

NPPF step two legal examinations candidate handbook

For candidates attending the national police promotion framework (NPPF) sergeants' or inspectors' examinations in 2026.

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How to use this handbook

Use the slide over page contents menu or scroll down to view the different sections in this handbook.

A full PDF version of this handbook can also be found in the [downloadable resources section](#).

Introduction

This version of the handbook contains the rules, syllabus and candidate information for NPPF step two legal examinations to be conducted online for 2026. It supersedes all previously published candidate handbooks.

Candidates must make themselves aware of the 2026 version of the candidate handbook for online examinations. Candidates should direct any enquiries about the examinations to their force examinations officer in the first instance, not to the College of Policing exams team directly.

Candidates should also ensure that they refer to the [online examinations candidate guide](#) for specific information relating to the examination itself and preparing for it.

Overview

The NPPF governance board reserves the right to interpret its own rules.

The NPPF consists of four steps.

- Step one – competence in current rank.
- Step two – legal knowledge examination.

- Step three – assessment against rank specific competencies and matching to vacancies.
- Step four – temporary promotion and work-based assessment.

Dates

There are two deliveries of the NPPF examinations in 2026. There is no national restriction on the number of resits that a candidate can have for the exams. Any restrictions regarding the number of resits is a local force decision.

The dates for the 2026 online NPPF exams are as follows.

- March sergeants' examination – Tuesday 17 to Thursday 19 March, between 8am and 8pm each day.
- May inspectors' examination – Tuesday 12 to Thursday 14 May, between 8am and 8pm each day.
- October sergeants' examination – Tuesday 6 to Thursday 8 October, between 8am and 8pm each day.
- November inspectors' examination – Tuesday 3 to Thursday 5 November, between 8am and 8pm each day.

All four exams are held over three days to enable us to provide a responsive and timely service for the higher volume of candidates taking this exam.

There is flexibility to sit the exam on any day within the official exam period of each exam. The College of Policing will provide more information to forces regarding this. There is no facility to offer alternative times or dates for candidates to sit the exams outside of the above dates and times.

Eligibility

To be eligible to enter the NPPF step two legal examination to the rank of sergeant or inspector, officers must meet the eligibility criteria for the NPPF step one.

NPPF step one confirms that candidates have:

- demonstrated competence in their current rank through their professional development review (PDR), their student officer learning and assessment portfolio (SOLAP) or an acceptable equivalent

- no live written improvement notices issued under the Police (Performance) Regulations 2020 and no reduction in rank under those procedures in the previous 12 months, beginning with the date of the notice
- no live written warning, final written warning or extended final written warning issued under the Police (Conduct) Regulations 2020
- adhered to the attendance management policy, taking full account of Police Advisory Board guidance on attendance management
- met the specific eligibility criteria for that exam as detailed in the following

Sergeants' specific eligibility criteria

Admission to the NPPF step two legal examination to the rank of sergeant is restricted to regular constables (those appointed to the office of regular constable) who, by the date of the NPPF step two legal examination, have:

- completed two years' service
- completed their probationary service
- not previously obtained a pass in a recognised police promotion examination (for example, they are not already an OSPRE parts I and II qualified sergeant)

Candidates nearing completion of their probation may only register for the examination if they are supported by their force and will have achieved substantive rank by the date of the NPPF step two legal examination.

Candidates and forces must ensure that candidates have met these criteria. Officers who apply early but are not substantive in the rank of constable will not be permitted to take the examination under any circumstances. Any officer who takes the examination before they are substantive for any reason will have their result voided.

Inspectors' specific eligibility criteria

OSPRE parts I and II qualified sergeants

OSPRE parts I and II qualified sergeants are eligible to apply for the inspectors' NPPF step two legal examination from the commencement (day one) of their sergeant posting, provided that they have not previously obtained a pass in a recognised police promotion examination (for example,

they are not already an OSPRE parts I and II qualified inspector).

All officers (OSPRE and NPPF qualified) are required to complete a minimum of two years as a substantive sergeant before they can be substantively promoted to inspector under Regulation 5 of the Police (Promotion) Regulations 1996 (as amended). OSPRE qualified officers are required to complete a probationary period of one year (or longer) in the role of sergeant as part of their mandatory two years as a substantive sergeant before they can be substantively promoted to inspector.

However, any candidate who holds the substantive rank of sergeant is immediately eligible to commence step one of the NPPF process and take the NPPF step two legal examination during this probationary period. OSPRE qualified sergeants are therefore entitled to take the NPPF step two legal examination for promotion to inspector at any time following promotion to sergeant because they are a substantive sergeant from day one.

NPPF qualified sergeants

NPPF qualified sergeants are eligible to take the inspectors' NPPF step two legal examination for promotion to the rank of inspector once they have successfully completed the NPPF route and been made substantive as a sergeant. Step four of the sergeants' NPPF process is a mandatory 12 months, which cannot be reduced in any circumstances. Officers cannot be substantive as a sergeant until the full 12 months has been completed and are not eligible to take the exam before they are substantive in rank.

Only candidates who hold the rank of sergeant are eligible to take the inspectors' NPPF step two legal examination.

Candidates nearing completion of their temporary promotion to sergeant may only register for the examination if they are supported by their force and will have achieved substantive rank by the date of the NPPF step two legal examination. Candidates and forces must ensure that candidates have met these criteria. Officers who apply early but are not substantive in the rank of sergeant at the time of the exam are not permitted to take the examination. Any officer who takes the examination before they are substantive for any reason will have their result voided and there is no right of appeal regarding this.

Fast Track programme

Candidates participating in the Fast Track programme should refer to the [guidance for Fast Track officers](#).

Fast Track candidates will take the examination in accordance with their programme timescales. Entry into the examination is not automatic and the responsibility remains with the participating force and the programme member to register for the NPPF step two legal examination to ensure attendance at the inspectors' knowledge examinations. Candidates must register in the same way as other candidates for the examination (further information available in [NPPF step two](#)).

Rejoiners to the police service

Officers rejoining the police service sit outside of the NPPF. However, officers who are returning to the police service at a higher rank than they left and to the ranks of sergeant and inspector are required to comply, in part, with the NPPF.

Unlike all other officers, rejoiners to the ranks of sergeant and inspector will recommence their service at the rank to which they applied to rejoin. Rejoiners will not undertake the NPPF steps in the usual order. However, they will still be required to undertake the step two legal examination for the relevant rank at the earliest opportunity as well as to complete the step four work-based assessment. Rejoiners are provided with two opportunities to pass the relevant step two legal examination. If the officer fails to attain the required standard, there may be grounds to invoke Regulation 13 of the Police Regulations 2003, to dispense of the officer's services.

Rejoiner members will be considered as meeting the step one eligibility criteria. Candidates must register in the same way as other candidates for the examination (further information available in [NPPF step two](#)).

Rejoiner members required to undertake the knowledge examination at the rank of sergeant or inspector will hold that rank at point of re-entry. Officers meeting the required standard for the knowledge examination will move to NPPF step four. Those rejoiner members failing to meet the required standard in the examination will be afforded one opportunity to resit, which must be done at the earliest opportunity.

Career breaks

There is provision for officers to take the NPPF step two legal examination while on a career break, providing that the terms and conditions of the career break agreed by their chief officer allow for this.

The force must inform the College's exams team of any such requests by the closing date for entry to the NPPF step two legal examination in question, together with confirmation from the chief officer confirming their approval.

Overseas duties

Because of restrictions on firewalls and browsers, as well as the stability of internet connections, the College cannot guarantee that candidates will be able to take the examination outside of the UK. If a currently serving officer is supported by their force or organisation to take the examination while on deployment in another country, this candidate should contact their force examinations officer. The College cannot provide support to officers who wish to take the examination abroad while on holiday.

Suspension

Candidates who are suspended from duty will be required to have chief officer sign-off allowing them to take the NPPF step two legal examination. Force examinations officers must ensure that this sign-off has been obtained before the candidate sits the examination.

Pregnant officers

If the NPPF step two legal examination falls within a period of pregnancy, an officer may choose to still take the examination. It may be possible to provide accommodations to assist with an officer's attempt at the NPPF step two legal examination while pregnant. Applications should be made as early as practicable (further information available in [reasonable adjustments and accommodations](#) for more information). If a force provides a testing centre, additional accommodations may need to be arranged directly with the force.

A copy of the most recent pregnancy-related force risk assessment may need to be submitted to your force examinations officer before sitting the NPPF step two legal examination, to allow any appropriate provision of accommodations to be made for pregnant officers. Every effort will then be made to ensure that reasonable accommodations are provided and that any hazards identified

within the risk assessment are minimised by adequate control measures.

Maternity leave

The NPPF governance board and the College of Policing shall not act or encourage candidates to act contrary to Section 72 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, which specifies that an employee must not work – or be permitted by their employer to work – while on compulsory maternity leave during the two-week period from the date of childbirth.

However, an officer may, if they so wish, take the NPPF step two legal examination if it falls within a period of maternity leave. It may be possible to provide accommodations to assist with an officer's attempt at the NPPF step two legal examination while on maternity leave (further information available in [reasonable adjustments and accommodations](#) for more information). If a force provides a testing centre, additional accommodations may need to be arranged directly with the force.

Any application for accommodation requests should be made no later than the closing date for entries for the NPPF step two legal examination.

Paternity leave

If the NPPF step two legal examination falls within a period of paternity leave, an officer may choose to still take the examination. It may be possible to provide accommodations to assist with an officer's attendance at the NPPF step two legal examination while on paternity leave.

Any application for accommodations should be made no later than the registration closing date for the NPPF step two legal examination.

Applications

NPPF step one

Applications to enter the NPPF step one are only acceptable when approved and submitted as meeting the eligibility criteria on behalf of the candidate by their chief officer.

- The step one eligibility form should be completed in force and signed by the candidate's line manager (or equivalent) to state that the candidate meets the eligibility criteria for step one.

- The step one eligibility form should be returned to the force examinations officer ahead of the registration closing date.
- The force examinations officer will verify the candidate's eligibility based on the completion of this form and will verify and allocate the candidate to the examination on the registration platform. Candidates must not be verified without the candidate's line manager (or equivalent) confirming they are eligible to sit the exam. Any candidate found to have taken the examination when not eligible will have their result voided. There is no right of appeal regarding this.

NPPF step two

All candidates will register for the NPPF examinations using the assessment information management system (AIMS). This is an online system developed to support the administration and delivery of national examinations. AIMS is an intuitive cloud-based system and is designed to work on a variety of mobile devices.

Candidates will be provided with details of how to register, along with a link to access the platform via their force examination officer when registration opens. It is a straightforward process and does not take long. Candidates will be asked to enter their personal and biographical details and to confirm which examination they are registering for. Candidates must take care to ensure that their personal details are entered correctly. When accessing feedback reports and results after the examination, candidates will be asked to confirm their name, date of birth, national insurance number and email address. If any of these are entered incorrectly during registration, this will cause a delay in getting results.

Candidates will receive an email confirming that their application has been received. Candidates are also advised to take a screenshot of the confirmation page to keep a record that their application was created and submitted, in case they do not receive the confirmation email. Candidates should not register again as this will create duplicate entries in the system.

The relevant force or organisation will then be asked to verify that candidates are eligible to sit the examination and will assign them to the correct examination by the registration closing date.

Registration periods

The candidate registration periods are as follows.

March sergeants' examination

- Opens on Monday 19 January 2026.
- Closes at 6pm on Thursday 19 February 2026.

May inspectors' examination

- Opens on Monday 16 March 2026.
- Closes at 6pm on Thursday 16 April 2026.

October sergeants' examination

- Opens on Tuesday 4 August 2026.
- Closes at 6pm on Thursday 10 September 2026.

November inspectors' examination

- Opens on Monday 7 September 2026.
- Closes at 6pm on Monday 5 October 2026.

Candidates should be aware that the above closing dates are the final dates for registrations to be verified and allocated by forces. Forces and agencies may have earlier closing dates that candidates need to register by. Candidates must check with their force examinations officer to confirm the closing date for registration in their force.

Candidates must register within the timeframe specified by the force examinations officer. Late candidate registrations will only be considered if exceptional circumstances can be proven as to why it was outside of the candidate's control to register in time. A heavy workload or being unaware of the registration period will not be accepted as exceptional circumstances.

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

Candidates registering for the NPPF examinations are requested to provide personal and biographical data on the AIMS registration platform.

In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, it is good practice to know the demographic of people applying for examinations, so that policing can build an accurate workforce picture.

Through this platform, we ask for your name so we can effectively manage examination logistics. Your name or any identifiable information will not be shared with any other organisation except your

force or agency and will not be used for any other purpose.

We ask for your help to develop an understanding of workforce diversity so that we can monitor any potential barriers faced. Providing this information is voluntary.

The information you provide will be held by the College for the purposes outlined above and in accordance with the GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and our duties under the Equality Act 2010.

We will use the information collected from you to report on the demographics of those attending. Your information will be used to form statistics and high-level reports that will not identify you or any other individual.

We will only hold your information in an identifiable form for as long as is necessary and in accordance with our privacy notice.

You have certain rights under the GDPR regarding your personal data, which include the right to access data held about yourself, to ensure it is accurate, and the right to request that it be deleted or no longer processed. You also have the right to complain about the processing of your information if you are not happy about any aspect of it.

The privacy notice can be found on AIMS. More information about your rights is available in our [full privacy notice](#).

You can also contact our data protection officer by emailing data.protection@college.police.uk.

Reasonable adjustments and accommodations

Reasonable adjustments – disability related requests

Candidates who can demonstrate that they have any form of disability, as defined by the Equality Act 2010, may apply for reasonable adjustment. This includes candidates with a neurodivergence, such as dyslexia.

Candidates should inform their force examinations officer of their request for a reasonable adjustment when registering.

The candidate must complete the reasonable adjustment request form, detailing their disability and adjustments requested. The candidate must also provide a report containing a diagnosis of their disability, as well as recommendations for any reasonable adjustments from an appropriate specialist in the area of their disability.

The candidate may wish to discuss options with their local force occupational health department before sourcing a specialist. In making their recommendations, it is helpful if the specialist has a clear understanding of the format of assessment that the candidate will be undertaking.

Please note that registering an intention to submit a request for reasonable adjustments on AIMS at registration is not a formal request.

It is the candidate's responsibility to ensure they provide the necessary documentation and request form to their force examinations officer in sufficient time.

Accommodations – non-disability-related requests

Candidates with conditions that fall outside of the Equality Act 2010 definition of disability – for example, conditions that are short-term and/or do not have a substantial adverse effect on the candidate's day-to-day activities – may be eligible to apply for an accommodation. We aim to provide all candidates with a fair assessment and we will aim to support requests for accommodations where these are appropriate.

However, in considering whether an accommodation is appropriate, it is important to ensure that the accommodation does not change the standard that the candidate is being measured against, and that the candidate is not provided with an unfair advantage over other candidates.

Candidates who require an accommodation in the examination should contact their force examinations officer in the first instance. Candidates may need to obtain a specialist report, although this may not be necessary in all cases, depending on the nature of the request.

Please note that a candidate whose force or organisation is not aware of their disability, and who wishes to maintain the confidentiality of it, can approach the exams team at the College of Policing directly. Candidates should, however, be aware that confidential requests for reasonable adjustments may diminish the extent to which reasonable adjustments can be made.

Offering reasonable adjustments and accommodations

Forces will consider the recommendations in the report or request, supported by psychologists from the College of Policing. Where a candidate has a disability and this is evidenced by their report, the force will confirm what would constitute a reasonable adjustment for the specified assessment process. Candidates will be advised before the examination of any adjustment or accommodation that is being offered.

Candidates are required to sign a reasonable adjustment agreement form that gives full details of the adjustment before the adjustment will be applied to their examination.

Any adjustments or accommodations offered will be applicable to the examination applied for. If a candidate is re-entering the examination and has previously submitted and accepted a reasonable adjustment, there is no need to resubmit the evidence if they are content to receive the same reasonable adjustment as previously.

However, please note that candidates will still need to notify their intention to request a reasonable adjustment.

Further information on reasonable adjustments and accommodations

Candidates should refer to the [reasonable adjustments policy](#) for further details on applying for reasonable adjustments and accommodations. Candidates and force examinations officers should refer to this handbook before obtaining a report or making a request for an accommodation or reasonable adjustment.

Further tips and guidance on reasonable adjustment and accommodation requests can also be found on the [Candidate online examination guidance](#) on the Knowledge Hub group (users are required to log in).

The report must be submitted to the force no later than the [closing date for registrations](#).

Failure to submit in accordance with this closing date could affect the College's ability to coordinate the request with the candidate's force or agency in time for the examination. It is the candidate's responsibility to plan ahead to ensure that the closing date for reasonable adjustment and accommodation applications is met.

Examination structure and syllabus

Structure

The sergeants' and inspectors' NPPF step two legal examinations consist of a single, three-hour examination containing 150 multiple-choice questions.

Questions will test candidates' knowledge and understanding of three areas:

- crime
- evidence and procedure
- general police duties

The syllabus content examined is cross-referenced to, and only contained within, the 2026 edition of the Blackstone's Police Manuals. These texts are the only official resource endorsed by the College of Policing and contain the required legal knowledge for prospective sergeants and inspectors. Examination questions are drawn solely from the contents of these manuals. Practice questions can be found on the [Candidate online examination guidance](#) on the Knowledge Hub group. (Users will be required to log in).

Candidates will be examined on the law and procedure only as it appears in the 2026 edition of the Blackstone's Police Manuals. Candidates are advised not to rely on previous editions, which may contain out-of-date material.

Blackstone's discount

A 30% discount for the NPPF manuals is available to all police officers and staff in England and Wales.

- [Find out how to get the discount code \(you will need to log in to College Learn\)](#)

Please note that the College of Policing only endorses the Blackstone's Police Manuals for the examinations. Other products, including the Blackstone's Q&As, are not affiliated with the College of Policing.

Syllabus updates

Usually, no further updates or supplements to the NPPF syllabus will be issued during its year-long lifespan. However, in exceptional circumstances, the College of Policing may issue an amended syllabus in advance of the next scheduled annual publication date.

Any changes to legislation or case law following publication of the 2026 edition will only be included in the examination paper under exceptional circumstances and only if suitable prior notification is given. For example, a major change to a key area of legislation or procedure during the lifespan of the current NPPF candidate handbook might render a significant part of the current NPPF syllabus content obsolete.

In such circumstances, it may be necessary for an update or supplement to the syllabus to be issued, to guide candidates on any additional material that would be examinable.

Any updates or supplements to the syllabus will be made available through our website and will be distributed to all force examinations officers.

- **[Go to the latest information about the NPPF step two legal exams](#)**

We will ensure that any syllabus updates or supplements are distributed well in advance of the examination date, so candidates have sufficient preparation time to familiarise themselves with any additional examinable material. Where possible, any additional study materials would be provided to candidates free of charge.

Please note that syllabus updates will only be made in exceptional circumstances and will not be made for every change to legislation included in the syllabus. Unless we provide notification through the channels outlined above, all of the syllabus will remain examinable regardless of any changes in the law.

For further guidance on this issue, candidates should regularly check our website or consult their force examinations officer during their preparation period. Candidates should not contact the College of Policing exams team directly with queries.

If an area of the syllabus is repealed or changed and not tested on in the examination, there is still an expectation that candidates will ensure they are familiar with the new legislation for their own professional development. To avoid any gaps in knowledge, forces and agencies should ensure that candidates are familiar with new areas of relevant legislation that are not tested in the

examination.

Examination development

All multiple-choice questions contained in the examination paper are written by trained question writers who have attended the College of Policing multiple-choice question writing course.

All questions are linked to the syllabus to ensure that all of the examination questions are relevant to the rank of sergeant or inspector.

The questions are quality assured by the College of Policing's legal services unit and by independent legal experts, who check the legal accuracy of the questions. All questions undergo this quality assurance process to ensure that the examination is up to date and legally accurate.

Questions removed from marking

During the marking stages, 10 questions are removed from the marking process and not included in the candidate's overall score, meaning candidates will be scored on 140 questions only.

All of the examination questions at the marking stage are evaluated once against a standard criteria, which are used to show whether questions are of an acceptable standard and fair for inclusion in such a high-stakes examination. This is to ensure that they have performed in a way that has been expected and provided a fair test of the syllabus.

The marking panel, ratified by the debrief panel, will remove 10 questions from the final score. These 10 questions will be those which have performed least well in the exam. The purpose of this is to ensure that the exam is valid and does not unfairly penalise candidates.

Candidates will not be informed of the location of the removed questions within the paper, nor will candidates be provided with their scores for the questions which are removed. These questions will not be marked or included in anyone's score under any circumstances. There will be no exceptions to this and the College is unable to accept appeals regarding this.

Subject content

The subject content for each of the examinations has been identified using a nationwide survey of operational sergeants and inspectors, together with strategic input from the NPPF governance

board.

This survey produces a blueprint of those areas in the syllabus that are both considered important and frequently encountered by officers holding that rank.

The established blueprint is reflected in the balance of questions included in each paper. This means that potential sergeants and inspectors are more likely to be tested on those areas of legislation that have been identified as the most relevant and frequently encountered by the officers already serving at the target rank.

However, it should be noted that candidates may be asked questions that relate to any part of the syllabus. The syllabus is approved by the NPPF governance board and reflects all aspects of the roles nationally. Therefore, some areas of the syllabus may be less relevant to different roles depending on force, region and role. However, all areas are examinable, as the examination needs to reflect the rank at a national level.

Although the syllabus content is similar in many respects for both ranks, some rank specific areas are different, as indicated in the Blackstone's Police Manuals and within the content detailed in the appendices of this handbook.

While there are some key areas where a high level of knowledge is required, the examination is not aimed at testing pure factual recall of those matters, which would be readily available for immediate reference in the workplace.

Candidates will not be examined on their ability to simply recall information that is contained solely within the tables in the Blackstone's Police Manuals. However, where the text directly refers to a paragraph of one of the Codes of Practice to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, candidates will be expected to know the relevant provision(s) of that Code.

The appendices of this handbook include the general areas to be tested within the NPPF step two legal examination syllabus and are intended primarily as an aid to help candidates in planning their study for the respective ranks. Blackstone's Police Manuals (2026 edition) is the definitive reference source for examinable material.

Candidate support and guidance

We'd also like to invite all prospective candidates to join the [Candidate Online Examination Guidance](#) on the Knowledge Hub group (users are required to log in) to access further materials in relation to the exam, such as practice questions, exam tips, a learning style and revision technique guide and more.

Candidates can access this group and download these files. Please note this is guidance only and candidates are not required to use the documents. They are available to aid candidates' revision and exam preparation. For further information, please contact your force examinations officer.

Further guidance

Candidates should also ensure that they have a copy of the [online examinations candidate guide](#) and that they follow the instructions in that guide before the examination. This will help candidates to be fully prepared and limit the chances of experiencing issues on the day. You can also read [technical support for the exam](#).

Any queries about the examination should be directed to force examinations officers. Candidates should not contact the College's exams team directly with queries.

- [Further guidance and information about the NPPF examinations](#)

Rules on examination day

Candidates must refer to the [online examinations candidate guide](#). This is also available from force examinations officers. This provides a comprehensive guide for preparing for the examination, accessing the examination on the day and what to expect when taking the examination.

Testing environment

There is no national requirement for candidates to take the examination at a testing centre or under supervision. Candidates are responsible for ensuring they have a suitable testing environment, as per the guidance in the online examinations candidate guide.

The College of Policing cannot accept appeals regarding an unsuitable testing environment, so candidates must ensure they take the time to plan appropriately for this. Forces do not need to provide an optional testing centre for their candidates. However, forces should refer to the online

examinations force guide for advice on setting up a suitable centre if they wish to do this.

Accessing the examination

Before sitting the examination, candidates will be asked to test their device by [performing a system check](#). It is very important that candidates schedule time to check their device and browser before the exam, to ensure that they don't encounter issues on the day.

Approximately one week before the exam, candidates will be emailed a link to their familiarisation exercise to familiarise themselves with the exam platform. They can only access this exercise once and it will be available until 7pm on the last day of the exam period.

Candidates are also strongly advised to take the time to complete the familiarisation exercise, even if they have taken an examination with the College before, as changes to the platform and/or functionality may have been made.

A few days before the examination, candidates will receive details of how to access the examination platform on the day of the examination, as well as information about how to log in to the examination.

Further [technical support](#) is also available.

Declaration notice

The decision to take the NPPF examination is that of the candidate. All candidates must read and agree to the declaration notice, which will be provided on the online examination platform, before being permitted to take the examination. This is to confirm that candidates agree to abide by all rules of the examinations and are fit and suitably prepared in relation to their knowledge, understanding and application of the law and procedure contained in the syllabus.

Any candidate who declines to agree to the declaration for the NPPF examination will not be eligible to take part.

Code of Ethics and conduct

The [Code of Ethics](#) applies to all officers, staff and volunteers across the police service in England and Wales. Candidates will be expected to:

- take personal responsibility for promoting and reinforcing the principles and standards set out in the Code
- actively seek to embed the Code by ensuring regular reference to it in their day-to-day decision making and professional responsibilities within policing

The highest standards are expected from all police officers and staff (or equivalent) and this is especially important for those in roles where greater autonomy and decision making is expected. It is therefore essential that candidates participate in the NPPF examination with the Code fully supporting their actions, contributions and decision-making.

Candidates who are found to have acted in a manner that contravenes the Code or any of its principles may be removed from the promotion process by their force or agency.

Any information entrusted to you during your examination, including the questions in the examination paper, has been disclosed to you in the course of your duties as a police officer or equivalent. In accordance with the standards expected of all officers and staff, this information must not be used for personal benefit, nor must it be divulged to other parties before, during or after the exam.

The use of artificial intelligence tools, such as ChatGPT, is strictly prohibited.

The College regards the improper disclosure of such information as a serious breach of confidentiality and will ensure that any reported instances are fully investigated under the police complaints procedure.

Rule breaches

Attempting to gain an unfair advantage

The design of the examination and mechanisms that have been introduced into the delivery of the examination mean that attempts to gain an unfair advantage (for example, cheat) are likely to be ineffective.

Candidates must not gain, or attempt to gain, any unfair advantage during the examination. All officers are expected to act with integrity and in line with the principles and standards of behaviour set out in the Code of Ethics.

Acts of gaining/creating an unfair advantage include but are not limited to:

- taking the exam on behalf of someone else
- assisting someone else to complete their exam or to answer any questions in their exam
- accepting assistance before or during the exam from someone to complete your exam or answer any questions during the exam
- using, or attempting to use, artificial intelligence applications during the exam will be deemed as attempting to gain assistance from another person
- attempting to pause, restart or stop the exam timer once you have started your exam, unless specifically advised by the College of Policing to do so because of a technical issue

Any candidate who is suspected of cheating will be fully reviewed and referred to the reports and disqualification panel. They could have their examination result removed and be banned from entering the examination in future for a period of two years or more. Candidates suspected of cheating will also be referred to their force's professional standards unit and a letter will be written to their chief officer.

The exam must be completed in one sitting. Candidates may take a comfort break during the exam, but this is not counted as a valid reason to pause the timer and must be taken while the exam clock continues to count down, unless an agreed reasonable adjustment that allows scheduled breaks to be taken during the exam is in place.

Candidates must not attempt to pause, restart or stop the exam or timer once they begin. Any attempts to pause the timer are logged on the system and will be recorded as unusual activity, which will be reviewed after the examination and reported to the reports and disqualification panel, if applicable. Attempting to pause the clock is a breach of examination rules and could mean the result is removed.

If candidates have an exceptional reason to close the browser, candidates must report this to the College of Policing via their force contact officer after the exam and within three days of the exam date.

Disclosing content of examination questions

Copying questions in any form, including copying and pasting, taking photos, using software to search, or any similar method is strictly prohibited and will be considered a breach of the rules.

Further information available in [disqualification procedure](#).

The questions remain the intellectual property of the College of Policing and we reserve the right to reuse questions. If people keep and share copies of questions, this affects the future integrity of examinations.

Candidates can take the examination within a 12-hour window on the examination day. If the examination content is shared before a candidate has chance to take the examination, this could lead to them having an unfair advantage and could affect the integrity of the examination in any format.

It is therefore paramount that you do not discuss examination content with anyone after the examination, including comments or pictures on social media, as this is likely to provide others with an unfair advantage.

The following are deemed as rule breaches in the exam. This list is not exhaustive – any attempted rule breach will be reviewed by the [reports and disqualification panel](#).

- Copying a question, or any part of a question, for use by self or someone else.
- Sharing questions, or any part of a question, including topic areas with someone else via any format.
- Adding a question, or any part of a question, to an artificial intelligence application or search functionality.
- Discussing questions or topic areas in the exam with someone else, including via social media.
- Taking a screenshot of a question, or any part of a question, for any reason.

Discussing the content of questions is strictly prohibited and presents a huge personal risk for that candidate and their future career.

Any candidate who is suspected of disclosing the content of the examination in any way will be reviewed, will have their examination result removed and be banned from entering the examination in future for a period of two or more years.

Candidates suspected of keeping or sharing the content of the examination will also be referred to their force's professional standards unit and their chief constable, or equivalent.

Non-attendance

Withdrawals

As dates for registration are close to the examination dates, candidates should fully consider if they intend to sit the NPPF examination before registering. Candidates who wish to withdraw from the examination after registering will need to inform their force examinations officer immediately, specifying their reason for withdrawing.

It is not possible to substitute a withdrawn candidate with another unregistered candidate. Candidates who withdraw from an examination will not automatically be re-entered into the next examination and will need to re-apply at the next available opportunity.

Forces will be charged for all candidates registered for the examination two weeks before the examination date.

Once a candidate has withdrawn from the examination, they cannot be re-entered.

Absence

Candidates who do not take the examination within the available window will be marked as absent from the examination.

All potential candidates are encouraged to consider carefully whether they genuinely wish to attempt the examination before they submit their registration.

Forces may implement their own penalties for absent candidates, and therefore candidates should report their reasons for absence to their force examinations officer. Forces will be charged for all absent candidates.

Sickness

A candidate who is either medically or self-certificated unfit for work, or is on limited duties through illness or injury, must provide a certificate from their force medical examiner (FME) or equivalent, confirming their fitness to sit the examination, even if sitting at home.

Candidates must submit the FME's certificate of fitness at the time of registration to their force examinations officer.

A candidate who is either medically or self-certificated unfit for work or on limited duties, and who is not in possession of an FME (or equivalent) certificate of fitness, is not permitted to take the NPPF examination. It is the responsibility of the force to ensure that any candidates who are medically or self-certificated unfit for work or on limited duties have been deemed fit to sit the exam by a suitable medical professional.

If a candidate has an illness or injury that has only become apparent to them on the day of the examination, they should refer to this sickness section. It will then be their decision as to whether they attempt the examination. If a candidate becomes unwell during the examination, it will be their decision as to whether they continue with the examination. The College cannot offer alternative dates to take the exam for candidates who are unwell on the day.

Results

NPPF debrief panel

The NPPF debrief panel will review the delivery of each NPPF step two legal examination before the results are issued. The panel consists of:

- a moderator nominated by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC)
- a member of the Police Federation for England and Wales
- a member of the College of Policing legal services team
- a representative from the College of Policing workforce development unit
- a representative from the College of Policing occupational psychology community

Before we can issue results, the NPPF debrief panel will:

- consider the impact of any unscheduled events that occurred during the administration of the NPPF step two legal examination
- ratify the results before their release

The NPPF debrief panel will not consider any reports of extenuating circumstances.

To progress within the NPPF, candidates will be required to demonstrate a standard of performance that indicates that they have a sufficient level of knowledge and understanding of the syllabus. As always, the NPPF debrief panel will compare the results of this year's examination with previous years to ensure that the delivery of the exams has been fair.

Pass mark

The pass mark is:

- 55% (77 correct answers out of 140) for the sergeants' examination
- 65% (91 correct answers out of 140) for the inspectors' examination

Candidates scoring 75% and above in the sergeants' examination and 85% and above in the inspectors' examination will be awarded an exceptional grade in the exam.

Low-band fails will be given to candidates scoring less than 30% in the sergeants' examination and less than 35% in the inspectors' examination.

The NPPF debrief panel reserves the right to alter the pass mark in exceptional circumstances if they see a significant deviation in the success rate for exams – whether higher or lower – and/or if they have evidence to show that a change in the pass mark would result in a fairer outcome.

Feedback reports

Force examinations officers will be able to access a full list of results via AIMS within three weeks of the examination date.

All results and feedback reports will be available to candidates within three weeks following the examination. The College will notify the force examinations officers of the date of the results release, and candidates will be sent a link to access their own feedback report via AIMS. Candidates will be required to verify their date of birth, national insurance number and email address to access their result. Any errors in inputting these at registration will result in a delay to being able to access feedback.

The candidate feedback report can be used by the candidate to identify any strengths and developmental needs in the areas that have been examined and assessed. The report includes a summary of candidates' final grading and total percentage score obtained in the examination. This

is also broken down into subject areas. Candidates are not issued with certificates following the examination.

The feedback report also acts as proof of the candidate's result and must be retained by candidates for future reference. We are unable to reissue feedback reports.

Candidates can expect to receive their results by:

- Thursday 9 April 2026 for the March sergeants' examination
- Thursday 4 June 2026 for the May inspectors' examination
- Thursday 29 October 2026 for the October sergeants' examination
- Thursday 26 November 2026 for the November inspectors' examination

Validity

The NPPF step two legal examination pass is valid for five years (less one day) from the date of taking the examination. For a candidate to be eligible to complete the NPPF step three, the date of the step three process must fall within this period.

If a candidate has not reached this point of the NPPF step three within the period from the date of taking the NPPF step two legal examination, they must return to NPPF step one. This decision was made by the police promotion examinations board (PPEB) and subsequently upheld by the NPPF governance board.

The effect is summarised in the following tables.

Sergeants' NPPF

Date passed NPPF step two legal examination	Must be successful at NPPF step three by
9 to 11 March 2021	10 March 2026
8 to 10 March 2022	9 March 2027
14 to 16 March 2023	15 March 2028

Date passed NPPF step two legal examination	Must be successful at NPPF step three by
3 to 5 October 2023	4 October 2028
12 to 14 March 2024	13 March 2029
1 to 3 October 2024	2 October 2029
18 to 20 March 2025	19 March 2030
14 to 16 October 2025	15 October 2030

The validity period of the 2020 sergeants' NPPF step two legal examination has now expired.

Inspectors' NPPF

Date passed NPPF step two legal examination	Must be successful at NPPF step three by
12 October 2021	11 October 2026
4 to 6 October 2022	5 October 2027
9 to 11 May 2023	10 May 2028
7 to 9 November 2023	8 November 2028
14 to 16 May 2024	15 May 2029
5 to 7 November 2024	6 November 2029
13 to 15 May 2025	14 May 2030
11 to 13 November 2025	12 November 2030

The validity period of the 2020 inspectors' NPPF step two legal examination has now expired.

Five-year validity period

Candidates can register for the NPPF step two legal examination has now expired if their validity period is near the end without having to forfeit their remaining validity time should a step three process be announced by the force in the months between the registration date and the examination date.

If the candidate is successful at the step three process, they must withdraw from the examination at the earliest opportunity and inform their force's examinations officer. Candidates who choose not to enter the examination before registration closes and are subsequently unsuccessful at a step three process will not be allowed to register late for the examination.

Candidates can choose to resit the NPPF step two legal examination before their validity period expires if they wish. Any remaining time on their validity period will be forfeited from the time that they sit the examination regardless of the result (for example, if the candidate fails the exam at the resit, their remaining validity time would be forfeited).

Extensions to validity

Extensions to the validity period will be considered for officers who have taken:

- maternity leave
- paternity leave
- maternity-related sickness leave
- maternity support
- adoption leave
- shared parental leave
- a career break for the purposes of care

Extensions to validity will also be considered for officers who have experienced periods of sickness that have led to long-term absences and/or have had a long-term, substantial adverse impact on an individual's day to day activities.

All applications for extension to the validity period should be made via your force examinations officer. Applications must include full details of the absences from work – including specific dates and reasons for absences – and must be confirmed as being correct by someone in your force (for example, line manager or human resources).

Working part-time or being on limited duties should not prevent an officer collating relevant evidence for, and from applying for, a step three process. Therefore, any requests regarding extensions because of part-time working or limited duties will need to clearly explain why this prohibited the officer from applying for promotion and/or gaining suitable evidence before it will be considered. This will need to be verified by the force.

Extensions to validity will be considered by the College's exams team and will be sent to the reports and disqualification panel in exceptional circumstances.

Reports will be sent to the panel every two months to consider (the first of the month in February, April, June, August, October and December). Please ensure that requests for validity extensions are therefore submitted at least two weeks before this date with all supporting evidence or they will not be included in the report on that occasion.

Officers cannot apply for a step three process without a valid step two pass and cannot apply before an extension is officially granted and communicated by the panel. It is the officer's responsibility to ensure they apply for an extension to validity ahead of time, as a response may take several weeks to receive.

Forces do not have any discretion to grant extensions to validity in any circumstances. All requests must be sent to the College of Policing, regardless of reason. Extensions to validity will not be considered in cases of lack of promotion opportunities or not achieving promotion to the next rank within the validity period in any circumstances.

Unscheduled incidents

Appeals of unscheduled incidents

Unscheduled incidents are defined as disruptions that are unforeseen and outside of the candidate's control, and that can be considered to have a direct and substantial impact on the candidate's result.

The College will not, under any circumstances, accept appeals of unscheduled incidents relating to any of the following.

- A force-provided testing environment. Any appeals of unscheduled incidents relating to a force-provided testing environment should be discussed directly with the force.
- A candidate-provided testing environment. Candidates should follow the online examinations candidate guide to ensure they have a suitable testing environment for the exam.
- Local connection issues, such as not having a strong enough connection to load the exam or experiencing connection issues during the exam that are outside of the national exam platform. Candidates must follow the guidance sent before the exam to ensure that their connection is strong and to limit their chances of experiencing issues. Guidance is also provided for candidates to follow during the exam if any issues do occur.
- Device issues. Candidates are provided with extensive information before the exam regarding suitable devices and must check that their device meets the criteria before taking the exam. Candidates should speak to their force if they do not have a suitable device.
- Lack of preparation and/or a heavy workload before attendance.
- Sickness through illness or injury before or during the exam, including family members. It is the candidate's choice if they choose to agree to the declaration and take the exam.
- Issues known to the candidate at the time of taking the exam.
- Incidences where the candidate has not followed guidance and/or not contacted the College in the first instance if issues have occurred during their exam causing further preventable issues.
- Reasonable adjustments. Candidates are provided with extensive information before the exam regarding their reasonable adjustment (if requested), including an agreement form which details the reasonable adjustment. Candidates can check their reasonable adjustment on their familiarisation exercise so they are comfortable with how this will work in practice. It is the candidate's choice if they choose to sign their reasonable adjustment agreement form and take the exam without understanding how their adjustment will be applied in practice.

Queries relating to the content of the examination questions will be considered separately and not accepted as an appeal (further information available in the section on [question queries](#)).

Submitting an appeal

Any candidate who wishes to report an unscheduled incident must do so in the form of a written report or email. It is the candidate's responsibility to provide the supporting evidence at the time of

writing and to make it clear in their email that they wish to report an unscheduled incident.

The report does not need to be countersigned by the candidate's line manager or above. The report must be submitted by the candidate to their force examinations officer and received by the College's exams team no later than three days after attending the examination. Reports must be sent to NPPF.enquiries@college.police.uk

The deadline for appeals for each exam is as follows.

- March sergeants' exam – Sunday 22 March 2026 by 8pm.
- May inspectors' exam – Sunday 17 May 2026 by 8pm.
- October sergeants' exam – Sunday 11 October 2026 by 8pm.
- November inspectors' exam – Sunday 8 November 2026 by 8pm.

This will be the only opportunity for candidates to submit reports. Reports that are not received within the specified timescale will not be considered further under any circumstances.

The exams team will acknowledge receipt of reports to candidates via their force examinations officer. Any reports submitted that relate to one of the factors outlined in the section on [appeals of unscheduled incidents](#) will be rejected and not considered further.

All reports accepted will be considered by the marking panel for special considerations (further information available in the section on [special considerations](#)).

Reports from candidates who are unsuccessful will be sent to the NPPF reports and disqualifications panel. Please be aware that the panel cannot change a fail result into a pass or add additional marks under any circumstances, so the result will not be changed.

However, the panel may recommend the candidate's force or organisation to not take that examination attempt into account, and to allow the candidate to have an additional attempt at the examination where local policy (for example, the number of retakes) would have otherwise prevented this from being an option. The panel can also make recommendations for the delivery of the exam to the College and/or force.

Reports from candidates who are successful will not be considered further by the panel.

Special considerations

The marking panel, in consultation with the NPPF debrief panel, will consider applying special considerations to any candidate who submits an appeal of unscheduled incidents that is accepted by the College. Special considerations will not be applied automatically for each appeal and will only be applied in exceptional circumstances where the marking panel and debrief panel are in agreement that it is warranted and fair to do so.

The College of Policing will not apply special considerations under any circumstances for incidents relating to any of the points listed in the section on [appeals of unscheduled incidents](#).

Applications for special consideration should be submitted in accordance with existing timescales for submission of reports as detailed in the section on [submitting an appeal](#). Applications received after this time will not be considered.

The NPPF marking panel also have the discretion to apply the special considerations policy in circumstances in which evidence has been brought to their attention – for example, by a force or candidate – that is likely to have had a direct and substantial impact on one or more candidates' results, but where a report has not been submitted.

If the NPPF marking panel determines, in conjunction with the NPPF debrief panel, that awarding special consideration is appropriate, the candidate will be notified via their force examinations officer. If special considerations are deemed appropriate, this would be applied to all candidates affected by that specific issue and not to just those who appealed.

The NPPF debrief panel cannot change a fail result into a pass. However, the marking panel will apply special consideration, if it is deemed to be appropriate, by awarding an allowance of 1% of the total raw marks available within the examination to affected candidates. In some cases, this may make the difference between a pass and a fail for candidates. The marking panel will conduct a thorough analysis of the candidates' results to ascertain the impact that the issue is likely to have had before the policy is considered.

This will only be applied in very exceptional circumstances that are deemed to be significant, out of the candidate's control and likely to have had a substantial and prolonged impact on a candidate's performance during the examination.

The decision of the NPPF marking panel, in conjunction with the NPPF debrief panel, is final. Once results have been ratified and released, results will not be reviewed again under any

circumstances.

Question queries

On occasion, the exams team may receive a query regarding the legal accuracy or fairness of a question included within the examination from a candidate.

The examinations are subject to a rigorous design process. All items used within each administration of the NPPF examination go through several review stages to ensure that they meet the necessary psychometric criteria required to confirm they are fair for inclusion in the exam.

This is to ensure that the item is legally accurate and a fair test of candidates' knowledge of the syllabus. This means that before any item is included in an exam, the exams team can be confident that it is suitable for use.

During the marking process, the marking panel reviews any queries raised by candidates in relation to specific questions, as well as any questions that have not performed as expected. This is to ensure that the questions are wholly correct and fair for inclusion within the exam. Any questions deemed to be unfair for inclusion in any way will be removed from the marking procedure for all candidates.

Queries must be submitted to the College's exams team no later than three days after attending the examination. Please note that queries received after this date will not be considered. The item will also be reviewed by the College's legal services team to provide a post-examination legal review if needed.

Remarking examination papers

There is no provision for candidates to contest their result once results have been released, or to request to have their examination remarked. The occupational psychology unit adopts a very rigorous and thorough marking process to ensure that all exams are accurately marked and checked. All unscheduled incidents reported in line with the guidelines above will be considered when marking.

Once the results have been released, these are final. The College's exams team will not remark exams.

There is no provision to add additional marks for candidates who score just below the pass mark. The pass mark for the exam is a standard agreed with the NPPF governance board and ratified by the NPPF debrief panel after each exam. This will therefore not be lowered for individual candidates in any circumstances.

NPPF reports and disqualifications panel

The NPPF reports and disqualifications panel will formally consider the reports based on unscheduled incidents and reported cases of irregularity or breaches of the rules. The panel consists of:

- a chief moderator nominated by the NPCC
- a representative from the College of Policing workforce transformation unit
- the head of the College of Policing occupational psychology unit
- a member of the College of Policing legal services team

The NPPF reports and disqualifications panel will consider any reports after the results have been notified. Once a decision has been reached, the College of Policing, on behalf of the chair of the panel, will notify the candidate of the decision.

The panel cannot change a fail result into a pass or add additional marks under any circumstances. Once the scoring has taken place and has been signed off by the debrief panel, the results will stand. Any adjustments made to the scoring will render the results invalid and the marking team will not endorse an adjusted result.

Unsuccessful candidates who have previously submitted reports have claimed that an event or series of events has contributed to their result because they were unable to perform to their best. However, in behavioural terms, it is not possible to make assumptions about what candidates would and would not have done had those circumstances not arisen. Different circumstances have different effects on people, and it is not appropriate to attempt to predict what that effect may or may not have been.

Other examining bodies, such as universities, are usually willing to consider both marginal fail results and the possibility of converting such results to a pass. However, they have the benefit of other evidence to consider – such as coursework and portfolios – that may support a conversion to a pass for a candidate who has achieved a lower-than-expected result.

Because of other evidence not being available, it is not possible to reconsider the marks awarded at the examination against any other information. Rigorous marking procedures are used following the examinations. Therefore, marginal fail results will not be reassessed or awarded a pass mark under any circumstances.

There is no right of appeal regarding a remark.

Disqualification procedure

Any candidate found to be in breach of the rules will be liable to disqualification.

If a candidate's behaviour reduces the reliability of their examination scores, their result may be nullified by the marker, notwithstanding any disqualification decision.

In cases of rule breaches, irregularity and misbehaviour, the panel can:

- fail the candidate
- disqualify the candidate from the current attempt and bar them from further attempts for a period of two or more years
- refer the candidate to their chief officer and their relevant professional standards department

Right of appeal

Candidates have the right of appeal to the chair of the NPPF governance board against the decision of the NPPF reports and disqualifications panel where there:

- are reasonable grounds for believing that the panel did not act in compliance with its rules
- is fresh evidence, that was not available at the time of the original report, for further consideration

This must be clearly detailed in the appeal before it will be considered further. There is no right of appeal in circumstances outside of this, for example disagreement with the panel's decision.

Appeals must be made by email to the chair of the NPPF governance board at

NPPF.enquiries@college.police.uk

Appeals must be countersigned by the candidate's line manager or above. The countersigned appeal must then be submitted by the candidate, and received by the exams team unit, within 21

days of the date of the letter in which the candidate is notified of the decision of the NPPF reports and disqualifications panel.

The exams team will forward the appeal to the chair of the NPPF governance board. The chair of the NPPF governance board will consider whether there are adequate grounds for appeal and will notify the exams team.

The candidate and relevant force examinations officer on behalf of the chief officer will be advised by the exams team in writing of the chair of the NPPF governance board's decision. The chair of the NPPF governance board cannot convert a fail into a pass but can vary or confirm the decision of the NPPF reports and disqualifications panel.

Blackstone's Police Manual

All areas of the syllabus are applicable to both the sergeants' and inspectors' examinations, except chapter 1.8, which is for the sergeants' examination only. Further information is available in the [appendices in the downloadable version of this guide](#).

Downloadable resources

A PDF version of the 2026 handbook is available.

- [NPPF candidate handbook 2026 \(pdf\) 363.88 KB](#)

Tags

Leadership development