

Candidates share their thoughts on our first online exam in policing

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Five officers tell us about sitting the National Investigators' Exam and provide top tips to help future candidates

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We know that policing is a challenging role, which requires officers to think on their feet and respond to a variety of evolving situations, always working hard to keep the public safe. The coronavirus pandemic has placed new challenges on an already demanding role but, as ever, policing has responded quickly and efficiently, rapidly adapting to the new regulations introduced by the government.

On 8 September, 1,394 officers from 46 forces [sat the National Investigators' Exam \(NIE\)](#), the first ever national online policing examination.

Here, five officers who sat the NIE share their thoughts, and offer some useful tips and tricks for future candidates.

Exams moving online

Perhaps unsurprisingly for a first-of-its-kind examination, a number of officers were hesitant about the new format. Tom Towe of Cheshire Police says: 'I was apprehensive about taking the exam online, as I was cautious that this was the first time that the exam had been conducted in such a format and was unsure of what to expect.'

Alastair Roper of Nottinghamshire Police echoes this, saying: 'Due to the changes that were being implemented because of COVID-19, I was very unsure of what to expect when I was told the exam was moving onto an online platform.'

He has personal experience of online exam implementation and the news that the College was moving examinations online left him feeling 'nervous about how the platform would work and how the exam would be carried out.' He adds: 'there was a lot of scepticism in force about being able to

look up answers and how the exam would be carried out fairly.'

Freya Hawkins of Avon and Somerset Police, Amy Barrett of Greater Manchester Police and Naomi Kinnersley of Staffordshire Police gave us similar responses.

Amy says she was 'already nervous about taking the exam, but nothing more than usual', until the coronavirus pandemic hit, which she says 'turned me into a nervous wreck'. Despite feeling anxious and nervous before the exam, all five candidates found that the online examination process had gone well and had some advantages over traditional methods.

Advantages and disadvantages of taking the exam online

As the NIE was the first examination to take place online, one of the main worries for candidates sitting it at home was whether they would have a stable Wi-Fi connection for the duration of the exam, with Alastair saying that he checked his internet connection for 'what felt like about 400 times!'

Freya chose to sit the exam at her nearest station. She says:

This way I could book the room, make sure no one disturbed me and plug my laptop into the force's internet connection rather than relying on Wi-Fi.

The day before my exam, I went to check the room I booked. I tidied it a little bit, made sure the internet connection was working, and then stuck a sign on the door to make sure no one used it or disturbed me during my exam.

Overall, all five felt that the advantages of an online exam outweighed traditional methods. Naomi says: 'I liked the flexibility of when and where I took the exam. I didn't have to travel miles to a location, I liked that I didn't have to wait with a large number of colleagues all going over questions and answers causing nerves.'

Amy says: 'I felt in control as I could pick where I sat the exam and what time worked well for me. I work better in the morning, before I have time to start panicking and trying to cram information in at the last minute.'

Alastair, Naomi and Amy all say that being able to sit the exam at home also reduced some of the distractions associated with traditional exams.

Alastair says:

When I sat the exam, it felt like I could manage my own time more effectively. I was not distracted by people getting up to go to the toilet, or someone knocking their pencils over, or the coughing fit that seemed to be inevitable in the old exam halls!

Naomi adds: 'The fact that a hundred other people weren't there made it easier, as there was no one putting you off by getting up or asking questions.'

Both Tom and Naomi pointed out that sitting the exam in the comfort of their own home allowed them to speak the questions out loud. Tom says that sitting the exam at home 'enabled me to read the questions out loud, which is an experience that I've never been able to have before in an invigilated hall and which truly helped me comprehend the questions better.'

Advice on sitting an online exam in policing

The online exam process will be replicated for the 2020 Sergeants' and Inspectors' exams. Alastair, Amy, Freya, Naomi and Tom shared some advice and tips that will help future candidates prepare for and sit an online exam themselves.

Revision

All five candidates say that they didn't change how they revised for the exam, and each of them used the Blackstone's Manual for revision. Alastair said that once the coronavirus pandemic struck and the exam was postponed, he 'replanned my revision and started from square one with a formal revision plan, which I stuck to'. Freya said that she 'used the Blackstone's Manual to read through a topic and then answered the online Q&As.'

Amy says she revised best by going through bite-sized chunks of information, so she used mind maps, 'along with colours to emphasise certain words or levels of authorisation'. She also says she liked the online questions, but shares a word of warning: 'Please be careful with online questions, as they can lull you into a false sense of security and will begin to repeat themselves'.

Alastair says:

There is nothing better than reading the NIE manual. As people say, if it's not in the manual, it cannot be questioned. Yes, some of it, to say the least, is 'wordy', but the devil is in the detail and the hard work definitely pays off!

Pre-exam checks

All five say they made sure to check their device's compatibility and the Wi-Fi connection, as well as doing a familiarisation test a few days before the exam. Amy also says she had her neighbour's Wi-Fi login on hand, just in case she lost connection on the day.

The candidates also say it was vital to minimise distractions for the duration of the exam. Amy turned her phone onto aeroplane mode before the exam, while Naomi says that she switched her mobile off entirely, unplugged her landline and even closed the blinds, so that she wouldn't be distracted by anyone appearing at her door. She also suggested having a regular clock, watch or timer to keep track of the time, as smartphones or smartwatches could be distracting.

Both Naomi and Alastair also had a supply of hot drinks on hand throughout the exam. Freya, who sat the exam at her local station, said she stuck a 'do not disturb' sign on the door, turned on her Out of Office and changed her status on Microsoft Teams to make sure no one would distract her.

Going back to previous questions

All five candidates point out that because of the layout of the exam, it was difficult to go back to questions they hadn't be able to answer at first attempt, as that involved clicking through all of the previous questions manually. Amy says that she wrote down the questions she was not sure about on a piece of paper, so going back to them later would be easier.

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