



February 2012

policebeat

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MAINTAINING AN EFFECTIVE POLICE SERVICE



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In its submission to Patten the Federation successfully argued for generous severance packages to encourage early departure from the RUCGC and its successor body the PSNI. It was not just that the sacrifice, commitment and professionalism should be financially recognised but that a reduction below establishment level would create headroom for the recruitment of a police service more representative of the wider community.

As a result over 5,000 officers, many with valuable frontline, detection and criminal intelligence expertise left the service. They did not expect to return. However, the peaceful, normal society envisaged by Patten as the context for implementation of his Report has not happened. Over the past twelve months we have had an officer murdered, others injured, over 140 bomb and gun attacks and nearly 20 officers have had to leave their family homes because of the severe terrorist threat. Even the Chief Constable Matt Baggott has publicly acknowledged in November 2010 that the service has downsized too quickly (relative to the prevailing police task).

Hence the need to urgently rebuild expertise to bridge the skills gap in existing resources, if the police service is to deliver the level of confidence the community expects. The Federation has consistently argued, that downsizing should have been proportionate to the security threat and to the potential for civil disorder. That expertise is available only from ex-officers of the RUCGC and the PSNI.

Attempts to recruit experienced detectives from police forces elsewhere have enjoyed little success.

The reality is that certain politicians are hysterically anti-RUC, to the extent that they would evidently prefer unqualified people to be recruited, even if that meant the effective functioning of the PSNI would be seriously hampered. And they cannot argue that their concern is for the public purse, since there has been no similar outcry over the decades old practice in the education sector of early retiring teachers being rehired by the same schools, or to the newly introduced generous pension terms, to encourage experienced teachers to retire.

No matter how unpalatable this may seem in some quarters, it will take time for PSNI officers to build the same necessary expertise and skills of their civilian mentors but hopefully the requirement to fall back on ex-officers will only be temporary. We are fortunate that these ex-officers have been available to combat the terrorist and criminal threat that continues to blight the path to normality. Of course some senior ex-officers have thought it necessary to intervene with unhelpful criticisms of the rehiring practice. They could have chosen to stay on to help overcome a threat that still exists and if unchecked will only get worse. When they left they also forfeited the right to comment with any legitimacy and therefore should know better.