

**Police Service of Northern Ireland, Graduation speech
by Brian Rea. Friday 12th September 2008**

Deputy Chief Constable, Graduated Officers, Distinguished
Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to be here at this graduation
ceremony today on behalf of the Northern Ireland Policing
Board.

The Graduating Officers in front of me are a group of people
who have made the exceptional career choice to serve our
community by joining the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

I also want, at this time, to pay tribute to you the parents and
friends of these new Officers, for standing by them as they
made their decision to serve us all as Police Officers.

This is an exciting start for you and I don't need to tell you
that you have a challenging and stimulating career ahead of
you.

As police officers, you face a very different policing environment than you would have had you qualified even ten years ago; the work of officers having evolved from carrying out their duties behind the walls of heavily fortified police stations to being out on the beat on foot, and in ordinary cars in the heart of the community.

I was listening to the radio in the car recently and someone said that “whilst we don’t want to live in the past, we ought not to forget the past”, and as we look to the future it is therefore important not to forget past and the very many sacrifices made by Police Officers and their families and reflect on how far our society has come away from the conflict and trauma of the past.

In this respect then we, as citizens of this country, owe an enormous debt of gratitude to all those Officers of both the Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross and the Police Service of Northern Ireland who served us with great courage and distinction over those extremely difficult years that were known worldwide as “the troubles”.

For nearly a decade, policing has been one of the central issues of the peace process and of the political negotiations

that have brought us to where we are today with a devolved Assembly at Stormont and it is hoped that when the negotiations around policing are concluded we will see those powers devolved as well and the jigsaw will be complete.

Since its inception in 2001, the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Police Service of Northern Ireland have made significant changes in keeping with the demands of a changing environment:

- Changes that have brought policing closer to the community and thankfully in many instances, though unfortunately not yet all, the community closer to policing;
- Changes which have provided a blueprint for policing worldwide;
- Changes which, through the work of the Policing Board, ensure a greater degree of accountability through strong independent oversight.

With the proposed devolution of policing and justice powers, policing remains in the headlines. However, we are in a positive position and have elected representatives from

across the whole political spectrum working together in the Assembly, at the Policing Board and in DPPs around the country making a contribution and I trust that we can get on with making policing in and with the community our priority.

It is in everyone's interests that our community is policed as effectively and efficiently as possible, and all those who have played a positive role in policing to date to help achieve this, are to be commended.

Everyone, and I emphasise everyone, is entitled to live in a peaceful and safe society, with the delivery of a good quality service from the police. Equally, police officers are entitled to the very same levels of respect and help from the community.

The PSNI, as you will know, has acquired a reputation throughout the world for setting the agenda in terms of good policing practice. The Board continues to host a range of international visitors and police officers from forces around the world who come to Northern Ireland to find out first hand what has happened in policing here.

Many of these visitors – from countries such as Pakistan, Venezuela, Canada and Brazil – have sought out and been briefed on the good practice that has been developed and applied here and all of you should be very proud to be part of this renowned and highly respected policing service.

On a personal level, today is a milestone for you all. It is a day you should always remember with great pride as it is a celebration of the achievement of your ambition to become a police officer.

Over the past few months you will have faced new challenges and gained new experiences. Your training has not been easy – it is not designed to be! It will have tested you, challenged you and helped you to push yourself to the limit, indeed you may have thought you wouldn't make it to the end but with the expert guidance and support of your trainers you have succeeded and, in doing so you have shown commitment, perseverance and dedication.

Today's ceremony marks the completion of your initial training and whilst you have learnt a lot over the past 21 weeks the learning process is not over. There is much more work to be done.

It was Vidal Sassoon who was reported to have said: “The only time success comes before work is in the dictionary”. You have all put the work in to achieve your ambition of becoming a police officer and you have been successful. You now have the opportunity to put your knowledge, training and instincts to the test.

In choosing to become police officers you have chosen to serve your community. A life dedicated to serving others is far from easy and you will in the course of your duties see the very best and the very worst society has to offer. But you are fortunate to have the opportunity to make a real difference to people’s lives through policing with the community.

It is important that our whole community has access to good policing and it is important that we continue to engage with the community to ensure their views are being heard. The Policing Board is currently developing its Community Engagement Strategy which gives all groups in our society a change to have their say on how their areas are policed.

To do this, the Board has set up what we call 'reference' groups so we can engage with all those groups of people who make up our increasingly diverse society including the most vulnerable namely, the elderly and also people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The Policing Board has been working closely with and building relationships with these key groups over the past year to make sure that, in line with our statutory duty, we encourage members of our community to co-operate with the police to prevent crime; and that the needs of the community are identified when setting targets and developing policing policy.

This may well be an area that you, as an Officer, may want to specialise in, but whatever the case, this type of community engagement will continue to have an impact on policing generally.

Today you have sworn to faithfully discharge the duties of the office of a Constable with fairness, integrity, diligence and impartiality, upholding fundamental human rights and

according equal respect to all individuals, their traditions and beliefs, and to discharge all your duties according to the law.

I have no doubt that as professional police officers you will always remember that oath, because it is only by upholding it that the Police will continue to gain the trust, confidence and support of the community. And that is fundamental to good policing – trust and support.

It is vital that our police service is supported by the entire community so that it can best serve that community.

Whilst Northern Ireland has made enormous progress in many respects recently we are not quite yet a ‘normal’ society as there are those out there who do not want to move forward but they have little or no support from the community or indeed any political party. They have nothing to offer our society but good policing has a lot to offer.

Officers, it is now your job, along with your colleagues to serve the best interests of our community.

If we are to continue to deliver the best in policing, which we all deserve and need, we must work hard at securing the

trust and support of the whole community through interaction with them.

The emphasis on community for us as a Board, and for the Police Service itself, is hugely significant, as Community Policing is a statutory core policing function that is now – and always will be - at the very heart of today's police service.

Never forget that you are part of this community and the fact that you wear a uniform doesn't change the fact that you are its citizens too.

As PSNI's newest officers you are the future of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and I am sure you will find that prospect an exciting one.

So as you begin your policing duties, remember that you will be judged by your actions. In all situations strive to give your best, impartially, fairly and with integrity. I hope that each one of you has a long and successful career ahead of you.

I congratulate you all again on your achievement, and on behalf of the Policing Board, wish you well for the future. You have the Board's best wishes and support.

Thank you.