



## **FCDO Services**

### Audit Report

April 2025

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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 six 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 six 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 including, where relevant, 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

FCDO Services is a trading fund of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). FCDO provides a range of integrated, secure services worldwide to support diplomacy, development and defence for the UK government.

- **Headcount:** 1,200 (January 2025)
- **Appointments:** 160 (last four quarters)
- **Exceptions:** 12 (last four quarters)
- **SCS1+2 / Commissioner-led competitions:** 5/1 (last four quarters)

The FCDO Services audit was in January 2025.

The FCDO Services Complexity Score is 1. This reflects a standard score for the smallest departments with a focused remit. FCDO Services were content with this score. FCDO Services engaged positively throughout the audit process.

## Audit Findings

The audit reviewed six campaigns and six exceptions.

### Good Practice

FCDO Services provided interview records which clearly noted outcomes for candidates.

FCDO Services stated a familiarity with operating within a secure government environment rather than a specific requirement.

### Areas for Improvement

FCDO Services should clearly explain what hybrid working opportunities are available, as phrasing on this in adverts was sometimes ambiguous.

FCDO Services should ensure that the job advert and candidate pack are consistent and provide the same information.

FCDO Services should clearly state which degrees or professional qualifications will be considered. This could have an impact on the candidate pool as some may be dissuaded from applying.

### Queries Raised

CSC queried one element of desirable criteria, which looked odd and therefore not clear to candidates. FCDO Services noted it was a typing error related to a link to a file path. FCDO Services also confirmed the desirable criteria was not assessed.

## Breaches of the Recruitment Principles

Six Serious breaches were identified in the audit, all related to assessing unadvertised behaviours not outlined in the advert leaving candidates unprepared.

Two Technical breaches were identified in the audit, both related to poor record keeping. One Technical breach related to scoring a presentation that did not happen. One Technical breach related to unclear scoring on interview records.

No breaches were identified outside the audit.

## Exceptions

The audit reviewed the following six exceptions:

- **Exception 1:** AO temporary appointment (Exception 1) for 1 year.
- **Exception 2:** EO temporary appointment (Exception 1) for 22 months.
- **Exception 3:** EO temporary appointment (Exception 1) for 16 months.

- **Exception 4:** EO temporary appointment (Exception 1) for 3 months.
- **Exception 5:** HEO specialist skills (Exception 4). Withdrawn at the offer stage.
- **Exception 6:** HEO specialist skills (Exception 4) for 15 months.

## Exception 1 usage

- **Total (last four quarters):** 12

FCDO made 12 Exception 1 appointments. Four were audited and evidenced as being used in line with its intended purpose.

## Diversity, Innovation and SCS Recruitment

### Diversity

FCDO Services have launched a new Employee Value Proposition (EVP) #Itallmatters that includes attracting diverse talent.

### Innovation

FCDO Services has identified, through horizon scanning, neurodiversity in recruitment practice as a theme to explore.

### SCS Recruitment (including External by Default)

The total number of SCS recruitment within the department conducted via fair and open, based on merit, in the last four quarters was five. Two appointments were made to external candidates.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Six Serious breaches and two Technical breaches inside the audit. No breaches outside the audit.

12 Exception 1 appointments with four audited for their intended purpose.

FCDO Services has launched an Employee Value Proposition, and continues to look at other opportunities, particularly in neurodiversity.

Five SCS recruited through fair and open process, with two external candidates appointed.

## Management Action Plan

The audit identified four recommendations:

	Recommendations	Priority	Implementation Date
1	FCDO Services should ensure candidates are not assessed on behaviours / criteria that were not advertised.		October 2025
2	FCDO Services should take steps to improve record keeping across all campaigns, in particular, ensuring that candidate outcomes are clearly recorded on interview records.		October 2025
3	FCDO Services should take steps to ensure the recruitment processes outlined in job adverts are consistent with the candidate packs to ensure all candidates can find the required information.		October 2025
4	FCDO Services should evidence, in future audits, more comprehensive new or ongoing work to develop diversity and innovation in their recruitment practices.		October 2025

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

## Moderation Meeting

At the Moderation Meeting, held on 12 March 2025, the Commissioners suggested FCDO Services continue to engage with the Commission on border improvements. The Commissioners agreed the recommendations and audit rating.

## 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
<b>Scale: 1-5</b>	1	2	2	2	4
<b>Weight (100%)</b>	40%	25%	10%	10%	15%
<b>Sub Score</b>	8	10	4	4	12
<b>Total Score</b>	38				
<b>Rating</b>	<b>NEED IMPROVEMENT</b>				

## Our Classification Systems

### Complexity Score

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

### Considerations Informing Audit Rating

Compliance, Breaches, Exception 1 Usage, Diversity, Innovation, and SCS Recruitment.

### Audit Ratings

<b>Good</b>	<b>70-100</b>
<b>Fair</b>	<b>50-69</b>
<b>Needs Improvement</b>	<b>30-49</b>
<b>Needs Regulatory Intervention</b>	<b>20-29</b>

### Recommendations

Priority	Definition	Action Required
<b>High</b>	Non-compliance with the Recruitment Principles.	Remedial action must be taken taken urgently within an agreed timescale.
<b>Medium</b>	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.
<b>Low</b>	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.