

The Superintendents' Association of Northern Ireland

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I have called this talk “Proposal for a long-term relationship”, because we are looking to the future today, and you are going to be part of that future, and we are going to be part of that future too. We are going to have to get to know each other and learn how to work with each other, and this is where it starts.

Other supervisory agencies may be temporary. The admirable Lord Clyde, the Justice Oversight Commissioner, will be folding his tents next year. The Office of the Policing Oversight Commissioner, Al Hutchinson, will close, on present plans, the year after.

Both Offices have made a tremendous contribution and we shall be sad to see them go. But that is progress. These were transitional appointments. As the programmes of reform are accomplished the need for these offices will disappear.

But the Inspectorate, like the poor, will always be with you. As long as there is scope for improvement, which there always is, we shall be working with you and with the other agencies of the criminal justice system to help the system as a whole to function better and to increase the public's confidence in it.

‘What about HM Inspectorate of Constabulary?’, you may ask. At present we in CJI work *with* HMIC, who have a separate statutory remit in relation to the PSNI. We have just been conducting a joint inspection with them of the PSNI's use of forensics, to complement CJI's own inspection of the Forensic Science Agency, and we took part in their recent quick review of training. We shall be doing more on human resources later this year.

I hope and believe that there will always be expert teams of Inspectors of Constabulary in England and Wales and in Scotland that we shall be able to call upon to assist us. But it is not impossible that Sir Ronnie Flanagan – now HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary – will be the last person to hold that title.

The Government has tabled proposals to merge all the Inspectorates of the criminal justice system in England and Wales – the Inspectorates of Constabulary, the Crown Prosecution Service, Courts Administration, Prisons and Probation – into a single body headed by someone probably with a title rather like mine: Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice.

Of course there is an Election tomorrow, and we must not pre-judge the outcome.

At present I depend upon being able to call on all these separate, expert Inspectorates to help me with different aspects of my job. But in the future, I suspect, the separate Inspectorates will not exist and there will be significantly less resource available in the merged Criminal Justice Inspectorate. CJI Northern Ireland may have to stand on its own feet a lot more.

Looking in to the future, it may be increasingly just you and us, with rather less help from outside.

CJI already has its in-house sources of understanding of policing. Your very own Brendan McGuigan is a tower of strength as my Deputy – someone who has really lived it for the last thirty years and knows everyone in the Service. I cannot yet use him on PSNI inspections, because he is too recently retired, but believe me, he gives me the low-down on all of you in the most good-natured way possible.

We also have Bill Priestley, who served in Kent Police and then in the RUC before moving to CENTREX to work on police training. Bill is immensely knowledgeable, and still writes the regular Law Reports in the Police Journal, which I am sure you all study assiduously.

You might think that when a Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice is appointed in England and Wales I shall be in a ‘little brother’ relationship to this great person, who will have the same breadth of remit as mine but 15 times the size of criminal justice system. But I don’t see it like that. The CJI job will always – or at any rate, for many years to come – have a unique status because of the special issues in Northern Ireland.

My colleague in England will not have it as part of his or her remit to try to ensure balance and even-handedness in the criminal justice system between two communities in tension with one another, a substantial part of one of which does not accept the legitimacy of the State and officially refuses to engage with its police service.

This is a huge and distinctive task, and it is our task, just as it is yours. There is no police service in the United Kingdom – not even the Met – that faces the challenge you do. Certainly they have to deal with ethnic diversity and the sensitive policing of minority communities, but not in the same complex political context. In other parts of the United Kingdom there is more of a consensus that (with few exceptions) criminal acts are not just technically unlawful but actually wrong.

We in the Northern Ireland criminal justice system have to think, imaginatively and flexibly – without compromising our principles – about how we can engage effectively with the community at large in this extraordinary and unpredictable political environment.

When people ask me whether I like working in Northern Ireland I always say ‘Yes’, for lots of reasons, but particularly it is so interesting because you really never know what is about to happen next. One minute only a photograph seems to separate us from

power-sharing, the next minute you have the Northern Bank raid, the next minute the McCartney sisters are being received in the White House. What is the next chapter?

This impossibility of forecasting the future often makes people in Northern Ireland give up on planning. This conference is called 'Commanding the Future'. But how can you look a decent number of years ahead when you don't know what lies around the next corner?

I recently ran what they call a 'Challenge Day' for the organization *Common Purpose*. Some of you may have been on these courses. We had a group of about thirty middle managers from a wide range of public and private sector organizations and I had to give them a project to engage them for a day.

The challenge I gave them was to envisage what the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland would be like in the year 2015. They were to do it in two stages, first predicting what they expected to happen and secondly saying what they would like to see happen.

I gave them an introductory briefing on the state of the criminal justice system today, and my expert staff gave them some illustrative projections of demographic trends, the age-profiles of the Protestant and Catholic communities in 10 years' time, the increasing numbers of ethnic minorities and so forth. They then went off in groups and interviewed people from some of the main criminal justice agencies. A great day was had by all, and they really engaged in the task.

The reason I mention it is because several people said how unusual it was to do that in Northern Ireland. You can't 'plan' in Northern Ireland. You can't foresee the future, because you don't know what will happen tomorrow. My colleague Dr Marie Smyth, who helped me with the exercise, tells me that this inability of Northern Ireland people to look forward is a well-attested phenomenon.

Partly it reflects the uncertainty of the political environment, partly it is a feature of poor societies that they tend to think short-term – in the extreme, about where the next meal is coming from - and even though Northern Ireland is nowadays reasonably prosperous the mindset is still influenced by memories of hard times.

But then there is the Past. Northern Ireland, for entirely understandable reasons, spends so much energy thinking about the past that it hardly has time for the future. Or it takes short-cuts and thinks the future must be like the past.

But we need to think about the future, and to think about it seriously and constructively – no short-cuts – because it is going to happen. It is not like Groundhog Day. One day the clock by the bedside will flip over and announce that it is 4 May 2010, then 4 May 2015, and many of you, I hope, will still be there to greet that happy day.

One of the joys of being very old like me is that you begin to feel a bit like a timelord - “I am the Doctor”. You have a sense of how things move on and how it will be to look back on 2005 as history.

The first step towards ‘commanding the future’ is to take it seriously. Leaders are the people who can see the future just a little bit better than other people, and can help their troops to prepare for it. Leaders are the people who can communicate a vision of the way they believe the future could be, and thereby help to bring it about.

In an organization like the PSNI you rightly look to the Chief and the top command to generate the vision. But the grades this Association represents are every bit as important in the process. It is no use having a vision which is out of touch with the operational realities on the ground. And equally, a vision has no chance of being accepted by officers on the ground if your grades are not backing it 100 per cent.

I have experience of change management in a variety of organizations, and I can tell you that the equivalents of your grades are nearly always the key to the process. Superintendent-level managers may not produce the initiative for change, but they can sure as hell prevent any progress if they are not on side.

That is why you need to be involved in thinking about the future in all your roles - as District Commanders, SIOs and Heads of Departments - so that you end up not just being told what to do but understanding and ‘owning’, internalizing and communicating, the need for the organization to progress.

And what a challenge that is for a Police Service that has already been through such radical change since Patten! I do not think I have ever come across a management challenge to equal it. There has been massive change in the past five years, but there will be more to come as Northern Ireland adjusts to more normal patterns of policing and as a ‘peace dividend’ is siphoned off to other public services like health and education.

It won’t be easy, but what is the alternative? Success is if we get back to normality, with a more ‘normal’ police service and criminal justice system, and there are challenges enough in that. Failure we do not want to contemplate.

So what did the middle managers on my course come up with as their vision of the future for the criminal justice system? No detailed prescriptions in that timescale of course, but a few pointers, perhaps:

- They were looking towards a smaller criminal justice system, which managed nevertheless to be more effective because it was working more closely with the community, getting more support from citizens and from a wide range of informal partner organizations.

- They were looking for it to cope with increasing ethnic diversity as a result of continuing immigration, and a changing age profile of the indigenous communities.
- They were looking for a still broader range of ways of tackling offending, taking business away from the formal system through diversionary and restorative processes.
- Finally they were looking for simpler ways to dispose quickly and locally with low-level ‘nuisance’ offences, recapturing the spirit of summary justice with processes that were proportionate to the offence.

I am actually optimistic about Northern Ireland, politically and economically. My guess – for what it is worth – is that things will continue to get better and that Northern Ireland, with its great natural advantages and superb human resources, will do well in an increasingly difficult international environment. But even if I am right, that does not mean an easy ride for those of us in the criminal justice system.

I am very proud to be working alongside the Police Service of Northern Ireland through these critical few years. CJI will try to be supportive. We shall try not to waste your time but to concentrate on the areas where we can add real value and help to move the organization forward. We shall aim to co-ordinate with the other supervisory agencies, of which there are many, to avoid duplication.

We are trying to build the reputation of CJI by being honest practitioners of our art, and not succumbing to the temptation to go for sensationalism. Ours, like yours, has to be a long-term strategy. We seek the same goals.

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland looks forward to a long-term relationship with you.

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