

I am a Detective Sergeant in the PSNI [REDACTED] I joined in the wake of transition from the RUC to the new service; a service created to stabilise the peace process in Northern Ireland and renew the Police Force.

There was much suspicion in those early days of the PSNI formation; in particular around what the new Service could bring that was not already achieved by the established RUC – a force which stood proudly in the face of Terrorism throughout the troubles. Any change would be met with fear and scepticism. Hundreds of good RUC men and women were murdered protecting and serving all the peoples of Northern Ireland. The creation of the new service was seen by many as an appeasement to those same terrorists.

The Patton report completely transformed the structure, composition, training and ethos of Policing in Northern Ireland. Lateral transfer, new training and technology, civilianisation of posts which did not require warranted officers and new approaches in how crime was recorded changed how Police conducted their business.

The initial costs associated with the changes soon paid back with interest. The new NICHE computer system, which maintained files in electronic format for direct sharing with the Public Prosecution Service increased efficiency and professionalism, along with a new Crime Management Centre to allow officers to relay the details of incidents whilst still on-the-ground, and remain on patrol, rather than returning to their station to complete a report which a trained touch-typist civilian could easily do with enough information given over the phone undoubtedly increased the visible Police presence in communities, leaving the officers free to be more pro-active and have more time to deal with incidents and investigate matters fully.

I propose that the Gardai should undergo and adopt similar transformation and developments.

LATERAL TRANSFER

As the years have passed the public's faith in Policing in Northern Ireland has steadily increased. The introduction of 50/50 recruitment, which directed that new recruits would come from 50% Protestant and 50% Catholic background dramatically changed the public perception on the culture within the Police. What was once seen as a cold-store for Nationalists became a normal and reasonable career option for many people of that tradition. In addition to the increased recruitment of Catholic officers the report also opened the door for lateral transfers from other Police Services. This lateral transfer policy enriched and transformed the Culture within the new Police Service equally as much as the 50 / 50 ratio policy introduced. Officers from completely different backgrounds to those of us from Northern Ireland were suddenly amongst the "native" cops. Officers from areas of London, Merseyside, Yorkshire and the like, with different life and work experiences were recruited and the result was undoubtedly a more tolerant, outward facing, progressive and stronger Police Service. Indeed, in many Police regions in England it is a requirement to serve in a different Police Region to your first region if you are to attain the more senior ranks of assistant and Chief Constables. The experience of Policing in another region exposes the candidate to other ways of problem solving and makes for a more developed and experienced candidate.

The Gardai should introduce Lateral Transfer at all ranks up to and including Superintendent. Transferees of just Constable rank or Sergeant or Inspector will only integrate into the fabric of Policing at that level. Transfer at all ranks would ensure the change is felt throughout all the tiers of Policing and management. Additionally, transfers at all ranks will shred any perception that the Gardai are a closed-off and insular unit by this single enactment.

The Commission should consider the experience and competencies required by the proposed lateral transferees at each rank. It may be prudent to stipulate that only officers with service of four years at a particular rank would be considered suitable for transfer into the rank of similar standing in AGS. This would ensure that any officer accepted for lateral transfer is established at that rank, has completed any probation periods and has completed all initial training at that rank.

A further benefit of recruiting officers from the PSNI is that those officers carry a competence and experience in handling firearms. Every officer with PSNI is trained to carry a handgun and furthermore, trained in the legislation around the use of firearms by Police, in the course of duties.

Should lateral transfer to occur the Gardai would benefit from recruiting experienced police officers, known and proven to be dedicated officers, perhaps in specialist roles, such as Detective, without the large scale training and mentoring requirements at entry level.

With Patton, Pension Portability was an integral feature of Lateral Transfer and this ensured the most qualified and experienced officers were attracted to join PSNI. I believe it is imperative that the Gardai adopt this policy to ensure the best candidates sign up.

The following advantages and benefits would also apply -

- Financial - the host service from which the officer is leaving has incurred all the costs associated with training that officer throughout their career.
- Professionalism & Expertise - the lateral transfer process can be tailored to recruit officers in a bespoke area of specialist need. For example if more Detectives are required to investigate Organised Crime Gangs – a process can be drawn up to attract officers with such expertise from outside forces.
- Communication - the creation of informal links between the Gardai and the Policing area from which the transferred officer has come from.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion I propose:-

1) Lateral transfer from other Police Services should be permitted at all ranks up to and including Superintendent. This will transform the culture of the Gardai for the better and introduce new experience and ways of thinking, without the costs of having to train persons to reach the levels and experience sought.

2) Civilianisation of all roles where a Police Constable (i.e. person who carries a Power of Arrest) is not required – e.g. gaoler, receptionist, prisoner transport, communications centre operator, etc. This will save monies and will ensure that persons employed in such roles will be specialists in that activity.

3) Creation of a central Occurrence Management Unit, operated by Civilian staff, who will record the details of calls and incidents – thus freeing officers from computer terminals to spend longer on-the-ground, with the community. The crime recorders will be skilled in their role and how crime is recorded will have uniformity throughout the country. Such a proposal will require that the Gardai invest in a new technology system to allow officers and administrative staff to record and monitor crime to deliver a more efficient and fully accountable service.

It is my opinion that officers from outside Police Services wishing to join the Gardai should have no boundaries, impediments or financial penalties put in their way that would disadvantage them or prevent the seamless transition and transfer of skills to the benefit of the Gardai and that officer.

On a personal level, the work of Bob Peirce and Chris Patton not only changed Policing in Northern Ireland forever it also ensured political stability, cultural reform and enhanced public confidence in the Justice System. I wish the Commission every success, because as the Patton Report showed, the work being carried out now can and will transform Irish society.