



Crown Commercial Service

Audit Report

July 2024

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Executive Summary

The Civil Service Commission audits organisations to drive greater innovation and improvement in departmental practice, while ensuring the important principle of recruitment on merit, after fair and open competition remains the cornerstone of an effective and impartial Civil Service.

The new audit programme better reflects the differences in scale and the challenge of recruitment within the different departments and organisations that the CSC regulates.

For each audit the Commission requests evidence on 6 Campaigns, with each to include records related to:

- o the job advert;
- o the candidate pack;
- o the sift records (with scores);
- o the interview questions;
- o the interview scores (with feedback);
- o the appointment; and
- o the chair / panel report;

and:

- requests evidence on 6 Exceptions;
- issues a questionnaire related to diversity, innovation and SCS recruitment;
- identifies areas of concern; potential breaches to the Recruitment Principles; and clarifying evidence from the organisation required for the interim audit;
- discusses the above with each organisation at an audit meeting;
- moderates the final report with Civil Service Commissioners to include the department's Link Commissioner;
- issues the Final Audit Report with the audit rating to the organisation; and
- follows up recommendations with the organisation to ensure the actions have been addressed.

Profile

The Crown Commercial Service is an Executive Agency. Its role is to bring together policy, advice and direct buying; providing commercial services to the public sector and saving money for the taxpayer.

- **Headcount:** 695 (March 2024)
- **Appointments:** 21
- **Exceptions:** 4
- **SCS1 and SCS2 Commissioner led competitions:** 3

The Crown Commercial Service's audit was in May 2024.

The Crown Commercial Service Complexity Score is 1. This reflects a standard score for the smallest departments with tight and focused remits / range and public profile. The organisation was content with this score.

The Crown Commercial Service was fully engaged with the audit, providing good evidence throughout the process of information gathering and the audit meeting.

Audit Findings

The audit reviewed six campaigns and five exceptions.

Good Practice

Crown Commercial Service Exceptions were recorded appropriately and selection processes were clear.

Areas for Improvement

The audit identified record-keeping errors including where it was not recorded in interview records when candidates had withdrawn or did not attend the interview.

To ensure a clear understanding of the required skillset by potential candidates, the department should employ more precise, objective language in its desirable criteria. Additionally, the department should ensure sift and interview records clearly document minimum pass marks.

Queries Raised

- Two campaigns referenced specific government knowledge within their desirable criteria, which could be exclusionary towards external candidates.

Crown Commercial Service responded by explaining the required knowledge could be readily acquired through the use of a search engine and this would be sufficient.

Breaches of the Recruitment Principles

No breaches were found during the audit.

Exceptions

The audit reviewed the following five exceptions:

- **Exception 1:** EO work experience, through University of East Anglia, short term and quick turnaround for 11 months.
- **Exception 2:** EO work experience, through University of East Anglia, short term and quick turnaround for 11 months.
- **Exception 3:** G6 temporary appointment for 5 months to cover maternity leave.
- **Exception 4:** EO temporary appointment for 7 months. Urgent need to cover 2 staff members leaving at the same time.
- **Exception 5:** EO temporary appointment for 14 months. Urgent need to cover 2 staff members, one promoted and one on maternity leave.

Exception 1 usage

- **Total (2023/24): 5**

Low use of Exception 1 in line with a department with this complexity score. Several Exception 1 appointments audited evidenced use in line with the intended purpose for Exception 1 (cover roles of short duration such as maternity cover).

Crown Commercial Service has two trackers: one recruitment tracker marked with exception cases and one exception tracker with salary and end dates.

Diversity, Innovation and SCS Recruitment

Diversity

Crown Commercial Service has invested in recruitment marketing material, including a new branded candidate and benefits pack (including accessible versions). Numbers of ethnically diverse candidates have increased from 19% (2022/23) to 27% (2023/24).

The organisation makes use of a range of internships and apprenticeships (for example: Autism Exchange). Additionally, the use of an inclusive language tool removes bias towards protected characteristics.

Crown Commercial Service is a Disability Confident Leader.

Innovation

Crown Commercial Service works with the Department for Work and Pensions to identify ways to promote adverts within local communities where ethnically diverse candidates reside. They have reached out to an external diversity partner to improve hiring practices.

SCS Recruitment (including External by Default)

Crown Commercial Service has recruited three SCS roles through a fair and open process. No External by Default exceptions were recorded. The Senior Recruiter (SCS1) or Resourcing Manager (SCS2+) oversees all recruitment.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Crown Commercial Service has recorded no breaches. It had minimal use of Exception 1; good and extensive evidence of increasing diversity; and some evidence of technology to improve diversity in recruitment. There were no concerns on SCS recruitment.

Management Action Plan

The audit identified one recommendation:

	Recommendations	Priority	Implementation Date
1	Crown Commercial Service should take steps to improve record keeping across all campaigns.		December 2024

The Civil Service Commission will follow up with the organisation to ensure actions have been taken to address the recommendations.

Moderation Meeting

The Moderation Meeting, held on 15 July 2024, noted the department often had to manage conflicts of interest during recruitment, which sometimes led to campaigns being abandoned.

However, the Commissioners recognised that the department had effective recruitment strategies in place, with a strong recruitment process and an interview panel maintaining objectivity and openness.

Audit Rating

The audit rating is determined by compliance (breaches and Exception 1 usage); positive actions (diversity and innovation) and SCS recruitment (including external by default and Commissioner insight). The weighting will also be determined by the department size – for example, larger departments will have more SCS staff than smaller departments who may not have any SCS staff.

	Breaches	Exception 1 Usage	Diversity	Innovation	SCS Recruitment
Scale: 1-5	5	5	4	2	5
Weight (100%)	40%	25%	10%	10%	15%
Sub Score	40	25	8	4	15
Total Score				92	
Rating	Good				

Our Classification Systems

Complexity Score

- 5** **Most Complex** – the largest, most varied or currently most high-profile departments
- 4** **Complex** – a large, varied or a high-profile department
- 3** **Average Complexity** – smaller, more focused departments, with a medium range and public profile
- 2** **Less Complex** – small department, low range and public profile
- 1** **Least Complex** – smallest departments with tight and focused remits / range and public profile

Considerations Informing Audit Rating

- Compliance, Exception Usage, Positive Action, SCS Recruitment; and Other

Audit Ratings

Good	70-100%
Fair	50-69%
Needs Improvement	30-49%
Needs Regulatory Intervention	20-29%

Recommendations

Priority	Definition	Action Required
High	Non-compliance with the Recruitment Principles or the Civil Service Commission.	Remedial action must be taken taken urgently within an agreed timescale.
Medium	Impact on the legal requirement of the Recruitment Principles related to fair, open, and based on merit.	Remedial action should be prioritised within an agreed timetable.
Low	No, or minimal, impact on the legal Requirement of the Recruitment Principles related to fair, open, and based on merit.	Remedial action should be taken at earliest opportunity within an agreed timetable.