

ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION



FAQs
FROM AMBERHAWK TRAINING LTD
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ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. I am not a masochist so why should I choose to sit an examination?

We find that a data protection or FOI officer becomes more confident if they pass the 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 combination courses are paced to prepare delegates for the qualification. So when booking a course, make sure you that are able to sit the exam on the 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 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 ISEB web-site (<http://www.bcs.org/server.php>).

5. Is the exam difficult and will I pass?

We think the ISEB written exam is difficult – anybody who says otherwise does not know what they are talking about. Just ask anyone who has done 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 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 do not know our competitors' pass statistics but we are proud of our statistics; that is why we publish them. For completeness, they include our track-record at Pinsent Masons.

- **Data protection statistics:** We have trained over **730 delegates** on our Data Protection ISEB courses. Using our teaching methods, **87%** of our delegates have passed this exam with an **average pass mark of 65%**. We estimate that, **on average**, other course providers have a **failure rate of around 1 in 3 of delegates**.

This explains why we offer a remedial support course for those who have failed with other course providers. Our estimates arise by subtracting our pass statistics from those published by the ISEB, excluding the results of the ISEB courses run by the Information Commissioner for his own staff that has a 100% pass rate. (Statistics: updated January 2010).

- **FOI statistics:** Since October 2006 (when 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), shows that Amberhawk has achieved a pass rate of 91% with an average pass mark 61.3%.

Since 2006/7 the ISEB website shows that for FOI there has been 144 passes and 45 fails with this qualification. During this comparable period Amberhawk delegates obtained 78 passes and 8 fails. Subtracting the two, one arrives at the collective performance of other training providers: 66 passes and 37 fails. (Statistics: updated January 2010).

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 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 further 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 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 ISEB exam itself

The 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 ISEB. Our timetable of courses is designed to fit in with the published 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 ISEB have recognized that special procedures are needed for such delegates and extra time is available, subject to medical note. We can provide 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 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. I want to do the ISEB in data protection and FOI.

If you are seeking both the Data Protection and Freedom of Information 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.

23. What are the differences between Combination Courses V1 & V2?

The 5-day intensive Combination Course **V2** is intended for those who want to focus only on the essential legal requirements or the 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 experience gained from being in post for a year or more.

By contrast, the longer course (**F1**) also covers the ISEB syllabus includes wider aspects that are not part of the 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.

24. What are the differences between Combination Courses Q1 & Q2?

The 5-day intensive Combination Course **Q2** is intended for those who want to focus only on the essential legal requirements or the 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 experience gained from being in post for a year or more.

By contrast, the longer course (**Q1**) also covers the ISEB syllabus includes wider aspects that are not part of the ISEB syllabus and these non-examinable subjects give delegates a far more rounded view of the subject. In particular, the longer Combination Course **Q1** contains:

- a discussion on the role of the data protection officer in detail;
- a wider consideration of security and transfer matters in the context of ISO27001 and security procedures in general;
- a comprehensive consideration the changes to Data Protection Act that has arisen as a result of Freedom of Information legislation (e.g. category (e) data);
- a wider consideration of the practical use of notification procedures in the context of data protection compliance;
- a detailed consideration of the 50 year history of data protection so that delegates are aware of their “data protection roots”; and
- 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 topical issues (e.g. data protection in the context of the surveillance society).

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 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. 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.

28. 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.

29. What other discounts are available?

Amberhawk organises the **Shelagh Gaskill Bursary** in the memory of a much missed colleague. It offers 50% saving for delegates from charities, housing associations, hospices and voluntary groups. Follow the link from the homepage of the website.

In addition, discounts are available if you are a member of **The National Association of Data Protection Officers** or “**NADPO**” or the “**Data Protection Forum**”; these are the leading special interest group dealing with FOI and Data Protection. They would not have agreed these arrangements if they thought we were not up to scratch.

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

We have discovered that our web content is regularly plagiarised or lifted by others. 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.

30. 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.