

**Sheridan, Kathleen R**

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**From:** Ruane, Kieran J  
**Sent:** Wednesday 12 February 2025 12:36  
**To:** College.Foundation.DS  
**Cc:** Reynolds, Amanda G; Grogan, Karen M; Colfer, Mary G  
**Subject:** Review An Garda Síochána's Pre-Selection Fitness Test and new proposed Physical Competency Assessment (PCA)  
**Attachments:** Final Report 11.11.24.pdf; PCA Presentation.pptx

**Chief Superintendent,  
Director of Training & Continuous Professional Development.**

The proposed new Physical Competency Assessment (PCA) used in the recruitment of new members to the organisation was previously forwarded by your office to the Acting Executive Director HR&PD on 18<sup>th</sup> November with further information provided on 1<sup>st</sup> November. A demonstration of the proposed PCA at the Garda College was provided to Commissioner Harris on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024. A total of sixty-eight serving members of An Garda Síochána participated in the initial trials of the proposed PCA in October 2025. Following a demonstration of the proposed PCA in December, the Commissioner requested additional trials of the PCA be conducted so as to provide a larger amount of data for analysis. Two hundred Trainee Gardaí based at the Garda College from Intakes 244 and 242 were identified for the additional trials and this would include seventy one female Trainee Gardaí representing 36% of the additional sample. The additional trials took place throughout January and February and are now complete.

#### **1. Current Pre Entry Fitness Test**

Candidates for entry to An Garda Síochána currently attend the Garda College to undergo the Pre Entry Fitness Test. This test is divided into two Stages; Stage 1 consisting of progressive 20 metre shuttle run and a muscular endurance test comprising of sit ups and press-ups and Stage 2, a Physical Competency Test (PCT) more commonly known as the obstacle course test.

In order to successfully complete the PCT candidates must pass both Stages 1&2. Should a candidate fail either or both stages, they are invited for retest, normally between 8-12 weeks later, to retest on the stage that they failed. Should a candidate be successful in appealing the result of a second failure, they must undergo both stages of the test again.

##### **1.1 Current Stage 1- Shuttle Run and Muscular Endurance Test:**

The objective of the progressive 20 metre shuttle run test is to run as long as possible there and back along a 20m track, keeping to the speed indicated by the beeps on the audio equipment. The candidate will hear loud beeps at regular intervals. The test is maximal and progressive. At first the speed is slow, but the speed will increase at the end of each minute by 0.5kph. The test involves candidates running from one cone to another cone 20 metres apart in a straight line. The applicants must reach the cone, with at least one foot, before/or on the beep. If the applicant fails to make the cone in time, they are given a warning and must finish that run to the cone and reach the next cone before/or on the beep. If the applicant fails to reach two cones in a row they are eliminated from the test. The highest standard to be achieved of 8.7 applies to males age from 18 to 25 and involves approximately eight (8) minutes of running in total.

There are distinct assessment levels for males and females with variances weighted in favour of age and gender, which is based on aerobic capacities or VO2 max of males versus females. For instance, a typical untrained male will have an increased aerobic capacity of 15% more than females. The muscular endurance aspect of Stage 1, sit-ups

and press-ups, is an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate good abdominal and upper body muscular endurance.

### **1.2 Current Stage 2- The Physical Competency Test (PCT):**

Candidates are then given a two-hour break before proceeding to The Physical Competency Test(PCT). The PCT consists of the Obstacle course. As part of this test candidates are required to sprint, change direction, run under and over barriers, up and down stairs, jump, carry a light weight a prescribed distance and pull a manikin along the ground a short distance. They must perform three circuits in 3 minutes 20 seconds. Given that this is a competence test there are no differences between the applicable assessment standards for male and female or indeed for age or gender.

## **2. Review An Garda Síochána's Pre-Selection Fitness Test New proposed Physical Competency Assessment (PCA)**

To briefly summarise on how the design of the new proposed Physical Competency Assessment (PCA) came about, [REDACTED] Dundalk Institute of Technology was engaged in August 2024 to review An Garda Síochána's Pre-Selection Fitness Test. [REDACTED] initial observations where that the current format of the test, while job-related, contains elements that may be open to legal challenge under the Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2015 as there are varying pass levels based on age and gender. [REDACTED] also advised that press ups and sit ups in Part A lack face validity - face validity is whether a test appears to measure what it's supposed to measure. [REDACTED] advised that context and content of the current Physical Competency Test, the obstacle circuit, in part B is valid, reliable and job-related.

The agreed scope for the review of Physical Competency Test (PCT) was as follows:

- I. Move away from the traditional age and gender related pass thresholds used in the current assessment (primarily part A of the test).
- II. Improve the overall face validity of the assessment (including removing press up and sit up tests).
- III. Establish a pass threshold that is related to the minimum standard required to undertake the role of a Garda in An Garda Síochána

### **2.1 Review Process**

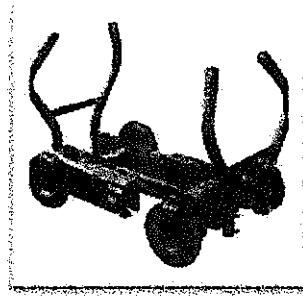
A steering group of subject matter experts was established to support [REDACTED] and following consultation with the steering group [REDACTED] proposed a trial be conducted of a Physical Competency Assessment (PCA) with changes that reflected the following:

- Remove the unjustified age- and gender-related pass thresholds
- Establish a pass threshold that is related to the minimum requirements to undertake the role of member of Garda Síochána (using incumbents from the front line to establish a new pass threshold)
- Improve the face validity of the assessment by removing press ups and sit ups entirely
- Integrate the 20m beep test into the Part B circuit assessment
- Integrate a push/pull obstacle into the circuit test by replacing the mannequin with a 'tank' sled (to replicate time and resistance previously provided by the push/pull machine which is no longer in operation)

### **2.2 Initial PCA Trials –October 2024**

In October 2024, PCA trials were held at the Garda College with front line members being tested to establish what fitness level was required to perform the front line role and to identify the appropriate pass standard. [REDACTED] recommendations for the trial pre-entry fitness test and physical competency test were:

1. All candidates, irrespective of age and gender, must complete a 20m shuttle run to level 5.6. This level is 88.2% of median aerobic capacity of untrained population aged 20-50yrs and allows for the candidates to retain an energy reserve to complete the PCT circuit immediately after the beep test.
2. Candidates must then immediately complete two laps of the PCT circuit. This is reduced from the current three laps. The current mannequin is replaced by tank sled (Photo below) which is set at level 1 and is pushed and pulled for 12metres per lap.

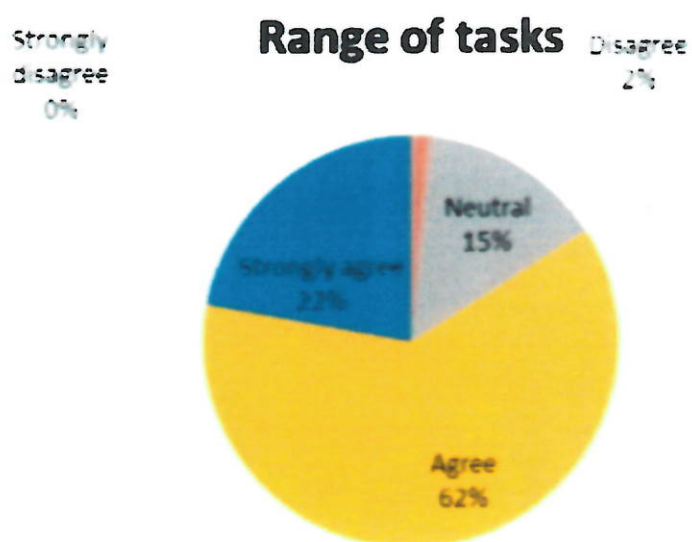
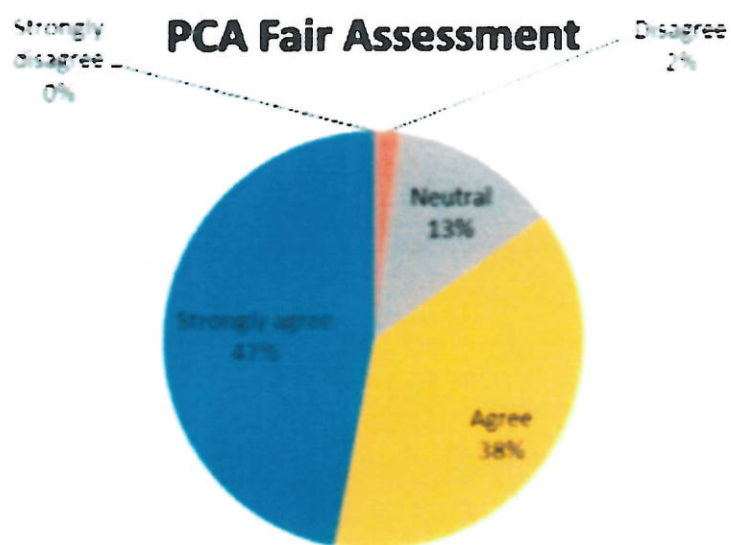


All regions were asked to send a cohort of members who were involved in daily operational policing duties working the core roster to participate in this trial. Participants including one inspector, thirteen sergeants and fifty-four Gardaí sourced from a range of geographical location, age, sex and rank to represent as accurately as possible the composition of core policing in Ireland. Nineteen females (28% of the total) and forty-nine males (72% of the total) participated. The age of participants ranged between twenty-three and fifty-eight years.

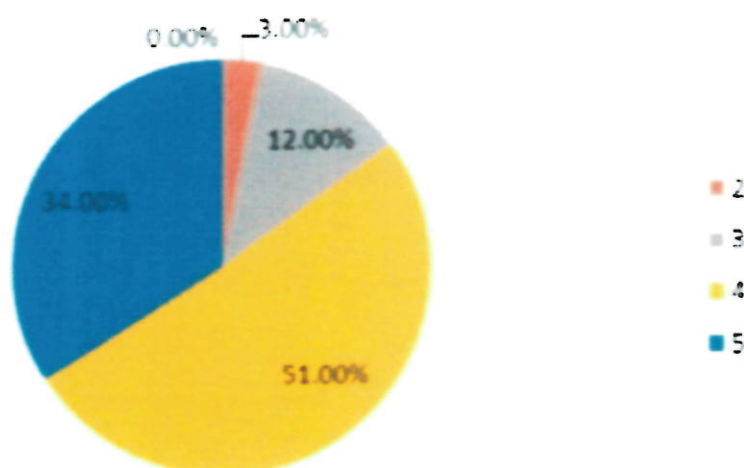
The PCA trial had a beep test at level 5.6 incorporated into it at the start of the assessment, irrespective of age or gender, all participants had to complete this 20m beep test run in 4 min 54 seconds before continuing straight into the PCT circuit. Analysis of the 68 participants that took part in the trial showed:

- 90% of the 68 participants completed the PCT circuit within 2 min 58 seconds after completing the Level 5.6 beep test in 4mins 54 seconds.
- 95% of the 68 participants completed the PCT circuit within 3min 10 seconds after completing the Level 5.6 beep test in 4mins 54 seconds.

On completion of the PCA trail the 68 participants from operational policing background where interviewed and the following three graphs indicate they were supportive of the PCA assessment being fair and the range of tasks being relevant and important which underpins the face validity of the proposed PCA.



## Importance of Tasks



### 3. Steering Group / recommendations.

The Steering Group of representatives was reconvened following the PCA trials to consider the analysis of the trial PCA data which was presented by [REDACTED]. There was a 50/50 split in the steering group as to the appropriate pass threshold to set for the PCT obstacle circuit with 90% and 95% being sought and therefore [REDACTED] calculated the midpoint (92.5%) to complete the revised Physical Competence Test of **8 minutes, 04 seconds (total time for the complete assessment, including shuttle run and circuit)**. [REDACTED] issued [REDACTED] final report and described this new proposed standard as well validated and operationally defensible.

### 4. Further PCA Trials with Garda Trainees –January / February 2025

Following a demonstration of the proposed PCA at the Garda College to Commissioner Harris on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024 additional trials of the PCA was requested so as to provide a larger amount of data for analysis. Two hundred and one Trainee Gardaí based at the Garda College from Intakes 244 and 242 were identified for the additional trials and this would include seventy one female Trainee Gardaí representing 35% of the additional sample.

The additional trials took place throughout January and February and due to injuries and illnesses, the actual number tested stands at 197, this includes 71 females Trainee Gardaí. [REDACTED] Garda Trainees [REDACTED] failed the PCA on their first attempt. [REDACTED] failed to complete the run within the recommended time of 8m 10s, the other [REDACTED] failed to reach Level 5.6. All [REDACTED] of these participants were given a second opportunity to complete the test the following week. [REDACTED] who initially failed to reach 5.6 on the bleep test, subsequently repeated but failed to complete the test within the 8m 10s time, they completed it in 8m 23s.

To briefly summarise, the two PCA Trials results for 265 participants are as follows:

Date/ Cohort of PCA Trial	Completed	Male	Female	20-29yrs	30-39yrs	40-49yrs	50-59Yrs	Passed	Failed
October 24 :Operational Members	68	49 (72%)	19 (28%)	16(24%)	22(32%)	22(32%)	8(12%)	63	5
Jan/ Feb 24: Trainee Gardaí	197	126 (64%)	71 (36%)	134(68%)	36(18%)	26 (13%)	0 (0%)	196	1



<b>Total</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>175</b> <b>(66%)</b>	<b>90</b> <b>(34%)</b>	<b>150</b> <b>(56%)</b>	<b>58</b> <b>(22%)</b>	<b>48</b> <b>(18%)</b>	<b>8(3%)</b>	<b>259</b> <b>(98%)</b>	<b>6</b> <b>(2%)</b>
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## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

██████████ has made ██████████ detailed recommendations in Section 6 of his attached report entitled ‘*A Review of An Garda Síochána’s Pre-Selection Fitness Tests*’ which provides scientifically-based support to ensure that the new standards in the PCA are justifiable and reliable. The key recommendations which have been incorporated into the new proposed Physical Competency Assessment (PCA) are:

- All candidates, irrespective of age and gender, must complete a 20 metre shuttle run to level 5.6. This level is 88.2% of median aerobic capacity of untrained population aged 20-50yrs and allows for the candidates to retain an energy reserve to complete the PCT circuit immediately after the beep test.
- Candidates must then immediately complete two laps of the PCT circuit. This is reduced from the current three laps. The current mannequin is replaced by tank sled which is set at level 1 and is pushed and pulled for 12m per lap. The pass level of the PCT obstacle circuit is set at **3 min 10 seconds (8 minutes 4 seconds in total)**. This is the 95th percentile of the cohort of operational members tested.
- Remove the unjustified age- and gender-related pass thresholds
- Establish a pass threshold that is related to the minimum requirements to undertake the role of member of Garda Síochána (this has been achieved in the review process using incumbents from the front line to establish a new pass threshold)
- Improve the face validity of the assessment by removing press ups and sit ups entirely

The lower beep test threshold, and more generous time threshold to complete the PCT circuits, should see significantly more candidates pass the pre-entry fitness / PCT tests.

The removal of press ups and sit ups removes any potential for a variation in standards of assessment and disputes as to whether the candidate’s arm bent at 90 degrees for each press up. This proposal sets pass thresholds based on the levels of fitness and physical competency of members currently performing front line duties, and is therefore robust and defensible. The attached presentation indicates that there was significant support amongst the front line members, who engaged in the trial, for the proposed new model of assessment.

The recommendations of ██████████ also removes any difference in testing regardless of age and gender. In a previous report written by titled *An Garda Síochána’s Physical Test for Trainee Recruitment –An Overview and Considerations for Development (2019) (Appendix A)* ██████████ describes the pitfalls associated with gender and age differences in fitness testing. It is asserted by ██████████ that males tend to perform better than females and younger adults tend to perform better than older adults in pre-employment physical fitness/ competence tests leading to accusations of direct or indirect discrimination, typically relating to age, gender or disability. It appears that in its current form the current fitness testing, particularly in the shuttle run could be seen to engage in direct discrimination against young males who must meet a significantly higher pass rate of 8.5 versus women in the 50-55-year-old category who are required to meet pass rate of 4.4.

██████████ describes direct discrimination as being when a worker is treated less well than another worker in the same situation or circumstances under any of the nine grounds covered in the Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2015 (lhrec.ie). A fitness test that sets different pass marks for men and women (gender-fair assessment) could constitute direct discrimination against men on the basis of sex (*D V Allcock v Chief Constable, Hampshire Constabulary, 3101524/97*). This issue becomes even more complex when considering pass standards for non-binary or transgender applicants.

Having considered the input of ██████████ Garda College is of the view that the removal of standards based on age and gender allows for a robust method of testing and future proofs the pre entry fitness testing from future legal challenge.

This proposed fitness test would take 8 min 4 sec per candidate, consisting of 4 min 54 sec for the beep test and 3 min 10 sec for the PCA circuit. [REDACTED] recommendation to have the candidates complete the PCA circuit immediately after the beep test means just one candidate can do the beep test at a time as to do otherwise would give some candidates an advantage over others as they would not be able to progress immediately to the PCA circuit. Under this proposed model just seven (7) candidates can be assessed per hour. However as the current system gives the candidates a two hour period between the beep test and the PCA circuit there is unlikely to be any significant impact on the total duration of the assessments. Consideration can be given to establishing a second obstacle course if the number of candidates increases to such a level that this is required.

Attached is also a brief PowerPoint that was used to brief Commissioner Harris on 16<sup>th</sup> December when the PCA was demonstrated and it outlines key points in the development of the PCA.

Forwarded for consideration.

**Kieran Ruane, Superintendent,  
Foundation Training/Bunoiliúna**

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