

# **MEDICAL BUREAU OF ROAD SAFETY**

## **EARLSFORT TERRACE TO**

## **BELFIELD CAMPUS**

### **REFLECTIONS ON FIVE YEARS 2007-2012**

#### **THE OLD AND THE NEW PREMISES**

The Medical Bureau of Road Safety, by arrangement with University College Dublin, has been housed in premises within or adjoining the School of Medicine for almost the entirety of its existence over forty years. With the transfer of the School from Earlsfort Terrace to the new building on the Belfield Campus in December 2006, the Bureau remained as one of the last occupants of the University building in “the Terrace” until it moved into state of the art and purpose-built premises on the Belfield Campus in November 2007. The new premises were built to high and purpose-focused specifications with funding from the Department of Transport and in close collaboration with the Buildings and Services Section of UCD. The new premises were designed to be insofar as is possible future proofed for the diversity of functions of the Bureau in the area of forensic testing in road safety coupled with ongoing research and teaching roles. The new premises were officially opened by the Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Mr. Noel Ahern, and the President of UCD, Dr. Hugh Brady in December 2008.

#### **THE TRANSFER**

The move came at an exciting time for the Bureau when the functions were expanding and the necessary staff numbers were going to be provided to address all of the duties to be carried out by the Bureau under the relevant legislation. The dedicated staff of the Bureau were directly involved in and consulted about the requirements of a modern forensic laboratory and carried out the very demanding task of the transfer to Belfield with great enthusiasm and enormous application. The setup and commissioning and validation of the laboratory equipment and methods in the new premises took particular skills. Preparations and packing took many weeks of co-ordinated and hard work. The final phase of the transfer of equipment and forensic samples was executed with the assistance of an escort by An Garda Síochána.

The Building Project and move was wonderfully facilitated and led by the Project Manager of UCD with the assistance of senior management of the Bureau and phase 3 of the Health Sciences Building became “The Bureau”.

## **ROAD TRAFFIC LEGISLATIVE CHANGES**

Mandatory alcohol testing was introduced in the 2006 RTA before the actual move to Belfield but the corresponding increase in specimen numbers impacted on the early years in Belfield.

The next undertaking was the introduction of the dual language Bureau certificates and the provision of the option of an Irish or English language printout from the EBT instruments recognising the proper status and requirements for the Irish language. This eventually happened in 2010.

In 2009 the Bureau began to prepare for the lowering of the alcohol limits in blood, urine and breath and for the introduction of dual limits for specified and unspecified drivers.

These changes which were eventually provided for in the Road Traffic Act 2010 and this had ramifications for almost every aspect of the Bureau's work including evidential breath testing, preliminary breath testing and blood and urine analyses.

### **Provision of Blood and urine kits**

Every single blood and urine kit which are prepared and packed in the Bureau and had been supplied, under the 1994 RTA, to Garda Stations all over Ireland had to be recalled and kits to conform with the new legislative requirements had to be issued. The preparation of replacement kits and regeneration of kits from the returned kits was an enormous logistical task.

The alcohol testing laboratory had also to re-validate its methods to accommodate the new lower limits.

### **Evidential Breath Testing Instruments– the New Generation**

A detailed programme for the procurement, testing, supply and commissioning of an entire new generation of evidential breath testing instruments for Garda Stations throughout the country was also undertaken due to the new penalty limits proposed.

A separate strategy was devised to accommodate the changeover of instruments and it was completed successfully in October 2011.

Over 95% of the Intoxilyzer 6000 IRL instruments were successfully changed over on the stroke of midnight October 28<sup>th</sup> 2011 to the new instruments, the EvidenzerIRL. No other jurisdiction has such a variety of levels with different penalties as is provided for in the Irish legislation.

A training course had to be devised and at least 1000 Gardaí participated in conversion courses for operators provided by Bureau scientists and Garda Instructors at the Bureau's premises at Belfield.

### **Conversion of breath alcohol roadside screening devices**

Each of the 1,000 roadside alcohol screening devices, the Draeger 6510s, had to be re-configured and recalibrated to measure the newly introduced different limits for the novice, learner and professional drivers. A conversion strategy was devised to enable the Gardaí to operate to midnight on 28<sup>th</sup> October with single limit devices and from midnight 28<sup>th</sup> October with the dual limit devices. Training of the Garda instructors was also provided by the Bureau scientists.

## **DRUG ANALYSIS**

Since the introduction of the Bureau Statutory Certificate of analysis in 2002 the Bureau carried out preliminary drug testing in its premises in Earslfort Terrace but had to outsource its confirmatory analysis due to lack of space and resources. Since the move to the Belfield premises the Bureau commenced confirmatory drug analyses in-house and to date with analyses for cannabis in blood and urine specimens and for benzodiazepines in urine, 85% of all of the confirmatory drug analyses are carried out at the UCD premises of the Bureau. This resulted in very significant savings to the exchequer and taxpayer from the year 2010 onwards.

### ***Collaborative Postgraduate Training of Gardaí in Roadside Impairment Testing***

A unique co-operation in forensic and medical education took place in 2011 with the combined Bureau, School of Medicine at UCD and Garda Training College, postgraduate Certificate course in Road Traffic Impairment Testing delivered to 80 Garda trainers who graduated successfully following course exit examination. This collaborative training programme is an integral part of the government's Road Safety Strategy and the 80 Garda trainers in turn rolled out the training to thousands of Garda members to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of An Garda Síochána in detecting and assessing impaired driving particularly due to drugs other than alcohol.

### ***Roadside Drug Testing Research Report***

In 2012 at the request of the Minister for Transport Tourism and Sport the Bureau undertook a major research in the area of drugs and driving. This resulted in a substantial report on roadside drug testing and equipment and related matters published in September 2012 at a launch attended by the Minister for Transport. This report has set out the map for the coming years for the further development of roadside chemical testing for drugs and ensures that the Bureau and by affiliation, the School of Medicine at UCD maintains its position as one of the international leaders in the area of forensic analyses and research in intoxicated driving.

## **ATTENDANCES AT COURT**

With the increasing volume and type of work carried out in the Bureau there has also been a corresponding increase in the demand for the attendance at courts nationwide by Bureau scientist. Between early 2010 and early 2011 requests or summons were received for scientists to attend court on at least 100 occasions for drug analysis alone.

## **LABORATORY INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (LIMS)**

The Bureau embarked on a strategy to obtain a LIMS provider in 2009 and the completion of the LIMS in 2011 for the alcohol programme was an enormous but successful enterprise undertaken by the staff of the Bureau. The Bureau continued in 2011 and 2012 to work towards including the toxicology programme and this work is near completion.

## **EXTERNAL INAB ACCREDITATION**

The Bureau managed the move from Earlsfort Terrace to Belfield with the minimum downtime of its INAB accreditation for its alcohol testing and EBT testing programmes. Both programmes were reassessed within weeks of the move and were awarded accreditation. Since the move to Belfield the Bureau has continued to increase the scope of its accreditation to include preliminary breath testing, preliminary and confirmatory drug analysis which it carries out at Belfield.

### **ROAD SAFETY STRATEGY 2007 – 2012**

The Bureau also played its role in the 5-year road safety strategy during this period. It had lead responsibility for two actions, was co-lead body for one and support agency for a further 9 actions out of the total of 126. During these years the country has seen a dramatic and welcome decrease in road traffic crash fatalities and serious injuries. The Bureau and its staff are very pleased to have had the opportunity to be one of the agencies involved in this achievement.

### **SAVINGS AND EFFICIENCIES**

In the worsening economic climate, the Bureau has played its part by making significant savings through cost cuttings and efficiencies. Thus €500,000 was saved in 2010, €550,000 in 2011 and a further €500,000 in 2012.

### **THE “DAY TO DAY WORK”**

Throughout this five year period and throughout the entire history of the Bureau, not only have there been landmark achievements and improvements and developments but all of this has continued on what has sometimes euphemistically been referred to “day to day work” of the Bureau carried out by a dedicated, skilled and energetic staff who are staff of University College Dublin assigned to the functions of the Bureau.

### **THE BUREAU AND UCD**

The ongoing, positive and collaborative relationship between the Bureau and University College Dublin has been one of the pillars of achievement in the long history of the Bureau. Long may this symbiotic relationship continue in its fusion of academic, forensic and road safety services to the public good and well-being.

*Professor Denis A. Cusack,  
Director,  
Medical Bureau of Road Safety.*

*December 2012.*