

Keeping People Safe



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2020-01967

Keyword: Organisational Information/Governance

Subject: Current probationary periods within PSNI and associated policies

Request and Answer:

Your request for information below has now been considered. In respect of Section 1(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) we can confirm that the Police Service of Northern Ireland does hold the information you have requested however it is estimated that the cost of complying with your request for information would exceed the “appropriate costs limit” under Section 12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. We have explained to you below that when PSNI estimates whether the appropriate limit is likely to be exceeded, it can include the costs of complying with two or more requests if certain conditions are met. In this case those conditions are met and complying with all of your requests would in our estimation exceed that appropriate limit set out in Regulation. We have explained this further below but also we followed the Information Commissioner’s Office guidance ‘*Requests where the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit*’ in relation to this request, which also provides further detail on the application of section 12 (1) of the FOIA. This guidance is available on the ICO website at the following link:

https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1199/costs_of_compliance_exceeds_appropriate_limit.pdf

You requested the following information from PSNI:

My request is in relation to the current probationary periods within PSNI and the policies associated and I request the following information:

Request 1

The names of the Probationer Constables who have participated in the Stage 2 PCA since 01/03/2020 to the present date?

Request 2

The timings achieved by the Probationer Constables in their Stage 2 PCA since 01/03/2020 to the present date?

Request 3

The difference in the times achieved by these probationer constables in their Stage 2 PCA in comparison to the time they achieved in their final PCA before graduating from Garnerville?

Request 4

The current disciplinary process and PSNI policy associated with Stage 2 probationers in relation to their PCA and their timings since 01/03/2020?

Request 5

What is the time restriction for Stage 2 probationers in their PCA since 01/03/2020 to the present date?

Request 6

How many probationers have completed their stage 2 PCA outside these time restrictions?

Request 7

How many stage 2 probationers have been put on PBS1, PBS2 or regulation 13 proceedings or other disciplinary measures as a result of their stage 2 PCA? Also the dates these probationer Constables were placed on these disciplinary measures?

Request 8

Names of probationer Constables who have participated in Stage 3 PCA since 01/03/2020 to the present date?

Request 9

The timings achieved by the probationers Constables in their Stage 3 PCA between 01/03/2020 and the present date?

Request 10

The difference in the times achieved by these probationer constables in their Stage 3 PCA in comparison to their stage 2 PCA?

Request 11

PSNI policy on Probationer management and the policy concerning the extension of the probationary period.

Answer

Section 17(5) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Police Service of Northern Ireland, when refusing to provide such information (because the cost of compliance exceeds the appropriate limit) to provide you the applicant with a notice which states that fact.

It is estimated that the cost of complying with your request for information would exceed the "appropriate costs limit" under Section 12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Section 12 of FOIA allows a public authority to refuse to deal with a request where it estimates that it would exceed the appropriate limit to either comply with the request in its entirety or confirm or deny whether the requested information is held. The estimate must be reasonable in the circumstances of the case. The 'appropriate limit' is currently £600 for central government and £450 for all other public authorities including PSNI. The relevant Regulations which define the appropriate limit for section 12 purposes are The Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulation 2004 SI 2004 No 3244. These are known as the 'Fees Regulations' for brevity.

Regulation 4(3) of the Fees Regulations states that a public authority can take into account the costs it reasonably expects to incur in carrying out the following permitted activities in complying with the request:

- (i) determining whether the information is held;
- (ii) locating the information, or a document containing it;
- (iii) retrieving the information, or a document containing it; and
- (iv) extracting the information from a document containing it.

Under those regulations PSNI can calculate the time spent on each of these permitted activities at £25 per hour (thus if the activity(s) takes more than 18 hours PSNI will be in excess of the 'appropriate limit').

When a public authority is estimating whether the appropriate limit is likely to be exceeded, it can include the costs of complying with two or more requests if the conditions laid out in Regulation 5 of the Fees Regulations can be satisfied. Those conditions require the requests to be:

- made by one person, or by different persons who appear to the public authority to be acting in concert or in pursuance of a campaign;
- made for the same or similar information; and
- received by the public authority within any period of 60 consecutive working days.

Regulation 5(2) of the Fees Regulations requires that the requests which are to be aggregated relate "*to any extent*" to the same or similar information. This is quite a wide test but public authorities should still ensure that the requests meet this requirement.

For PSNI to respond to the following request numbers 2, 3, 9 and 10 due to the recording system would entail a manual trawl of records. From 1st March 2020 a total of approximately 300 PSNI Probationer Officers have completed the Stage 2 PCA and due to the recording system each result would need to be retrieved individually. It would require firstly identifying during this period each Probationary Officer who completed Stage 2 PCA, and then retrieving their time. From 1st March 2020 approximately 250 PSNI Probationer Officers have completed the Stage 3 PCA and again each result would require to be individually retrieved. Then once each Probationary Officer completing the Stage 3 PCA during the time period was identified it would further require a comparison of their time. It is estimated that to respond to these requests alone would be in excess of 32 hours.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this letter should be considered as a Refusal Notice, and the request has therefore been closed.

Advice and Assistance

You may wish to submit a refined request in order that the cost of complying with your request may be facilitated within the 'appropriate limit'. In compliance with Section 16 of the Act, PSNI have considered how your request may be refined to bring it under the appropriate limit, we can provide responses to the following request numbers:

- Request numbers 5 and 6
- Request Number 7 (limited to 5 Districts)

In addition it should be noted that Requests 1, 4, 8 and 11 would attract FOI exemptions and therefore the information would not be provided.

Submission of a refined request would be treated as a new request, and considered in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, including consideration of relevant Part II exemptions.

If you have any queries regarding your request or this 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.