education

It has not been possible to provide the detail which has characterized previous reports because of the relatively long interregnum between the departure of Maj Biegel and the arrival of his permanent successor Maj Lewis.

The groundwork begun by Maj Biegel through the development of numerous accredited courses for SUS has been largely maintained but funding cutbacks during the year have reduced the availability of some courses. (These cutbacks have been imposed, as we understand it, by the local funding agencies, not through any failure of MCTC).

Lt. Finch's ideas incorporated in the Trafalgar Programme are being fleshed out and discussed and would if implemented be of great assistance to those SUS on very short sentences. Providing sufficient courses sufficiently often to cater for any number of SUS on short sentences has been a problem for both education and training for some time. For SUS with longer sentences it may be desirable but not always possible for them to pursue courses in the local college because of rigid term and examination dates.

The problems with literacy and numeracy regularly mentioned in reports remains a serious problem but extra sessions in the evenings to try and reduce the problem have been introduced. Without a stricter recruitment standard there is a limit to what can be done at MCTC in what is often a very short time.

We look forward to a detailed report from the Department for inclusion in our next Report.

Reception Area

The reception area is presented as being clean, warm and functional. On average some 30SUS are admitted and processed per week. There are usually two personnel on duty at any one time on each shift with another member of staff working on the main gate.

Arrangements have been made to ensure one female member of staff is available for any female SUS. Garrison and local visits for NCOs and above usually take place on a Wednesday afternoon although this is not exclusive to these ranks. Most of SUS visiting occurs at the weekends; special arrangements are made for those visitors traveling long distances. Staff within the reception area liaise with the Welfare department.

Prior to admission a SUS unit is sent details to ensure he/she attends with the correct documentation and Kit. It would appear from interviews with SUS that in a few cases their Units do not give them full details of the kit they should bring with them. On arrival the SUS are given relevant information including details about the IBOV. A private interview room is available and it is envisaged a new visiting centre will be available sometime in the next two years. To maintain high standards of care and welfare child protection protocols are in place along with advice on how to access the Welfare

department. Each SUS is subject to a risk assessment and this is an ongoing process. The morale in the reception area is high and it appears to be well structured and efficiently organised. Comments from SUS would also endorse this view, although unsure about what to expect they feel they are given appropriate information.

Medical Area

The medical area is presented as a warm well maintained orderly unit. The medical centre, is staffed by, one full time civilian medical officer, two part time nurses one part time pharmacist and part time physiotherapist. The unit does not offer 24 hour service although access to medical treatment and care is available using local facilities. All SUS who are admitted receive a full medical.

Any SUS who require more specialist input are referred to local services such as Community Mental Health Teams and Community Psychiatric Nurse. Risk assessments are carried out as an ongoing process to identify those SUS who may be susceptible to self-harming or misuse of drugs and alcohol.

Staff report they do have some SUS who have contracted sexual transmitted diseases and these are referred to the local GU unit. A new pharmacy was opened last year and this has been of great benefit. One area of concern was that personnel files are kept in a cabinet which is not made secure however the building is secure when not in use. Some staff have suggested it would benefit the medical centre if a part time civilian clerk could be engaged to assist with some of the administration work. They also highlighted some SUS being sent to the MCTC when not fully fit - an example was given one SUS arriving four days after he had been in a Road Traffic Accident. Overall the medical centre is a well run and organised unit which is able to see to many of the needs of the SUS. Child protection protocols are in place and staff receive regular training

A & D Companies

One of the improvements to the accommodation in these companies has been the refurbishment of the showering and washing areas. This necessitated "doubling up" whilst the work was carried out, but each company now has much better facilities.

However the delays in obtaining correct water pressure in the new showers are appalling (out of the control of MCTC staff) and have led to numerous justified complaints from SUS.

During visits, the premises were clean and the ambience purposeful. The increasing high proportion of SUS detained for AWOL offences raises concerns, and points to the existence of other underlying problems. There have been innovations to ensure that under 18 year old detainees are suitably accommodated and monitored.

C Company

Staff in C Block continue to manage some difficult situations and detainees with complex needs in a humane and sensitive manner. They do their best to ensure that the environment is safe and secure whilst at the same time purposeful to enable detainees to make the most of the confinement period encouraging individuals to participate in activities e.g. gym, educational training etc.

HMIP Report

For the purpose of this report attention has been given to two areas highlighted by the June 2004 inspection by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons namely:

Resettlement

A database has been set up enabling the staff to ensure that all aspects of the resettlement programme for an individual are being adhered to, wherever possible. This enables the staff and SUS to track progress during his or her sentence, and aims to ensure that every assistance is given. In the event of a missed lesson this can easily be established and action taken to ensure that the schedule is being maintained. Particular emphasis is being placed on 'Basic Skills'. Hard copy charts are produced for easy comprehension by the SUS. The system is working well and valuable guidance is given to SUS who, on release from MCTC, will be leaving the Armed Services.

Complaints

Reference to complaints procedures was made in the HMCIP report (page 5, para. 2; recommendations 9.03 and 9.39-41). Part 2 Standing Order 25 now very clearly defines the Complaints Procedures and Complaints Database. Form Reference Annex A entitled MCTC Complaints Database-Initial Reporting Procedure is used during the initial complaint interview. The information on the form is entered on the database. Box 8 of the form provides for Resolution of the complaint. It will now be possible to track any complaint from its inception to finalisation. {Copy of Standing Order 25 and Reporting Procedure Form attached}. In addition there is in each company lines a box to enable the IBOV to be contacted directly by SUS. These are regularly checked by members of IBOV, who should also check the Complaints Database which can be viewed on the computers located in both A and D companies. Complaints without resolutions should be checked.

Disciplinary Procedures

One complaint from a SUS was investigated relating to the procedure whereby he and two other SUS were found guilty of drinking alcohol while on release in the town. The only evidence which can be obtained in such cases under the current procedure is the opinions of staff as to their appearance and behaviour. No form of breathalyser can be used by the staff to confirm that alcohol has been drunk. This has been considered in the past by the appropriate authority.

The Board suggests that this should be reconsidered again. As it is not necessary to ascertain the level of alcohol in breath but only whether it is present, perhaps a simple breathalyser similar to that used by the police for roadside tests could be used. It would not need to be too accurate, it would not be costly and the amount of training required would be minimal. Agreement to its use by SUS could be conditional on their release outside the MCTC.

It was also pointed out that there is no provision for an appeal when a disciplinary hearing is held under .Imprisonment and Detention Rules. While it is appreciated that this cannot be changed without the amendment of a Statutory Instrument, it could be a breach of human rights and most disciplinary decisions which are subject to quasi

judicial consideration provide for some form of appeal e.g. employment legislation. It is suggested that this be noted for consideration when legislative changes are considered.

It must be added that the Board did not find any irregularity in the way the case was handled nor sought any change in the decision made but was only concerned as to the existing procedure.

Catering

Efforts have been made to maintain the range of choice in meals. IBOV members continue to receive complaints from time to time about lack of variety and quality of food provided. On the whole, however, members are generally satisfied that the provision is both healthy and adequate. SUS are encouraged to make specific complaints which, if reasonable, are dealt with on the spot.

Inspections of the kitchens and equipment have found them to be clean and in good order, and the staff conscious of health and safety procedures. A rotation system in serving meals is in operation to ensure that detainees have access to full choice of menu irrespective of their position on the staging system.

Prevention of Self-Harm and Suicide

The MCTC seeks to ensure the following:

- ❖ Safety: that SUS are held in an environment in which all reasonable steps are taken to identify vulnerability and prevent suicide and self harm. In addition, relevant information on individuals judged to be vulnerable and at risk should be communicated effectively and appropriate action taken.
- ❖ Respect: that SUS at risk of suicide or self-harm know where to find help and access it at times of crisis or need.
- ❖ Purposeful Activity: that SUS who are at risk of suicide or self-harm should be encouraged to participate in appropriate purposeful activities including coping skills programmes.

All new arrivals are required to complete both a medical questionnaire and an initial Risk Assessment.

There is a Suicide Prevention Awareness Team (SPAT) which is scheduled to meet quarterly. The SPAT was criticised by the Prison Inspectorate for failing to meet the quarterly target. However, meetings are now being held regularly.

The MCTC liaises on a regular basis with the Prison Service and has adopted the Prison Service Order 2700 which provides what is effectively a “bible” of best practice. The Chair of the SPAT has established excellent links with the Prison Service and regularly attends Eastern Area suicide awareness meetings.

There is a risk assessment committee which includes both the Commanding Officer and the Padre and this Committee meets weekly.

There is a very high level of staff training, including refresher training. A designated member of staff on each company carries a ligature knife at all times and emergency response kits are also available in residential areas.

There are clearly displayed notices in each Company providing details of how to contact the Samaritans.

Steps are taken to ensure that SUS deemed to be at risk are given the opportunity to undertake purposeful activity by the provision of training and education but this is subject to risk assessment.

The Prison Service Inspectorate undertook a full inspection of the MCTC in June 2004 and the subsequent report was very positive about the measures in place to both prevent self-harm and reduce the risk.

The Board is satisfied that the MCTC take the issue of self harm seriously and the procedures adopted provide an adequate level of protection for S.U.S.

Welfare

The Board is pleased to note the continued high levels of welfare support offered to S.U.S. with all new entrants interviewed as soon as practicable on their arrival. We are concerned, however, at the levels of financial debt that some S.U.S are involved with and feel that this can be a significant barrier to the successful reintegration of S.U.S into the community. During the reporting year there have been significant changes in the delivery of welfare services in the areas of housing, mental health and debt counselling. The Board is hopeful that these changes will enhance the level of service on offer; we will continue to monitor progress in these areas during the coming year. We will be particularly interested in the results of the mentoring pilot and will review the report with the Commandant once it is available. The staff within the Welfare department is to be congratulated for their continued efforts on behalf of S.U.S. and we note in particular the impact that the appointment of a full time Padre has made.

Conclusion

This year has been a busy one of change for the Board in that it has adopted new visiting procedures and recording to enable it to monitor the type and range of complaints. New formal visit programmes have also been introduced with the aim of seeing as many SUS as possible.

We are satisfied that overall the Centre is run professionally and with care and compassion and staff do their best to meet the ever changing needs of the Detainees in their care.

J J Bond – Chairman

December 2005

Table A

The Board received a total of 11 written complaints during the year from May 2005 when the new system was implemented. Of these the complaints were about

Unfair treatment – 8

Food – 1

Accommodation 1

Bullying 1

Discipline 1

Other – 1

(Some complainants had more than one complaint)