

Garda uniforms help pay for schools in India

17 August 2008 By Nicola Cooke

A Co Monaghan company expects to boost employment after winning a €12.6 million contract to provide Garda uniforms for the next three years. James Boylan Safety Ltd (JBS Group), which employs 50 people and has annual turnover of €15 million, won the deal in an open tender against ten other European companies. It is the largest deal to date for JBS, which was founded in 1944 as a shoe manufacturing firm, but became a workwear and protective clothing business in the late 1990s.

Unusually, the deal will also benefit children in India, as JBS donates 15 per cent of profits to its own charity, Educo, which builds and runs schools in India. Set up by JBS Managing Director Declan O'Donnell and Chairman Grattan Boylan in 2006, Educo has raised €600,000 to date. This money has been spent on two schools in Mumbai and Kolkata, and the purchase of 41,000 schoolbooks for orphans in Kerala. A third and fourth school are now being built, and the firm's aim is to build one school a year in India and have 5,000 children in education within five years.

Lee Gartland, national sales manager of JBS, said that the firm was one of the major

players in its niche sector of safety supplies and corporate clothing. It already supplies some safety equipment and clothing to the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Irish Defence Forces. It has also supplied uniforms for Hibernian, the VHI and numerous credit unions and hotels.

Under the terms of the Garda deal, more than 14,000 Gardaí - including students at the Garda training college, the Garda Reserve and Gardaí on UN duties - will each be fitted with their entire uniform requirement. Gartland said that "around the clock" fitting crews would be dispatched to more than 200 locations around the country over the coming months, and would work to the Garda shift system. "This uniform is the officers' everyday operational one that you see them wearing in stations or on the beat," he said.

While the new uniform will be very similar to the current Garda uniform, getting the specifics "spot-on" is vital, according to Gartland, because many items of the new uniform will be made in countries such as India. Once the fittings are completed, production will start in factories in ten



countries worldwide, a massive logistical undertaking. The finished goods will then be brought together at JBS's central logistics facility - a 30,000 square foot state-of-the-art facility in Monaghan - and the garments put into individual "personpacks". The complete uniform, in all the correct sizes, will then be issued to each individual Garda.

Depending on the rank and role of a particular Garda, the individual pack could contain more than 20 different garments. JBS has developed customised software to facilitate the complexities of dealing with almost 300,000 individual garment requirements.

"We won this contract for a number of reasons, including former contracts we have completed for the Government Supplies Agency (GSA), and our ethical background in ensuring all our suppliers have very high standards," said Gartland.

"We have supplied general issue items to the Defence Forces, tunics to the Air Force and high visibility jackets to the military police. We don't envisage any problems in carrying out this job, but pitfalls are inherent in a business where bespoke items are manufactured in foreign countries," he said.



"UK, European and Asian manufactures will make the uniform, because the cost of manufacturing such items in Ireland is now just too high. The transit times of getting goods from Asia can also be a couple of months. We may increase staff numbers to deal with demand, and we already have a strong customer base here," he said.

The contract should also help the company to fund Educo's activities. JBS

chairman Boylan said that the company was lobbying other companies and organisations to be more philanthropic. It had already secured €200,000 from the hedge fund division of a bank in Scotland, and a day's earnings from trading company Future Prophets.

"We have also twinned St Conleth's College, in Ballsbridge, with a school in India, and both sets of students are communicating electronically and learning about each other's history," he said.

"We believe education is the way to break the cycle of poverty, and some children in our schools who were victims of the sex trade are now learning computers, dressmaking and baking. We want more Irish companies to contribute to our cause."