



The Independent Monitoring Group. Front (l-r) Michael Howard, Asst Sec Gen Dept of Defence, Eileen Doyle, Chairperson IMG, Gerry Rooney, Gen Sec PDFORRA. Back (l-r) Brian O'Keeffe, Gen Sec RACO and Dep COS Maj Gen Jim Sreenan.

Moving Forward

Since the publication of her initial report on bullying and harassment, RACO have played a major part in the work of the Independent Monitoring Group (IMG), which was set up subsequent to the report. Lt Col Brian O'Keeffe and Eileen Doyle shared their views on the subject with SIGNAL Magazine.

Lieutenant Colonel Brian O'Keeffe (General Secretary RACO)

"April 2002 saw the beginning of the work of the Independent Monitoring Group (IMG), set up to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the "Doyle Report" published last Spring. This is a major undertaking for the Defence Forces, aimed at

ensuring change in policy, structures and, critically, behaviours within the organisation. The presence of both RACO and PDFORRA on the Monitoring Group panel is something which I believe is fundamental and vital for both the associations and the Defence Forces. The group has been meeting at regular intervals, has gathered relevant information and has also introduced a number of the policy changes that were recommended in the Doyle Report on 'Harassment, Workplace Bullying,

Discrimination and Sexual Harassment in the Defence Forces.'

"One of the key missions for the IMG is to re-instil confidence in the complaints procedures within the Defence Forces. There are several steps that have been taken in this respect. The complaints procedures themselves have been totally revamped. They now include both formal and informal procedures aimed at solving problems at the earliest stage and the lowest level possible. They have been made very "user-friendly" and

their introduction has been accompanied by a major awareness campaign to ensure that every member of the Defence Forces has ready access to the information they will need if they wish to make a complaint. Within the procedures there is a facility to use a "contact person" as a go-between to deal with both the complainant and the person complained about to try to solve complaints informally. A training programme for these "contact persons", who will be in every unit, will be held shortly.

"Another initiative has been the establishment of an independent external helpline for members of the Forces. This was recommended in the "Doyle Report" and provides a completely confidential and anonymous point of contact for personnel who need help and support. The service is provided by Staff Care Services and provides a 24 hour freephone for initial contact. This is backed up by access to a network of professional counsellors throughout the country. So a member of the Defence Forces who contacts the helpline can be referred by Staff Care to a counsellor in his or her own area for further help. All of this is absolutely confidential. This service is designed to complement, rather than replace, the extensive internal military personnel support structures that already exist.

"During the research for the "Doyle Report" the area of training was highlighted as one of particular concern and was identified as a flashpoint. The IMG has paid particular attention to this area, starting with the main training institutions, the Cadet School, Brigade Training Centres, and the Air Corps and Naval Service Colleges. We have had a series of meetings with instructors in these centres and with students and former students, as the users of the services they provide. We are taking our time here – to listen to all of these personnel to determine where the problems lie and what the solutions might be. I believe we are making real progress in this area – but it takes time. It can not be a question of rushing in and changing procedures for the sake of it. We have to ensure that the 99% of practices that are good are retained and that only the negative practices and procedures are eliminated.

"There has also been significant progress in developing an exit questionnaire and interview process in order to determine what are the factors responsible for the relatively high turnover of personnel. A team from the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) has been engaged for this work and the new



Eileen Doyle, Chairperson, Independent Monitoring Group.

process is expected to be in place and operational later this year. This should give us a valuable insight into the experiences in the organisation of those personnel who are leaving. This will be followed up later by a similar process for people on joining – to determine things like their expectations of military life – and for mid-career personnel. So when all of that is in place we should have a very valuable picture of expectations

and experiences of personnel throughout their military careers.

"Overall I am satisfied with the progress the IMG is making. The response from military management and from personnel of all ranks on the ground has been positive, sensible and very encouraging. There is a shared view that bullying or harassment is completely unacceptable in the Defence Forces in any circumstances. But there also

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appears to be a broad acceptance that there is a need for real change in a number of areas – not only in terms of structures and procedures, but also in aspects of our organisational culture and our behaviours. There also appears to be an understanding that we are talking about a long-term challenge. It is relatively easy to change structures and procedures quickly and there has been real progress in these areas, but getting the necessary change in culture and behaviour, which we are really after, will take much longer.

**Eileen Doyle
(Chairperson,
Independent
Monitoring Group)**

Could you give a broad outline of the timeframe that your work with the Independent Monitoring Group has been progressing?

“We are midway through our work as set out by the Minister and the Chief of Staff (COS) last year, so it is a good time to reflect on the work that we have done. Following the original timetable, we should complete our end of the work by Spring 2004. After that time the Independent Monitoring Group may no longer exist, but I don't think that it will be the end of the road in terms of implementing recommended changes in the permanent Defence Forces, in fact I think it will only be the beginning. I would be very confident that given the commitment of the key players in the Independent Monitoring Group that progress and change along the path we have decided upon will be ongoing.

What have your observations been on what RACO and PDFORRA have brought to the table?

“It has been fascinating to work with the two organisations. For someone who has worked at management level in education, it is a very interesting insight. They are not trade unions in the sense of trade unions that I've worked with, but they do possess some of the attributes of trade unions, such as their commitment to their members in the development of the permanent Defence Forces. I would have the view that RACO was quicker off the mark in developing as an organisation, particularly in terms of education and development. As both RACO and PDFORRA are now in their second decade, it's very interesting to see each

association conscious of a new challenge. The two associations have distinct differences, as they represent two very different arms of the Defence Forces, yet at the level of the Independent Monitoring Group I feel very lucky as chairperson that I have the total commitment of both associations and the diligence and hard work of their General Secretaries. This is not to say that there is always agreement, I wouldn't want that, but there is always hard work and a definite clear vision of where both associations see themselves going.

But the associations weren't in the initial blueprint for the Independent Monitoring Group?

“That's true. I think it's useful to know that the initial intention when I was approached by the Minister for Defence was to do some research for the Defence Forces. After initial meetings with Minister and his personnel, and when I had the chance to think about what they wanted, I went back to them with

associations and it's true to say that the work of the Independent Monitoring Group would not be possible if it were not for the commitment of RACO and PDFORRA.

How open do you believe the Defence Forces are to change?

“As an organisation the Defence Forces like any other is comprised of people. So, the question really is, are people determined to change? I think that the important thing from our angle as an Independent Monitoring Group, and my limited perspective as chairperson is to keep hope alive and to keep a fundamental belief in the human ability to strive to do better. That is something I firmly believe in. Education and training are at the heart of development within the Defence Forces. The organisation is committed to education and training and in their development in that extent we will measure their commitment to change. Then there are other factors, there is the reality of how the broad service of the Defence Forces

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the observation that what they wanted would not work if it was simply a piece of academic research. The reason I was convinced it wouldn't work was I felt people in the Defence Forces would feel I was brought in to 'put the boot in' so to speak. I have to say that both the Minister and the COS were admirable in how open they were to my suggestion that a small committee should be set up and that something had to be done quickly to react to the negative headlines about workplace behaviour within the Defence Forces. So that was how that small committee emerged. Neither RACO nor PDFORRA were represented on it, in fact it's true to say that it wasn't intended that they would be. I realised then that they were anxious to take part in the Independent Monitoring Group and that I would have open access to them through their General Secretaries. I suppose if the clock could be turned back, it's easy to say now that their inclusion from the very outset would have been wise. There has been admirable commitment and hard work from the two

is already developing and changing. Only recently we had the beginnings of an external helpline and counselling service for Defence Force members, to supplement and complement the internal support structures within the organisation. The gap that the committee originally identified in its report was the need for an external confidential counselling service, so that has already begun. There is also the other development, which the Minister has worked hard on, and that is the Ombudsman. I think if certain developments that are underway continue to progress and change, and when the Dáil delivers on the Ombudsman which I sincerely hope will happen in this Dáil term it will be a definite and symbolic sign to the Defence Forces that change is real, and change is happening. It will bring about the realisation that there can be a better workplace for every individual within the organisation. The Defence Forces workplace will improve and continue to develop. The Ombudsman legislation and the setting up of the external, confidential support service will be the final signal to mem-

bers of the Defence Forces that this change is for real. There is also the issue of the Defence Force Regulation A7 which deals with interpersonal relationships and discipline in the Forces, and which was used for complaints within the Defence Forces. Under the law you also have to have informal complaints procedures, we've done a lot of work on that and the training for "contact persons", who have a vital role in the informal procedures, is about to begin. The reworked A7 document was launched in early April, but I think there is still a lot more work to be done in this area.

Could this analysis of the Defence Forces open the door for similar work with other organisations in the state?

"What the Defence Forces of Ireland have done is certainly a challenge to other structured organisations in this country, such as the Fire Service, the Garda Síochána or the legal profession. I think there is a lack of a comparable major review of an Irish work-

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place. We have done studies, but none with as big an organisation as the Defence Forces. Any organisation that cooperates with a comparable review in the future will probably not have it as difficult as the Defence Forces, a lot of the problems will have been discovered and resolved during this monitoring process.

What should happen in March 2004? What would you like to see happen?

"The great thing about organisational development is that there is never an end. There will be new insights, new people and new experiences. These things contribute to organisational development in many ways. I

am certain that development of the Defence Forces will continue beyond my involvement and that of the Independent Monitoring Group. I would like to be able to say that the varying aspects of the Defence Forces organisation that the Independent Monitoring Group has interacted with will be more open and creative. I hope that there will be a greater ease in being able to say 'we don't know.' I think that point is a crucial point in any organisations or individual's life, to be able to say that. Reg Evans, the great strategic management guru said that is not enough to say 'what are we good at, what do we know, the fundamental question should be what do we not know?'



The mixture of RACO and PDFORRA with other members of the IMG is hopefully a winning formula says Eileen Doyle.

That is something that is very challenging for any workplace. If the Defence Forces can acknowledge that key question, and seek to move towards gaining the knowledge that is missing, it is a major step. That will mean continuing to develop their partnership with the Department of Defence, continuing to develop the education and training aspect at all levels. I would also like to see equality in relation to access to training courses and all that pertains to promotional opportunities, that's an enormously challenging area and it's something that we're working on at the moment. It's more of a concern to PDFORRA than it is to RACO, as RACO has established formal agreements with management regarding these issues. We are seeking to develop a greater transparency in the selection process for courses and promotion. We are seeking a coherent, human, fair and equal response to a request for information.

How optimistic are you that goals can be achieved by March 2004?

"Frankly, I think it's a bit soon, because you're looking at major organisational and cultural change. There are arguments over the length of time that it can take to implement cultural change, but I'm not sure it's something that can be measured in years. I think it's possible by next year that considerable progress could be made, but we have to remember that this is based on 1998 equality legislation. This is progress that must be made. We are talking about the wish of the Defence Forces and the Minister that best practise prevails in the workplace. I would see that as something that must be delivered by next year, it is a legal obligation. What we are dealing with is system change in terms of equality. Once we can change the system, and it's something that the military is working hard on, there will be a ripple effect on other practises within the workplace. We will be looking to have dignity and respect as recognisable aspects of the organisation at all levels. We will have definite progress.

What key issues/concerns have RACO brought to the table?

"Well there are particular concerns in both associations for education and training on every level. Interestingly, we're actually in the middle of interacting with those who are conducting and receiving training at all levels around the country. We are about half way through that process and generally we are hearing similar concerns from both instruc-

tors and those receiving instruction. The concerns on both sides would be echoing those of the top people in the military, that high standards would be maintained, that the chain of command would be protected and of course the Independent Monitoring Group completely agrees with that. On the other hand the concerns of the student body that they would have a greater awareness of the purposefulness of the training, and of course that reflects that concerns in general of young students in Ireland today. We are 35 years into free education and I believe that the taxpayer would also like to think that our young people are more aware of their rights and responsibilities. All those aspects of education are of huge concern. Somebody from the Air Corps made the point to me recently that everyone who joins the Defence Forces is a volunteer, and I think that is something that one shouldn't underestimate. They are choosing what I would consider a difficult career, with very hard training. There are concerns with the numbers that are leaving, and I think we

paints a very unhappy picture, which still exists. So in the case of the Defence Forces the statistics that came out in the research were extremely serious and were taken very seriously by both the Minister and the COS. Indeed two days before the launch of the report the Minister approached me to head up a group to implement the report's recommendations. That's an unusual thing to happen from my experience with government. The response was serious because the findings were serious and are serious but I believe that things will change. There are still work practises prevailing that are undesirable and unethical. I suppose it's like a jigsaw, and to date the Independent Monitoring Group has been looking for the corner pieces, the start constructing some sort of framework. We are also trying to receive adequate feedback and RACO and PDFORRA have been very strong at facilitating that, ensuring that we would have feedback. The varying teams that we have used, comprised of both associations and the military, the first time that's happened in the history of the Defence Forces. In each

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will learn interesting things from the exit interview process, which we have initiated with the Independent Monitoring Group. One of the things I'm interested in though is why do people stay? If we could understand why people stay we could learn a lot about the organisation that doesn't always come out in straight research. For some people, they have stayed because they simply are there too long and feel they can't leave, some regret that. We also have to look at the reality of western society, under 35's on average are going through three careers, which may or may not be related. Young people coming into the Defence Forces are not different in this respect. But I think the organisation in general has a good record of retaining staff, that would be the envy of other companies.

Have you uncovered anything that you found shocking during your research?

"I am familiar with comparable international research, such as the military in the UK, USA and Australia. Generally that research

instance we have formal feedback to the Independent Monitoring Group, and that has influenced our work and how it will be conducted in the future.

What has RACO's particular input been?

"Initially there was a glib attitude from some as there was a belief that the bullying was for the most part carried out by the officer corps. But that is not the case. You also have peer negative behaviour. What's significant for organisational development is taking responsibility for behaviour. I think it is fair to say that the General Secretary of RACO, as a member of the Independent Monitoring Group, has shown himself to be both courageous and proactive in identifying the importance of training and education. Another person in a similar position in a trade union organisation might not have that courage. RACO has shown itself to have leadership, and to recognise the significance of its own membership for organisational development or for negative workplace behaviour. For me that's very encouraging.