



National Crime Agency

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 National Crime Agency (NCA) is a non-ministerial department. NCA is a crime-fighting law enforcement agency responsible for leading the UK's fight to cut serious and organised crime.

- **Headcount:** 6,000 (November 2024)
- **Appointments:** 1,025 (last four quarters)
- **Exceptions:** 70 (last four quarters)
- **SCS1+2 / Commissioner-led competitions:** 8/1 (last four quarters)

NCA's audit was in March 2025.

NCA's Complexity Score is 2. This reflects a small department with a low range and public profile. However, NCA explained they are tackling organised immigration crime, which is a government priority. CSC explained the remit for complexity score 3 to the NCA and took this away for discussion at the audit moderation meeting.

NCA engaged positively throughout the audit process.

Audit Findings

The audit reviewed six campaigns.

Good Practice

NCA clearly outlined how applications would be assessed if high volumes were received.

NCA showed consideration to candidates for those holding the desired professional qualification, and towards candidates who had the equivalent through a degree, or a willingness to work towards the qualification, allowing all to apply.

NCA provided clear guidance to candidates on how desirable criteria would be used in the event of tied candidates.

Areas for Improvement

NCA should ensure job adverts are proofread before being published to avoid ambiguity and to ensure consistency with application packs.

NCA should ensure the ability to acquire security clearance is not a criteria for assessment at application stage.

NCA should clearly outline the assessment criteria for each stage of the application process in their adverts, including at what stage behaviours will be assessed, what will be assessed in presentations, and whether CVs will be assessed.

NCA should ensure that sift and interview records clearly detail what candidates are assessed against, and also note any withdrawals or non-attendance.

Queries Raised

In all six campaigns, CSC requested further information on what candidates were assessed against at sift and interview due to unclear records. NCA provided further information to confirm that the criteria assessed were those outlined in the job advert. CSC noted this, but advised that sift and interview records should clearly outline what criteria candidates are assessed against at each stage of the process.

Breaches of the Recruitment Principles

Two Technical breaches were confirmed during the audit. One Technical breach was for record keeping related to not recording candidate outcomes. One Technical breach was for assessing CVs when this was not mentioned in the advert.

Two Serious breaches were recorded outside of the audit, both for seeking approval from the Commission for exception extensions after the original secondments had ended.

Exceptions

The audit reviewed the following five exceptions:

- **Exception 1:** EO temporary appointment (Exception 1) for 1 year.
- **Exception 2:** G6 temporary appointment (Exception 1) 2 years plus a 1 year extension.
- **Exception 3:** EO highly specialist skills (Exception 4).
- **Exception 5:** HEO temporary appointment (Exception 1) for 2 years.
- **Exception 5:** AO temporary appointment (Exception 1).

Exception 1 usage

- **Total (last four quarters):** 44

NCA made a total of 44 Exception 1 appointments. Five of these exceptions were audited and evidenced Exception 1 was being used in line with its intended purpose.

Diversity, Innovation and SCS Recruitment

Diversity

The NCA People Strategy for 2022-2025 sets out a three year plan to focus on Culture, Leadership, Diversity and Inclusion, Workforce Planning, Officer Capability, Pay and Benefits, and HR Future.

NCA seeks to promote its roles via a diverse range of career fairs and job boards. NCA participates in the Care Leavers Scheme.

Innovation

NCA is researching different websites to attract a diverse range of applicants.

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 eight. Seven of these appointments were made to external candidates.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Two Technical breaches were confirmed in the audit and two Serious breaches were recorded outside of the audit.

44 Exception 1 appointments were made with five audited in line with the intended purpose.

NCS Diversity and innovation was low for the size of the organisation.

Eight SCS recruited through a fair and open process. Seven appointments were made to external candidates.

Management Action Plan

The audit identified five recommendations:

	Recommendations	Priority	Implementation Date
1	NCA should put measures in place to monitor exception appointments more closely to avoid seeking approval for extensions after the exception has expired.	High	October 2025
2	NCA should evidence, in future audits, further new or ongoing work to develop diversity and innovation in their recruitment practices.	Medium	October 2025
3	NCA should take steps to improve the structure and accuracy of job adverts to ensure candidates are provided with greater clarity on application processes.	Medium	October 2025
4	NCA should take steps to ensure that candidates are provided with greater clarity in relation to expectations at application, sift and interview stages, for example at what stage behaviours will be assessed, what will be assessed in presentations, and whether CVs will be assessed.	Medium	October 2025
5	NCA should take steps to improve record keeping across all campaigns, including recording all candidate outcomes.	Medium	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 in March 2025, the Commissioners noted NCA's unique and difficult context and recommended that as a result the organisation continues to engage proactively with the Commission to ensure compliance with the Recruitment Principles. The Commissioners agreed the complexity score should be raised to 3. The Commissioner also agreed to the audit rating (subject to this change) and recommendations.

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	2	3	3	1	4
Weight (100%)	40%	25%	10%	10%	15%
Sub Score	16	15	6	2	12
Total Score	51				
Rating	FAIR				

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.