

Vote 20. - Garda Síochána

23. Civilianisation

In December 1993, the Minister for Justice announced a crime fighting package, including the recruitment of 200 civilian clerical/administrative staff in the period 1995 to 1997 thereby releasing an equivalent number of Gardaí for operational duties. As a result of a Government decision in June 1995, the civilianisation proposals were put on hold.

In July 1996, the Minister for Justice announced the recruitment of 200 civilians between then and early 1997 to enable an equivalent number of Gardaí to be released from clerical/ administrative duties to operational duties. Although 200 additional posts were originally sanctioned, this was subsequently reduced to 194 following Department of Finance sanction to substitute 6 anti crime package posts for 4 posts in the Garda information technology area following a review of the staffing requirements there. This substitution of posts did not require that an equivalent number of Gardaí be released for operational duties.

The 194 staff to be recruited comprised 130 clerical and 64 non-clerical personnel. The number of these posts filled in the period July 1996 to August 1998 is as follows.

	1996	1997	1998	Total
Clerical personnel	47	57	10	114
Non-clerical personnel	-	1	5	6
	47	58	15	120

In response to my inquiries regarding the delay in recruiting these staff, the Accounting Officer informed me that:

- On a general note, the Civil Service, like other employers, is facing difficulties and delays in recruiting staff because of the upsurge in our economy. Notwithstanding these difficulties, almost 90% of the clerical posts have now been filled. However, there have been significant delays in filling the non-clerical posts. Most of these relate to new grades which has complicated the process. In some cases (e.g. Call Takers) the relevant staff associations and unions have raised concerns which have to be addressed. The Department is continuing to work in close co-operation with the Gardaí, the Department of Finance and the Civil Service Commission (CSC) with a view to filling all 194 posts as soon as possible.
- The CSC did not have large numbers of clerical personnel candidates readily available when the Government decision was announced. There are delays associated with the holding of a public competition and considerable time elapses before candidates come on stream. In addition, the Garda area requires that the candidates have excellent typing skills but the CSC have encountered severe difficulties and delays in securing clerical staff with the necessary

typing/keyboard skills due to the present recruitment situation generally. For example, while a number of nominations were provided last year through the CSC, the fall off rate (because of offers of other employment, rate of pay on offer, commuting costs and transfers *etc.*) is quite significant - out of advance lists of over 120 applicants, the net intake of clerical staff to the Garda area amounted to only around a dozen staff. The Central Transfer List is a list of clerical staff seeking relocation to provincial offices across the Civil Service (including the Garda Síochána) and the list is accessible to all Departments. Agreement between the Department of Finance and staff representatives requires that provincial clerical vacancies are offered, in the first instance, to persons on the Central Transfer List and in practice this can cause considerable delays.

- Non-clerical personnel consisted of Civilian Driver (30), Call Taker (20), Telecommunications Technician (10), Researcher (2), Irish Language Teacher (1), Social Studies Teacher (2), Communications Studies Teacher (2), French/German Language Teacher (2), PE Teacher (1), Photographer (1), Cartographer (1), Occupational Health Nurse (1) and Print Room Assistant (1). In the case of posts other than Call Takers and Civilian Drivers, it was necessary to arrange, in consultation with the Garda Authorities, the Department of Finance and the CSC for public competitions to be held to select candidates to fill these posts. Because of resource difficulties facing the CSC, there have been delays in running some of the competitions. The following posts have been filled this year - 2 Researchers, 1 Irish Language Teacher, 2 Social Studies Teachers and 1 French/German Language Teacher. The position of Print Room Assistant was filled last year. In the case of the Communications Studies Teachers, it has not been possible to find suitable candidates and consideration is being given to scheduling a second competition. It is also expected that the competitions for a PE Teacher, Photographer and Cartographer will be advertised by the CSC in October 1998.
- A job specification and conditions of service for Civilian Drivers were agreed with the Department of Finance in January 1997 who asked the CSC to arrange for the holding of the necessary competition. It emerged that the CSC was having some difficulties at the time in scheduling competitions due to lack of resources to deal with the level of competitions to be held for various Government Departments. In mid 1997 it was suggested to the Department that the competition for Civilian Drivers did not appear to be appropriate to the CSC on the basis that the positions should be classified as industrial civil servants and as such would be a matter for the Department and / or the Garda Authorities to hold the necessary recruitment competition. The Department then prepared a revised job specification which was provisionally approved by the Department of Finance in October 1997. Some considerable time has been spent discussing various aspects of the posts with Garda management and the Department is currently in the process of finalising details with the Garda Authorities. A competition will be held soon.
- A job specification and conditions of service for Call Takers were agreed with the Department of Finance in January 1997 who asked the CSC to arrange for the holding of the necessary competition. The CSC suggested some minor changes to the job specification and these were referred back to the Garda Authorities for their observations. When the Garda response was received, the matter was referred back to the Department of Finance to clarify the grading of the posts following on the restructuring agreement for the Clerical Assistant (CA) and Clerical Officer (CO) grades as the pay and conditions for the Call Taker posts were originally based

on the CA grade. Clarification was received from the Department of Finance in March 1998 and the CSC were instructed to proceed with the competition arrangements that same month. The competition was advertised in June 1998 in conjunction with the forthcoming CO competition.

The Accounting Officer also stated that:

- The delay in recruiting civilians has meant that the total cost to the Exchequer of running the Garda Síochána (civilians plus Gardaí) has actually been slightly less than it would have been if the target for recruitment of civilians had been fully met earlier. There are, however, operational inefficiencies. Less Gardaí have been available for operational duties, some Gardaí are still involved in doing tasks that could be done more cost effectively by civilians and certain specialised posts have remained vacant.
- The Government decision to recruit additional civilian staff for the Garda Síochána was intended to free up Gardaí for operational duties but did not affect the total strength of the Gardaí nor was the recruitment of civilians intended to be a substitute for the recruitment of more Gardaí.
- By 31 July 1998, 106 Gardaí had been released to operational duties with a further 2 to be released in August 1998.

I also sought the views of the Accounting Officer of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) who informed me that in the course of 1996 the CSC experienced a significant increase in demand for competitions across all Departments. This was not matched with an increase in resources. The situation was exacerbated in July of that year with the demands of the anti-crime package which included both the civilian posts and a significant number of additional Garda Trainees some of which were to be recruited from the 1994 competition. Recruitment from this competition had ceased in mid-1996 and the additional resources allocated for Garda recruitment had been withdrawn. In August 1996 written and oral submissions were made by the CSC to the Department of Finance for additional resources. In particular the Department was requested to re-instate the additional resources provided for the 1994 competition or to advance allocation of additional resources necessary for the 1997 Garda recruitment campaign ahead of schedule to progress the necessary competitions. Sanction for these additional resources was not received until May 1997. By that stage the Garda recruitment programme was already under way using resources diverted from other programmes and thus the opportunity to advance other anti-crime package competitions was lost and a backlog of recruitment had built up in a number of areas. As Garda recruitment was a Government priority this proceeded at the expense of other recruitment programmes.

24. Garda Stores

In the 1991 and 1992 reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General, concern was expressed about stores management in the Garda Síochána and the Department later undertook to improve procedures.

The day to day purchasing needs of the Gardaí are met by the Barrack Masters Office which operates from the Garda Depot in the Phoenix Park. The central stores area for the country is also located there. Expenditure on inventory amounts to approximately £36 million per annum and the value of stores held in the Depot at 31 December 1997 amounted to approximately £3.2 million.

In 1991 a computerised system for stock control was introduced at a cost of approximately £270,000 for the general stores area. This system was designed to provide management information to facilitate effective stores management and proper purchasing procedures.

In 1995 a firm of consultants was engaged by the Garda authorities to develop a conceptual design plan for the Gardaí to cover the operations of the force. The consultants identified purchasing and inventory management as an area that should be reviewed separately and a study group was set up to evaluate the problems and recommend possible solutions. This group was assisted by the company who had installed the original stock control computer software and although recommendations were submitted to management in December 1996 they had not been implemented by May 1998. The group had recommended

- centralising the stores and purchasing functions
- the introduction of restructured procedures and the carrying out of a functional reorganisation
- enhancing the computer system pending its eventual replacement
- introducing an adequate number of properly trained staff
- fostering a professional attitude to the purchasing and supplies management function

In the course of an audit at the Garda Stores a number of weaknesses in the controls and procedures were noted.

- There had been no physical inventory of stocks carried out for a considerable time which militates against good stores management.
- Adjustments to stock levels on the system were made as stock issues or stock receipts rather than being shown as adjustments. There was no documentation to show how the adjustments arose and whether the reasons for the discrepancies were investigated and resolved satisfactorily.
- There were no formal procedures in place to determine the most advantageous stock levels.
- The system was not being used uniformly in all the stores areas in that
 - ▶ there was no set policy on updating stock valuations
 - ▶ the recording of stock returns differed
- The standard costs assigned to store items on the system were not reviewed and amended on a regular basis.
- There were no procedures for identifying and dealing with slow moving and obsolete stocks.

- In some stores areas there was no differentiation between new and used goods. Some items which were used for a period were returned, stored and recorded with new items, at the same value as the new items.
- There were approximately 17,000 unit code allocations on the system but only 9,000 of these were in use. It is possible for items purchased which are already in store to be allocated a new unit code.

Moreover, random stock checks carried out on audit revealed examples of

- stock recorded on the system but not in stores
- stock in stores but not recorded on the system
- stock listed at incorrect valuations
- old or obsolete stock listed at original valuation
- radio stores still in stock which were purchased several years ago for specific purposes e.g.
 - ▶ two CCTV cameras which were purchased in 1994/95 at a cost of £12,795 each for use in Cork Prison had remained unused in stock ever since, even though similar type equipment was subsequently purchased and used in the Temple Bar area of Dublin
 - ▶ a communications console system purchased for use at Dublin Airport at a cost of £69,100 a number of years ago ended up being used for spare parts and was recorded in stock at its original value.

As the audit findings indicated that stock control procedures were not satisfactory and as the value of stocks at the end of the year was questionable I sought the observations of the Accounting Officer. He informed me that:

- Despite progress being made by 1994 it was recognised by both the Department and Garda management that fundamental changes were still required if a fully efficient and effective stores system was to be achieved and this led in 1995 to the establishment of the study group.
- Until the group's recommendations have been fully implemented it is almost impossible to guarantee that some faults of the type identified by the audit will not occur. The Department must therefore be oriented towards fundamental change. The recommendations of the group, if implemented, would address nearly all the issues raised by the audit. Priority has been given to implementation of the recommendation concerning the upgrading of the computer system and that upgrading is now at the implementation phase. Some of the other recommendations posed difficulties as:
 - The implementation of many of the recommendations would be facilitated by a centralised Garda stores. While a suitable site has been purchased there have been serious difficulties in obtaining the necessary finance and sanction to carry out the works required to complete the project (cost will be in excess of £2m).
 - Serious resource and organisational implications arose but nevertheless these matters must be addressed and will be pursued vigorously with Garda management.

- The question of reorganisation of responsibility for stores and the level of staff resources has to be addressed by Garda management in a more comprehensive way than heretofore.
- To manage this process he has instructed that an implementation plan for the recommendations of the study group be drawn up by October 1998 setting out target dates for acceptance and implementation of the various recommendations. A steering group comprising officials of the Department, Garda management and outside experts will be established to monitor progress in this area.
- More generally, the question of stores management may also be addressed in the context of the current Strategic Management Initiative review.

The Accounting Officer also stated that:

- Stocktaking takes place on an annual basis in a number of stores. In the other areas i.e. clothing, U.N., Miscellaneous Stores, Armoury, a stock take took place in 1994. In addition, a series of planned rolling checks took place on selected items on a weekly basis. In 1995, as a result of the formulation of the study group, stock takes within the Barrack Master's Section were suspended pending the expected early implementation of its recommendations, when it was felt that better information and business procedures would be in place. It was not envisaged that full implementation of all recommendations would have been so prolonged. The upgraded computer system is now being implemented and all sections will now undertake annual stock takes or weekly rolling checks.
- In the main, discrepancies identified during the stock takes/rolling checks were investigated by examining the transaction history for the item concerned. If resolved satisfactorily the discrepancy was amended. If not, on approval of the Supplies Officer an adjustment was made. The practice of adjusting stock levels by issuing stock or receiving stock on to the system is not official policy. All sections have been instructed to cease this practice forthwith. This practice can only be explained by inexperience of store practices and lack of on the ground computer expertise and staff training. This problem will be remedied by documenting the procedures for stock control, which will incorporate "adjustments to stock". All discrepancies now coming to notice are being documented, investigated, amended if resolved and adjusted on approval of the Barrack Master if required. This process has been centralised and is channelled through the system administrator who has responsibility for the computer system.
- In 1993 the Garda Stores Committee was established by the Department of Justice. They examined a number of proposals for procurement procedures and ultimately decided on a strategy dedicated to purchasing stocks just before they are required and the virtual abolition of stock holdings, except where it was necessary to hold a certain level of stock for emergencies. In such cases minimum reorder levels were to be identified. To date, these have not been decided on and can only be determined by an analysis of the trend of usage levels using information from the computer system. With the recent assignment of a system administrator, this task is now receiving attention and is expected to be completed before the end of the year.

- The computer system was in the main used as a basic inventory management tool and the absence of procedures led to the system not being used uniformly. There was no emphasis on stock valuation. These problems are now being addressed and the system administrator will ensure that the necessary controls/procedures are in place to resolve this concern. A standard cost application will be used by all stores areas using the system and the matter will be finalised by August 1998.
- Slow moving and obsolete stocks were determined by local stores management who, on identification, specified the necessary process to deal with them. These were local arrangements but are now being addressed globally and formal procedures will be put in place.
- The practice of issuing items which when finished with, were returned, stored and recorded with new items, evolved by following precedents and in the belief that it was accepted as best practice. In the light of the concerns expressed, Garda management have now had this practice stopped and amended procedures are being put in place.
- A review of code allocations has not taken place since the system was put in place in 1991. While the computer software (both the existing and the proposed enhanced version) provides extremely powerful stock control management tools, lack of on the ground computer expertise and staff training has prevented the stock system being used other than for recording incoming and outgoing transactions. These factors together with the lack of centralised control have resulted in the purchasing features of the system not being fully utilised to date. A major problem in this regard was the high turnover of staff who were not there long enough to receive adequate training or develop expertise. The situation has now improved. To address the multiplicity of code allocations all sections have now been requested to liaise with the system administrator and produce a comprehensive list of current unit codes.

With regard to the specific matters of radio stores the Accounting Officer explained that:

- One part of the CCTV Camera was issued subsequently to Cork for operational use. The remaining cameras were retained in stock as a contingency for use as spares for cameras already in use in various locations and in the event of the supplier not being in a position to provide a unit at short notice for urgent security operations. The use of this equipment as spares was clearly not in accordance with best practices.
- The console for Dublin Airport was an integral part of the Garda Communication System to be installed in purpose built accommodation to be provided by Aer Rianta. However, Aer Rianta did not proceed with the plans and the console remained in stock. This system is now obsolete and is not being supported by the manufacturer. It was thought prudent from an economic viewpoint to utilise the console as spares to support the communication system rather than retain it as a complete unit. Changes in management structure and planning procedures should ensure that concerns raised in respect of radio stores will not recur.

As regards annual stocktaking and year end valuation the Accounting Officer indicated that:

- The general situation regarding stocktaking has been addressed in response to my concerns on the absence of stock takes. Stock takes in all eight stores areas have now been completed
- Matters relating to obsolete stock, item codes, costings and stock adjustments have been implemented in respect of six stores areas and will be finalised for the remaining two areas by the end of August 1998.
- The necessary structure will be put in place to ensure that the weekly transactions for each stores area are verified and certified correct.
- Rolling stock checks are now taking place on 2% of stocks in each stores area on a weekly basis. An annual inventory will take place in each stores area.
- The year end valuation placed on stocks, other than at transport section, was computed by the system. At the time of compilation he believed that the end of year value on stocks was correct but in the light of my audit findings he could not be satisfied as to its validity.

The Accounting Officer emphasised that the implementation of improvements in the Garda Stores areas will not happen overnight and that it is essential that progress is monitored and reviewed on a regular basis. In this regard, he will be supplying me with regular reports on general progress as well as keeping me informed on the specific matters raised.