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**THE INDEPENDENT
COMMUNITY OBSERVER (ICO)**

**ANNUAL REPORT
2025 FOR THE
PSNI RECRUITMENT
CAMPAIGN**

BACKGROUND

In September 1999 the report of the Independent Commission on Policing (known as the Patten Report) recommended that police recruitment should be contracted out to an independent agency and that there should be community oversight of the process.

Subsequently, the Board established a team of volunteers from all sections of the community known as Independent Community Observers (ICOs). Their role is to observe, and report to the Board on PSNI recruitment processes in line with Section 10 of the Police (Recruitment) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2001.

CONTEXT

This report will consider the PSNI recruitment campaign which was launched in January 2025 with Assessment Centres taking place from April to July 2025. As per previous campaigns the ICOs were solely involved at the Assessment Centre stage. This stage involves ICOs observing a sample of the recruitment process for the post of PSNI Police Constable and reporting back to the Board on:

- The adequacy of facilities and arrangements; and
- Whether, as far as practicable, the same procedures were applied to all candidates.

THE RECRUITMENT STAGES¹



¹ The current stages for PSNI recruitment (as managed by the Independent Recruitment Agency, Deloitte)

DETAIL

The PSNI recruitment campaign opened in January 2025, with assessments taking place in a community venue setting from April–July 2025.

Due to several ICOs withdrawing from the scheme since the last PSNI recruitment campaign in 2021, additional recruitment was undertaken to ensure adequate capacity and to ensure the effective implementation of the ICO Scheme. Four ICOs were successfully appointed following interviews conducted in March 2025. This increased the total number of active ICOs to nine, which would be the minimum number of volunteers to ensure the continued operation of the scheme.

ICOs attended the Assessment Centres from 30 April 2025 through to 2 July 2025, which included the observation of Sergeants' Briefings and Roleplays. The final assessment day was held on 3 July 2025.

The ICOs made a total of 35 visits to the Assessment Centre and during this time they observed 157 Roleplays and 35 Sergeants' Briefings. Within these visits the ICOs observed and commented on whether:

- Candidates were given equal amounts of time for each process;
- The same procedures were applied to all candidates;
- Instructions to candidates were clear, whether spoken or written;
- The appropriate number of assessors/role players etc were with the candidates;
- Candidates were treated with respect/courtesy/sensitivity/confidentiality and professionalism;
- Candidates were given prompt responses to any questions they had;
- The size of the rooms / temperature / lighting etc were acceptable;
- There were no distractions for candidates such as excessive noise;
- Background briefings were provided as necessary; and
- Sessions lasted the specified length.

At the time of ICO visits 89% (31) found that the same procedures were being applied to all the assessments. This is a reduction of 7% from the previous campaign (96% from 53 visits).

During ICO visits 60% (21) rated the facilities as good which was a 38% decrease from the previous campaign (98%).

ICO visits rated 40% (14) of the facilities as acceptable compared to 2% from the previous campaign.

A further statistical breakdown of the reports received during the 2025 campaign are outlined below and published at www.nipolicingboard.org.uk

TABLE 1: Duration of the Observation

Duration	Total	%
< 60 mins	0	0%
60-89 mins	1	3%
90-119 mins	18	51%
120 - 180 mins	15	43%
> 180 mins	1	3%
TOTAL	35	100%

TABLE 2: Type of Test Centre Observation

Type of Test				
Sergeants' Briefing	Role Play 1	Role Play 2	Role Play 3	TOTAL
35	67	67	23	192

TABLE 3: Observer Rating of Procedures

Procedures	Total	%
Same procedures applied across all assessments	31	89%
Same procedures not applied across all assessments	4	11%
TOTAL	35	100%

TABLE 4: Observer Rating of Facilities

Facilities	Total	%
Good	21	60%
Acceptable	14	40%
TOTAL	35	100%

INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY OBSERVERS ‘DE-BRIEF’ SESSION – OCTOBER 2025

Following the completion of the 2025 PSNI Recruitment Campaign, the Board held a de-brief session with all ICOs in order to gain further insight and context around their feedback on the assessment centre venue.

It was noted that there had been a marked decrease in the rating of the facilities compared to the previous recruitment campaign in 2022 where 98% of ICO visits rated the facilities as ‘good’, compared to 60% during this recent campaign. However, this follow-up feedback session indicated that the majority of the ICOs had a positive perception of the community venue used for the 2025 campaign. ICOs reported that this venue was more than adequate and actually the preferred option compared to the hotel setting/venue which was used for previous campaigns.

Some ICOs, however, cited that the external noise in the vicinity of the venue and from adjoining rooms impacted their decision to rate the facilities as ‘acceptable’ rather than ‘good’.

Another potential factor contributing to the variance between the data of the previous ICO campaign and this most recent campaign may also be attributed to the composition of the ICO visits. During this campaign, ICOs resumed visiting in pairs, whereas in 2022 and due to Covid-19 restrictions, ICOs observed sessions singly. As a result, ICOs conducted fewer visits during the 2025 campaign (35) compared to the 2022 campaign (54).



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