



100th Graduation Ceremony

1 April 2016

Minister, Chair, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to extend a warm welcome to you all and thank you for joining us today, to celebrate the 100th PSNI Graduation.

2016 is a year of significant centenaries. For the Police Service of Northern Ireland this centenary graduation is a celebratory event. It is an opportunity to recognise our achievements, acknowledge our successes and look to the future.

It has been a really busy Easter for policing. From 25–29 March, 137 notified parades took place right across Northern Ireland. A number of un-notified parades also took place and investigations are progressing into these. In policing events such as parades, commemorations and protests our upper most objective must be to keep people safe, and then to facilitate people's human rights – often this means balancing conflicting human rights as we uphold the law.

But we also have to understand that whilst these are very logical objectives often the people taking part in parades, commemorations and protests will have an emotional connection to that event. They will naturally view the event and the surrounding policing operation through that emotional lens and will therefore have their own perceptions. It would be foolhardy of us to ignore how powerful these perceptions can be – but we deal in facts and it is therefore our responsibility to get those facts across.

In the wider context it is the responsibility of us all - including organisers, community leaders and politicians to deal with those perceptions responsibly. The events of Easter weekend have again highlighted how policing in the modern era, brings with it risks and challenges not only at an operational level but it requires resilience when the decisions you will make on the ground will sometimes be re-examined not only by ourselves and oversight bodies but in the court of public opinion. With this in mind the fact that officers are still prepared to deliver this service is all the more impressive.

It is both an honour and a privilege to be the convening officer today.

Constables of class 07/15, you have been attested as Constables in the Police Service of Northern Ireland - welcome to the police family!

We celebrate the commitment you've made to policing in the company of family and friends - we also celebrate with our communities, who you've given a commitment to serve, with courtesy, fairness and respect.

When I joined the police over 30 years ago I did so with the primary aim of keeping people safe. That motivation hasn't changed today - every officer and member of staff in the Police Service of Northern Ireland is working to Keep People Safe.

Policing can be a challenging job. At the recent Chief Constable's Highly Commended Awards in March, 46 police officers and staff had extraordinary service acknowledged.

There were two officers who took actions when confronted with an agitated man wielding two large knives – they saved the life of a woman.

Like them you will find yourself standing in harm's way to protect vulnerable people, running towards danger when others are running away.

You will have an opportunity to make a difference to the lives of real people - like the two officers who delivered first aid at the scene of an attempted suicide - they saved a woman's life.

There will also be dark moments, when you have to knock on the door of a mother or father to tell them their loved has been fatally injured in a road traffic collision. Unfortunately, this has already had to happen on 14 occasions this year.

Policing is not an easy choice. There will be bad days and long nights; there will be uncertainty and danger. But you have the support of over 9,000 colleagues - police officers and staff who will be working to help you deliver outcomes for victims, to protect the most vulnerable in our communities and to reduce harm.

You have an opportunity to make a difference - like the two officers, who were awarded commendations for the actions they took which led to two suspects being arrested and charged with explosive offences.

You will often see the very worst of human nature, the aftermath of crime scenes, the devastating impact that crime can have on people's lives. But you will also be rewarded with seeing the very best of human nature - the concerned neighbour who is looking out for the welfare of others - the witness who is prepared to have their voice heard and support cases going before the courts – the volunteers that come forward to help in searches for missing persons.

No one intervenes in people's lives in quite the same way as police officers do. It is a huge privilege but it also carries with it a huge responsibility and that is something you should never lose sight of.

Society endows police officers with powers above and beyond the ordinary citizen and that in itself brings extraordinary responsibility. In utilising those powers you will protect people; you will prevent harm and you will bring offenders to justice.

But it is not just what you do that is so important. How you do it matters just as much.

While keeping people safe is what we do; Policing with the Community is how we do it.

Policing with the community means understanding how your actions as a police officer impact on individuals and communities. It means treating people with courtesy and respect and fairness.

We are perhaps one of the most accountable organisations in these islands and that in itself is one of our great strengths.

You will be held to account for your actions and by upholding our core values, you can be justly proud of what you do and how you do it.

As police officers, the ways in which we work to keep people safe are wide and varied. Many within policing are driven by the variety. No matter what role you perform throughout your career, that ethos of policing with the community must remain true.

During the break I want you to put on the numerals you have earned and to wear your uniform with confidence and with pride. These are numerals that you may wear for the rest of your working career. Last week, I had the great honour of presenting Chief Superintendent Henry Irvine with certificates to mark 43 years of service to policing. A lifetime dedicated to the service of others.

Over the last 22 weeks you have been given outstanding training to the highest academic standard and you've completed extensive tactical and operational training.

You are going out of here today as the best equipped and most freshly trained officers that I have under my command and you should rightly have confidence and self-belief.

But please don't forget that you are first and foremost, a citizen in uniform.

In your job, when you meet people in crisis, let them remember the person that you are and not just the uniform.

Being accepted into the PSNI makes you the lucky ones. In the most recent recruitment phase 2,121 candidates attained the standard and were brought forward from the Initial Selection Test to the Assessment Centre. There are hundreds of people who want to be police officers serving our communities.

You have made it through and you should be very proud.

So, while there will be challenges ahead I am confident you are capable of rising to them. As police officers you have an incredibly important role to play in helping to build a safer, more confident and peaceful society in Northern Ireland.

A number of officers have lost their lives as they've sought to play their part in making Northern Ireland a better place - we remember them today, the contribution they've made, their legacy and the loss that their colleagues, families and friends still feel.

Over the course of the last 15 years, The PSNI has been present through all the difficult periods. We are operating in an environment of austerity.

Our budgets have reduced drastically since the formation of the PSNI but by collaborating closely with our partners and our communities we will continue to play our part.

So be proud of the Police Service you have joined. Be true to the attestation you have just taken to serve and to protect. Be the change you want to see in the community.

Finally, I ask that you enjoy the rest of this very special day, which is an important milestone in your policing career.

Thank you.