

United States General Accounting Office

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Fact Sheet for the Honorable  
Dean A. Gallo, Ranking Minority  
Member, Subcommittee on District of  
Columbia, Committee on Appropriations,  
House of Representatives

October 1989

## D. C. GOVERNMENT

# Interim Report on Changes in Police Qualifications





United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

General Government Division

B-237051

October 3, 1989

The Honorable Dean A. Gallo  
Ranking Minority Member  
Subcommittee on the District  
of Columbia  
Committee on Appropriations  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Gallo:

In response to your March 24, 1989, request, this fact sheet provides partial results of our work regarding the District of Columbia's compliance with Title I of the District of Columbia Appropriations Act, 1989 (Public Law 100-462). Title I requires that the District maintain police qualifications equal to those in effect as of August 19, 1982.

We agreed to focus our work on eight specific questions you asked regarding police recruit qualifications. As agreed, this fact sheet covers the first four questions:

- How was the entry-level police examination contractor selected?
- Have there been changes in the qualifications for police candidates since 1982?
- How and why is the conversion factor used in scoring entrance examinations?
- Can any points be added to a candidate's score?

Our subsequent report will address the four remaining questions, which concern training at the police academy and accreditation for the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and the police academy.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

We developed the following answers to the four questions:

- The District of Columbia Office of Personnel (DCOP) selected the McCann Associates police recruit examination on the bases of its job-relatedness,

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To determine how the conversion factor is used, we asked DCOP officials to prepare a narrative explanation of how and why the conversion factor is used. We compared DCOP's narrative explanation with supporting documentation provided by DCOP.

We obtained DCOP's written policy on what points can be added to a candidate's passing score. We also reviewed policy on the impact of veterans or District residency preference points on the scores on the eligibility certificate.

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As arranged with your office, we plan no further distribution of this fact sheet until 30 days after the date of issuance, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier. At that time, we will send copies to interested parties and make copies available to others upon request.

If you have any questions regarding this fact sheet, please contact me on 275-8387. The major contributors are listed in appendix II.

Sincerely yours,



Earl F. Walter  
Acting Director, General Management Issues

- the Police Officer Examination, Form ESV-100, developed by McCann Associates;
- the Multi-Jurisdictional Police Officer Examination, developed by the Educational Testing Service for the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the Police Foundation, and the International Personnel Management Association (IPMA);
- the Entry-Level Police Officer Examination, Form A1-M, developed by the Selection Consulting Center (California) for IPMA; and
- the Police Officer Examination, developed by the Human Resources Center of the University of Chicago.

On the basis of an internal DCOP review and evaluation of various police officer written examinations, both prior to and in response to the Request For Proposals, the mayor of the District of Columbia approved DCOP's recommendation to adopt the McCann Associates examination. Of particular importance was the District's determination, as set forth in a March 1982 memorandum signed by the mayor, that the McCann examination was of greater job-relatedness and had less adverse impact on minorities than other examinations under consideration.

HAVE THERE BEEN CHANGES IN THE QUALIFICATIONS  
FOR POLICE CANDIDATES SINCE 1982?

Relatively few changes have been made to the qualifications for police candidates since 1982. Specifically, minor changes were made in 1986 to improve clarity in the wording of six items on the McCann examination. In addition, in February 1987, the maximum height restriction for police officers was eliminated.

Changes to the McCann Examination

DCOP and McCann Associates officials told us that the police entrance examination (ESV-100) has remained essentially unchanged since 1982. According to these officials, six questions were revised slightly in September 1986 to improve their clarity. We were unable to verify McCann Associates' and DCOP officials' statements concerning changes to test ESV-100, because McCann Associates did not permit us access to the test documents.

During our work, we also noted that for the first two administrations of McCann's test in April and September 1982, the minimum passing score was set at 60 correct questions of the 100 that constitute the examination. From the third administration in September 1983 until the present, the minimum passing score has been set at 50 out of 100. According to DCOP's written explanation for this change, prepared at our request, the minimum passing score was revised

candidates from highest to lowest (passing) scorer, nor does the conversion "boost" candidates with raw scores lower than the pass/fail cutoff point into the passing range.

This conversion formula is based on the District of Columbia Personnel Regulations, Chapter 8, Section 809.6, which require that:

"The Personnel authority shall prescribe the absolute and relative weights to be assigned the individual components of the examination, and, where numerical weights are used, shall assign final ratings on a scale with a maximum value of (100). In these circumstances, candidates who do not receive at least a rating of (70) shall be rated as 'ineligible'."

#### CAN ANY POINTS BE ADDED TO A CANDIDATE'S SCORE?

A police candidate who receives a passing score on the McCann test can, after conversion of the score to a percentage basis, receive points for veterans preference and District residency. These points only change a candidate's relative position on the list of successful applicants.

#### Veterans Preference and District Residency Can Be Added to Passing Scores

Since 1982, candidates who receive passing raw scores have been eligible for a maximum of 10 veterans preference points. Five points are awarded for veterans status and another five for a service-connected disability. Thus a converted score of 80 could be increased to a maximum of 90, enhancing the candidate's position on the hiring list.

Since June 1989, candidates who receive passing raw scores have been eligible for District residency preference points. A maximum of 10 points can be added to a candidate's converted score, thus enhancing the candidate's position on the hiring list.

With implementation of the District residency preference, the maximum combined (District residency and veterans) converted score will be 110. This total is composed of the maximum initial converted score of 90, the 10 points to be available for District residency, and the maximum 10 points available for veterans preference.

On the basis of our discussions with DCOP officials and our review of the District's guidance for awarding preference points, we found no evidence of procedures for adding points to raw or nonpassing scores.

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"based on data showing that the loss of 'passing candidates' [i.e., those whose raw scores were 60 or above] to subsequent screening hurdles [i.e., drug screening and background checks] was greater than originally projected, . . .the concern with adverse impact [on minorities], and the recommendation of McCann Associates. . . ."

It should be further noted that the revised score corresponds with the passing score (40 correct of 80 questions) when the entrance examination was Civil Service Test 21.

#### Elimination of the Maximum Height Restriction

In February 1987, the maximum height restriction of 77 inches was eliminated. We were told that the height requirement was found to hamper recruitment efforts at a time when the Department faced increasing personnel needs to meet the growing MPD workforce.

#### HOW AND WHY IS THE CONVERSION FACTOR USED IN SCORING ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS?

The conversion process is done to make passing scores comparable to other entrance test results from a mathematical perspective. The conversion process is not applied to a failing score and thus does not change a score from failing to passing. In addition, the conversion process does not change the order of raw passing scores.

#### Conversion of Test Results Does Not Affect Pass/Fail Status

According to DCOP, it is common practice for employers (particularly in the public sector) who administer a variety of different examinations with different numbers of items and different passing scores to adopt a single standardized scale for reporting and communicating test results to candidates. As a norm, most employers have chosen the range of 70 to 100 points as the standard passing range. While this practice contributes to consistency in score reporting across tests and improves candidate understanding of test results, it requires the employer to develop a different conversion formula for each test administered. A conversion formula is simply a mathematical equation that converts the raw test scores obtained by passing candidates to a standard scale ranging from 70 to 100 points. The passing raw score is converted (or set equal) to 70 so that candidates who fail to obtain a passing raw score on a test are disqualified from further consideration for hire.

In the same way that one would use a mathematical formula to convert temperature readings from a Celsius to a Fahrenheit scale, the conversion of raw scores for police officer candidates who pass the McCann test does not change the relative order of

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RECRUITMENT, SELECTION  
AND TRAINING OF DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA POLICE OFFICERS

HOW WAS THE ENTRY-LEVEL POLICE  
EXAMINATION CONTRACTOR SELECTED?

The McCann Associates police recruit examination was selected after the screening of existing available tests, issuance of a Request for Proposals from vendors, and an evaluation of the vendors' responses.

Chronology of Test Contractor Selection

In March 1982, DCOP selected McCann Associates as the contractor to provide the entry-level police examination that would replace Civil Service Test 21. DCOP's decision to replace Test 21 was based on its own analysis and the advice of a consultant. DCOP concluded that Test 21 had an adverse impact on minorities and was not sufficiently job-related.

The consultant gave the District several options to replace Test 21. However, a DCOP analysis determined that user history shortcomings existed with some of these examinations. For example, one option, the Police Career Index (PCI) examination, used separate scoring formulas for black and white candidates. Black candidates were awarded additional points on the examination solely on the basis of racial status. Although such "test fairness" formulas may have had some technical basis, DCOP questioned the advisability of awarding points to minorities solely on the basis of race. It appears that DCOP was concerned that if the practice was publicized as the result of a freedom of information request, the political consequences would be formidable and potentially divisive. DCOP rejected PCI because the scoring procedures were controversial.

As an alternative to the PCI examination, the consultant recommended that one of two ability tests be used in combination with the Gordon Personal Profile Examination on an interim basis until a suitable selecting device, tailored to the needs of the District of Columbia, could be developed. The two ability tests advocated by the consultant, the Short Test of Education Ability and the Adult Basic Learning Examination, were basic tests of ability and achievement. DCOP did not support using either the Gordon Personal Profile Examination or the two ability tests because they were not job-related for the selection of municipal police officers.

Because the consultant's proposals were not suitable for DCOP's use, DCOP evaluated several additional police officer written examinations. These were

limited adverse impact on minorities, and ease of administration. DCOP made its selection after reviewing and evaluating existing available tests, issuing a Request for Proposals from vendors, and evaluating vendors' responses.

- Relatively few changes have been made to the qualifications for police candidates since 1982. Minor changes were made in 1986 to improve clarity in the wording of six items on the McCann examination, and in February 1987, the maximum height restriction was eliminated.
- The conversion process is done to make passing scores comparable to other entrance test results from a mathematical perspective. The conversion process is not applied to a failing score and thus does not change a score from failing to passing. In addition, the conversion process does not change the order of raw passing scores.
- Candidates who pass the written exam may be eligible for additional points for veterans and/or residency preference. Candidates who fail to achieve a passing score are ineligible to receive additional points.

Our detailed responses are presented in appendix I.

#### OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Our objective was to respond to four questions dealing with the recruitment and selection of police officers for the District of Columbia. To meet this objective, we focused our review on activities occurring from August 1982 through May 1989. We gathered and reviewed documentation and interviewed officials at the Metropolitan Police Department and McCann Associates in Langhorne, Pennsylvania.

To determine how the entry-level police examination contractor was selected and what changes have occurred in the examination since 1982, we met with the Director of Personnel, the Chief of Policy, and other officials from DCOP. We also discussed these matters with the president and vice president of McCann Associates. Because McCann Associates denied us access to the test documents, we did not verify information given to us regarding changes in the test. McCann Associates based the denial on the proprietary nature of the documents.

