

COMPOSITION OF THE POLICE SERVICE

- 14.1** The parties to the Agreement believe it essential that the police service should be “representative of the society it polices”. The RUC is not representative. Only about 8% of its officers are Roman Catholics (see box 12), while more than 40% of the population of Northern Ireland is Roman Catholic (in the most recent census in 1991, 43% of those aged between 20 and 59 who declared their religion were Catholics, and 50% of those aged below 20). Only 12.6% of its officers are women (a third of whom are in the Part Time Reserve). We received many submissions from all parts of the community arguing that there should be more Catholics/Nationalists and more women in the police. The RUC is widely seen as overwhelmingly Protestant and male. We also received submissions arguing that there should be more officers from ethnic minorities, more gay and lesbian officers, and more officers from “working class” backgrounds.
- 14.2** We take the view that, as we said in Chapter 1, real community policing is impossible if the composition of the police service bears little relationship to the composition of the community as a whole. The MacPherson report on the investigation of the murder of Stephen Lawrence¹ in London made a similar point. McGarry and O’Leary argue in their book about policing in Northern Ireland that “effective policing requires strong links between the police and the people they serve, and it is impossible to create these if the police are overwhelmingly from one community, so more Catholics, especially nationalist Catholics, are needed on efficiency grounds”². We agree that this is a matter of the efficiency and effectiveness of policing; it is not just a matter of fairness, although that too is important. The police service in Northern Ireland needs to include appropriately large numbers of nationalists, including republicans, if it is to be fully effective.
- 14.3** Nor is it a matter of having Catholic police officers to police Catholic people, or Chinese officers to police the Chinese community. Indeed we would regard that sort of balkanisation of policing as unhealthy. And the observation was made to us that it is no more pleasurable for a Catholic to be arrested by a Catholic officer than by a Protestant. The point is that communities as a whole should see themselves as having a stake in the police service as a whole. If all communities see the police as their police, there will be a better, cooperative partnership between community and police, and therefore more effective policing.
- 14.4** It is the imbalance between the number of Catholics/Nationalists and Protestants/Unionists which is the most striking problem in the composition of the RUC. The under-representation of women is a problem for police services everywhere. The proportions in the rest of the United Kingdom, North America and continental Europe are not much higher, and in the Republic of Ireland the percentage is significantly lower. The American police departments we visited had been unable to find a way to get the proportion of women beyond about 15%, and in some departments – even with women chief officers as role models – they were experiencing a retreat from this figure. This problem goes well beyond Northern Ireland (and there is a specific complication regarding

¹ “The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry”, *op.cit.*

² McGarry, J. and O’Leary, B. *op.cit.*

European Union law which we describe in detail in paragraph 15. 11), but we are convinced that a much higher proportion of female officers would enhance the effectiveness of policing and we should like to see Northern Ireland leading the way in this area. In the next chapter, on recruitment, we make a number of proposals as to how this might be achieved.

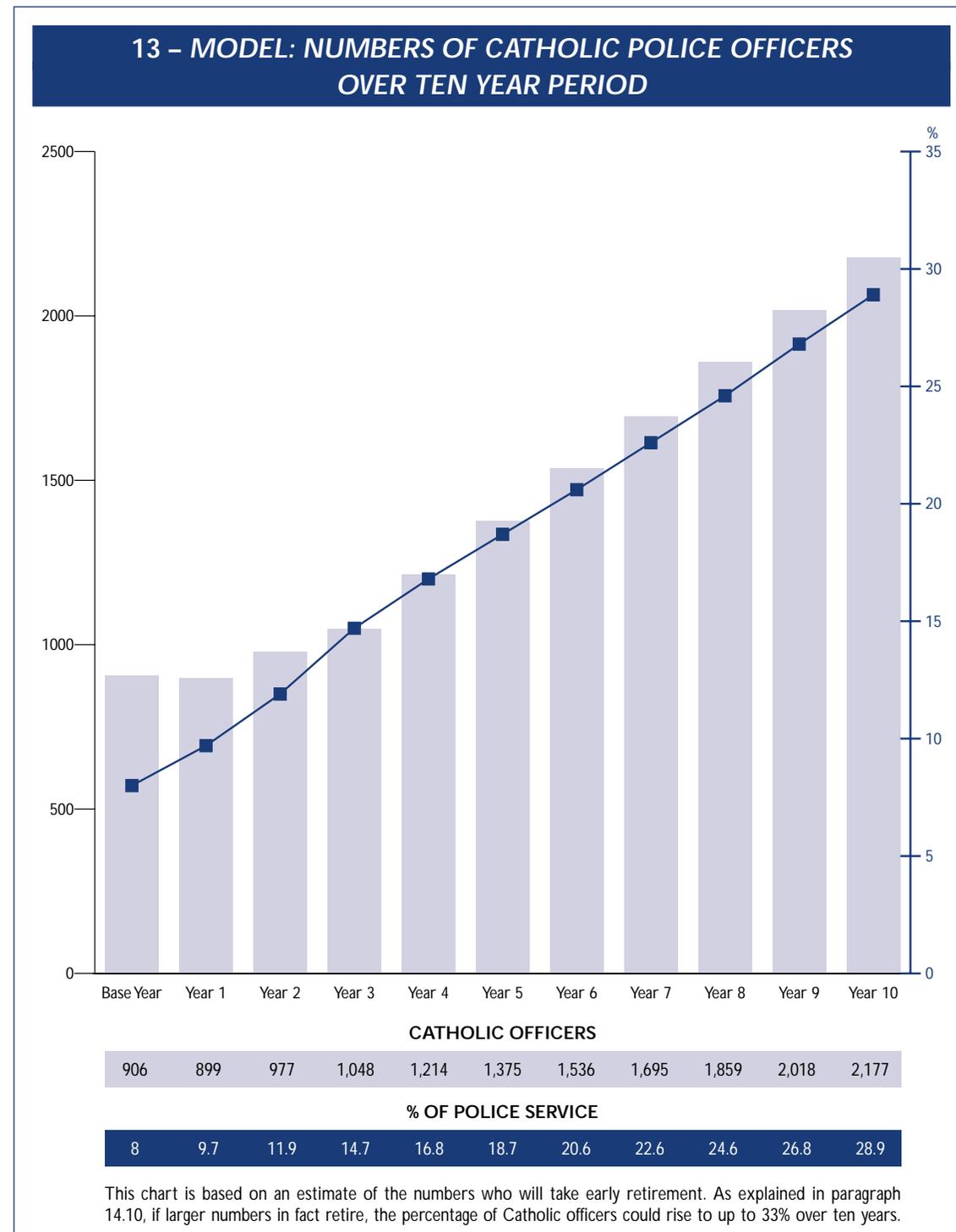
12 – COMPOSITION OF THE RUC BY RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND AT 31 DECEMBER 1998			
	REGULARS	FULL TIME RESERVE	TOTAL
Protestant	7,470 (88.3%)	2,568 (87.5%)	10,038 (88.1%)
Catholic	704 (8.3%)	202 (6.9%)	906 (8.0%)
'Other'	283 (3.4%)	165 (5.6%)	448 (3.9%)
All officers	8,457 (100%)	2,935 (100%)	11,392 (100%)

Source: RUC

- 14.5** We do not set specific target percentages for the proportion of women officers because, on the one hand, the experience elsewhere cautions against setting them too high and, on the other hand, since women are half the population it is hard to justify setting them much lower than that. But, some idea of what may be achievable can be gathered from the fact that 35% of the Part Time Reserve is female (and 58% of those below 35 years old), and also from the fact that 37% of the first RUC recruit intake of 1999 was female. These figures indicate an encouraging level of female interest in police work. The proportion of women in the RUC below the age of 35 is 19%, after which age it declines rapidly. A key problem is therefore retention, and part of the answer lies in providing opportunities for job sharing, flexible working arrangements and career breaks. Since many women are also attracted by part time police work, there is a very important argument for retaining and developing the Part Time Reserve, as we have recommended in Chapter 12. But a determined effort needs to be made to attract women into full time police work, not only in Northern Ireland but in policing worldwide.
- 14.6** Ethnic minorities comprise less than 1% of the population. Half of these are Chinese. Although there have been one or two Chinese officers in the RUC, there is not at present a strong interest among the Chinese community in joining the police (the same applies in the United States). Nevertheless, we believe that every effort should be made to recruit from the ethnic minorities and we make proposals to this effect in the next chapter. But we do not set specific target figures, which we believe would be unrealistic given the small populations involved.
- 14.7** Groups representing gays and lesbians did not favour targets for the proportion of gays and lesbians in the police, and we agree that this would be impractical and intrusive. But we believe that it should be clear that people of various sexual orientations are equally welcome to join the police, and we make proposals to this effect in the next chapter.
- 14.8** We also take account in our proposals on recruitment of the perception in some quarters that police officers are predominantly middle class. A great many of the officers we have met would not describe themselves as coming from a middle class background, but the perception nevertheless exists. It would of course be absurd to try to set composition targets based on criteria as subjective as “class”, but all our proposals are designed to achieve a police service which is an integral part of all the communities in Northern Ireland.

- 14.9** As we have said before, the Catholic/Nationalist – Protestant/Unionist imbalance is a case apart, and here we do make proposals which include recruitment and composition targets. We have worked intensively on this, with the help of consultants, taking account of the following factors:
- Overall size of the police service. As we argued in the previous chapter, we believe that a service of 7,500 regular officers is justified by the policing requirements of Northern Ireland. A larger service might provide scope for a more rapid transformation of the composition, but would be extremely costly and, being too large for the policing task, inefficient and wasteful. A smaller service, which some submissions favoured, would provide extremely limited scope for new recruitment.
 - The early retirement of regular police officers must in law be on a voluntary basis. We have therefore had to make estimates of the numbers who would volunteer, and the number of positions that would consequently become available to be filled by recruits.
 - The importance of merit as a criterion for recruitment, a point made to us strongly from all parts of the community.
 - The inequity, as we judged it, of recruiting more Catholics/Nationalists than Protestants/Unionists over a period of years. We have opted for a recruitment profile of 50% Protestant, 50% Catholic over a ten year period (which reflects the demographic breakdown of people now in their twenties, or who will reach the age of recruitment over that period). An imbalance in recruitment now would result in an imbalance in the composition of the police in the future.
- 14.10** The model we have developed would lead to the proportion of Catholic officers more than doubling within four years, to between 17% and 19% (depending on the take-up rate of the early retirement option for existing officers), and quadrupling within ten years to 29-33% (see box 13). We believe that this is a very substantial increase within a reasonable timeframe (by comparison, it took the New York Police Department 25 years to move from 12% ethnic minority officers in 1974 to 33% in 1999). It quickly gets into the range of “critical mass” estimates that experts have given us (between 15% and 30%), as the level needed to ensure that a minority does not find itself submerged within a majority organizational culture.
- 14.11** We have not taken our model beyond ten years. As we have said in the previous chapter, we would expect the question of the size of the police service to be revisited by that time. In the light of recruitment experience and other developments between now and then, a judgment would need to be made as to whether special measures were still needed to achieve a police service representative of the community or whether this could now be expected to develop naturally. Either way we envisage that the composition of the police should continue to move towards a closer resemblance to that of the community as a whole.
- 14.12** At present the Part Time Reserve is the component of the RUC with the lowest proportion of Catholics – less than 5%, as opposed to 7% in the Full Time Reserve and 8% of the regular officers. Whole areas of Northern Ireland which are predominantly Catholic/Nationalist are unrepresented in the Part Time Reserve. We believe that this needs to be rectified, not least for operational reasons. A Part Time Reserve that drew police officers from these areas, hopefully including as large a proportion of women as there is in the present Part Time Reserve, would make a substantial contribution to community policing not least because, by definition, part time officers live in or

close to the neighbourhoods they police. At the same time it would give a significant boost to the overall composition balance in the police service. We have recommended a target of some 1,000 new reserve police officers to be recruited from Catholic/Nationalist areas. Unlike recruitment to the regular police service, where numbers will be constrained by the take-up rate for early retirement, these new positions could in principle be filled rapidly. If these new reservists were recruited within, say four years, this would mean that regular and part time Catholic police officers combined would be over 22%, nearly treble the present percentage, and the figure after 10 years would be 40%.



Civilians

14.13 It is important that the same principle of a balanced and representative workforce should also apply to the civilian staff. It would be illogical to argue for diversity in the officer ranks while

leaving the civilian staff unchanged – especially if many jobs now held by officers are to be progressively civilianised.

14.14 Returns prepared by the Police Authority for the Fair Employment Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission suggest that while the proportion of women in the civilian staff is 66%, the proportion of Catholics is only 12%. In part this might be explained by a reluctance of those living in nationalist areas to work in a police environment, or fear for their safety if they were to do so. However, it is clearly at variance with the general policy in the Northern Ireland Civil Service and urgent steps should be taken to secure a distribution which reflects the religious balance.

14.15 Since most of the civilian staff are members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, and have been concerned to retain their status as civil servants and transferability to other Departments, there is no need to develop the additional schemes for early retirement and voluntary severance which we recommend for the police officers. Some may indeed wish to avail themselves of facilities for early retirement which are generally available in similar circumstances across the Civil Service. It should also be possible to effect early and substantial change by encouraging staff to transfer to other Departments, making full use of the payments available for relocation and other inducements.

14.16 *We recommend that the Northern Ireland Civil Service management should facilitate transfers to other Northern Ireland Departments and should cooperate with the Policing Board and the Chief Constable in achieving a balanced and representative civilian workforce.* New civilian entrants to the combined police service should be recruited in the same way and by the same process as we recommend for officers in the next chapter.

Policing Board and other policing bodies

14.17 This chapter has so far addressed only the composition of the police service itself, but it is important that all official bodies involved with policing should be reflective of the community as a whole. This has not been the case in the Police Authority and we have the strong impression that it has not been so in the Northern Ireland Office Police Division. *We recommend that every effort should be made to ensure that the composition of the staff of the Policing Board, the NIO Police Division (or any successor body), and the office of the Police Ombudsman should be broadly reflective of the population of Northern Ireland as a whole, particularly in terms of political/religious tradition and gender.*