

Request Reference: 210A/22

1. Exams or written tests used by your force that are required to be completed by special constables during personal Safety Training

Applicable exemption: Section 31(1)(a)(b) – Law enforcement

Explanation of Harm

Personal Safety Training (PST) exists in recognition of the fact that by the nature of the role, police officers are at risk of being physically harmed and when use of force is necessary, there is the added risk of harming someone else, other than the officer. Therefore, the basic purpose of testing and examinations in the context of PST is to ensure that officers successfully demonstrate that they understand the legislation, are proficient to operate within the legislation, and can also apply the techniques safely. If they don't successfully pass a written test then the force will implement additional training to bring the individual up to the correct level. And without that level of testing, and refresher training, the force cannot truly provide the assurance that officers are suitably qualified to use the tactics and techniques operationally.

However, the only way of ensuring that the results of any PST knowledge test is untainted, is not to disclose the questions to the student beforehand.

Knowledge checks allow trainers to check and determine if students/officers have understood the content that has been presented to them. Revealing the questions beforehand could lead to some students/officers being deficient in their knowledge, therefore undermining the assurance PST training and testing seeks to achieve, which is to provide trained police officers to carry out law enforcement functions in order to protect the general public.

Public Interest Test considerations

Arguments in favour of disclosure:

Police Officer Personal Safety is a widely discussed topic, as exemplified by the following link: [NPCC and College of Policing pledge to improve officer and staff safety following largest ever survey of police workforce](#). In addition, there is information already in the public domain that sets out the legislation that governs the principles of using force.

Due to recent high-profile incidents and events which have brought Police use of force into question, there is a genuine public interest in knowing that police are properly trained, tested and able to perform the functions of law enforcement. Disclosure would allow further discussion and evaluation of such matters.

Arguments in favour of maintaining the exemption:

The Police Service exists to protect and serve the general public through the prevention and detection of crime, which includes the apprehension and prosecution of often violent, or aggressive offenders. If an officer is not proficient in applying techniques that are used in self-defence, including conflict management and de-escalation tactics, the outcome is that the risk of injury is increased. Injury leads to the removal of officers from front line duties, and decreases the force capability to proactively operate in pursuit of law enforcement.

A lack of training or proficient testing leads to an under confident officer. This impedes their ability to deal with violent or aggressive offenders, which also encourages offenders to take additional measures to avoid apprehension. And when an offender absconds, this may result in further offences being committed. This would increase the risk of harm to the general public, which is contrary to the purpose policing serves to protect.

Balance test

For a public interest test, arguments in favour of disclosure need to be measured against arguments that favour maintaining the exemption, in order to decide where the balance of public interest lies. The public interest is not what interests the public, or a particular individual, but what will be the greater good, if released, to the community as a whole.

The arguments above include an acknowledgement that there is public interest in the level of Police Personal Safety training and testing.

However, the core function of the Police is law enforcement. As explained within the harm above, Police Officers face dealing with violent and aggressive situations, often resulting in the use of force. As such, measures are taken to ensure that the workforce are provided with appropriate training to ensure their own health, safety and welfare is protected, as well as those they engage with; the general public. In order to reach levels of assurance that the Officers can operate safely and effectively, there is the requirement to test and examine the proficient use of tactics and techniques taught. This is achieved in concert with demonstrating that the use of force is done so lawfully, and proportionately.

Albeit there is information already in the public domain that speaks about Police use of force in general terms, any further disclosure of the PST testing process risks degrading the purpose of such. This would lead to a lack of assurance that Police Officers are not, in front line roles, deficient of Personal Safety skills. This not only puts the Officer at risk, but impacts the general public more broadly.

Therefore, having weighed the arguments for and against, it is my opinion that on balance the public interest favours maintaining the exemption. West Midlands Police will not disclose information that puts officers or members of the public at risk of harm and prejudices the prevention or detection of crime and the apprehension or prosecution of offenders.