



Government Commercial Function

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

The Government Commercial Function (GCF) is a cross government network within the wider Civil Service and the Cabinet Office. It employs senior commercial professionals to be deployed to departments and public bodies to lead the most complex and novel commercial / contract management programmes and projects. It ensures that the Government has the right people in commercial positions.

- **Headcount:** 1,688 (October 2024)
- **Appointments:** 196
- **Exceptions:** 3
- **SCS1+2 / Commissioner-led competitions:** 25/5

GCF audit was in October 2024.

GCF Complexity Score is 2. This reflects a small department with a low range and public profile. GCF was content with their complexity score. GCF engaged positively with the audit process.

Audit Findings

The audit reviewed six campaigns and three exceptions.

Good Practice

Candidates were provided with clear information on the qualifications needed for roles, as well as an alternative acceptable option to not holding one, for example a willingness to work towards a qualification.

In several adverts, the selection process was clearly advertised to candidates, including what pass marks would be required to progress and what they mean for the candidate. For example, in one campaign 'A' meant that the candidate would be eligible for permanent appointment, and scoring a 'B' meant they would be eligible for a 22 month fixed term appointment.

Records clearly showed what was being assessed at the interview stage and provided a scoring guide for panel members, as well as a clear process to provide feedback to the candidates.

Areas for Improvement

GCF should ensure that interview records clearly record all candidate outcomes, including non-attendance, withdrawals, and a candidate's outcome following Assessment Centres.

GCF should ensure that advertisements clearly identify which elements will be assessed, such as CVs, and provide sufficient information for candidates at each stage of the selection process. This includes clearly outlining if candidates will be required to deliver a presentation, allowing them sufficient preparation time.

In one campaign, sift records indicated candidates were assessed against a statement of suitability, which was not mentioned in the application process. This was a misleading score on the sift record, which was not used. GCF should ensure that sift records are consistent with the advertised process.

GCF should ensure job adverts and candidate packs are quality checked to avoid ambiguity to candidates.

Queries Raised

- In multiple campaigns, candidates were expected to attend a Virtual Assessment Day Centre. The Commission requested further information on what candidates were expected to do at the assessment centre and whether candidates were aware of this prior to attending. GCF responded that the assessment centre team called the successful candidates before the assessment day, with a brochure sent in advance explaining the process.
- In all audited campaigns, candidate names were visible on sift and interview records. The Commission noted that name blind sifting is common practice in the Civil Service

and queried why the details remained on records. GCF confirmed that name blind campaigns were being trialled.

Breaches of the Recruitment Principles

No breaches were recorded for GCF during or outside of the audit.

Exceptions

The audit reviewed the following three exceptions. These were noted by the GCF as Exception 2, but have been amended to the correct exception usage:

- **Exception 1:** G6 former Civil Servants (Exception 5). This was noted as Exception 2 usage, but corrected in this report in line with the Recruitment Principles.
- **Exception 2:** G7 former Civil Servants (Exception 5) for 17 months. This was noted as Exception 2 usage, but corrected in this report in line with the Recruitment Principles.
- **Exception 3:** SCS2 former Civil Servants (Exception 5) with no end date. Approval was issued by the Commission on 19 July 2024 for the use of this exception. This was noted as Exception 2 usage, but corrected in this report in line with the Recruitment Principles.

Exception 1 usage

- **Total (last four quarters):** 0

GCF uses a spreadsheet to track exceptions, which is regularly reviewed.

Diversity, Innovation and SCS Recruitment

GCF only recruits Grade 7 and above, so apprenticeships and internship programmes are not pursued.

Diversity

GCF has a mandated diversity balance for interview panels. Panels must have a mix of gender plus one of either an ethnic minority member or someone with a disability (this can be non-visual).

GCF is currently running a six-month blind sift trial to see if this affects the application and selection process.

GCF is currently looking to produce a recruitment strategy with diversity and inclusion embedded into it.

Innovation

GCF ran an Employee Value Proposition (EVP) project to outline the benefits and rewards the employer offers to its employees, which helps organisations attract and retain top talent. This included a case study collection for candidates.

SCS Recruitment (including External by Default)

25 SCS were recruited through the fair and open process, based on merit. Seven of these appointments were to external candidates.

Conclusions and Recommendations

GCF recorded no breaches and no use of Exception 1. One of the audited exceptions was recorded as exception 2, but should have been recorded as exception 5. GCF should check with the Commission if unsure.

There was minimal demonstration of diversity and innovative approaches on recruitment attraction.

SCS recruitment was considered good with all roles being run externally.

Management Action Plan

The audit identified two recommendations:

	Recommendations	Priority	Implementation Date
1	GCF should take steps to improve record keeping across all campaigns, in particular, in relation to consistent sift and interview records on scoring and candidate outcomes.	High	October 2025
2	GCF should take steps to ensure that candidates are provided with greater clarity in relation to expectations at application, sift and interview stages.	High	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 5 March 2025, Commissioners acknowledged GCF's context as a function rather than a department, which means that its staff are embedded in different departments. However, GCF has a centralised function for HR and recruitment, and Commissioners agreed that the score was a positive outcome for a function.

It was noted that GCF has more work to do to maximise opportunities to bring in people externally. Commissioners reflected that this was a change from previous recruitment practices which saw a high proportion of external recruitment.

The recommendations and audit rating were agreed.

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	2	2	4
Weight (100%)	40%	25%	10%	10%	15%
Sub Score	40	25	4	4	12
Total Score	85				
Rating	GOOD				

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

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.	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.