Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction and research strategy

The following chapter describes the research strategy and the method of analysis. The case study approach is presented. The design and procedures for administering the surveys (questionnaires) and the arrangement of interviews are presented. This chapter also includes details of the procedures employed to protect the confidentiality of the respondents. In addition to the analysis and review of secondary historical data and literature, it was decided to use a number of methodological approaches to data collection.

Taken together, the methods chosen (interviews, surveys and observations) would provide a holistic view and analysis. Gill & Johnson (1997) and Remenyi et al (1998), identify the importance of having a research strategy. For the purpose of this work the first step was a review of recent literature to provide a narrative description of the subject area. Remenyi et al (1998) recognises that most researchers will approach a study with some preconceptions, some of which are derived from the literature review and others due to the researcher’s background, knowledge and experience. They cannot be avoided but must be recognised.

Content analysis

Content analysis is a methodology in the social sciences for studying the content of communication. According to Lasswell, content analysis is considered a scholarly methodology in the humanities by which texts are studied as to authorship, authenticity, or meaning. Neuendorf (2002, p10) offers a six-part definition of content analysis: “Content
analysis is a summarising, quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method (including attention to objectivity, intersubjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalisability, replicability, and hypothesis testing) and is not limited as to the types of variables that may be measured or the context in which the messages are created or presented.” It gained popularity in the 1960s when Glaser & Strauss (1967) referred to their adaptation of it as ‘grounded theory’.

The method of content analysis enables the researcher to include large amounts of textual information and systematically identify its properties, e.g. the frequencies of most used keywords by locating the more important structures of its communication content. Yet such amounts of textual information must be categorised analysis, providing at the end a meaningful reading of content under scrutiny. As an evaluation approach, content analysis is considered by some to be quasi-evaluation because content analysis judgments need not be based on value statements if the research objective is aimed at presenting subjective experiences. Thus, they can be based on knowledge of everyday lived experiences. Such content analyses are not evaluations.

On the other hand, when content analysis judgments are based on values, such studies are evaluations (Neuendorf 2002). This is a closely related if not overlapping kind, often included under ‘qualitative analysis’, used primarily in the social sciences. It is systematic, and a technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding. It often involves building and applying a ‘concept dictionary’ or fixed vocabulary of terms on the basis of which words are extracted from the textual data for concording or statistical computation (Neuendorf 2002).
Content analysis is also a method for summarising any form of content by counting various aspects of the content. This enables a more objective evaluation than comparing content based on the impressions of a listener (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Content analysis, though it often analyses written words, is a quantitative method. The results of content analysis are numbers and percentages (Neuendorf 2002). Though it may seem crude and simplistic to make such statements, the counting serves two purposes: to remove much of the subjectivity from summaries and to simplify the detection of trends.

Case study approach

According to Sharp et al (2002) the presentation of the case study often reflects the nature of the work a person is involved in: “The case study is often the basis for student’s projects, particularly in the social sciences. In this type of research students may spend a period in an organisation and the comments and conclusions which emerge will be based solely on their experiences in that setting” (p157). Catherine Hakin (1987) states: “the case study is the social research equivalent of the spotlight or the microscope in which emphasises is placed on the value of understanding a phenomenon as it exists within a natural context” (p61). In contrast to approaches that attempt to analyse contributing variables in isolation, the case study places emphasis on the observation and reconstruction and analysis of the case under study.

In compiling case studies the researcher collates all existing evidence relating to the phenomenon under study and then makes predictions and draws conclusions. Yin (1994) distinguishes between case study designs on the basis of presence or absence of theory in the area under investigation and by the number of cases compiled. The exploratory case
study is employed in the investigation of novel areas characterised by the lack of theory and evidence traditionally used in forming hypothesis. The use of case studies for the creation of new theory in social sciences has been further developed by the sociologists Glaser and Strauss who presented their research method, grounded theory, in 1967. The popularity of case studies in testing hypotheses has developed only in recent decades. One of the areas in which case studies have been gaining popularity is ‘education’ and in particular ‘educational evaluation’.

Case studies have also been used as a teaching method and as part of professional development, especially in business and legal education. The problem-based learning (PBL) movement is such an example. Glaser & Strauss (1967) suggest that exploratory case studies are useful when the intention is to formulate a theory based on the findings. The descriptive case study, in which a complete description of the phenomenon is described in its context, is designed within the boundaries of existing theory. Explanatory case studies again designed relative to an existing theory, are used to determine cause/effect relationships within the area of examination. The objective is to assemble a list of independent variables and determine those most correlated with the dependent variables (Yin 1994).

Finally; Yin also distinguishes between designs that examine multiple (replication) cases and those examining single cases. The present research project contained features of exploratory, descriptive and explanatory case design (Travers 2001). This project was to an extent concerned with casual factors, such as those factors that determined the success or failure of an education programme, given the lack of adequate research into the current education programme and general research in education, training and development of Irish
police trainees it seems appropriate to consider the present research as being primarily exploratory in nature.

Thus the research, which is employing a triangulatory approach of surveys, semi-structured interviews and possibly the most accurate way to describe as adopting for the last section of the triangle personal observations. Criticisms of using case studies are many, for the purpose of brevity they can be seen a originating from two view points; that questioning the external validity or generalisability of the case study given its questionable representativeness and; that the questioning the internal validity of the chosen case study given the questionable data reliability.

On the first point, one commonly stated weakness of the case study approach is that researchers often select case in an arbitrary manner that erodes the external validity required for reliable generalisations to be made. While it may be true for some studies, Hamel, et al (1993) note that a lack of representativeness is not characteristic of the case study approach in general. Based on their examination of a number of studies, they conclude that, in the main, case study selection has been contemplative and based on the advantages each offers in the illumination of the phenomenon under investigation. On a second level, Hakim (1987) points out that both representativeness and external validity are enhanced through the employment of multiple case designs.

Criticisms levelled at the internal reliability of case studies focus on their subjective nature. On one level they are often reliant on the “subject experiences” of the participants (Hamel 1993, p23). On a second level the researcher is vulnerable to bias, through interaction with the participants and environments for example, and manifest in the
decision making process. According to Kazdin (1982) the inability to rule out such sources of bias prevents the formulation of internally valid conclusions. To an extent it is futile to deny the existence of subject variables within qualitative research of this nature, it is important to note that case study researchers are aware of the problems and have adopted strategies such as data and methodological triangulation to maximise objectivity.

Within a case study research data triangulation involves collating information from diverse sources of data i.e. multiple interviewees. Methodological triangulation combines a variety of research techniques, such as interviewing, participant observation and document analysis (Kazdin 1982). Both approaches reduce the subjectivity of research by ensuring that findings are based on multiple sources of information that are mutually supportive.

In justifying this section of the methodology employed here, it is also pertinent to note that the case study approach does offer advantages for those engaged in exploratory research, more information - to gain more information about the structure, process and complexity of the research object when relevant information is not available or sufficient. The case study approach also allows flexibility for the researcher to account for themes emerging during the data collection process. Rather than strictly defining the boundaries of the object of the study as occurs in quantitative survey methods for example, the case study researcher welcomes emerging and unexpected themes and endeavours to explore their relevance (Yin 1994).

The case study is an in-depth examination of a phenomenon as it exists in context and the advantages are on two levels: on the first level efforts are dedicated to the exploration of a
real life representation of the object of the study, in the second level, this exploration accounts for background variables that impact on the phenomenon (Yin 1994). These points are directly relevant to this research. The case study approach is justified by the exploratory nature of the research.

Secondly, confidence in the validity and generalisation of the research is encouraged through the use of surveys, interviews and personal observations. In fact many of the attractions of the case study research are directly relevant to researching the new education programme in general. In an area characterised by a notable absence of in-depth research (from an Irish perspective there is only government commissioned research) and given the necessity to research a new and un-tested education programme the case study approach as a part of the approach employed provides a welcome respite.

Given to an extent as discussed earlier the nature of the topic in my opinion the approach to the to quantitative and qualitative research methodology provides an excellent means of yielding high-quality valid data on the current education programme on which credible conclusions can be made.

A case study is also an intensive analysis of an individual unit (e.g., a person, group, or event) stressing developmental factors in relation to context. Case studies may be descriptive or explanatory. The latter type is used to explore causation in order to find underlying principles. They may be prospective (in which criteria are established and cases fitting the criteria are included as they become available) or retrospective (in which criteria are established for selecting cases from historical records for inclusion in the study). Another suggestion is that case study should be defined as a research strategy, an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context.
Case study research can mean single and multiple case studies, can include quantitative evidence, relies on multiple sources of evidence, and benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions. Case studies should not be confused with qualitative research and they can be based on any mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence. Single-subject research provides the statistical framework for making inferences from quantitative case-study data (Lamnek, 2005). An average, or typical, case is often not the richest in information.

In clarifying lines of history and causation it is more useful to select subjects that offer an interesting, unusual or particularly revealing set of circumstances. A case selection that is based on representativeness will seldom be able to produce these kinds of insights. When selecting a subject for a case study, researchers will therefore use information-oriented sampling, as opposed to random sampling. Outlier cases (that is, those which are extreme, deviant or atypical) reveal more information than the putatively representative case.

Alternatively, a case may be selected as a key case, chosen because of the inherent interest of the case or the circumstances surrounding it. Or it may be chosen because of researchers’ in-depth local knowledge; where researchers have this local knowledge they are in a position to “soak and poke” as Fenno (1986) puts it, and thereby to offer reasoned lines of explanation based on this rich knowledge of setting and circumstances. Whatever the frame of reference for the choice of the subject of the case study there is a distinction to be made between the subject and the object of the case study (Baxter et al 2008). The subject is the practical and historical unity through which the theoretical focus of the study is being viewed. The object is that theoretical focus – the analytical frame (Dul et al
Beyond decisions about case selection and the subject and object of the study, decisions need to be made about purpose, approach and process in the case study.

Thomas (2011) thus proposes a typology for the case study wherein purposes are first identified (evaluative or exploratory), then approaches are delineated (theory-testing, theory-building or illustrative), then processes are decided upon, with a principal choice being between whether the study is to be single or multiple, and choices also about whether the study is to be retrospective, snapshot or diachronic, and whether it is nested, parallel or sequential. It is thus possible to take many routes through this typology, with, for example, an exploratory, theory-building, multiple, nested study, or an evaluative, theory-testing, single, retrospective study. The typology thus offers many permutations for case study structure. A critical case is defined as having strategic importance in relation to the general problem and allows the following type of generalisation, ‘If it is valid for this case, it is valid for all (or many) cases.’ In its negative form, the generalization would be, ‘If it is not valid for this case, then it is not valid for any (or only few) cases.’

The case study is also effective for generalizing using the type of test that Popper (2000) called falsification, which forms part of critical reflexivity. Falsification is one of the most rigorous tests to which a scientific proposition can be subjected: if just one observation does not fit with the proposition it is considered not valid generally and must therefore be either revised or rejected. Popper himself used the now famous example of, “All swans are white”, and proposed that just one observation of a single black swan would falsify this proposition and in this way have general significance and stimulate further investigations and theory-building. The case study is well suited for identifying “black
swans” because of its in-depth approach: what appears to be “white” often turns out on closer examination to be “black.”

**Design of the questions for interviews (single and group)**

For the purpose of this work, semi-structured interviews were chosen as one of the methods to collect the primary data. A range of questions using simple style, scope and sequence throughout was utilised. Initially the main research questions were assembled and in turn broke and sub-divided the research questions into mini-research questions. Following this the relevant issues were perused and what was required as data was selected, to ensure a correct balance was being achieved cross referenced at all levels and finally as not to have the whole process too rigid, certain questions were formulated and developed to allow a flowing structure on a certain loose format to be implemented in the interview. Questions were standardised and asked to every respondent. Finally, all sections of the topic through the research objectives were crosschecked for total coverage (Roche & Brannick 1997).

The scope and sequence of the questions given to the respondents started with warm up general questions to a more direct conversationalist approach to the main body of questions relating to the topic. The issues discussed were completed in a friendly, efficient and purposeful manner. Each of the respondents was eager to participate and eager to share their views, experiences and recommendations for the programme. It is noteworthy that one issue more than any other came to the fore while conducting the interviews the area of communication; the ability to listen, talk and intervene at the right moment. It allowed me to conduct good quality interviews free from bias and allowed me to collect and document the relevant information and data as it was presented. I also
wanted to use interviews as one of several methods to explore the research objectives. It added an extra dimension and gave me a different angle and further depth to judge how well they corroborate each other. In including interviews in the research methodology the advantages and limitations of the interviewing technique were known to me.

The interviews were used to delve into and understand the behaviour of the group being interviewed without the application of a pre-established categorization that might limit the field of inquiry. They sought to discover and understand, not just the ‘what’ and ‘how’, but to also explore the ‘why’ (Fontana et al 1994). They provided the scope to achieve good quality data free from bias because of open-ended questions used. They allowed me to produce a set of questions which insured the interviews remained true to my research objectives and allowed me to take part in the interview process outside of merely recording responses. This would be in line with Sharp & Howard (1996) who state: “The interview as providing higher quality information that is free from bias, than many other methods available to them...can supplement by open ended discussion” (p147).

The interview schedule was designed with a number of broadly overlapping questions which at once allowed for the development of a constructed conversation, it further allowed the interviewee the opportunity to answer questions to their own satisfaction without being tied merely giving responses to closed-ended questions (Sharp & Howard 1996). Roche & Brannick (1997) regards the interview as a different method of data collection because of its preparation, construction and execution; it is systematic and controlled by the researcher to avoid bias and distortion of factual information.

Most research designs have incorporated interviews regardless of the methodology (Roche & Brannick 1997). A semi-structure interview has its own character and though may
differ in style and tradition must contain certain core elements to survive (Travers 2001). Roche & Brannick (1997) state, they are an exchange of conversation/dialogue, thematic, topic-orientated, narrative, biographical and any number of the above can be discussed. Relevant contexts can be brought into focus so that situational knowledge can be produced; in effect data and knowledge are constructed rather than facts simply being reported. Also, this is seen as a form of construction/reconstruction of knowledge rather than excavation. In this method the interviewer has a free flow to formulating questions when required and can use at any stage neutral probing (Sharp & Howard 1996).

The interviews can be viewed as unique in that they only took place once and personal because they were conducted face to face. There was also an element of guidance throughout as there was an interview guide but it allowed ample freedom to formulate questions that arose through the interview. In using the semi-structured interviews a theoretical framework in a structured approach was constructed and employed. The interview was the same for all interviewees with open-ended questions, single type interview and the process was not too fixed or rigid so as to allow for free flowing data. My part in the process was to encourage the interviewee to develop aspects of their responses which were particularly pertinent to my research and to gain a greater understanding of individual’s attitudes, their role, their views and generally their views on the changes they have participated and witnessed.

Having selected semi-structured interviews and my role, this position now allowed a meaningful way to generate data (Roche & Brannick 1997); interaction with the interviewees and access to their accounts and productive talks. Knowledge was also viewed as situational, contextual and interactional. The interviewees reasoning and
judgements in certain areas were important because of their focus on education and training, events/situations and on trainees. In this regard situational rather than abstract questions were preferred (Roche & Brannick 1997).

The questions were specifically designed to be broad, innocuous and uncontroversial. The reasoning behind this presentation was the result of an awareness garnered through the literature assessments of Holdway (1993) and Young (1991). Both of these theorists draw attention to the fact that police tend to be suspicious and highly attuned to criticism or censure of their role generally and all move wary of unsolicited interest in either themselves or the role they function at (Holdway 1993; Young 1991). This method also allowed me to generate a fairer and fuller representation of respondent’s perspectives. A great deal of planning was put into the construction of the interviews but I was conscious that the interviews should proceed as a conversation with a purpose (Roche & Brannick 1997). A range of questions using simple style, scope and sequence throughout was utilised. Initially the main research questions were assembled and in turn broke and subdivided the research questions into mini-research questions.

**Group interview**

The group interview is a methodology that has been gaining popularity among social scientists (Fontana et al 1994). Jankowicz (2000) describes it as an interview of people, in which the data is distilled from the dialogue and general discussions of the group participants. Extensively used in market research, Easterby-Smith et al (1991) describe
them as ‘steered conversations’. The objective is to gather insights from the participants about the research topic. This is achieved through the self-disclosure of the participants.

Typically group sizes range from four to ten people, however, size should be dictated by two over-riding considerations: Firstly, the need to provide a diverse range of perceptions; secondly, the need to provide each participant with the opportunity to disclose their perceptions (Krueger et al 2000). This elicitation of data is achieved through a sequence of questions that stimulate, maintain and steer the discussion. It requires considerable interpersonal skills (Jankowicz 2000). The interviewer needs to ensure against individuals or groups dominating the discussion, while encouraging recalcitrant respondents to participate and ensuring responses are received from all group participants.

Advantages/disadvantages

The advantages according to Fontana et al (1994) include inexpensive, data rich, flexible, stimulating to respondents, recall aiding and cumulative and elaborative over and above individual responses. The problems/disadvantages they assert include the emerging group culture may interfere with individual expression, the domination of the group by one person, the group format makes the research of sensitive topics difficult, group think is a possible outcome and the requirement for interviewer skills is greater because of group dynamics. Despite these difficulties, focus groups or group interviews remain a viable research option for the qualitative and quantitative researcher.

From an exploratory position on attitudinal change it was recognised there was not enough information available about the research subject. Certain operational variables were defined to gain information per se, hence, the use of diary entries for the group
interview as part of approach. The explanatory research approach was selected for
explaining social events or relations, to gain and advance knowledge about the structure,
processes and their nature and linking of factors from different sources into general
statements. With regard to the descriptive element of the research this allowed me
correctly conduct an independent investigation into the current education system aiming at the
social events, relations at various levels and to provide background information about the
issue in question and to try and achieve stimulating explanations (Krueger et al 2000).

Survey method

Another of the approaches to this study is the survey method. They are regarded as the
most common method of data collection (Sharp & Howard 1986). It is a generally held
view that no specific formula has yet been devised that will create a good questionnaire.
Authors such as Moser & Kalton (1971) and Boyd et al (1985) state that questionnaire
design is more of an art form than a science, with Oppenheim (1966) suggesting
expounding the parallel view that questionnaire design cannot be taught from books.

Oppenheim’s remarks that: “the world is full of well meaning who believe that anyone
who can write plain English and has a modicum of common sense can produce a good
questionnaire” (p37). The message is made cogently explicit by Gill & Johnson (1991,
p84) who emphasised that: “A vital skill...is the ability to structure, focus, phrase and ask
sets of questions in a manner that is intelligible to respondents”. Bearing in mind the
objectives of this study, the concern was to design a questionnaire that would elicit valid,
reliable responses in an efficient manner and whose interpretations would consequently
yield a generally clear picture of the perceived impact of competency development and
accelerated recruitment on students and probationers. Considering all of the above it was
decided to devise a predominantly structured open question framework for the questionnaire.

There is a lack of literature available on this research, and in agreement with Gill & Johnson (1991, p8) who state “that there is no one best method”, there was a need to compliment the questionnaire with interviews and some personal observations. The use of different research methods to collect information in the same study is known as triangulation. The methodology aims to combine them so as to counteract any dangers to validity identified in each. There is a need to identify the strengths and weaknesses of these methods. Jick (1983) suggests that in the process of the triangulation the weakness in each single method will be compensated by the counterbalancing strengths of the other.

The researcher gathers most surveys by postal method or personally. In most cases they are employed as the single method of data collection however, in this case other research methods will also be employed to counteract the weaknesses that can be a feature of surveys (Jick 1983). The advantages and limitations of questionnaires were considered by the very nature of the organisation under research, the geographic location of the respondent’s work and education, the organisation and the type of survey to be conducted. In general terms from a financial point of view surveys are less expensive, they give quick results, the respondent’s time will not be wasted (especially in this research project), less opportunity for bias or errors, surveys can be stable, consistent and uniform in their application. The disadvantage or limitations that could only visualised in respect of this research would be inexperience in designing a questionnaire in that it would not be probing thus allowing poor clarification in the answers (Roche & Brannick 1997).

Reliability and Validity
Reliability

According to Alreck & Settle (1985) the most fundamental test of reliability is the ability to get the same data from several measurements made in similar fashion. Therefore to satisfy this evaluation criterion it should be possible for another researcher to replicate the original research using the same subjects and the same research design under the same conditions and produce the same result. Bell (1993) considers that, for example, questions that ask for opinions may produce different answers for a range of reasons. It is likely, therefore, that people asked to give their attitude to management will react in different ways given their own particular set of experiences. There are a number of different devises for checking reliability such as test, retest and alternative-form methods. These methods are not always feasible or necessary, and that in surveys with limited resources of time, the check for reliability comes at the stage of question wording and piloting the instrument.

Validity

Gill & Johnson (1991) defines validity as to do with whether an item actually measures or describes that which it is supposed to. Population validity is the extent to which the findings can be extrapolated from the immediate research population to other people and ecological validity has to do with which conclusions may be generalised to other, larger, contexts and settings. Whilst further studies may have to be undertaken in others settings, I consider the findings of this research to be internally valid and have external validity in terms of similar work groupings on the Irish police. To perfect the data collection through a questionnaire two pilot surveys were conducted to test my skills at designing a questionnaire before full primary data collection was attempted.
Design of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to be efficient in the collection of data and in line with the views of Sharp & Howard (1996) and Gill & Johnson (1991) governing surveys. It included a covering letter, the instructions for completing the survey and the questions in the main body. The covering letter was specific and it explained the nature of the research and neutralised any doubts or mistrust respondents may have had in relation to the survey. The instructions to the survey were also short and specific. The first section of the survey establishes the basic background demographic characteristics. The main body or heart of the questionnaire is where I measured my time and effort to ensure that the questions, content, format, structure, wording, overall flow was correct and the questions adhered to the basic rules of questionnaire construction. The survey probes respondent’s attitudes on a variety of issues.

According to Roche & Brannick (1997) the logical order of the questionnaire allows for transition and flow. Considering the narrow scope of the research, a mixed format of questions transferring from the general to the specific was employed and that moved from personal to impersonal. They were primary in nature and directly related to the research topic (Roche & Brannick 1997). Secondary questions were utilised to provide information on secondary issues such as student’s opinions, how reliable a certain educative instrument is, their participation in certain activities and events. They were used to safeguard the integrity of the questionnaire, the correctness of the methodology and seek truthfulness from the respondents.
Tertiary questions were also used to establish an acceptable framework that allowed for ease of data collection. They assisted the respondent to get a breather and were relevant and interesting to the respondent. They were also designed to stimulate the respondent and were free from bias (Sharp & Howard 1996). Direct questions were used on a number of occasions to ascertain information from the respondent about himself or herself. In designing the questionnaire and to illicit quality data on specific areas of interest a number of filter and contingency questions were used (Sharp & Howard 1996).

Certain aspects of the research topic related to general scenarios, this was followed up with contingency questions geared to gain more specific and additional information. To close the design of the questionnaire a number of open ended questions were used. These types of questions have advantages and limitations. The advantages are they allow respondents to express their feelings and thoughts, they allow more information details than pre-coded questions, they allow for conclusions to be arrived at in relation to the respondent, they allow creativity and sometimes offer extra scope to the researcher by giving information the researcher may not have foreseen. Their limitations vary from the extreme to the general and mostly involve the element of time, large amounts of information for collation and can offer useless or irrelevant information (Roche & Brannick 1997).

The survey was conducted in what could be described as a very stable environment and the advantages of using open-ended questions were regarded as viable and relevant considering the respondents. However to balance the negative effect of the response category of ‘I don’t know’ or ‘no comment’ filter questions to eliminate the need for a neutral response were employed (Sharp & Howard 1996). In preparing the questionnaire
the content was viewed as very important if quality data was to be gained (Roche & Brannick 1997). The composition of each question addressed one item only. No double barrel questions were asked. The questions were relevant to the research topic. The questions were systematic and broken down into a good order where not too many questions were asked on one particular area of the topic. At all times the questionnaire was simple and easy to read.

The next stage considered was the layout, content and format for the questionnaire. The layout was simple and the questions were well presented and easy to read, interpret and answer. Instructions as stated were also clear and specific and at all times left plenty of room on the papers to allow comments from the respondents. In deciding on the content, I ensured that the questions were relevant, un-ambiguous, not leading, non-personal, non-vague, not embarrassing, plain and simple English appropriate to the respondents level within the education programme and that the whole questionnaire flowed so as to allow the respondent easy access to its completion.

A professional document was produced that respected the rights and feelings of the respondents. In dealing with the format the drafts were externally examined to ensure that weaknesses were eliminated and questions were changed or upgraded. Based on the examination, revision changes were implemented and questionnaire was sent for re-examination. This continued until the questionnaire was considered satisfactory (Roche & Brannick 1997). The questions for the pre-competency group occurred in the open environment. The survey for the competency intakes took place within he confines of the Garda College.
For the pre-competency group I was required to track down individual subjects at their respective work districts; many had moved to another district however, the internal PULSE¹ network regarding exact location eventually located them. None of the subjects (pre or post competency) exposed strong aversion to completing the questionnaire. Some subjects due to days off, annual leave or sickness delayed some of the returns.

Two pilot studies were carried out to check the suitability of the questionnaire. They were conducted; in the Garda College in February 2007 and in a Dublin division in May 2007. The results were analysed and interpreted. The studies showed positive results and were only adjusted on a minor level. The main objectives were to determine respondent’s level of comfort with personal type questions, question ambiguity or lack of clarity, bias and reaction, time to complete the questionnaire and willingness to engage in an interview after completion of the questionnaire.

The respondents were fully briefed on the objectives of the survey and all agreed it was a valid subject to investigate. The questionnaire in this research is an integral part of the process of gaining quality data. It extends the process of translation connecting abstract concepts to specific questions. This instrument of research was useful because it assisted gaining the information that was required for formulating answers to the research questions (Sharp & Howard 1996). In gaining access to the participants for the case study for my research did not prove problematic. However, conveying objectivity and neutrality and stressing the legitimacy of the object of the study helped me to enhance the access required. Some experienced researchers (Sluka 1995) stated displaying sympathy with the participants is more likely to be successful. In my experience expressions of neutrality,

¹ Police Using Leading Systems Effectively (coined from an internal Garda competition 1997/1998)
explanations of the legitimacy of the research were very effective in securing the cooperation.

**Undertaking of confidentiality**

Mindful of ethical/confidential requirements in preparing this thesis, a method of work was established that:

- Ensured complete confidentiality in relation to information provided to me
- Maintained confidentiality of respondents
- Provided an appropriate setting for respondents for the interviews and surveys to be completed by them in confidence
- Established clear liaison and communication procedures
- A commitment of confidentiality to all in relation to information furnished was given.

Respondents were ensured they would not be identified or that the information provided could lead to their identity. Before attending for the surveys, group interviews and interviews respondents were informed that the data presented was entirely confidential. In the course of the surveys and interviews, respondents recounted their experiences in their own way with a clear account of their experiences.

**Use of quotations**

The findings chapter in this thesis quote extensively from respondent’s direct primary data; in that sense it is like listening to the voices of the respondents expressing their experiences. The purpose of quotations is to provide a representative account of the respondents experiences in their own words, including colloquialisms and informal
terminology, for example, many respondents referred to the Garda Síochána as the ‘guards’ and trainees as ‘recruits’. The specific language is important and accuracy of the information was essential for the mind set of those who trained in whatever period.

Quotations have a ‘kernel’ which allows the feelings and experience of the respondent to come to the fore. It also allowed me to avoid ‘patchwork’ writing, or presenting a jumble of miscellaneous information from various sources that is merely pieced together, the quotations fit logically into the text of this research. The italicised words used in the quotations are the actual words used by the respondents. All names and identifying details are deleted to preserve anonymity and are substituted by a number. The choice of quotations in the text intends to represent the range of experiences described: talent, passion, need, conscience, personal and development experiences. The source of each quotation used is anonymised and, where necessary and appropriate, numbers were used, for example r6 or r22 for Gardaí and Trainee’s cr22 or pcr 16 and T/T2 or T/T7 for teacher/trainers.

**Achieving data for analysis**

Roche & Brannick (1997) state that data collected should be viewed from three main areas for analysis – literally, interpretively and reflectively in deciding what counted as data for research. In researching these collection procedure(s) it was decided that the areas selected would contribute to the overall picture being presented. It was required to show the aspects of the interaction from the respondents in form and sequence, a formal structured approach. To read the transcripts of the interviews for what they represent, mean or what can be inferred from them and in the reflexive sense to judge my role as the researcher and author and my interaction with all respondents. In total I wished to achieve
a balanced view between all areas and to seek corroboration with the rest of the data collection through the other two methods of empirical research.

**Ethical considerations/validity and insider research**

Whilst many of the ethical concerns surrounding the present research are readily discernible from my discussion, they merit further consideration here. Complying with ethical standards is important in all research areas but it is of particular importance for those engaged in research in their own organisation. In examining the principal moral and ethical concerns surrounding the present research, the Code of Professional Ethics of the Psychological Society of Ireland was drawn on. The term ‘insider research’ is used to describe projects where the researcher has a direct involvement or connection with the research setting (Robson 2002). Such research contrasts with traditional notions of scientifically sound research in which the researcher is an ‘objective outsider’ studying subjects external to his/herself (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). Clearly there are a number of ethical issues to be considered when conducting the research. All respondents were informed of the purpose of the study prior to their participation. Confidentiality of all participants at all times was assured prior to the commencement of the study. Informed consent was obtained from each participant and retrospective withdrawal would be allowed if needed be. All references to trainees and junior gardai and their garda operational regions will be by code. The interviews with Garda College/divisional staff are also by code references.

Full permission from two Directors of Training and Development at the Garda College before and during the research period was obtained to complete any form of research required. All participants were assured that my research materials will not be used except
for research purposes. Participants will be fully debriefed and access to copies of the final thesis will be available for inspection to all participants through the researcher. There are various ways in which a researcher can be categorised as an insider. For example, professionals may carry out a study in their work setting, also called practitioner research (Robson 2002).

Researchers may be a member of the community they are studying or they may become an accepted member after a period with the community. Collaborative research, where researchers and subjects are both actively involved in carrying out research (Titchen in Jarvis 1999), exemplifies the ‘blurring of boundaries’ between the researchers and researched which causes allegations of invalidity. Such boundaries are obliterated when the researcher becomes the subject of study, as in personal narrative. Insider research could also be extended to include cases where the researcher is partisan to the emotional/political/sexual affiliations of the subject(s). Examples include feminist research carried out by feminists (Devault 2004) and gay research carried out by homosexuals/lesbians (Leck 1994).

**Selection of administrator to assist in my role**

I was originally uneasy about carrying out research on my own organisation, interviewing and surveying those involved in educating and training trainees, practising trainee’s, operational and administrative gardai and interviewing senior management. A decision was made to deal with this properly; to remain detached when conducting the interviews/surveys and analysing the data. The first important issue was to ensure that cross referencing of the results of the surveys/interviews against other relevant sources of data.
The second issue was one of confidentiality for the respondents and to ensure that any response was not accepted at face value; a critical analysis of the data would be required. This would also help minimise that respondents did not have their own personal agenda and that their answers might well be self-serving. Thirdly, to ensure a random stratified sample was chosen, a colleague at the Garda College was asked to act as administrator and select the respondents.

My colleague selected the two trainee phases in question out of a possible eight. In each phase there were 12 classes of trainees. He randomly selected 8 of these classes and the eight classes were surveyed three times from each intake over a period of 62 weeks as they advanced from phase one through phase three. He also selected the date and time for each survey and ensured that it was placed on the trainee time-table as a period of research, the trainees did not know until the two of us walked into the lecture theatre what was going to take place. My administrator was also used to select respondents from an internal garda HRM list for the first programme, the second programme, operational sergeants and tutor gardai and the numbers for the focus group from the two phases surveyed. The very last issue to consider was my own actions and what was required, I am an experienced member of the Irish police who has been lucky to work in various fields of policing.

With insider research, the concept of validity becomes increasingly problematic because of the researcher’s involvement with the subject of study. Positivists may argue that, because of this involvement, the researcher is no longer objective and their results may be distorted. Thus, from this essentially correspondence view of validity, whereby valid or true knowledge corresponds to an objective world, the validity of insider research is
threatened (Kvale 1995). On the other hand, neopositivists and anti-positivists claim that, because complete objectivity is impossible, the researcher's biases threaten validity or trustworthiness. The following questions were raised and needed to be answered:

- Will my relationships with subjects have a negative impact on the subject's behaviour such that they behave in a way that they would not normally?
- Will my tacit knowledge lead them to misinterpret data or make false assumptions?
- Will my insider knowledge lead them to make assumptions and miss potentially important information?
- Will my politics, loyalties, or hidden agendas lead to misrepresentations?
- Will my moral/political/cultural standpoints lead them to subconsciously distort data?

There are also many cited advantages of insider research. Some argue that insiders have a wealth of knowledge which the outsider is not privy to (Jones in Tedlock 2000). It is argued that interviewees may feel more comfortable and freer to talk openly if familiar with the researcher (Tierney 1994). From an anti-positivist perspective therefore, insider research has the potential to increase validity due to the added richness, honesty, fidelity and authenticity of the information acquired.

Promoters of qualitative research claim that arguments against insider research are applicable to all research. For example, one can never guarantee the honesty and openness of subjects, and our research is always coloured by our subjectivities. Complete objectivity is thus impossible. The task is to minimise the impact of biases on the research
process, to carry out research in consciousness of its socially situated character and to make the researcher's position vis-à-vis the research process transparent (Hammersley 2000). By making the research process transparent and honest, it is argued that readers can construct their own perspectives which “are equally as valid as our own” (Cohen et al 2000, p106). Practitioner action researchers carry out studies in their field, often with the aim of improving practice (Jarvis 1999). Thus ethical and practical dilemmas arise. These dilemmas and the ways in which they are managed also raises questions concerning the validity of research.

According to Cohen et al (2000), case studies strive to portray “the close-up reality” and “thick description” of participants’ “lived experiences” (p182). To capture this subjective reality, honesty, trust and openness between researcher and researched is essential. As Eliot (1993) states: “The insider researcher should consider “dismantling the value structure of privacy, territory and hierarchy, and substituting the values of openness” (Eliot). As Eisner states, “there is no single, legitimate way to make sense of the world. Different ways of seeing give us different worlds. Different ways of saying allow us to represent different worlds” (p54). In my preparations it was acknowledged that, due to my garda supervisory position, respondents may have felt under pressure to take part. I had to acknowledge that respondents were not willing participants, which may have impacted on their honesty and thus on the quality of data.

It also recognized that my professional role as a sergeant attached to continuous professional development and ex-member of Garda College staff may have prevented participants from being honest. I also acknowledged that internal politics may have prevented teacher/trainer staff from revealing important information. Although from first
contact to time of interview my main concern was to build up trust and to help the staff feel that they were participating, as equals, in a conversation.

The issue of confidentiality was paramount to this research and this was ensured to the best of my ability so it did not impact on the quality of data. Participants were assured that information given would not be made public to colleagues. Participants would not be identifiable in the thesis. Fears were counteracted each and every time of contact by assuring participants of the confidentiality of any information given.

Another potential threat to the reliability of this study is my tacit insider knowledge. I did not make assumptions and fail to address or probe important issues as a result. My familiarity with teaching staff did not reduce my willingness to ask uncomfortable and/or important questions. I believe that my insider status had a considerable impact on the honesty and depth of conversations with participants. I have already documented the strategies used to counteract the potentially negative effects of my insider role. A common criticism of qualitative research is that it is particularly prone to bias and invalidity because “the researcher is the research instrument” (Hammersley & Gomm 1997, p3). With insider research, the issue of bias becomes more salient because of the researcher's involvement with the research context. Some may accuse me of being biased towards establishing the effectiveness of a programme for which I was involved in and/or there was a danger that my interest in the programmes may have prompted me to probe for information that I wanted to hear, or gloss over information that did not suit my agenda.

My study is defended by claiming that my professional responsibilities offset the potential for bias. One practical step that was taken took to minimise the impact of biases was to
enlist the help of an administrator for selecting the respondents, arranging the time and place for the data collection in the college and the selection of the other respondents for the research. Another technique used which is termed respondent validation, participants were asked to review the data they provided and to really check it to their own ‘subjective reality’.

When conducting research in one’s professional context, ethical dilemmas arise which threaten the collation and reporting of data. It is acknowledged that, like all action research, individuals and institutions stood to gain or lose by the transmission and utilisation of knowledge acquired. Thus I was aware of the consequences of my research on colleagues. Hurtful or important data was not omitted; my values of moral equality, moral autonomy, impartiality and reciprocity guided me throughout.

One final, practical issue which was identified as a potential insider threat to my research was lack of time. Carrying out detailed research is a time-consuming task which can be difficult to balance with full-time employment. As Eliot (1993) says “Insider research tends to be viewed as a teaching versus research dilemma which gets resolved in favour of the former” (p169).

**Did my insider status compromise the validity of my research study?**

To capture or make an attempt to capture participants' subjective construction of reality within the garda recruitment environment, through my depiction of these realities, my interpretations of participants’ responses were exercised. Thus in this case criteria of authenticity from (Guba in Cohen et al, 2000) and credibility in (Denzin & Lincoln 2000) were used. In such interpretive research, Radnor (2001), states that “consciousness that
there is evidence to support the interpretation generates confidence in the bases of the researcher's interpretation” (p40).

From such a perspective, my insider position could be viewed as potentially enhancing validity for various reasons. I have valuable knowledge and experience of the research context which outsiders will not have, for example, internal jargon, legitimate/taboo subjects, and internal politics and so on are well known to me. When conducting enquiries this knowledge to obtain richer data was used (Coghlan 2003). However, as outlined, there are many factors which may have compromised the validity of the research. Although the effect of these factors were minimised, it is difficult, if not impossible, to fully evaluate the success of my attempts. The following questions were asked of myself and are important to this study:

**Question:** Did my relationships with subjects have a negative impact on the subject's behaviour such that they behave in a way that they would not normally?

**Answer:** Because of my rank and position, the college trainees may have told me what I wanted to hear, and colleagues may have feared that this information would be used for other purposes. On the other hand, because they were familiar with me they may have felt more comfortable and freer to talk openly and honestly. My insider status as a training sergeant may have made participants feel more comfortable talking about ‘personal’ issues and thus may have enhanced the validity of my study.

**Question:** Did my prior, tacit knowledge distort results by leading to misinterpretations or false assumptions?
Answer: No, I did not fail to probe important issues on the trainee programme and I did not falsely assume the existence of commonalities between myself and the subjects because of their similar training and professional backgrounds? On the other hand, insider knowledge may have enabled the researcher to probe pertinent and relevant issues.

Question: Did hidden politics, loyalties and other agendas lead the researcher to misrepresent or disregard important data?

Answer: No, there were no hidden agendas.

While these issues are important to consider with insider research, it is argued that they should be considered in all research regardless of the researcher's position. As May (2002) states, “the knower (researcher) is now implicated in the construction of the known” (p2).

If, as Hammersley (2000) argues, our research is inevitably coloured (consciously and unconsciously) by our subjectivities and our social, historical and cultural backgrounds, what constitutes validity? If, as theorists argue, our research is just one representation of a multiplicity of realities, how can we guarantee that it is valid and trustworthy? An attempt has been made to illustrate that there are no definitive answers to these inherently difficult questions. However, many researchers will agree that it is important to be aware of them and to realise our own limitations and potentials as researchers (Hammersley 2000). Taking these issues into account, can we only aspire to an ever-elusive concept of validity in qualitative research? For the moment, Deem & Brehony’s suggestion seems a useful guideline for this difficult period: “Perhaps then, validity is best regarded as something which is to be worked towards rather than fully achieved” (1994, p165).

Cross referencing with relevant published data
Data from this thesis was cross referenced with available data from the various Irish publications, dissertations, projects, the findings in the Walsh Report 1985, for the first programme, the findings in 1999 Review for data from the Walsh programme, the findings in new 2009 report for data from the current programme and findings collected by PDIU\textsuperscript{2} in 2003/2004 on the non-accelerated competency recruits to ensure the data was not accepted uncritically and at face value. The data was cross referenced with the general findings from the Patten Commission (1999) and the HMIC Report (2002) on probationer training for an international comparison. This was completed to ensure that there were no personal agendas in answers to the questions, and/or that answers might well be self-serving.

Data collected from phase two was also cross referenced with my own research on six divisional training centres (two in the DMR, one in a large city and three rural divisions) on success rates, assessments and general information gleaned from their respective divisional assessment forms. Cross referencing for phase two also took place with data provided from surveys with ten operational sergeants and ten tutor gardai on quality aspects of the phase two programme. Phases one and three were cross referenced against Garda College data that existed on grades achieved, pass rates and failure rates.

**Privacy and confidentially**

Two sections of the Code of Professional Ethics of the Psychological Society of Ireland are of significance within the context of this research. The first S.1.2.5 states that information provided by the participant is confidential and should not be disclosed without prior consent. I have obtained full permission from all respondents to place this

\textsuperscript{2} Programme Development and Implementation Unit
thesis anywhere for public accessibility. Trainee Garda members were not overly interested in this code of practise in fact, they were of the opposite view in that their comments, views and opinions would be clearly produced in the content of the thesis.

College and divisional staff members stipulated that interview material was for use within the text of the final thesis only and could be used for publication. In general terms however, under the condition of anonymity, the use of material was at my discretion. Section 1.2.6 states that material should be stored, handled, transferred and disposed of in a way that attends to the need for privacy and security. During the present research all data was stored in a secure environment and, where possible, steps were taken to obscure information that could be used to identify participants.

**Informed consent and freedom of consent**

The Code of Professional Ethics of the Psychological Society of Ireland highlights the researcher’s responsibility to supply information to the participants that enables him/her to make informed choices. The use of secrecy in sensitive research has been widely debated. Mitchell (1993) believes that the common perception of secrecy and disclosure as polarised phenomena, anonymous and mutually exclusive ignores the reality of social research. Given the interplay of context with research practise, and the presence of secrecy of police work, secrecy and disclosure should be viewed as existing along a continuum where participants are more or less aware of the exact nature of the study.

**Participants and sample**

In terms of gaining access to participants, co-operation was secured, consent, guidance and support from two former Directors of Training and Development of the Garda College
in 2004 and 2005. This was re-confirmed in 2009 by the then Director (third who shortly afterwards was promoted to the rank of assistant commissioner. Therefore access to the Irish police, relevant members therein, and related information had already been agreed.

Access to teaching staff proved to be no problem as all were most willing to participate in my research. Management would not participate. The sampling of participant numbers used was based on analysis of the existing Irish commissioned publications on induction training; The Walsh Report 1985, Keating 1999 and the new 2009 Report which is the first review of its kind within the Irish police in terms of its scope and magnitude. Information on respondent numbers, demographics and characteristics are presented in appendix three.

**Chapter conclusion**

This chapter described the research strategy and the method of analysis. The selection of the case study and the use of content analysis were explained in detail as part of the strategy of analysis. The design and procedures for administering the surveys (questionnaires) and the arrangement of interviews were also presented in detail. This chapter also included the procedures employed to protect the confidentiality of the respondents, the data provided and the method by which the data was compiled. In addition to the analysis and review of secondary historical data and literature, the decision to use a number of methodological approaches to data collection, together, with the methods chosen (interviews, surveys and observations) would indeed provide a holistic view and analysis. For the purpose of this work the first step was to review recent literature to provide a narrative description of the subject area, which at times from an Irish perspective was very narrow. I also recognised that most researchers will approach a study with some preconceptions, some of which are derived from the literature review and
others due to the researcher’s background, knowledge and experience. I could not avoid this but I ensured they were recognised. An in-depth discussion was presented on insider research as I am a serving member of the organisation under research. I believe given the nature of what is included it was possible to employ a series of methodologies in this research project, with this in mind a comprehensive case study approach to the Garda Siochana development and training environment that are tied at the hip, so too speak is applied to the research methodology.

This chapter has set out the rationale for the primary and secondary research conducted as part of this work. It identified the research population from which primary data was extracted and set out the options considered by the author when planning the research and justifies the methodology finally employed. The case study: the Garda Siochana and its training environment are presented in the next chapter.