



Strategic Plan 2008-2010

*Respect for rights in the penal system with
prison as a last resort*

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1. Introduction

(a) History of IPRT to date

IPRT has been in existence for approximately 15 years as a non-governmental organisation working in the area of penal reform. The organisation has had notable successes in many of the policy areas in which it is active. IPRT has published a wide range of policy positions and research documents; we have campaigned vigorously across a wide range of penal policy issues; and we have established IPRT as the leading independent voice in public debate on the Irish penal system. Through its short history IPRT has been led by committed and talented voluntary board members and has had a small number of highly motivated and skilled staff. We have been sustained largely by the financial support of a number of charitable trusts and, to a lesser extent, by the subscriptions of our members.

(b) Appraisal of IPRT's Current Status

At present, IPRT has one staff member and enjoys a secure but modest financial position. IPRT is not currently in receipt of any public funds and relies on donations from charitable trusts and membership subscriptions to cover its operational costs. This contributes to guaranteeing the independence of the organisation. However, our capacity to achieve substantial progress in the policy area has been restricted by the limited resources at our disposal.

IPRT has established a role as an independent, focussed, niche NGO. Relative to its capacity and resources, IPRT has earned a good reputation among decision-makers and has established a relatively high profile with the general public through our own initiatives and by engaging with public policy discussions around issues of importance to penal reform. However, it is also true that some sections of the public, and even some individuals and institutions operating in the criminal justice sphere, are not well informed about our work. It is also the case that much of IPRT's work has been reactive in nature and IPRT has not been in a position to set a policy agenda to the degree we would like.

(c) Environment for Action

While Ireland's rate of imprisonment remains close to the European average in terms of the average prison population (the prison population on any given date is sometimes referred to as the prison "stock"), there has been a trend towards expansion over the past 20 years. In October 2007, the average daily prison population was reported as being 3,325, which represents an increase of more than 50% since 1995 and corresponds to a rate of imprisonment of approximately 76 per 100,000 of population. The present prison-building programme promises a further significant increase in prison capacity.

Ireland continues to have high rates of committal to prison relative to the overall prison "stock", which is explained by the prevalence of short sentences of less than one year and by a high proportion of prisoners committed on remand. In 2006 there were 12,157 committals to prison while the average prison population was 3,331. Notable features of our prison population include the imprisonment of debtors and fine defaulters, poor literacy levels and poor mental health. Overcrowding is common and the absence of basic sanitation or "slopping out" remains an issue in a large proportion of the prison estate. Illegal drugs are widespread and concerns have been expressed about rising levels of inter-prisoner violence.

On a positive note, the new prison buildings, while not without their challenges, will improve living conditions for many prisoners. Important progress is being made in relation to the system of youth justice and there are some positive moves towards developing alternatives to custody. At the same time, systems for the rehabilitation of prisoners in detention and for reintegration to society on release remain underdeveloped. Over the lifetime of IPRT's existence, a number of important new agencies have been established including the Inspector of Prisons and the Irish Human Rights Commission. Ireland has also ratified a number of important human rights treaties, has given legal effect to the European Convention on Human Rights and has enacted new prisons legislation governing the administration of prisons. There has also been a growth in the work of a number of statutory and non-governmental agencies in a number of areas of penal policy. The work of all of these agencies is an important factor influencing the strategic decisions IPRT makes about the issues that we will concentrate on over the period of this Plan.

2. Strategic Plan

(a) Background to Strategic Plan

The main purpose behind the development of a Strategic Plan for IPRT is to bring coherence and clarity of purpose to the work of the organisation. The Strategic Plan will also make the work of the organisation more transparent and assist the IPRT Board to measure our success in achieving clear and stated goals.

In preparing our Strategic Plan, we have consulted widely with other agencies working in the Irish penal system and in related fields. It has been suggested to us that while IPRT has reached and maintained a high profile given its resources, its work could be more structured and could achieve greater connection between our more academic research work and the practical reality of the penal system. The Plan has been drafted through a series of facilitated Board meetings over the first half of 2008, where IPRT had the benefit of a professional facilitator with expertise in change management in both the private and public sectors. We have also canvassed the views of our membership through a structured questionnaire. A significant proportion of our membership responded to this questionnaire and their views have been incorporated.

(b) Sustainable Development of IPRT

IPRT believes that there will remain a need for a specialist penal reform organisation in Ireland in the longer term. In this regard, our Strategic Plan is aimed at ensuring the sustainable development of the organisation into the future. The Goals and Objectives set out in this Strategic Plan are predicated on the view that IPRT can realistically aspire to operating at a more pro-active and expanded level of operation into the longer term. In this regard we have set out an incremental level of development over the period of the Strategic Plan, which aims to match the operational expansion of the organisation with a parallel development of our capacity.

Models for the level of operation we might ultimately aspire to in the longer term can be seen in the work of organisations such as the Howard League for Penal Reform and the Prison Reform Trust in the UK. In Ireland too we can look at the growth in

recent years of other human rights and social justice NGOs as models for the level of organisational development IPRT might aspire to. If we take the present level of IPRT activity as representing Stage 1 in our development (2008), Stage 2 will see us reach an intermediate point where we will have 2-3 staff, a secure funding base, an increase in membership and a wide range of structured activity in the areas of research, awareness raising and campaigning (2010). Targets and objectives for Stage 3 of this developmental process will be set in 2010 and will involve further expansion of IPRT along the lines of leading human rights NGOs in the UK and Ireland.

(c) Outline of Strategic Plan

By first defining the IPRT's vision for the Irish penal system, the Strategic Plan makes clear the fundamental principles which motivate all of our work. In the context of the Irish penal system, this vision takes concrete form in our mission statement. This is what IPRT is fundamentally about, a clear statement of our *raison d'être*.

From the Vision and Mission Statement, the Plan will set out four key Organisational Goals, which can be deduced from Vision and Mission Statement. The Organisational Goals are: research and policy; raising awareness; campaigning and building alliances; and growing the organisation. These four areas are the “how” of how IPRT will achieve its Mission Statement. In relation to each of these Goals, a strategic programme of objectives is set out, with critical success indicators, timelines and long-term targets to measure achievement of the Goals in question. The four Organisational Goals are:

- Develop a coherent and comprehensive base of research and policy;
- Raise awareness of the work of IPRT and of penal reform issues;
- Campaign across our policy remit by building alliances with key stakeholders,
- Grow the organisation in an incremental and sustainable manner.

Finally, an Operational Plan describes the structures, processes and resources that IPRT uses to achieve its Organisational Goals at a day-by-day level. IPRT's primary resources are its Board, its Staff and its Members. The Operational Plan also describes the financial and other resources available to IPRT and provides a clear description of the “nuts and bolts” of IPRT.

3. IPRT’s Vision and Mission Statement

Following consultation and a strategic planning process, the Board of IPRT now articulates a new **Vision** for the organisation. This **Vision** expresses the fundamental objectives of IPRT, which underpin all of our work and provide the inspiration for the goals set out in this Strategic Plan:

IPRT’s Vision:

“Respect for rights in the penal system with prison as a last resort”

To achieve this **Vision**, IPRT commits itself to achieving a number of specific objectives. These objectives are set out in the **Mission Statement** of the organisation.

IPRT’s Mission Statement:

“IPRT is committed to reducing imprisonment, respecting the rights of everyone in the penal system and progressive reform of the penal system based on evidence-led policies. IPRT will achieve these goals through research, raising awareness, building alliances and growing our organisation.”

All of IPRT’s work is underpinned and informed by our Values as an organisation

IPRT’s Values

Respect for human rights

Advocacy based on research and evidence-led policies

Working constructively with others in the penal system

The remaining part of this Strategic Plan will set out how IPRT intends to fulfil this Mission Statement, through the attainment of specific **Strategic Organisational Goals** and through the **Operational** use of IPRT’s available resources.

4. Core Organisational Goals

To achieve the mission statement of IPRT, we have identified four core Organisational Goals. These Goals are the principal means by which IPRT will achieve its Mission Statement.

The four Organisational Goals are to:

- Develop a coherent and comprehensive base of research and policy
- Raise awareness of the work of IPRT and of penal reform issues
- Campaign on IPRT's policy areas through building alliances with key stakeholders
- Grow the organisation in an incremental and sustainable manner.

Remit of Operation

Before outlining the four key areas of work, we need to first determine the remit of our work: those areas in which we do work and those that we do not. As our Mission Statement we have identified our key areas of work as reducing imprisonment, respecting the rights of everyone in the penal system, and promoting progressive reform of the penal system. In operational terms this means that the focus of IPRT is on (i) the use of imprisonment, including sentencing, alternatives to custody and diversion and (ii) the treatment of those in detention. It is not concerned with broader criminal justice issues that are unrelated to the penal system. In identifying the remit of the organisation, we have focussed on those issues that we are uniquely placed to work on and we have also been cognisant of the areas of operation of other bodies and agencies. In this way we have identified areas of policy in which we feel we can strategically focus our resources and expertise to make clear and measurable impacts.

4.1 Develop a coherent and comprehensive base of research and policy across all of the policy issues identified in our remit

The first Strategic Objective for IPRT is to research and develop a policy base for the organisation. This policy base will cover all of the issues within IPRT's remit and will be based on clear criteria for papers. All IPRT Papers will be clear and comprehensible, will serve as authoritative reference documents, and will be durable

and of lasting relevance and value. All of IPRT's work in this area will be underpinned by our value of reliance on evidence-led policies.

Taking our defined remit as a starting point, IPRT has conducted (i) a thorough review of our work to date, (ii) an appraisal of the most pressing issues facing the Irish penal system, and (iii) an analysis of those areas in which IPRT is best positioned to make an effective contribution. From this analysis IPRT has identified ten areas on which we will concentrate our work. In each of these areas we will develop policy position as the foundation for all of our work. These are:

1. Human Rights, Prison Conditions and Deaths in Prison
2. Rule of Law in Prison and Accountability
3. Women in Detention
4. Youth Detention
5. Health in Prison, including Mental Health and Drug Policy
6. Immigration Detention
7. Sentencing
8. Reintegration of Prisoners
9. Alternatives to Custody and Diversion
10. Prison Building and Prison Policy

There will be two main categories of Papers: (i) Position Papers, brief summary documents outlining the main facts around a policy issue and setting out the principles of IPRT policy in that area; and (ii) Research Papers, which are more comprehensive studies on an issue containing detailed policy recommendations. All Papers will be approved by the IPRT Board according to standards of clarity, authority and relevance and will provide the basis for IPRT's Awareness Raising and Campaigning work.

4.2 Raise awareness of the work of IPRT and of penal reform issues

As an advocacy organisation, communication plays a crucial role to achieving our Mission Statement in two related ways. First, to ensure that our research and policy work is effective, it is crucial for IPRT to disseminate and raise awareness of our policy position and research papers. Secondly, to achieve our wider policy objectives,

it is crucial that IPRT plays a leading role in public debate around penal issues and influences key stakeholders.

Engaging in public debate around issues related to criminal justice, and prisoners' rights in particular, presents particular demands and requires particular skills. A large part of our work in this area will involve responding to the apparent demonisation of offenders, dispelling myths and instead disseminating facts about the penal system. IPRT will strive to ensure that our Executive Director and Board members are well-briefed and prepared for these tasks. We have identified six key means of achieving these twin goals:

1. Media
2. Website
3. Publications
4. Events
5. Academic Publications and Conferences
6. E-Bulletin/Members

4.3 Campaign on IPRT's policy areas through building alliances with key stakeholders

As a small niche organisation, it is important in pursuing the IPRT policy agenda that we build alliances with other key stakeholders in the criminal justice system. IPRT again has a dual purpose here. On one hand we aim to ensure that our own work has maximum impact by integrating and coordinating it with the work of other agencies, and on the other hand we aim to build an infrastructure of allies in favour of penal reform. We have identified 10 key stakeholder groups that we will establish formal relationships with over the period 2008-2010:

1. The Oireachtas
2. Legal Professions/ Judiciary
3. Government
4. The Statutory Sector
5. Prison Staff
6. Prisoners

7. Civic Society
8. Academia
9. International Bodies
10. Groups and Institutions in Northern Ireland

4.4. Grow the organisation in an incremental and sustainable manner

IPRT believes that penal reform will remain a challenging issue for many years to come and that accordingly there will remain a need for a specialist penal reform organisation in Ireland in the longer term. Our Strategic Plan is aimed at ensuring the sustainable development of the organisation into the future, with the projected expansion in our activities is matched by an attainable increase in our available resources. In relation to each of the key area of resources of the organisation, we have identified clear objectives for the period 2008-2010, which will allow us to meet the objectives set out in Organisational Goals 1-3 and which will bring IPRT to the next stage in our development. The resources of IPRT include:

1. The Board
2. Membership
3. Patrons/Supporters
4. Staff
5. Interns and Volunteers
6. Funding Base and Strategy

5. Organisational Structure

This section describes the structures and resources which IPRT will use to achieve its organisational goals and the procedures we have in place to ensure that the organisation makes the most efficient and effective use of our limited resources.

5.1 Members and Annual General Meeting

IPRT will continue to operate as a membership organisation and the AGM is the ultimate governing body of the organisation. According to the Constitution of the Trust, the AGM will be held not more than 15 months after the previous AGM and will (i) approve the annual report of the trust; (ii) approve the financial statement of the trust; (iii) approve the workplan for the following year; (iv) elect a new board of directors; (v) determine the policy and direction of the trust; (vi) appoint auditors, bankers and solicitors, as appropriate; (vii) and consider any other matters which it may consider appropriate.

The rules and procedures relating to members and to the AGM are set out in the IPRT Constitution. In line with the submissions of members to the consultation process around the IPRT Strategic Plan, the Executive Director will endeavour to ensure that members can make appropriate contributions to the work of the organisation. The Constitution provides for both Patrons and Honorary Members. The Chairperson will bring forward proposals in relation to both categories of members and the Board will make decisions on these proposals.

5.2 Board of Directors

The Executive Director and the Board will work together to maintain and build an expert board that provides the organisation with leadership and expertise in a range of areas relevant to penal reform. The Board is committed to ensuring that its membership is regularly reviewed and supported in performing its functions. The value that the Board brings to the organisation is a capacity to focus on the broader strategic goals of the organisation, above the day-to-day work of the office. It is a key resource for IPRT and in order to maximise the input of its members, we set out here a clear description of the responsibilities and role of the Board.

The IPRT Constitution provides that the Board may comprise of at least six members. Six members of the Board are elected at the organisation's AGM and further members may be co-opted by the Board. In line with the Vision of the organisation, IPRT is committed to ensuring that the Board is representative of Irish society, is gender balanced and is an expert Board that includes the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully lead the organisation. The Board is also committed to ensuring that there is a regular turnover in membership of the Board.

Strategic Leadership

The first function of the Board is to ensure that the organisation maintains its institutional integrity; stays true to, and advances its mission, values and mandate; and focuses on those activities that are most important to realising its goals. This role will include developing and reviewing all major policy decisions of the organisation. The primary role of the Board is to ensure that the Strategic Plan of IPRT is implemented and kept under regular review.

Governance

The second function of the Board is to ensure that the organisation is led well and managed soundly, and in doing so ensuring that the board is well-constituted, prepared, and equipped to carry out its responsibilities. The Board is uniquely placed to provide oversight and guidance to the work of the organisation, ensuring that the work of the IPRT remains focussed and true to our Strategic Plan. Central among the governance functions of the Board is the recruitment and oversight of the work of the Executive Director and staff. The Board will meet at quarterly intervals and decisions by the Board will be made by consensus where possible, or alternatively by consultative decision-making (whereby the Chairperson makes decisions in consultation with the other Board members) where consensus is not possible.

The **Chairperson** will lead the Board and will act on behalf of the Board when it is not in session. The Chairperson will work with the Executive Director to set the agenda for Board meetings and will chair all Board meetings. While the Board of IPRT will agree the organisation's policies, the execution of those policies at the Board level will be undertaken by the Chairperson. In the absence of the Chairperson,

the **Vice-Chair** will assume the functions and role of the Chairperson. Where significant decisions need to be taken at Board level between scheduled Board meetings, this will usually be done through the **Management Committee**. The Management Committee comprises of the Chairperson, Vice-Chair, Treasurer and the Executive Director.

Financial Oversight

Safeguarding the financial soundness and integrity of the organisation, and assuring the adequacy of its financial resources is integral to the viability of the organisation and the organisation must have a stable and diverse funding base to achieve its goals. As a limited company the Directors of IPRT, as a company, are drawn from the Board and have ultimate financial responsibility for IPRT. The Treasurer is the member of the Board responsible as accounting officer for the organisation.

Work

Given the limited resources available to IPRT and the expertise of our Board members, individual Board Members may be allocated responsibility for the work on some of the objectives set out in the Organisational Goals of this Plan. Procedures as to how work by Board members in those areas may be managed are set out below.

5.3 Executive Director

At present the only full-time staff member of the organisation is the Executive Director. The primary role of the Executive Director is to carry out the day-to-day work of the organisation, to implement the Strategic Plan and to achieve the Organisational Goals set out therein. The Executive will liaise with the Board Members individually and collectively on the achievement of those Goals and is accountable to the Board for the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

5.4 Staffing and Staff Policies

Over the period of the Strategic Plan, it is anticipated that, resource permitting, IPRT will begin to recruit additional staff. All staff will be recruited jointly by the Board and the Executive Director and will be managed by and accountable to the Executive Director. IPRT will develop staff policies to cover all the main areas of human resource management during the period of the Strategic Plan. In doing so, IPRT is

committed the principles of equality of opportunity, to staff development and to ensuring full respect for all labour laws.

5.5 Practices and Procedure

This section sets out the practices and procedures of IPRT as to how it achieves its Organisational Goals and clarifies the roles of the Chairperson, Board, Executive Director and Staff in achieving the objectives set out in section 3 above.

Research

Work on the research objectives of the organisation will be overseen by the Executive Director and a nominated member of the Board. Individual Board members will be identified to contribute to certain research projects. The Executive Director and nominated Board member will oversee work on all policy papers and bring draft papers before the Board who will give final approval for all policy papers.

Raising Awareness

Work on the awareness raising objectives of the organisation will be carried out primarily by the Executive Director in consultation with the Chairperson. Where individual Board members are identified to work on specific awareness raising objectives, the Executive Director will support and assist them as required. All awareness raising work will be coordinated through the IPRT office.

Campaigning and Building Alliances

Work on the campaigning and alliance-building objectives of the organisation will be carried out primarily by the Executive Director. Board members will have a crucial role to play in maintaining good relations with key stakeholders through formal and informal contact. Where individual Board members are identified to work on specific campaigning objectives, the Executive Director will support and assist them as required. All campaigning work will be coordinated through the IPRT office.

Growing the organisation

The main responsibility for achieving the objectives relating to Board development will lie with the Chairperson and Vice-Chair. The wider objectives of member and

funding development will be coordinated by the Executive Director in conjunction with the Chairperson.

(d) Provision for Review of the Strategic Plan

Regular review of the strategic plan is vital to monitor its implementation and to gauge its effectiveness. In IPRT, it is the responsibility of the Board to keep the Strategic Plan under review and to ensure that the goals and objectives set out in the Plan are being met. The Board will review the implementation of the Strategic Plan on an annual basis and will bring the details of this review to the AGM.

In 2010, IPRT will prepare and carry out a comprehensive review of this Strategic Plan with a view to beginning work on the next Strategic Plan for the organisation.