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RECRUITMENT

- 15.1** We have noted before that the main problem facing policing in Northern Ireland has been the political divide between Protestants/Unionists and Catholics/Nationalists and the identification of the police with unionism and the British state in the minds of many nationalists. This has undoubtedly had some effect on the rate of application to join the police from the Catholic/Nationalist community, as has the active discouragement, sometimes including intimidation, which many potential recruits from that community have experienced.
- 15.2** The Agreement is an opportunity to move decisively away from this problem. The Agreement includes agreed constitutional arrangements for Northern Ireland, and an agreed polity provides a basis for agreed policing. In this report we have recommended a new police service working closely with, and responsive to the local communities it serves. The key to making that police service representative of those communities – indeed the key to the successful implementation of nearly everything in this report – is that the leaders of communities now actively encourage their young people to apply to join the police service. *We therefore recommend that all community leaders, including political party leaders and local councillors, bishops and priests, schoolteachers and sports authorities, should take steps to remove all discouragements to members of their communities applying to join the police, and make it a priority to encourage them to apply.* We cannot stress this recommendation too strongly. Unless it is implemented, the following recommendations will have limited effect. *We specifically recommend that the Gaelic Athletic Association should repeal its rule 21, which prohibits members of the police in Northern Ireland from being members of the Association.* The continued existence of this rule in the light of our recommendations can only be a deterrent to the recruitment of Catholics, or a factor in separating those Catholics who do join the police from an important part of their culture.
- 15.3** The police have tried numerous ideas to increase the recruitment of Catholics and women. It is difficult to gauge how successful these measures have been. The percentage of Catholic applicants rose from 12% to 21% after the IRA ceasefire in 1994, and fell back when the ceasefire ended. It rose again in 1998 to 20%. The number of women recruits in the 1998 intake was 37%. These increases would appear to owe more to perceptions of an improving political and security situation than to anything else. Programmes such as schools liaison, one week work experience attachments for students, familiarisation days and open days must have had some impact. But the overall relationship between schools and the police is not all that it should be; the police have been unable to establish liaison with some 25% of schools in Northern Ireland, and those schools are in precisely those areas where communities are least well represented in the police (and some of the schools with which the police are in contact are only prepared to meet police officers on the premises of other schools).
- 15.4** *We recommend that liaison be established between all schools and universities and the police service in Northern Ireland immediately, and that work experience attachments and familiarisation days be organized with active support and encouragement from community leaders and teachers.*
- 15.5** We were impressed by the beneficial effect that police cadet schemes had had in the United States,

both in improving the relationship between the police and young people from under-represented communities, and also in improving recruitment from those communities. The Chicago Police Department's cadet scheme, for example, had been responsible for encouraging many black recruits into a department that had very few black officers thirty years ago. The New York Police Department has a large cadet programme, with 1,200 recruits enrolling in the current year. Many US police departments also have "Police Explorer" schemes, sometimes jointly run by the police and youth organizations, which offer activity programmes for teenagers, particularly aimed at those from lower-income neighbourhoods. The Explorer programmes are not recruitment exercises, but they help contribute to a cooperative relationship between police and community which undoubtedly improves the prospects for broader recruitment from the community.

- 15.6** The recommendations we have made for community policing should create such a cooperative relationship, but we believe that serious thought should be given to setting up a police cadet scheme in Northern Ireland and activity programmes akin to the Explorer programmes in the United States. These schemes should be open to all young people, but targeted particularly in those areas where the relationship between police and community needs most development. Schemes like this could only work, however, if there was active support and encouragement from political and community leaders, churches and teachers (see paragraph 15.2). Provided such support was forthcoming, and there was no risk to young people involved, *we recommend that pilot cadet schemes should be set up.* We have been told of proposals for high school programmes in the United States to prepare young people from inner city areas for a career in public service, including the police. We would suggest that a scheme on these lines be considered by the education authorities in Northern Ireland.
- 15.7** Although the Chief Constable should remain responsible and accountable for recruitment, we are not persuaded that the technical work of recruitment should be done by police officers or within the police service itself. We believe that it should be done by human resources professionals and *we recommend that the police should contract out the recruitment of both police officers and civilians into the police service. We also recommend that there should be lay involvement, including community representatives, on recruitment panels.*
- 15.8** We also think that advertising needs a more professional approach. We have not been impressed by the recruitment advertisements we have seen. *We recommend that the recruitment agency should advertise imaginatively and persistently, particularly in places likely to reach groups who are under-represented in the police.* As at present the advertisements should make it clear that the police service wants to attract more Catholics and women. But every effort should be made to get this message across, through local newspapers, magazines, club and community centre noticeboards and any other way that can be found to reach the target groups directly. Gays and lesbians, and ethnic minorities, should also hear through their own clubs, magazines and newspapers that their applications to join the police would be positively welcomed. *We recommend that the agency should advertise beyond Northern Ireland, in the rest of the United Kingdom and in the Republic of Ireland.*
- 15.9** Merit must remain a critical criterion for selection for the police service. We do not propose that religious or cultural identity, gender or ethnicity should be treated as a makeweight for merit. *We recommend that all candidates for the police service should continue to be required to reach a specified standard of merit in the selection procedure. Candidates reaching this standard should then enter a pool from which the required number of recruits can be drawn.* The procedure should apply both to officer and civilian recruitment.

- 15.10** *We recommend that an equal number of Protestants and Catholics should be drawn from the pool of qualified candidates.* This broadly reflects the religious breakdown of the population in the normal age range for recruitment (see Chapter 14). Our model (Chapter 13, boxes 9 and 10) envisages that 370 officer recruits will be taken each year on average (the maximum would be 440). 185 of these would be Catholic and 185 would be “Protestant or undetermined” (the present categories used by the RUC)¹. This would, incidentally, be a slightly higher level of Protestant recruitment than at present (172) as well as a much higher level of Catholic recruitment. We believe that the ratio of recruits should be kept to 50:50, at least for the ten years of the model. In the event that the level of Catholic application does not initially produce enough qualified candidates – which we hope will not happen, but it may take a year or two for interest and confidence to build up – it may be necessary to aggregate the numbers over two or three years.
- 15.11** We have consulted the Fair Employment Commission about the proposal above and we have taken an opinion from counsel on the legal position. We are advised that, although the proposal would require an amendment to domestic legislation, it is not incompatible with European legislation, so it is possible to make the requisite amendment to the law. Regrettably, the legal position is not the same in respect of recruitment of women, where European legislation clearly rules out such a proposal. We are, however, encouraged by the most recent level of female recruitment and our concern is more with retaining women in the service once they have been recruited. Every effort should be made to ensure that women are offered as many opportunities for a fulfilling full time career as men. We are concerned that so few women are promoted to the middle, let alone the senior ranks. The RUC has also been slower than other police forces to introduce flexible working arrangements, as Her Majesty’s Inspector of Constabulary observed in February 1998². *We recommend that priority be given to creating opportunities for part time working and job-sharing, both for police officers and police service civilians. We also recommend that career breaks be introduced.* The Royal Canadian Mounted Police allow any officer – male or female – to take a career break of up to five years, for any reason. Some women may decide to resign rather than take a career break. We suggest that, in such cases, an effort should be made to contact them after, say, five years, to ask them to consider rejoining the police, and that they should be able to do so without reapplying afresh. The Ontario Provincial Police have done this, with some success. A number of female police officers have raised the problem of child care with us, and *we recommend that child care facilities be introduced where practicable, or child care vouchers and flexible shift arrangements offered.*
- 15.12** Two points about the present recruiting process have been put to us as contributory factors to the low level of recruitment of people from Catholic/Nationalist and/or lower income areas. The first is the length of the recruitment process, which although now shorter than it was two years ago still takes up to a year. HMIC judges that some good candidates are bound to be lost because they withdraw during this period. Peer group pressure, second thoughts or impatience may lead them to change their mind. *We recommend that the process should be reduced to no more than six months.*
- 15.13** The second point is that the RUC has stricter eligibility criteria than other police services in that relatively minor police records can disqualify a candidate from further consideration. Young

¹ The RUC do not at present ask candidates their religion. Assumptions are made on the basis of what school a candidate attended. If a candidate attended a school outside Northern Ireland, no determination is made.

² HMIC evidence to House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, recorded in report published in July 1998, op.cit.

people from communities alienated from the police are more likely than others to have had minor run-ins with the police, and those communities are precisely the ones from which more recruits are needed. We emphatically do not suggest that people with serious criminal or terrorist backgrounds should be considered for police service but *we do recommend that young people should not be automatically disqualified for relatively minor criminal offences, particularly if they have since had a number of years without further transgressions, and that the criteria on this aspect of eligibility should be the same as those in the rest of the United Kingdom. We also recommend that there should be a procedure for appeal to the Police Ombudsman against disqualification of candidates.* There must be no predisposition to exclude candidates from republican backgrounds.

15.14 We received several submissions from people who felt that members of a police service should not be members of loyal orders or secret societies. The main organizations mentioned in this connection, although not the only ones, were the Orange Order and the Freemasons, both of which are clearly associated with the Protestant faith. The Orange Order is also explicitly associated with unionism, and has a constitutional position within the Ulster Unionist Party. The Orange Order were unable to tell us how many of their members were in the police service. In our (anonymous) cultural audit, less than 1% of police officers said they were members of the Orange Order, 8% said they were Masons, 88% said they were members of no such organizations, and 3% did not say whether they were or not. We cannot estimate how many of those who did not respond to our survey may be members of organizations, but from the large sample of 6,267 who did it would appear that the number of Orange Order members in the police service is small. The number of Masons is somewhat larger, and some former members of the police have remarked to us that Masons have in the past been present in relatively large numbers in the Special Branch.

15.15 Police officers, like everyone else, are entitled to their private views, and to join legal organizations that reflect those views. The key issue is whether membership of such organizations affects officers' ability to discharge their duties effectively and impartially. We would prefer that public servants were not members of secret societies or organizations perceived to be sectarian such as the Orange Order or the Ancient Order of the Hibernians; and we note that the Chief Constable has himself said that he would strongly prefer that members of the police service did not belong to Orange lodges³. But a ban on members of such organizations joining the police would exclude a significant percentage of the community (Orange Order membership is well over 60,000), and it is a primary aim of this report that there should be no section of society which feels excluded from policing. Provided it is clear that an officer's primary and overriding loyalty must be to the police service and to the values of that police service (a point on which we received clear assurances from the leaders of the Orange Order), we do not believe that membership of any legal organization should render someone ineligible to join the police. The new oath we have recommended (in paragraph 4.7) is drafted with this point in mind. All officers should in our view swear to "accord equal respect to all individuals and to their traditions and beliefs". This undertaking should have precedence over any oaths or qualifications associated with other organizations to which an officer may belong. It should continue to be the case that police should not participate in demonstrations or other public displays which may be perceived as influencing their impartiality.

15.16 If the problem of loyal orders and exclusive societies is largely one of perception, this owes much to the mystery as to who is a member and who is not. We believe that this is unhealthy in a police

³ Sir Ronnie Flanagan, evidence to House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, 18 March 1998. Committee report op.cit.

service and incompatible with the openness and transparency that we have advocated throughout this report. *We recommend that all officers – those now in service as well as all future recruits – should be obliged to register their interests and associations, and that the register should be held both by the police service and by the Police Ombudsman.*

15.17 We have so far concentrated on entry-level recruitment to the police service. The targets we have set would bring about a substantial change in the composition of the police service in the lower ranks within a few years. It would, however, take longer before the proportions in the senior ranks began to change as a result of what we have proposed. In fact the proportion of Catholics in the senior ranks – Superintendent and above – is over twice the proportion in the RUC as a whole (ie. over 16%). But we should like to see that proportion at least doubled in as short a time as possible. The only way to do this is to encourage more Catholics to apply for the senior positions. Selection must be on the basis of merit. One way that has occurred to us to broaden the pool of applicants is to contact Catholic police officers from Northern Ireland serving in police services elsewhere. We understand that there is no register of Northern Ireland Catholics serving in other United Kingdom police services, but we have met some and understand that there are quite a few others. We also understand that there are officers from Northern Ireland, some indeed still living in Northern Ireland, who serve in the Garda Síochána. These are Catholics who wanted to be police officers but, for one reason or another, were unable or unwilling to serve in Northern Ireland. *We recommend that the recruitment agency should seek to identify such officers, contact them and encourage them – particularly those in more senior ranks – to apply for positions in the Northern Ireland police.*

15.18 Regardless of religion, *we also recommend that lateral entry of experienced officers from other police services, and secondments or recruitments from non-police organizations should be actively encouraged.* We believe that any police service can benefit from the infusion of diverse talent and experience from elsewhere.