ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

AMBERHAWK

FAQs
FROM AMBERHAWK TRAINING LIMITED
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1. I am not a masochist so why should chose to sit an examination?

We find that a data protection or FOI officer becomes more confident if they pass the BCS/ISEB examination. This is because they have passed an independent assessment of their competence in the subject and an assessment of their ability to understand the wider issues of associated with FOI or data protection law. Because delegates understand the law, they become sure of their interpretation; this means they become more confident and adept at using the techniques to resolve their data protection/FOI problems. Your employer also reaps the benefit of all your hard work – he has a trusted and qualified DP or FOI officer as a member of staff. In addition, if there is enforcement action against a data controller or a public authority, then having ensured that the officer responsible is qualified will help demonstrate to the Commissioner that the data controller or public authority has "its heart in the right place".

2. Why is the exam date so important?

Our standard and intensive courses are paced to prepare delegates for the DP or FOI qualification. So when booking a course, make sure you that are able to sit the exam on the BCS/ISEB's chosen date. Once you commit to this date, the booking system will choose the dates of the course you need to attend. If something unexpected happens to upset plans, we can usually provide alternative training options at no additional charge.

3. What happens if I miss a course?

Attendance at accredited training is a compulsory requirement of BCS/ISEB for all exam candidates, so you must attend all courses. However, if you miss a course by accident or unfortunate circumstances, we can often provide alternative training options at no charge – for example, attendance at another course.

4. Where can I find full details of the syllabus?

The syllabus can be obtained from the BCS/ISEB web-site (Google "BCS Data Protection syllabus" or "BCS Freedom Information syllabus").

5. Is the exam difficult and will I pass?

We think the BCS/ISEB written exam is difficult – anybody who says otherwise does not know what they are talking about. Just ask anyone who has taken the examination. However, we think you should pass if you can find the time to do the necessary studying. We can give you all the studying tools you need to pass, but it is up to you to find the time to use them. The BCS/ISEB examination is a public examination and most employers provide time which can be used for revision as it is in your employer's interest that your mark is as high as possible.

6. How do Amberhawk's exam pass statistics compare?

We are proud of our statistics which is why we publish all of them (and for completeness, they include our track record at Pinsent Masons). However interpretation of statistics is always a difficult matter because they can be manipulated to give a misleading impression.

So if another provider were to claim a pass rate of 75% you might think that it compares not badly with ours at 87% - **but you'd be wrong**. This is because a supplier who claims a 75% pass rate is actually saying that they have a 25% failure rate (i.e. 1 in 4 of their candidates fail the exam). As our figures show, we have a failure rate averaging close to 13% (1 in 8 fail). **So it follows that we can legitimately claim that we are twice as good**.

Another false comparison could arise if a supplier were to claim to have an average pass mark of 59% when we have 65%. The fact that the marks are only 6 marks apart **masks a 10% gap between the two performances.**

Finally you need to know the absolute number of delegates to understand the value of any percentage pass rate claimed. In our case, we have trained altogether **900 candidates** for the data protection and FOI qualifications so our statistics demonstrate a consistently high standard over a long period.

We think that **all statistical comparators** show you have a much better experience with us.

- **Data protection statistics:** We have trained over **850 delegates** on our Data Protection BCS/ISEB courses. Using our teaching methods, **87.2%** of our delegates have passed this exam with an **average pass mark of 65%**. We estimate that, **on average**, other course providers who do not publish their results have a **failure rate** of around **1 in 3 of delegates**.

  This is why we offer a remedial support course for those who have failed with other course providers. Our estimates are worked out by subtracting our pass statistics from those published by BCS/ISEB, excluding the results of the BCS/ISEB courses run by the Information Commissioner for his own staff which have a 100% pass rate.

- **FOI statistics:** Since October 2006 (when BCS/ISEB changed the pass mark from 60% to 50%), Amberhawk has achieved a pass rate of **95% with an average pass mark of 61.7%**. The combined statistics since the start of the qualification (including the 60% period), show that Amberhawk has achieved a pass rate of 91% with an average pass mark 61.3%.

  Since 2006/7 the figures published on the BCS/ISEB website show that for all training providers for FOI there have been 144 passes and 45 fails. During this period Amberhawk delegates obtained 78 passes and 8 fails. That's a pass rate of over 90%. This means that training providers would do not publish their results are getting a pass rate of 64% (66 passes and 37 fails).

7. How many delegates per course?

Because legislation is complex and often involves the balancing of opposing objectives, high quality interaction with expert course tutors is essential. We try to limit the number of delegates per courses to no more than sixteen.

8. Are course tutors experienced?

Yes. Tutors have decades of experience and have been involved in many consultancy assignments, and have trained data protection, FOI and security specialists from local authorities, businesses, health authorities, police forces, universities, banks and building societies. Your tutors also have a qualification in teacher training. Amberhawk also provides consultancy, helpline and legal services in data protection and FOI. We also contribute to public policy in the area (see the policy documents part of our web-site) and we have given oral and written evidence to Parliamentary Committees. All this experience helps make our courses topical and relevant. If you have any doubt about this just look at the materials on the website or our testimonials or ask someone who has attended our courses. After 10 years of training, there are nearly 1,000 of them.

9. How good is Amberhawk's training?

Your tutors have been accredited by the BCS/ISEB in respect of these courses for several years as employees of Pinsent Masons and now in Amberhawk. Your tutor has also obtained a teacher training qualification. As for training effectiveness, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, so why not look at the FAQ "*How does Amberhawk's exam statistics compare?*".

10. Who will see my exam mark?

Marks are confidential and will not be disclosed without **prior** consent. Amberhawk will know whether candidates have passed or failed and if we are granted permission by candidates to see their marks then we can assess the effectiveness of our courses and provide feedback.

11. What happens if I fail?

Pessimist!! Most of our people pass. However, if the worst happens you can re-sit the examination, but we would want to discuss your result with you before you took that step. We have a good track record with the few delegates who undertake on repeat sittings. Delegates who fail usually find for whatever reason, they have been unable to do the work. See the FAQ *,"What is our expectation of delegates?".*

12. Can we guarantee exam success?

Of course we can't guarantee exam success, but we can offer support if things do not go right first time. We are so confident in our teaching methods at Amberhawk that if you were to fail and decide to have another go, we will provide an opportunity to re-sit at the basic cost of £250+VAT (which just covers the BCS/ISEB exam fee and our overheads in hosting the exam). We offer all other training support services for free **– if there is a next time, Amberhawk will support you through it.**

13. What is our expectation of delegates?

Learners are expected to do 1 hr coursework immediately after each day course; this is to reinforce the day's learning. Delegates will be encouraged to undertake set written assignments and to attend the mock exam in order to refresh their experience of exam conditions. As with all qualifications assessed by written essay-type examination, revision and homework are essential; delegates should allow between 40-60 hours in total.

14. What about the BCS/ISEB exam itself

The BCS/ISEB exam is a closed book exam with only a small multiple choice section (20 marks in data protection; 15 in FOI). The rest of the exam is written format where the candidate is expected to show knowledge of the relevant legislation and its practical effect. The pass mark is 50% but our average pass mark is about 14% higher. There is a distinction at 80% and a few of our candidates have achieved such a mark. We have had several candidates that have had scores over 90%.

15. What is our method of teaching?

Our courses are presented with a mixture of class room style presentation and group working.

16. Who chooses the exam date?

The examination itself and its timing are the responsibility of the BCS/ISEB. Our timetable of courses is designed to fit in with the published BCS/ISEB exam dates, and it is a good idea to sit the exam immediately after your course. Delegates to **Q1** and **V1** can spread attendance of these seven courses over a time period which suits them (e.g. over a number of weeks). Delegates to **Q2** and **V2** can get to the same position by intensive study.

17. Why do we have a Mock exam?

One reason for our success is the combination course **QE** and **VE.** This provides the correct training for the examination by setting a Mock Exam and debrief tutorial which identifies the errors in each candidates exam technique. This is especially important if delegates have not taken a written three-hour examination for some years.

18. What about Educational Special Needs or Disabilities?

The BCS/ISEB have recognized that special procedures are needed for such delegates and extra time is available, subject to medical note. We can provide BCS/ISEB's policy on this matter if we are informed. Additionally, please discuss this matter with the tutor **before** the course so that we can plan changes to the course (if need be) or explore accessibility issues. We undertake to discuss any such problem raised **in confidence**. There might be a modest additional charge (of the order £50) if we have to hire computing equipment for your examination.

19. I am a vegan or have other specialist dietary needs?

Please let us know in advance of the course so we can work something out. We usually provide a vegetarian option in our lunch menus but that might contain nuts. Any such dietary requirements will be discussed *in confidence*.

20. Am I disadvantaged if English is my second language?

Some elements of the courses deal with English law with all that entails (e.g. double negatives; need for precise reading and writing skills). However, the BCS/ISEB have recognized that special procedures are needed for delegates whose first language is not English. Please discuss this matter with the tutor when you get to the course or contact us in advance. We undertake to discuss any linguistic problem *in confidence*.

21. Can I get CPD points?

Attendance at this course will deliver 6 hours non-accredited CPD points provided that those requiring CPD sign a form confirming attendance (this form will be retained by Amberhawk who will then be able to confirm your attendance to the Solicitors Regulation Authority). Such non-accredited training can make up 75% of your annual CPD requirement; your attendance at our courses will be part of that proportion. For a half day course it would be 3 hours CPD. But don't leave early as lawyers too often.

22. What are the differences between the standard & intensive FOI courses?

The 5-day intensive Combination Course **V2** is intended for those who want to focus only on the essential legal requirements or the BCS/ISEB syllabus requirements; **V2** limits itself to this objective. Combination Course **V2** is well suited FOI officers who have not received formal training but have practical experienced gained from being in post for a year or more.

By contrast, the longer course (**F1**) also covers the BCS/ISEB syllabus includes wider aspects that are not part of the BCS/ISEB syllabus and these non-examinable subjects give delegates a far more rounded view of the subject. In particular, the longer Combination Course **F1** contains more time for discussion, for detailed commentary on recent Decision Notices, and for class room exercises that reinforce learning.

23. What are the differences between the standard & intensive DP courses

The 5-day **intensive** DP Course **Q2** is intended for those who want to focus only on the essential legal requirements or the BCS/BCS/ISEB syllabus requirements; **Q2** limits itself to this objective. Combination Course **Q2** is well suited to data protection officers who have not received formal training but have practical experienced gained from being in post.

By contrast, the **standard** course (**Q1**) also covers the BCS/ISEB syllabus includes discussion on wider aspects that are not part of the BCS/ISEB syllabus and these non-examinable subjects give delegates a far more rounded view of the subject. In addition there are tutorials and practice questions timetabled into the course and an opportunity to discuss current data protection issue.

In particular, the longer **standard** course **Q1** contains:

- three, half-day, tutorial sessions to recap difficult concepts, reinforce learning and explore practical data protection problems, relevant case-law (e.g. *Durant v FSA*, *MDU v Johnson*) and Tribunal Decisions (e.g. Monetary Penalty Notice cases, Enforcement Notices)

- opportunities to discuss topical data protection issues in class (e.g. data protection in the context of the surveillance; cloud computing).

- a discussion on the role of the data protection officer in detail, record keeping and how to deal with difficult issues.

- a more detailed discussion of Privacy Impact Assessment, content of contracts, and Privacy by Design

- a wider consideration of security and transfer matters in the context of ISO27000, HMG Security Framework, the Information Assurance Maturity Model (IAMM) or the Local Government Data Handling Guidelines and security procedures in general;

- consideration the changes to Data Protection Act that has arisen as a result of Freedom of Information legislation (e.g. full commentary on category (e) data);

- a wider consideration of the practical use of notification procedures in the context of data protection compliance; and

- a detailed consideration of the 50 year history of data protection so that delegates are aware of their "data protection roots".

24. I want to do the BCS/ISEB in data protection and FOI.

If you are seeking both the Data Protection and Freedom of Information BCS/ISEB qualifications you are strongly advised to do the data protection course first. This is because one day of the FOI course is devoted to the interface with the access regime in data protection.

25. Amberhawk's courses are too expensive?

Well, you pay for what you get. Your tutors are leading experts in the field and have 30 years of experience in DP and FOI – something that can be tried and tested via Google. Also look at the FAQs "**How good is Amberhawk's training?**" and the FAQ "**How does Amberhawk's exam statistics compare?**". We have 4 out of 5 delegates pass the exam with us – our competitors collectively have something like 1 delegate in 3 fail.

26. Can we get Amberhawk's BCS/ISEB courses on-site?

We have a very competitive on-site rate for all our courses, if you can get a group of delegates together from any organisation. Contact us and we shall send you details.

27. Can you help if I failed with another training provider?

"*Yes we can*". [*cheers, Barak*] We recognize that this is a sensitive subject, but Amberhawk is experienced in putting together tailored remedial training to help delegates get it right next time. The cost is between £300 and £500 in addition to the BCS/ISEB's examination fee. *Contact us* for a confidential discussion.

28. I have a complicated booking to do

If you have a complicated booking, use the booking form and post/fax it to us in the usual way. The automated system is designed for the simpler transactions. If in difficulty, always use *Contact us* on the website and we will contact you.

29. Do I have to use the automated booking system?

We are very aware that some individuals have worries about sending personal details over the internet. Given certain press reports these worries are very understandable. If you are more comfortable not using the booking system, print off the booking form and send it to us in the usual way.

30. What other discounts are available?

Amberhawk organises the **Shelagh Gaskill Bursary** in the memory of a much missed colleague. It offers 50% (i.e. up to £1000) saving for delegates from charities, housing associations, hospices and voluntary groups. For details, follow the link from the homepage of the website.

We are also delighted to feature *NADPO* (http://www.nadpo.org.uk/index.php) and the *Data Protection Forum* (http://www.dpforum.org.uk/) as organisations we have long been associated with and which we recommend. Indeed Amberhawk provide speakers for their events and we attend on a regular basis.

The discount is worth **£250** if you book a non-intensive BCS/ISEB course and **£150** if you book an Intensive BCS/ISEB course. The automated booking system will deduct the discount.

If you book one of our on-site courses, there is a discount of **£100** per day off our fees.

If you are not a member, you can still claim the discount if you promise to join either NADPO or the Data Protection Forum within a week of booking the course.

Finally, discounts are also available if you are booking more than one BCS/ISEB course; these obviously vary depending on the course and course venue, so contact us for details.

31. I want to ask a specific question not on in the FAQs

Please don't hesitate to use the *contact us* link on the Amberhawk web-site to enter your specific query.

We have also discovered that our web content is regularly plagiarised. If you find a site content which is similar, remember that the real thing might cost more but it is of better quality than any counterfeit.

32. What do other people who have attended our courses think?

Just click at the **Testimonials** on the Amberhawk web-site homepage. We are confident that you will find someone in your line of business (e.g. financial, central or local government, police, press etc) who has been on our courses.

33. How to use the automated booking system

The automated booking system deals with all straightforward bookings (e.g. any number of delegates attending a chosen course). The system allows an individual to book courses on behalf of such delegates. Payment can be arranged by credit card or we can send you an invoice if you provide an order number or reference number for the order.

If you have a complex booking (e.g. you want to book a two delegates for a DP course and another delegate for an FOI course or courses at different locations), you might find it easier to do separate automated bookings (e.g. one for DP, the other for FOI) or download the booking form from the "relevant brochure" page. You can also download this form if you don't want to use the automated system.

The booking system first asks you where you want to take your course. The options available are "London", "Leeds", Edinburgh", "Manchester" and "Any Location". Then you are asked whether you are seeking the BCS/ISEB qualification (the options are "Yes" or "No"); if you indicate "Yes", you tell the booking system that you want to book the appropriate examination package linked to your chosen course location.

Finally on this page, you are asked whether you want to book:

- The "standard" qualification course (42hrs training as recommended by BCS syllabus)
- The "intensive" qualification course
- A selection of individual full-day DP or FOI courses.

If you are seeking a BCS/ISEB qualification and if there is more than one possible exam date at your chosen location, you will be asked to confirm your preferred an exam date. The exam date, once chosen, dictates the dates of the courses at your chosen location. See the FAQ (**Why is the exam date so important?** on page 3) for more details.

If you have confirmed an exam date you will be presented with a list of course dates and dates associated with the exam. If you opted for a choice of individual course dates, you will be provided with a list of course dates for your chosen location.

The next page requires you to provide the name, invoice address and e-mail address of the person doing the booking; often the person doing the booking is a delegate, but the system does not assume this. If you are booking for yourself (or others) but want to send invoice details to a third person, enter the data pretending that the third person is doing the booking for yourself.

There some discounts for NAPDO and Data Protection Forum Members; these are deducted automatically.

The system asks for the number of ALL the delegates and their email addresses so they can be sent confirmations and later, the joining instructions.

Before your booking is confirmed, the system displays a copy of the data you entered for checking. If you make a mistake, you will need to go commence the booking again.

The system allows you to pay for the courses by credit card (we do not retain credit card details). If you want to pay on invoice we can only confirm the booking if you provide a Purchase Order reference or number.

The automated booking will send **all** delegates and the person doing the booking, an e-mail confirming the *bookings@amberhawk.com*. This is almost immediate. Invoices will be sent to the postal address of the individual making the booking (and usually this individual is also the delegate.