

COOPERATION WITH OTHER POLICE SERVICES

- 18.1** Our terms of reference asked us to make proposals concerning the “scope for structured cooperation with the Garda Siochana and other police forces”. We inquired into the cooperation that exists at present, and also consulted police services elsewhere about their relationships with police in neighbouring countries.
- 18.2** The present relationship between the RUC and the Garda Siochana is regarded by both police services as very good, indeed officers from each service went so far as to tell us it could hardly be better. Each service expressed a high regard for the professionalism of the other. Our judgment is nevertheless that a great deal more could be done to exploit the “scope for structured cooperation”, and we make several specific recommendations below. We believe that these proposals would greatly enhance the effectiveness of crime prevention and detection in the island of Ireland, where much crime already has a cross-border dimension, a phenomenon which we would expect to grow in significance.
- 18.3** The RUC also has numerous links with other police services, particularly with those in Britain, but also with North American agencies and others elsewhere in the world. Again, we found that the professionalism of the RUC is held in high esteem by those like the Metropolitan Police or the Federal Bureau of Investigation who have had close dealings with it over the years. However we found, not surprisingly, that a high proportion of these dealings have been in the counter-terrorism field, and cooperation across the broader range of police activities has been less developed than one would expect between a major United Kingdom police service and other services in the United Kingdom, North America, Europe and elsewhere.
- 18.4** We believe that this needs to be remedied, both because the globalisation of crime requires police services around the world to collaborate with each other more effectively and also because the exchange of best practice ideas between police services will help the effectiveness of domestic policing. We make a number of recommendations below with these objectives in mind.

Cooperation with the Garda Siochana

- 18.5** First, the Garda Siochana. We accept that the present relationship between the Garda and the RUC is, as both services described it to us, a good one. There are frequent meetings, both regular and ad hoc, at various levels from the operational level to the top ranks. There has long been a good exchange of information and good operational cooperation, particularly against terrorism.
- 18.6** When we looked, however, at the cooperation between Kent County Constabulary and its neighbours in France and Belgium, we found that much was being done there which is not being done between the RUC and the Garda; and that the cooperation there was more structured, whereas that in Ireland was more ad hoc and dependent on personal relationships. Kent police have signed several protocols with police services across the Channel; they participate in an annual Cross Channel Intelligence Conference with police services from France, Belgium and Holland, which has working groups dealing with such issues as smuggling, vehicle crime,

organized crime and crime trends; they are able to work with counterparts in mainland European jurisdictions, in evidence gathering, including interviewing witnesses on both sides of the channel; and there are Kent police officers based in France, and vice versa, to facilitate liaison. Exchanges between police services also benefit from European Union funding.

- 18.7** All these arrangements strike us as sensible cooperation between neighbouring police services in separate sovereign jurisdictions, designed to achieve more effective policing in the interests of both sides. Yet comparable arrangements do not exist between the two parts of Ireland, even though the scale of cross-border criminal activity is at least as great as that between Kent and France or Belgium and probably rather larger. *We recommend that the two police services should have written protocols covering key aspects of cooperation.*
- 18.8** *We also recommend that the present pattern of meetings between the police services in Northern Ireland and the Republic should be enhanced by an annual conference, designed to drive forward cooperation in areas of common concern.* These areas might include drugs, smuggling, financial crime, paedophile rings, or any other subject identified by the conference, and working groups might be set up to deal with each. We would see some attraction in extending participation in the conference to other police services in the British Isles, such as the Metropolitan Police and Strathclyde, with whom the Irish and Northern Ireland police have well developed connections, provided there was a solid policing case for doing so and both the Irish and Northern Ireland police services agreed.
- 18.9** Cooperation between police services, particularly neighbouring ones, can be greatly facilitated by personnel exchanges. These help to familiarise services with the way their neighbours work, and to build up personal links between different services. Exchanges also help disseminate new ideas and best practice. Surprisingly few exchanges take place even between the Northern Ireland police and other United Kingdom police services, and none between the RUC and the Garda Siochana.
- 18.10** *We recommend that there should be a programme of long-term personnel exchanges, such as fixed-term secondments, between the Northern Ireland police and the Garda, in specialist fields where cooperation between the two services is most needed, such as drugs, and in areas such as training.* (We do not envisage exchanges of patrol officers.) *We also recommend that consideration be given to posting liaison officers from each service to the central headquarters and/or border area headquarters of the other.* Liaison officers should not become a substitute for direct regular communication between the police services at the local or operational level, but could be useful to deal with new or unusual business where cooperative channels have not already been established.
- 18.11** Joint training opportunities would also be valuable in building up a framework of cooperation between the Northern Ireland police and the Garda. There have been almost none in the past. *We recommend that there should be structured cooperation between the two police services in training,* which we believe would bring a number of benefits, including the development of personal relationships between police officers of the two services, the sharing of expertise and possibly economies of scale.
- 18.12** We were surprised to discover that there are no joint exercises between the RUC and the Garda. There has been no joint disaster planning, in the event for example of a train or aircraft crash on

the border. *We consider this to be a serious omission and recommend that it be rectified immediately; there should be joint disaster planning and the plans should be tested by regular joint exercises.*

18.13 We were informed by Kent police that, in the event of a disaster taking place on one side of the Channel with a substantial cross-Channel dimension – for example the Heysel stadium disaster of May 1985 – it is standard and automatic procedure for officers of the other country or countries involved to be dispatched immediately to the area of the disaster to work with the local police as part of the investigating team. We were struck that, although there was undoubtedly close cooperation between the Garda and the RUC immediately after the bomb in Omagh in August 1998, such an exchange of officers did not take place. *We recommend that consideration be given to establishing a provision for an immediate exchange of officers and pooling of investigative teams after major incidents with a substantial cross-border dimension, akin to the arrangements which exist between Kent and the police services of France and Belgium.*

18.14 Joint planning and exercising would greatly enhance the effectiveness of the police response to major incidents and also in the fight against cross-border crime. This could be further enhanced by improving the inter-operability of the communications systems of the two police services. We discovered from talking to border police officers in both the Garda and the RUC that the radio links between them are not always effective. Their information technology systems are incompatible. *We recommend that every effort should be made to ensure that fast, effective and reliable communications are established between the Garda and the Northern Ireland police, both through improved radio links and through compatible IT systems.* We should like to see the RUC and the Garda coordinate their IT strategies closely. The main purpose would be to facilitate operational links, but we see no reason why there might not also be savings from joint training courses or joint research projects in IT.

18.15 Compatible IT systems would permit the development of common or shared databases (subject to data protection legislation), which could greatly assist the police services of both Northern Ireland and the Republic in dealing with cross-border crime. *We recommend that joint database development be pursued as a matter of priority in all the main areas of cross-border criminality, such as drugs, smuggling, vehicle theft and terrorism.*

Cooperation with other police services

18.16 The need for close cooperation is greatest in the case of the Garda Síochána, as it would be between any two neighbouring police services sharing a long and open land boundary. But much of what we have said above applies also to police services elsewhere, particularly in Great Britain. The RUC has had personnel exchanges with police services in Great Britain, but on a much smaller scale than police services elsewhere in the United Kingdom have had with each other. There are reasons for this, not least the reluctance of many police officers in Great Britain to consider moving to Northern Ireland during the Troubles. But our impression is that these are only a partial explanation and that exchanges have not been pursued as a matter of much priority. This is a pity. We believe strongly that any police service, or non-police organization for that matter, can benefit from extensive interchange and contact with other organizations. Moreover it is normal in Great Britain for police officers to serve in more than one police service before reaching chief officer rank (Assistant Chief Constable or above); but most chief officers in the RUC

do not have this wider experience. *We recommend that a determined effort be made to develop exchanges, and long-term secondments, between the Northern Ireland police and police services in Great Britain.*

- 18.17** Training links between the RUC and police services in Great Britain have tended to be limited to senior officers, and contacts generally are much more developed at the level of chief officers. For the same reasons that joint training with the Garda may be useful, so we also believe that training links would be beneficial with other police services. *We therefore recommend that there should be training exchanges and some joint training between the Northern Ireland police and police services in Great Britain. We further recommend that consideration be given to structured links between the four principal police training establishments in the British Isles, namely Bramshill (England), Templemore (Republic of Ireland), Tulliallan (Scotland) and Garnerville or the proposed new police college in Northern Ireland, perhaps in the form of periodic meetings rotating around the four venues.*
- 18.18** The RUC has developed contacts with police services further afield, notably with the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the United States. Recently the FBI organized a joint training visit for officers from both the RUC and the Garda Síochána. We welcome this development and believe that overseas exposure of this kind is useful for any police service. *We recommend that international training exchanges be further developed, focussing in particular on matters where the police in Northern Ireland need overseas police cooperation and on best practice developments in policing worldwide. We also recommend cooperation with other police services in the field of research.*
- 18.19** We believe that exchanges of this kind will benefit all participants. Northern Ireland police officers have much to give as well as much to gain. The RUC has internationally recognized expertise in a number of areas of policing, not only in matters resulting from the security situation in Northern Ireland but also in such areas as child abuse and rape (CARE). A number of European countries have sought and received CARE training from the RUC. *We recommend that the police should develop opportunities to provide more training for overseas police services in their areas of excellence.*
- 18.20** Police in any jurisdiction benefit from serving alongside colleagues from other countries in United Nations peace-keeping operations. Several police services from Great Britain have participated in such operations in recent years, as has the Garda Síochána. The RUC has not participated in the past, yet it has many skills which would be valuable in such situations. *We recommend that the Northern Ireland police should be ready to participate in future United Nations peace-keeping operations and we express the strong hope that they be invited to do so* (see also paragraph 13.20). We would also encourage the Northern Ireland police to seek out other international policing opportunities, for example secondments to Interpol and Europol.