

MENTORING SYSTEM

The most valuable capital for Latvian Prison Administration is the human-resource. The professional knowledge, skills and competences of every person is the key to organization's success, and it is extremely important that the employees carry out their duties and tasks with the utmost professionalism thus reaching the goals set by the organization.

Latvian Prison Administration's Training Centre implements professional further education programme "Prison security" the target audience for which is instructor type prison officers with special service ranks comprising the majority of everyone employed by the Latvian Prison Administration.

The Head of Training Centre Lt. Colonel Dace Konošonoka talks about the necessary changes to ensure the learning of the programme "Prison security" and the challenges connected with it:



Dace Konošonoka

The Head of Training Centre Lt. Colonel



In autumn of 2019 we surveyed persons working in prisons who have previously been the students of Training Centre, as well as their mentors. Currently the Heads and Deputy heads of Security department and Monitoring

department are mostly delegated as their mentors. When analysing the results of the survey we concluded that for the majority of students the practical part of programme "Prison security" – traineeship in prison have been learned only partly. Also, there was noted some distance and lack of support from the mentor side, which can lead to not fully learning the traineeship programme. Students from their mentor expect support and regular opportunity to ask for advice, to receive an answer about the work processes and their pattern. Mentors on the other hand base their minimal participation in carrying out these responsibilities on the large amount of their basic duties and not enough time.

To prevent this defective learning of traineeship programme, within the framework of Norway Grants Project there were established two work groups with the common goal to develop a system to improve traineeship organization and carry out mentor training. Within the framework of the work groups we have developed the mentor selection process and traineeship organization guidelines, which include instructions on rights and duties of mentor, student, Head of Training Centre as well as Head of prison to ensure successful fulfilment of traineeship organizational process.

In every prison there have to be professionally prepared and trained mentors. We are planning that the instructor type prison officers with appropriate education and specific experience will be selected as mentors, who will be available daily to the students and will be able to regularly answer the unclear questions, give their support and evaluate students during their traineeship. To successfully carry out the cooperation between the mentor and student as well as learning the professional knowledge and skills in work environment, mentor has to have certain competences, and these competences are what will be further developed by attending the special mentor training programme (several days long) in the Training Centre. Mentor training programme content includes such topics as building trust, motivation, feedback and its use, evaluation, strategy for reaching goals and completing tasks, developing cooperation.

The goal of the process is educated and professional personnel, and during this process all sides have an extremely important role – students, mentors, Training Centre and imprisonment place. By using the gained knowledge in workplace, it is possible to ascertain how the theory works in practice and what is needed to improve the theoretical knowledge. Thus, the interaction and feedback after the practice is essential. Strengthening the cooperation of the involved sides is specifically noted as one of the goals to improve the learning process during practice. This is a case where it is possible to gain the maximally effective training result by applying regular feedback in different directions.

An enormous support for improving and further developing the mentoring system is Latvian Prison Administration cooperation with Directorate of Norwegian Correctional Service (KDI), University College of Norwegian Correctional Service (KRUS) and Romerike prison.

Tor-Arne Håland, Romerike prison inspector, while sharing his experience about Norwegian correctional service educational system, explains that in Latvia it is a challenge to provide basic education for prison staff because the majority of prison officers already have formed their view on how to conduct themselves when working with prisoners.



Tor-Arne Håland
Romerike prison inspector

Norway had this challenge in the early 1980s. Norway then chose to give to already permanent prison officers 3 months of training divided in three different time periods. The duration of this training went over a year.



It has taken a long time to arrive at the system we are working in today. When it comes to what challenges we have had in Norway, the greatest challenge was not facing the Norwegian population. The greatest challenge has been to get our own employees to participate in the various reforms/changes we have had in the criminal justice system over the last 20 – 30 years.

