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Eligibility criteria for the role of police constable 2020

This guidance is about:

Police officer recruitment – eligibility criteria
for the role of police constable

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Introduction

This guidance updates College circular 02/2011 to ensure the guidance conforms to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 and the College of Policing APP Vetting guidance 2019. Forces should ensure that their policies comply with the Police Regulations 2003 and other prevailing legislation.

This guidance sets out the eligibility considerations which apply to applications for the role of police constable in respect of:

- age
- previous applications
- financial checks
- criminal histories
- references
- membership of the British National Party (BNP) and other similar organisations
- vetting of candidates who have been living or are resident abroad
- nationality
- identity verification and right to work
- tattoos and body piercings
- swimming
- driving
- routes into policing.

This guidance helps to ensure consistency in the way applications are processed. It aims to provide clarity for applicants and make the recruitment process fair and transparent.

1 Age requirement for police officers

Candidates aged 17 and above may apply to become a police officer and may take up appointment on reaching the age of 18 or above, if successful.

There is no upper age limit for appointment, but it should be noted that police forces want to ensure that they receive a reasonable return on their investment in training. Police forces will need to pay particular attention to applications received from those over the age of 57 years. These applications should be referred to the Director of Human Resources or equivalent.

2 Previous applications

Previous applicants can reapply six months after receiving their letter of rejection from a police force, unless otherwise notified by the force they are continuing their application with.

For SEARCH, the six-month period is in place to give people time to develop before reapplying and therefore, ensuring that future success is as a result of further development rather than familiarity with an assessment process. Forces are able to make decisions locally about this in order to best meet their current recruitment requirements. From the College's perspective, a candidate can therefore reapply/apply to a new force at any time following their unsuccessful application, post assessment centre (AC) or unsuccessful AC attendance. However, they would not be able to sit the police SEARCH AC within six months of their last attendance, unless otherwise notified by their recruiting force.

Applicants can apply directly to more than one police force at a time for the position of a police constable. They will still only be able to sit one assessment centre at any one time, however, this does not prevent candidates from entering applications with more than one force, should they wish to.

3 Financial vetting

Schedule 1 (of regulation 6, paragraph 4) of the Police Regulations 2003 states that a member of a police force shall not wilfully refuse or neglect to discharge any lawful debt. All members of the police service are in a privileged position with regard to access to information and could be considered potentially vulnerable to corruption.

This section of the guidance should sit alongside the College of Policing APP Vetting guidance 2019 for the police service

<http://library.college.police.uk/docs/appref/Vetting-APPpdf.pdf>

4 Vetting applicants with criminal histories

The guidance is based on the following principles:

- The public is entitled to expect that the police service recruits police officers with proven integrity.
- Police officers and special constables are vulnerable to pressure from criminals and others to disclose information.
- Convictions, cautions and other material information, which reflects on personal integrity, must be revealed by police officers and others in the evidential chain to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) on every occasion that they submit a statement of evidence in a criminal case.
- This is in accordance with the CPS Disclosure Manual. This information will be used by the CPS to assess the strength of the police officer's evidence and, if the case proceeds, is likely to be disclosed to the defence and may be used in open court to challenge the credibility of the police officer. Such an occurrence could undermine the integrity of the evidence, the witness and the police service.
- Police forces should not recruit those with cautions or convictions, which may call into question the integrity of the applicant or the police service. Each case should be dealt with on its own individual merit.

- This guidance should sit alongside the College of Policing APP Vetting guidance 2019 for the police community and police force vetting policies and procedures <http://library.college.police.uk/docs/appref/Vetting-APPpdf.pdf>

5 Recruitment process checks

Before recruiting anyone to work in a police force, thorough checks must be undertaken to ascertain whether anything is known to the detriment of the applicant, his/her spouse or partner, or close relatives such as parents, in-laws, siblings or others residing or associating with the applicant. Further checks will take place of any self-declared or discovered criminal associations which could heighten vulnerability, bring discredit upon, or otherwise cause embarrassment to the police service.

This guidance should sit alongside the College of Policing APP Vetting guidance 2019 for the police community and police force vetting policies and procedures: <http://library.college.police.uk/docs/appref/Vetting-APPpdf.pdf>

6 Criminal convictions

The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 does not apply to police officers. Police forces are therefore entitled to ask applicants to reveal spent convictions during the recruitment or vetting process.

The criminal convictions criteria defined by this guidance must be used to assess each application on an individual basis. Eligibility will depend on the nature and circumstances of the offence. It is not possible to set out a full list of convictions that will preclude a person from becoming a police officer. If the offence is deemed sufficiently serious, a person will be rejected, irrespective of their age at time of offending. For example, this could be offences that resulted in a prison sentence or if the applicant is a registered sex offender. For all other convictions or cautions, there is a rebuttable presumption that applications should be rejected; each case will be assessed carefully on its own merit.

This guidance should sit alongside the College of Policing APP Vetting guidance 2019 for the police community and police force vetting policies and procedures: <http://library.college.police.uk/docs/appref/Vetting-APPpdf.pdf>

Where it is suspected that an individual has failed to declare a conviction or caution, their vetting clearance will be withheld and their application for appointment discontinued.

7 Outstanding charges and summonses

Where an individual discloses an outstanding charge or summons, the application should be put on hold until the outcome is known, at which point it will be considered in accordance with this guidance.

This guidance should sit alongside the College of Policing APP Vetting guidance 2019 for the police community and police force vetting policies and procedures: <http://library.college.police.uk/docs/appref/Vetting-APPpdf.pdf>

8 HM Forces

Serving members of the armed forces who are convicted of any criminal offence by a military tribunal will have any such offences recorded on the PNC. This will include any aspect of a conditional discharge.

9 Relatives and associates with criminal convictions or cautions

Where relatives or the associates of an applicant are found to have unspent convictions or cautions for recordable offences, the following should be considered:

- The likelihood that the applicant's performance and discharge of duty will be adversely affected, eg, through adverse pressure or a conflict of interests.
- The nature, number and seriousness of the offences or involvement in criminal activity and the time over which these took place.
- Whether the circumstances are likely to bring discredit to, or embarrass the police service.

A decision that an applicant is deemed unsuitable on the basis of relatives' convictions, intelligence material or his/her criminal associations should be taken at the appropriate level. The results of checks on relatives and associates should not be disclosed to an applicant to protect that information in line with data protection legislation and to avoid potential disclosure of intelligence.

This guidance should sit alongside the College of Policing APP Vetting guidance 2019 for the police community and police force vetting policies and procedures: <http://library.college.police.uk/docs/appref/Vetting-APPpdf.pdf>

10 References and character references

It is preferable that references come from an applicant's previous two employers, including the current employer, or from their school or university, as appropriate, and cover a minimum of three years. Enquiries to the current employer should not be taken up until the candidate is recommended for appointment or has given permission for those employers to be approached.

In line with section 60 of the Equality Act 2010, sickness or medical information should not be requested from referees until a conditional or unconditional offer of employment is made.

The purpose of obtaining references is to verify statements made by candidates and to obtain an indication of whether there is any reason why an applicant should not be employed as a police officer. Essentially, employment references should confirm employment between the specified dates and in the position stated. They should also ascertain whether a candidate attends work regularly and punctually, performs satisfactorily and is not subject to disciplinary proceedings.

The Police Regulations 2003 require candidates to produce satisfactory character references. If a candidate has served in any police force, in the armed forces, in the civil service, or as a sailor/mariner they will be required to produce satisfactory proof of their good conduct while serving.

11 References: HM Forces

Resettlement periods for members of the services can be as much as 18 months. Therefore, police forces may want to consider this before accepting applications from service personnel, if they have more than 12 months before their discharge. Discharge certificates or equivalent, ie, a letter from a commanding officer for service personnel will normally be satisfactory proof of good conduct.

However, there may be occasions when the police service is not wholly satisfied by the assessment. Very careful consideration should be given to any application where there is cause for concern or confusion about why the highest level of discharge assessment was not in fact given.

In these cases, the police service will make further enquiries to satisfy themselves of the candidate's good conduct. The police service can, for instance, with the agreement of the applicant, contact the appropriate service to obtain a copy of a candidate's record.

Police forces should note that drug or alcohol problems will not be reflected in an assessment, unless they have had an adverse effect on the applicant's performance.

Police forces should also note that the assessment takes account of overall conduct and any offences committed and recorded. Convictions which are spent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 are not taken into account, and minor punishments, awards and dispensations which were incurred over five years before the assessment are disregarded.

12 References: Other police forces

References should always be obtained from previous police service employment.

13 References: Education

The school, college or university should be contacted if the applicant has not worked before, or if there is insufficient employment history.

14 References: Employment

Employment references should always be taken up and should be obtained in a consistent and systematic way. They must cover the period of at least three years prior to application and should include the current or previous employer.

References should not normally be taken from current employers until an offer of appointment is being considered. References may be taken earlier with the applicant's agreement. Medical information such as sickness and absence details should not be requested until a conditional or unconditional offer has been made.

15 Gaps in dates of employment

Gaps in employment should be dealt with as follows:

- Any unexplained or unsatisfactory gaps (over six months) should be checked by telephone or letter (as appropriate) for a satisfactory explanation, ie, redundancy from their last job, seeking other work, caring for a child or relative, etc. If a satisfactory reason is given, the application form should be notated and the application may proceed.
- If there are several unexplained gaps in employment, the applicant should be asked for an explanation and the reasons recorded.
- Queries about employment gaps or employment history should be satisfied prior to assessment.

16 Other references

Although character references (other than from employment) should not be sought as a matter of course, voluntary work or other activities in some cases can give a good indication of whether an applicant is likely to have the qualities to become an effective police officer. In the absence of employers' references, police forces may, where appropriate (and with permission from the applicant), seek references from individuals who would be in a position to provide this information.

If an applicant belongs to, or has previously belonged to a professional body, references should be obtained to ascertain if the applicant has been involved in any disciplinary proceedings or has been struck off.

17 Membership of the British National Party (BNP) or similar organisations

The Police (Amendment) Regulations 2004 amended paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the Police Regulations 2003 (restrictions on the private lives of members of police forces) and this came into force on 1 January 2005. The Home Secretary also issued a determination setting out the specific organisations of which membership is banned. These are:

- British National Party (BNP).
- Combat 18.
- National Front.

Police officers should abstain from any activity which is likely to interfere with the impartial discharge of their duties or which is likely to give rise to the impression among members of the public that it may so interfere. If a candidate is a member of the BNP or similar organisation, the application will result in rejection.

18 Vetting candidates who have been living or are resident abroad

The police service needs to carry out recruitment vetting procedures on all applicants to determine an applicant's suitability for access to sensitive and classified material. This guidance applies to all applicants (including United Kingdom nationals and those from British Crown Dependencies who have been living abroad) and should be read alongside the College of Policing APP national security vetting and force vetting policy <http://library.college.police.uk/docs/appref/Vetting-APPpdf.pdf>

Police forces should ensure that they have obtained adequate and satisfactory vetting information on all applicants. It is for police forces to make decisions on a case-by-case basis.

If a candidate has recently resided abroad, the police force should ensure there is an appropriate level of checkable history as outlined in the APP Vetting guidance 2019 <http://library.college.police.uk/docs/appref/Vetting-APPpdf.pdf>

19 Guidance on nationality

Under section 82 of the Police Reform Act 2002, irrespective of place of birth, a person of any nationality may be a member of a police force for any police area in England and Wales. This is subject to candidates satisfying other qualifications for appointment.

Candidates who are not members of the European Economic Area (EEA) are required to have leave to enter or leave to remain in the United Kingdom for an indefinite period. Such applicants must reside in the United Kingdom free of restrictions or have an entitlement to do so.

Candidates must be sufficiently competent in written and spoken English and numeracy. This must be demonstrated by undertaking and successfully completing the AC. This ensures that all candidates can communicate effectively in both spoken and written English.

20 Guidance on identity verification and right to work

Under the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006, candidates who are subject to immigration control must not be employed unless that person has been given valid and subsisting leave to be in the UK by the government and that leave does not restrict them from taking up employment. Specific documents must be checked and recorded before the individual begins employment.

21 Guidance on tattoos and body piercings

Independent research conducted by Ipsos Mori on behalf of the Police Federation of England and Wales in 2016 found that members of the public are largely accepting of police officers and staff with visible tattoos.

Candidates with visible tattoos or facial piercing may be eligible for appointment. Each case must be considered on its own merit. The force should consider if any tattoo on the neck, face or hands is acceptable. This includes the size, nature and prominence of the tattoo.

Visible tattoos are unacceptable if they could reasonably be interpreted as discriminatory or offensive and/or indicate attitudes or views inconsistent with the College of Policing's Code of Ethics and the Standards of Professional Behaviour.

It is possible that in some instances, applicants will volunteer to have their tattoos removed. The procedure is typically performed by a dermatologist and involves laser treatment. There is no guarantee that such treatment would be successful and there are known cases where patients have been left with permanent scarring. On no account must an applicant be told that an application will be considered favourably if tattoos are removed or toned down. Should an applicant insist on proceeding with treatment, they should be informed by letter that the police force regards the decision as entirely the candidate's own, and that the police force cannot accept liability for any outcome. Additionally, no guarantee can be given that a further application would ultimately be successful.

22 Swimming

In some police force areas, the ability to swim is an essential part of a police officer's duties. Applications should not be rejected due to an inability to swim unless the police force concerned can justify why this is an essential requirement. The decision on whether swimming is an essential requirement should, therefore, be made locally.

23 Driving

In some police force areas, being able to drive is an essential part of a police officer's duties. Police forces should use their discretion as to whether the ability to drive is an essential requirement, and therefore this decision should be made locally.

24 Entry routes for police constables

There are three new entry routes for the role of constable. These include:

- **Apprenticeship.** Join as a constable and follow an apprenticeship in professional policing practice – this is known as 'earn while you learn'. This route normally takes three years with both on and off-the-job learning.

On successfully finishing the programme, you complete your probation and achieve a degree.

- **Degree-holder entry.** If you have a degree in any subject, you can join and follow a work-based programme, supported by off-the-job learning. This route normally takes two years, and the learning you have undergone is recognised in a graduate diploma in professional policing practice when you complete your probation.
- **Pre-join degree.** If you want to study first, you can do a three-year degree in professional policing at your own expense, and then apply to a force and follow a shorter on-the-job training programme. Being a special constable can be included in this route.

Further information can be found on the PEQF transition guidance held by the force.

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We're the professional body for everyone who works for the police service in England and Wales. Our purpose is to provide those working in policing with the skills and knowledge necessary to prevent crime, protect the public and secure public trust.

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