

NPIA 06/2011

This circular is about:	Police Officer Recruitment: SEARCH® Pass Mark and Prioritising Candidates
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This circular is addressed to:	Chief Officers of Police
Copies are being sent to:	Clerks to Police Authorities H R Directors

Dear Chief Officer

Police officer recruitment: assessment centre pass mark

This Circular sets out the national minimum pass mark for the national police recruitment assessment centre (Police SEARCH®) and advises forces on how they can prioritise candidates for appointment.

After consideration from the Police Advisory Board and approval from Home Office Ministers the national minimum pass mark for Police SEARCH® from 1 November 2007 has been set at:

50% of available marks across the assessment centre plus

50% of available marks in the competency area Respect for Race and Diversity plus

50% of available marks in the competency area Oral Communication plus
44% of available marks in the competency area Written Communication.

The Police SEARCH[®] protocols provide that the pass mark is valid for 12 months after the candidate attends the assessment centre. The candidate's result should only be extended beyond the 12 month period in exceptional circumstances, and a maximum extension of an additional 12 months is recommended. If the force is considering extending the validity of candidates' results, forces should be aware of the potential risks of the extension, and it is recommended that any extension is equality impact assessed.

More details are available in the Police SEARCH[®] protocols, contact PoliceSEARCHadmin@npia.pnn.police.uk for more information.

Forces can prioritise candidates using one or more of the following options:

1. Prioritise candidates according to pass mark
2. Operate an in force interview
3. Equality Act 2010 – positive action provision when candidates are equally qualified.

Forces should make it clear to potential applicants if they are intending to use any of these options, and should be open in terms of the criteria that applicants will be assessed against. Forces should also inform potential applicants that a pass at the assessment centre does not guarantee appointment.

Forces should conduct a local equality impact assessment before using any of these options, and continually monitor their use to ensure there is no unlawful discrimination.

Prioritising candidates according to pass mark

Forces may prioritise the top scoring candidates for appointment. If a force had 50 vacancies to fill, this would be done by taking the candidates with the 50 highest scores.

A force may set a score, above the minimum, at a level which past experience suggests would be achieved by the number of candidates for which vacancies exist. Any such score should be reviewed regularly to ensure that it continues to produce the number of

candidates that matches the number of vacancies; with the score being adjusted up or down as necessary. Such a variable "cut score" could be justified as long as it has the effect of allocating places, as nearly as possible, to the highest scoring candidates. However, a permanently fixed local pass mark should not be set, as this could not be related to a justifiable criterion for prioritising amongst candidates who have achieved the national minimum pass mark.

Forces should never appoint a candidate who has not met the national minimum pass mark.

In force interviews

Forces may choose to interview and select the most suitable recruits to meet their particular force needs from their waiting list of candidates who have achieved the minimum standard at the assessment centre.

In order to minimise the potential for discriminatory treatment and ensure that all applicants are assessed against national job related criteria, interviewees should have successfully completed the national recruitment process.

Interviews should be structured against force identified criteria; these could include, for example, diversity issues, knowledge of particular local communities or areas, personal responsibilities of policing and understanding of the role.

Equality Act 2010 – positive action provision when candidates are equally qualified

Situations may arise in which a number of candidates are assessed to be as qualified as each other. The primary source of evidence for determining whether candidates are equally qualified should be the overall score each obtained at the Police SEARCH[®] assessment centre or against the local scoring keys for the subsequent in force interviews.

In such cases, forces should be aware that they have the option of using the positive action provision set out in Section 159 of the Equality Act 2010. In practice, this allows a force, when faced with making a choice between two or more candidates who are equally qualified, to take into consideration whether one is from a protected group that they

reasonably think is disproportionately under-represented or otherwise disadvantaged within the workforce.

Any positive action measure taken in recruitment must be a proportionate means of achieving the aims set out in Section 159(2); that is to help people overcome a disadvantage or to participate in an activity.

Forces using the positive action provisions will need to ensure that the criteria used in assessing whether a candidate is equally qualified are fully justifiable, and are advised to base any decisions on a clear workforce analysis / equality plan.

If a force decides to use positive action under Section 159, consideration should be given to how to manage those candidates who are equally qualified who are not prioritised (i.e. whether they are rejected from the application process or if their pass will be retained by the force for the allowed period, for any future recruitment opportunities).

Forces should remember that the use of the positive action provision is voluntary. However, forces should be aware that it is unlawful to have a policy in place to allow treating people who share a protected characteristic more favourably and each case should therefore, be considered on its merits.

Further guidance about how to operate this positive action provision, including in instances of bulk recruitment, is available from the Government Equalities Office and their document "Equality Act 2010: What do I need to know? A quick guide to using positive action in recruitment and promotion" (<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/equalities/equality-act-publications/equality-act-guidance/positive-action-recruitment?view=Binary>).