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**Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland.**

**CC: The Policing Authority**

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### **Proposal for a Strategic Approach to Garda Síochána Training and Development.**

Regarding ongoing controversies and issues relating to An Garda Síochána (AGS), a common, reoccurring theme is the need for appropriate training. This is reflected in the Garda Inspectorate Submission to the **Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland** (2017) which highlights deficiencies in governance, accountability, leadership and supervision. This submission recommends *“the development of a strategy to improve the decision-making skills of leaders and supervisors and to ensure that they are well-trained and have the confidence to inspire staff, tackle underperformance and reward good work”* and *“the introduction of a performance management system to encourage personal responsibility and good performance and for continued underperformance to provide an ultimate sanction of dismissal”*.

It is clear that what is necessary is a framework for competency development for AGS which promotes and supports a culture of professionalism and integrity as well as a strategic approach that links all training programmes from basic training, mid-level to senior management training, including specialist training. This will aid in creating the much-needed link between learning, practice and ethos and ensure that training programmes and course are specifically designed to meet the requirements of the specific role profile.

A member of An Garda Síochána performs a diverse range of tasks and functions in the course of their duty. These tasks and functions greatly vary depending on the rank or specialisation of the member. Despite this, these tasks and functions have never been defined and mapped.

Consequently, there is a lack of clarity regarding the knowledge, skills and competencies

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required for each role profile and therefore, a deficit of targeted training required to build capacity in specific areas.

As a former member of AGS with extensive experience in training, I am aware of the distinct lack of a strategic approach to training development and the disjointed nature of training design.

There is a Bachelor Degree programme for entry level training with a set of learning outcomes based on a competency framework. However, this framework is a stand-alone system with no coordination or harmonisation between it and the other learning products including: continuous professional development, mid and senior level management training, leadership training and the numerous specialist training programmes. What exists is a disparate range of training courses that may or may not reflect the learning needs of all Garda activities. This lack of coordination or harmonisation is because no 'job-mapping' processes have been conducted to identify and agree competence profiles for Garda tasks and functions at all levels.

In addition, there is a lack of consistency across iterations of each course – the fundamental learning delivered to participants on one iteration of a specific course may differ greatly from the learning delivered to participants on another iteration of the same course. Topic delivery depends on the availability of specific experts and what that expert thinks a Garda should know. It is also dependent on time constraints, resulting in topics being dropped arbitrarily from the timetable. While this training delivers specific knowledge or develops specific skills, building individual and organisational competencies is not guaranteed.

The Garda Síochána is about to embark on the process of developing two new Education Programmes for Police Managers: 1). An 'Executive Leadership Programme' (Level 9 National Qualification Framework {NQF}). The stated aim of this one-year programme is to "*develop strategic leadership competencies*" in Senior Management. 2). A 'Bachelors of Science Degree in Police Leadership and Governance'. This three-year programme (Level 8 NQF) also focuses on Senior Management and "*aligns itself to the Garda Síochána strategy in renewing the present, in creating the future and instilling an ethical and professional police force*".

These worthy endeavours are aimed at continued professionalisation of Garda Management and are aligned to Garda strategy. They do not represent a strategic approach to training and development. Because the competencies required for policing roles have never been identified, agreed and mapped, these programmes cannot ensure that the necessary competencies of the specific roles of the target participants are being developed. In addition, they will not ensure the harmonisation of learning across all ranks and specialisations.

What is required is a tool, a Sectorial Qualifications Framework (SQF), to support a strategic approach to AGS education and training that has at its core the enhancement of professionalism and the harmonisation of learning and professional standards, incorporating values and human rights principles. Without such a tool, all training programmes follow a contents-delivery model rather than a competence-development model that is future proofed and that ensures common standards and values and transferable competencies. The contents-delivery model is driven by what the service provider views as essential knowledge and skills for policing functions rather than being informed by the views of oversight bodies, stakeholders and subject-matter experts.

Such a tool, aligned to the NQF and inspired by the 'Bologna and Copenhagen' principles for education and learning, would:

- Provide a strategic platform for all Garda training with an overarching frame of reference;
- Link training standards to operational requirements and job competencies;
- Ensure harmonisation of learning across all ranks and specialisations;
- Ensure operational relevance of training courses;
- Ensure common standards across job profiles;
- Ensure transferability of competencies;
- Ensure an incremental, targeted approach to training where there is no unnecessary duplication;
- Promote professional learning;
- Enable benchmarking;
- Facilitate comparability of qualifications;

- Facilitate and ensure quality assurance.

Developing an SQF would require a consultancy process with stakeholders in order to develop competencies profiles and job-mapping. This process identifies, defines and describes policing jobs, tasks and functions at all levels and in all areas as well as the knowledge, skills and competencies required to perform them. It ensures a common standard and that all learning delivered to the organisation is aimed at developing the knowledge, skills and competencies in order to effectively carry out the specific tasks and functions. The job competencies will capture all policing activities.

These competencies profiles would represent an agreed national reference point for policing occupational standards. This would enable the development of a comprehensive set of the learning outcomes that can be cross referenced with the competencies profiles. All training design would start by scoping the competency profile of the target audience and formulating learning outcomes mapped to the overarching competencies defined for the role or task. The relationship between the programme outcomes, module outcomes and professional competencies would be mapped and verified in a vertical and horizontal mapping exercise across and between all modules and phases of each training programme. The specific learning outcomes would incrementally build operational competencies and a continuous learning strategy would facilitate the building of capacity within the organisation which, in turn, would enhance and harmonise learning across the organisation. In this way, permanent change in behaviour, through the acquisition of knowledge, is developed and successfully transitioned to the workplace.

SQF for AGS specifically related to policing education and training needs would offer a comprehensive, integrated and flexible platform for competence-based curricula development. It can provide an overarching framework encompassing all levels and functions within the organisation and define learning outcomes that reflect all the learning required for police related activities. Thus, it would ensure the training of relevant skills and appropriate competencies – professional knowledge.

This structure enables a learning cycle which contributes to the enhancement of knowledge, skills and competence required to achieve the outcomes directly related to the skill development, leadership, critical thinking, strategic planning and the situational judgement required for policing at all levels. Thus, the values and goals of the organisation would be reflected in programme design. It enables a strategy for learning and development that ensures the development of the individual member is strategically coordinated to meet the organisation's learning needs and is integrated in a cohesive manner across all ranks and roles. This type of framework would ensure that all training design addresses the core pre-defined competencies and is operationally relevant. It would also ensure that there is a framework to capture and reflect recommendations from Inspectorate reports and other inquiries.

It would reduce the cost of training by ensuring that all training is addressing a specific learning outcome, is targeted at the appropriate learner and eliminates duplication where learners attend several courses over their career where much of the same learning is repeated. It would have the added value of fitting into the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) for the purpose of validation, accreditation and quality assurance.

Ultimately it would ensure "cultural reform" by ensuring that values are embedded within the SQF at every level and aligned competencies are developed and reinforced over the course of a member's career.

This proposal is also in line with Garda Inspectorate: Changing Policing In Ireland, (November 2015) recommendations on training in that it would:

- Ensure "*more effective use of the training budget for the Garda Síochána*".
- Improve "*strategic planning and implementation of training plans with the establishment of a Training Governance Committee*".
- "*Prioritise training based on an annual Training needs analysis*".
- Ensure "*timely delivery of well-trained recruits for deployment*".
- Ensure "*improved integration and clarity of role with the implementation of a Garda staff induction training programme*".

- *“Improve skillsets and reduced risk with the provision of pre-promotional training to all personnel prior to placement”.*

I have experience coordinating the development of an SQF for a comparable sector and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this idea further if that was considered necessary.

Yours Sincerely

Geraldine Noone