

**Submission to the Commission on the  
Future of Policing –**

**Irish Language Training and Linguistic  
Diversity Among An Garda Síochána.**

**Gearóidín McEvoy**

# Submission to the Commission on the Future of Policing – Irish Language Training and Linguistic Diversity in An Garda Síochána

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## 1. Introduction

The current system of Irish language training in An Garda Síochána insufficiently meets the needs of Irish-speaking persons in Ireland. The system does not result in any workable level of language competency. The overall recommendation of this submission is as follows:

***Recommendation 1: Provide comprehensive Irish language training for designated recruits to An Garda Síochána and accommodate the recruitment of persons with diverse language skills.***

## 2. Comprehensive Irish Language Training

Rather than removing all Irish language training and contravening the Constitution, it is recommended that a training programme which facilitates comprehensive Irish language training would be offered to recruits. The training ought to be of such a standard that participants would become capable of carrying out their duties in Irish. It is recommended that there be some sort of incentive to opt for this training to ensure that there remains a workable number of Irish language speaking members throughout the country.

This would perhaps render the majority of members incapable of speaking minimal Irish, such as to facilitate an arrest or to breathalyse a motorist. However, there is no evidence to suggest that a majority of members are sufficiently trained by An Garda Síochána to do so at present.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See 2007 Coimisinéir Teanga Investigation of An Garda Síochána at <https://www.coimisineir.ie/imscruidithe?lang=EN&year=2007#searchinvestigations> [date accessed: 16/12/2017], 2011 Coimisinéir Teanga Investigation of An Garda Síochána at <https://www.coimisineir.ie/imscruidithe?lang=EN&year=2011#searchinvestigations> [date accessed: 16/12/2017] and 2012 Coimisinéir Teanga Investigation of An Garda Síochána at

A specialised training programme for Irish would mean that there would be a steady stream of competently trained Irish speaking members to facilitate the needs and constitutional rights of Irish speakers. Such a programme would actually provide language skills rather than satisfying a bare minimum requirement of language training where no recruit can emerge with sufficient language skills to carry out duties based on the training alone.

***Recommendation 2: Provide comprehensive, incentivised Irish language training to certain number of recruits, rendering them capable of effectively carrying out their duties through Irish***

### **3. Recruits with Diverse Language Skills**

National diversity among the force is extremely low.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the national and linguistic diversity of modern Ireland is growing.<sup>3</sup> While I was unable to find statistics relating to the language competencies among members of the force, the low number of non-national members possibly reflects low language diversity among the force.<sup>4</sup>

I have no evidence to suggest that the Irish language requirement acts as a barrier to this linguistic diversity. However, this is not to say that the Irish language requirement is not proving a hurdle for foreign-national recruits who have never studied Irish. There may indeed be a combination of factors which deter foreign nationals from joining the force<sup>5</sup> of which might constitute the Irish language training.

Nevertheless, linguistic diversity among the force is an asset. It allows certain members to communicate directly to a non-English speaking person rather than through an interpreter. This

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<https://www.coimisineir.ie/imscruidithe?lang=EN&year=2012#searchinvestigations> [date accessed: 16/12/2017]

<sup>2</sup> In the latest figures, only 57 members came from non-Irish backgrounds. See

<http://www.thejournal.ie/chinese-gardai-overseas-non-irish-2843607-Jun2016/> [date accessed 12/12/2017]

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/cso-figures-show-182-languages-are-spoken-in-state-s-homes-1.2230943> [date accessed: 13/12/2017]

<sup>4</sup> Among the 57 non-Irish members, there are at least 11 who come from English-speaking countries and it is therefore difficult to speculate as to whether they are monoglots or not. (There were 7 American members reported and 5 British members. However, one British member was reported as Welsh and so it is possible that this member may speak Welsh). See *ibid*.

<sup>5</sup> It is possible that the deterrence is internally imposed by An Garda Síochána, however. In 2005 when the entry requirements to An Garda Síochána were altered, the force saw an estimated 900 foreign applicants. [See <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/about-900-foreign-nationals-apply-for-garda-jobs-1.516806> date accessed: 02/01/2018] However, as the statistics above [*supra* note 2] show, this has not translated into a large non-Irish representation. It may also be that in recent years the number of new members recruited has dropped in response to a moratorium on hiring. See <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/frustration-in-the-ranks-as-garda-cutbacks-and-moratorium-bite-1.955881> [date accessed: 02/01/2018]

can also help to build rapport between members and diverse linguistic communities.<sup>6</sup> It is recommended to introduce a nationwide campaign to encourage foreign nationals to join the force, with a particular emphasis on those who speak other languages (aside from Irish and English) fluently. It would be particularly beneficial to encourage recruits from some of the largest language communities within Ireland, such as Polish, French and Romanian.<sup>7</sup>

***Recommendation 3: Encourage foreign-nationals to join An Garda Síochána through nationwide campaign, emphasising the benefit of language skills within the force.***

#### **4. Interpreters**

While it is preferable that members would be able to speak directly to the public, rather than through an interpreter, this is not always possible and alternatives must be considered. Interactions between members and a non-English speaker are usually facilitated by interpreters. However, it must be understood that the field of interpreters in Ireland is hugely problematic.<sup>8</sup> As the interpreter process currently stands, there is no regulation, training or specialisation required for someone to be considered an ‘interpreter’. This can cause huge problems for law enforcement and for vulnerable members of the public.<sup>9</sup> It is not conceivable to remove the need for interpreters entirely through language diversity in recruitment of members. However it is possible to avoid the problematic aspects of interpretation services.

It is recommended that the interpreters used by An Garda Síochána would be only those adequately trained, specialised law enforcement interpreters.<sup>10</sup> This will help to ensure

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<sup>6</sup> Abbe and Brandon, ‘Building and Maintaining Rapport in Investigative Interviews’ 2014 Police Practice and Research Vol 15(3) 207. See also testimony from Garda Emilia Gilroy (originally from Poland) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQaNqyw-TGU> [date accessed: 17/12/2017] and Garda Nan Hu (originally from China) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKcQhlex0S4> [date accessed: 17/12/2017]

<sup>7</sup> Census 2016 Summary Results – Part 1 CSO, 2017) at 54. Available at [http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/population/2017/Chapter\\_5\\_Diversity.pdf](http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/population/2017/Chapter_5_Diversity.pdf) [date accessed: 03/01/2018]

<sup>8</sup> See Bacik, ‘Breaking the Language Barrier: Access to Justice in the New Ireland’ 2007 Judicial Studies Institute Journal Vol 2 109. See also <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/no-quality-controls-laid-down-for-courts-and-garda-translators-1.674842> [date accessed: 31/12/2017]

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/even-with-my-english-i-could-tell-it-wasn-t-right-1.674845> [date accessed: 29/12/2017]

<sup>10</sup> Although the training facilities in Ireland are no longer in existence, the expertise for adequate training remain in place. See <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Irish%20Translators%20and%20Interpreters%20Association.pdf/Files/Irish%20Translators%20and%20Interpreters%20Association.pdf> [date accessed: 28/12/2017]. Note that this means it is also recommended that friends or family members of accused persons, victims of crime or others, who may speak English would never be used as pseudo-interpreters.

effective communication and minimise misunderstandings between members of the public and An Garda Síochána.

It is possible facilitate on-site interpretation, including in cases where a person seeks to speak Irish to a member who is not sufficiently trained. It is recommended to create a phone interpretation service<sup>11</sup> whereby members can contact a specific language speaking member of the force or a unit of trained interpreters to facilitate communication with non-English speaking persons. A specialised interpretation unit may be set up or the service could be contracted to another organisation. This would mean that when a member who does not speak a certain language interacts with non-English speaking person (including an Irish-speaking person), there would be an immediate and comprehensive service available to facilitate communication.<sup>12</sup> There would be no need to bring the person to a station or to wait to procure an adequate interpreter. In respect of Irish-speakers, this would also minimise complaints about under-trained members of the force and maximise An Garda Síochána's compliance with the *Official Languages Act, 2003*.

***Recommendation 4.1:***            ***Use only trained and specialised interpreters to facilitate communication.***

***Recommendation 4.2:***            ***Implement a phone-interpretation service to facilitate immediate communication between members and the public when necessary.***

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<sup>11</sup> Similar to the system in Australia. See <https://www.tisnational.gov.au/> [date accessed: 07/12/2017]

<sup>12</sup> As opposed to an ineffective service of a member who can say only a few sentences in Irish and cannot adequately process the needs of the person in question.