

# EXPLORING PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

## ~ FOCUS ON POLICING

### Aims:

- To enable critical debate about issues of decision-making and participation at a local level.
- To explore issues of inclusion and representation within our public institutions.
- To investigate ideas of power, responsibility and human rights.

### Extension Ideas:

Students could investigate a different public service eg. a local health or education authority. What symbols or slogans do they have? What structures do they think exist to appoint senior people within these organisations? How could they find out?

### Web Links:

[www.ruc.police.uk](http://www.ruc.police.uk)

<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/police/patten/recommend.htm>

for further details about the Patten report and recommendations.

Local area police web sites eg. [www.west-midlands.police.uk](http://www.west-midlands.police.uk)

### Exploring issues in Northern Ireland ...

- Students to be given a copy of 'Policing reform' which shares some basic information relating to current policing issues in Northern Ireland today. Whole class discussion would be useful to clarify key issues and different perspectives.
- Focusing on the main Patten recommendations, students' task is to outline the key arguments on each side of the debate from a nationalist and unionist perspective, for further feedback and discussion.
- Students might then put forward suggestions for five main aims for Policing reform in order to contribute to the 'building of new citizenship' in Derry and Northern Ireland. How might this compare with issues and challenges for policing in our own communities?



Martin Melaugh

<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/photographs>

### Exploring issues locally ...

Students' task is to go through a decision-making process of appointing a new Chief Constable for the County of 'Smithshire'. [See the support sheet 'Smithshire County Profile'.]

#### Designing a job advert for the new chief constable

Begin with a brainstorm of the qualities needed in a Chief Constable ... what sort of person would be needed for such a post?

List ingredients needed in the advert ... students could look at other job adverts as a stimulus for this.

In groups students to design and draft their job advert [this could be for a newspaper or a web-site].



# POLICING REFORM

The police force in Northern Ireland is known as the RUC [Royal Ulster Constabulary]. This force was set up in 1922, and today has a total membership of over 13,000 officers.

## Views about the RUC:

### A Loyalist perspective ...

Loyalists generally have a high regard for the RUC, feeling that the force has done much to defend communities from the threat of terrorism.

### A Republican perspective ...

Republicans generally perceive the RUC as being unrepresentative of their community, and discriminatory in its practice towards the nationalist community.

## Implications of the Peace Process

The Peace Process which resulted in the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998 made a commitment to set up an Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland. This Commission chaired by Chris Patten was charged with the task of reviewing current practice and making recommendations for future policing arrangements in Northern Ireland. Many of its recommendations have since been incorporated into a Northern Ireland Police Bill which has been put before the House of Commons, and has been hotly debated.

## The RUC ...

### a few facts and figures

- ❑ In Northern Ireland there is 1 police officer to every 140 civilians, as compared to ratios of 1:434 in England and 1:459 in Wales.
- ❑ 93% of the officers of the RUC are Protestant.
- ❑ 301 officers of the RUC have been killed during 'the troubles'.
- ❑ From 1969 to 1975 when the British army had primacy in security matters, the RUC has gradually taken over the main responsibility for security.
- ❑ By April 2001 there had been 8,000 applications to the new police service.

Source: Cain Project

Source: RUC

## The Patten Report, 1999

### Recommendations include:

- ❑ To change the name of the RUC to 'The Northern Ireland Police Service'.
- ❑ That officers should take a new oath, expressing a commitment to upholding human rights.
- ❑ A new badge and symbols should be adopted which are entirely free from any association with either the British or Irish states.
- ❑ That the force seek to increase recruitment from the Nationalist / Catholic community.

### Views about the Patten Report:

Ulster Unionist party:

“The Patten Commission has allowed itself to be diverted into a gratuitous insult by stripping the service [RUC] of its name, badge and flag.”

Lord Fitt, former leader of the SDLP writing in the Daily Mail:

“... over the years I have had my quarrels with the RUC. But I admit publicly that without the courage and integrity of the men and women of the RUC, Northern Ireland would have suffered a bloodbath.”

Editorial, Belfast Telegraph:

“More thought and more support for the police from within the Catholic community will be required. Stop, read, think and don't rush to judgement on Patten, should be the watchword in the days and weeks ahead.”

Chris Patten, chairman of the Commission;

“We are transforming the RUC, not disbanding it.”

# Smithshire County Profile

Smithshire county is made up of urban and rural areas, and has a multi-ethnic population. Communities vary in their social and economic make-up, and drugs, crime and racism are issues that concern the local population.

Recently an Asylum Seekers Processing Centre has been located in a part of Smithshire. This has led to campaigns in some local areas against asylum seekers.

The last Chief Constable had been personally criticised in some sections of the press for leading a force 'rife with racism', whilst others proclaimed the need for the police to take a tougher approach in their role as 'protectors of society'.

