

1. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland makes its response through the Church & Society Committee. The committee has a wide representation, drawing its members from both North and South of the border, from different communities across Northern Ireland, both ministers and elders. It is the task of the committee to struggle with the variety of opinions that exist across the denomination and to make a considered response in light of both that wide variety of opinions across the church and the opinion of the committee. The committee seeks not simply to represent the views of Irish Presbyterians but to consider those views with the broader context of our ever-changing society and to offer a view which is believed to both fair and justifiable.
2. When the Patten recommendations were made available for public consultation it was certain that there would be a challenge inside Irish Presbyterianism to accept the 50:50 recruitment process. While not everyone was in agreement with the position the committee and subsequently the General Board and General Assembly took, on the matter a decision was reached. That decision was not wholly in favour of 50:50 recruitment given concern about contravening fair employment legislation and about the merit pool which meant that some would be rejected despite having more merit than others. We recognise though, that the present consultation document emphasises that: As at 1 October 2010, 3995 officers have been recruited under the temporary provisions. All officers recruited have demonstrated that they meet the required UK standards. (Para. 29)
3. Over the years it has remained a matter of concern that many Presbyterians who would have liked to become members of the PSNI were excluded on the basis of their faith tradition. This has caused heartache and disenchantment.
4. However, Presbyterians are also aware that there is a bigger issue and a bigger goal. The bigger issue is the development of a genuinely shared society in which everyone takes their responsibilities seriously. That includes responsibility for dealing with crime which is a matter for everyone in society, every community and every locality but for this to be a reality the PSNI would have to better reflect the diversity within society. That diversity is clearly represented, for example, by the correlation between the numbers of police service members drawn from within the broad ethnic community. (para. 38) The report tells us that as of October 2010 the representation from the Catholic community stands at 29.38%. It was with the bigger goal of a shared society gathering around a mutually respected and accepted policing service that Patten set the target at between 29% and 33%. This would suggest to us that a continuation of the temporary arrangements is not essential to achieving any bigger goal but has made its contribution.
5. Society has gone through a long period of normalizing and there are those who believe that as a sign of normalizing the temporary provisions should be ended. What this would effectively do is to allow a society to grow up which gives people the opportunity to be where they are best suited on the basis of who they are and the gifts they have as opposed to the tradition from which they come. Such normalizing, however, remains dependent, as did the Patten proposals in the first place, on a willingness to have changed hearts and minds and open institutions. The dissident groups, for example,

and our conversations with some who represent the Nationalist and Republican communities would suggest that such changes of heart, mind and action have not yet occurred. This is true for both sides of the community - there remain those who would like return to the old style of policing and whose hearts are not in the changes and there are those who are not yet prepared to sign up to the new arrangements despite the proven track record that has been developed over the last ten years. Society cannot wait for ever for those who do not want to change.

6. In light, then, of the following considerations:
 - a. that 29.38% of those within the policing service are Catholics
 - b. that this percentage makes it past what Patten recommended as acceptable (between 29% and 33%)
 - c. that the provisions used to operate the 50:50 recruitment rule are temporary
 - d. that there has been enough time for the temporary legislation to give freedom to Catholics to join the service

It is our view that the temporary provisions should now come to an end.

7. It has been evident from discussion of this matter that many of the old hurts are still there. No matter which side of the community we speak with we find those hurts still near the surface and while their healing is a matter for concern we do not detect that they are going to drive society back to a place from which it has already come. Yet we are minded to emphasise that we believe the impact of the past has not been properly dealt with and that society still has to face that issue if it is to move on healthy and free of the fear of a return to the past.
8. We are also mindful that there are still those who do not trust the PSNI outrightly. They yet remain to be persuaded. But we also recognise that there are many who wish to move forward and to continue to normalize but the removal of the temporary provision makes them nervous. We would want to assure them that it is our conviction that no one should be excluded from the policing service because of their cultural background or faith tradition. We believe that the Policing Board should keep careful watch to ensure that the PSNI both retains and develops trust across the broad spectrum of Northern Irish Society and also continues to strive to be representative of society as a whole.

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