

Keeping People Safe



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2021-00573

Keyword: Human Resources

Subject: Promotion Competitions

Request and Answer:

Your request for information has now been considered. In respect of Section 1(1)(a) of the Act we can confirm that the Police Service of Northern Ireland does hold some information to which your request relates and this is being provided to you. We further consider the information you seek in request numbers 1 and 2 are partially exempt by virtue of Section 31 of FOIA and have detailed our rationale as to why this exemption applies. We have also provided you with links to guidance issued by the Information Commissioner's Office which we have followed in responding to your request.

Please can you provide me information on your promotion process/competition and related statistics relating to your legal exam for police promotion within PSNI? Where possible, please can you break down separately the figures relating to 'Constable to Sergeant' and 'Sergeant to Inspector' exams?

The questions I have are as follows:

Request 1

What is the broad promotion process for Constable to Sergeant and Sergeant to Inspector promotion competitions within PSNI? For example 'Competence at current rank, then legal exam, then application form, then interview, then assessment centre')

Request 2

Please can you provide any supplementary documentation which explains in more detail these steps of the promotion process? For example: any guidance documentation or preparation materials provided to candidates ahead of the interview, assessment centre (including aptitude tests) or advising them on other things they can expect/prepare for in the process if this exists; a copy of the application form template; a copy of the interview scoring guidance aimed at assessors or candidates if permitted to release.

Answer

PSNI have provided the information for the most recent 2 years when the completions were undertaken in as previously advised in Request Number F-2021-00297, to provide any further years would exceed the FOI cost limit of 18 hours.

The 'broad promotion process' is explained in the applicant information document which is provided separately. It should be noted that the documentation for the Sergeant promotion process would be the same as Inspector with the exception of the word sergeant being replaced with Inspector

PSNI have provided separately the following documents which are in a redacted format for the reasons as articulated below:

PSNI – Sergeant Application Form.
Sergeant Applicant Information
Interview Rating Scale
Information for Study Guide page

Section 17(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Police Service of Northern Ireland, when refusing to provide such information (because the information is exempt) to provide you the applicant with a notice which:

- (a) states that fact,
- (b) specifies the exemption in question and
- (c) states (if not otherwise apparent) why the exemption applies.

The exemption, as well as the factors the Department considered when deciding where the public interest lies, are listed below:

Section 31(1)(a)(b) – Law Enforcement - Information would be likely to prejudice (a) the prevention or detection of crime (b) the apprehension or prosecution of offenders.

The full text of exemptions can be found at www.legislation.gov.uk and further guidance on how they operate can be located on the Information Commissioners Office website www.ico.org.uk.

Section 31 is a prejudiced based, qualified exemption which means the PSNI must demonstrate harm in disclosure and consider the balance of the public interest in releasing the information.

A summary of the Harm and Public Interest Test for Section 31 is provided below.

Harm

The information refers to e-mail addresses and a web address and the release of this information is a sensitive area. Once information is disclosed by FOI there is no control or limits as to who or how the information is shared with other individuals, therefore a release under FOI is considered a release to the world in general, not just to the individual requesting the information.

Releasing these details into the public domain would allow criminals and anyone intent on disrupting police in their law enforcement role, to bombard the system with e-mails therefore both directly and indirectly impacting on the prevention and detection of crime.

Public Interest Test

Factors Favouring Release – Section 31

Release of this information could give the public better access to Police Departments and provide a clearer understanding of the organisational structure.

Factors Favouring Retention – Section 31

Disclosure of an e-mail address could compromise the PSNI's law enforcement abilities by risking the bombardment of the addresses with e-mails. This would mean that police officers and staff may be tasked with answering emails which could be better dealt with by other departments and release of an e-mail address could increase the risk of cyber-attack which would hinder legitimate e-mails. This could potentially lead to more crime being committed and individuals being placed at risk by important information not getting through to the correct departments.

Decision

The release of information under FOI is a release into the public domain and not just to the individual requesting the information. Once information is disclosed by FOI, there is no control or limits as to how the information is shared with other individuals therefore a disclosure under FOI is considered a release to the world in general.

While there may be a public interest in releasing the information requested, the PSNI must ensure that its law enforcement capability is not adversely affected by the release of e-mail addresses. There may be a public interest in having the capability to have direct access to police departments; however the PSNI will not release details that may hinder the detection or prevention of crime through the release of information which may be of assistance to criminals and direct e-mail addresses have the potential to be inappropriately used or maliciously attacked.

Taking all these factors into consideration, PSNI are satisfied that the exemptions outlined above are applicable to this request and should not be disclosed.

Clarification Sought from F-2021-00297

Requests 3 D and E as follows:

Request 3 D - How many people attempted promotion to Sergeant beyond the exam when?

Request 3 E - How many people were successful in the process promoted to Sergeant?

Can you please provide clarity and confirm what information you request at these 2 requests and confirm what you refer to meaning: how many people were successful in the whole process.

Clarification Received

For 3d, I'm essentially asking for how many folk attempted to get promoted, i.e. participated in the promotion competition.

For 3e, of those who attempted, how many were actually successful and achieved promotion?

This will then give me the figures at each step of the promotion process, ranging from those sitting the initial exam to those actually promoted.

Request 3 A

I understand you generally run promotion processes every two years. For the most recent years (2014, 2016, 2018, 2020), please can you provide the following statistics, broken down for each year (note, if it is too time consuming, the most recent one or two processes will suffice):

How many people sat the Constable to Sergeant legal exam?

Answer

Please find the information the table below for officers who sat the Constable to Sergeant promotion exam in 2019 and 2020:

YEAR	2019	2020
Total	1293	1356

Request 3B

How many people passed the Constable to Sergeant exam?

Answer

Please find the information the table below for officers who passed the Constable to Sergeant promotion exam in 2019 and 2020:

YEAR	2019	2020
Total	411	479

Request 3C

How many people were in a qualified pool or otherwise eligible (i.e. passed an exam for which the qualification had not expired) to apply for Sergeant promotion opportunities?

Answer

Please find in the table below the total who were eligible to apply for the promotion exam in 2019 and 2020:

Year	2019	2020
Total	4800	5234

Request 3D

How many people attempted promotion to Sergeant beyond the exam when?

Answer

Please find in the table below the number who 'attempted' the promotion process in 2019 and 2020:

Year	2019	2020
Total	1293	1356

Request 3E

How many people were successful in the process promoted to Sergeant?

Answer

In 2019 a total of 213 officers were promoted to the rank of Sergeant; however there is no information held for 2020 as the process in 2020 is ongoing and has not yet been completed due to the impact of the COVID pandemic.

Request 4 A

4a - 4e. Please can you answer the same questions in 3a - 3e, but this time in relation to the Sergeant to Inspector process?

How many people sat the Sergeant to Inspector legal exam?

Answer

Please find the information the table below for officers who sat the Sergeant to Inspector promotion exam in 2019 and 2020:

Year	2019	2020
Total	270	309

Request 4B

How many people passed the Sergeant to Inspector exam?

Answer

Please find the information the table below for officers who passed the Sergeant to Inspector promotion exam in 2019 and 2020:

Year	2019	2020
Total	209	241

Request 4C

How many people were in a qualified pool or otherwise eligible (i.e. passed an exam for which the qualification had not expired) to apply for Inspector promotion opportunities?

Answer

Please find in the table below the total who were eligible to apply for the promotion exam in 2019 and 2020:

Year	2019	2020
Total	806	812

Request 4D

How many people attempted promotion to Inspector beyond the exam when?

Answer

Please find in the table below the number who 'attempted' the promotion process in 2019 and 2020

Year	2019	2020
Total	270	309

Request 4E

How many people were successful in the process promoted to Inspector?

Answer

In 2019 a total of 100 officers were promoted to the rank of Inspector; however there is no information held for 2020 as the process in 2020 is ongoing and has not yet been completed due to the impact of the COVID pandemic

Request 5

I understand it may not be easy to determine how many were historically in a 'qualified pool' of individuals eligible to undergo a promotion process for Sergeant or Inspector (3c, 4c). If that is the case, please can you simply state the most recent count of individuals at each rank eligible to apply for promotion?

Answer

Please refer to our responses provided at Request Numbers 3 C and 4 C.

If you have any queries regarding your request or the decision please do not hesitate to contact me on 028 9070 0164. When contacting the Corporate Information Branch, please quote the reference number listed at the beginning of this letter.

If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter. In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to the Head of Corporate Information Branch, PSNI Headquarters, 65 Knock Road, Belfast, BT5 6LE or by emailing foi@psni.pnn.police.uk.

If following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision maker, you were to remain

dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request you may make a complaint, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the PSNI has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. You can write to the Information Commissioner at Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out, however the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Please be advised that PSNI replies under Freedom of Information may be released into the public domain via our website @ www.psni.police.uk

Personal details in respect of your request have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.