



# **Serious Fraud Office**

## Audit Report

January 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 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 including, where appropriate, 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 Serious Fraud Office (SFO) is a non-ministerial department. Its role is to investigate and prosecute serious or complex fraud, bribery and corruption.

- **Headcount:** 536 (July 2024)
- **Appointments:** 100 (last four quarters)
- **Exceptions:** 19 (last four quarters)
- **SCS1+2 / Commissioner led competitions:** 3 (last four quarters)

SFO was audited in July 2024.

SFO's Complexity Score is 1. This reflects a standard score for the smallest departments with a focused remit. SFO was content with their complexity score.

SFO was engaged throughout the audit process and audit meeting, and has attended the CSC Recruitment Principles training.

## Audit Findings

The audit reviewed six campaigns.

### Good Practice

SFO clearly detailed the assessment criteria for the sift and interview stages. This gave candidates a good opportunity to prepare in advance.

### Areas for Improvement

SFO should clarify if, and how, CVs will be assessed on advertised roles. Additionally, SFO should clarify how desirable criteria will be assessed.

SFO should mitigate human errors in the adverts by quality assuring the job adverts.

### Queries Raised

- The Commission noted poor record keeping in the interview records.

SFO responded that they would improve their record keeping, particularly around what happens with candidates (non-attendance; progression; after the interview). SFO is currently going through changes in the team, which include appointing Talent Acquisition managers, who will be trained in good record keeping.

### Breaches of the Recruitment Principles

SFO had one Technical breach related to SFO merging behaviours - Seeing the Big Picture with Leadership - into one score. This was recorded as breach because the behaviours were advertised separately and did not follow the advertised process.

SFO did not incur any breaches outside of the audit.

## Exceptions

The audit reviewed the following six exceptions:

- **Exception 1:** AA temporary appointment (Exception 1) for 12 months.
- **Exception 2:** SEO (former Civil Servant) (Exception 5). Permanent role.
- **Exception 3:** G7 temporary appointment (Exception 1) for 12 months. Urgent lawyer role.
- **Exception 4:** HEO temporary appointment (Exception 1) for 12 months.
- **Exception 5:** G7 reinstatement (Exception 5). Permanent role.
- **Exception 6:** G7 Secondment (Exception 3) for 12 months. Financial analysis.

## Exception 1 usage

- **Total (last 4 quarters): 15**

SFO had 15 Exception 1 appointments. SFO explained that Exceptions are recorded on MS Excel spreadsheet monitored by the hiring manager.

## Diversity, Innovation and SCS Recruitment

### Diversity

SFO is implementing a new Enterprise Resource Planning system, which will capture diversity information that will then help them make targeted approaches to recruit people from underrepresented demographics. SFO aims to start capturing more EDI data through the recruitment process.

### Innovation

SFO have started advertising on different platforms such as LinkedIn, Indeed and using recruitment agencies to attract candidates from a wider background.

### SCS Recruitment (including External by Default)

The total number of SCS recruited through the fair and open process, based on merit, was three for the last four quarters. Two appointments were offered to external candidates.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

SFO recorded one Technical breach. There was higher than average use of Exception 1. There was only some demonstration of initiatives to improve diversity and innovation. SFO is looking to implement new systems to capture more data in the near future and advertise on different platforms to attract wider backgrounds. There were no concerns on SCS recruitment.

## Management Action Plan

The audit identified four recommendations:

	Recommendations	Priority	Implementation Date
1	The Serious Fraud Office should ensure behaviours are assessed separately, as advertised, and not merged to form one score.	High	June 2025
2	The Serious Fraud Office should evidence, in future audits, any new or ongoing work to develop innovation in their recruitment practices.	High	June 2025
3	The Serious Fraud Office should take steps to reduce errors in job adverts.	Medium	June 2025

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 29 October 2024, noted the lack of evidence provided on both diversity and innovation, which led to a recommendation to provide further evidence in future audits.

The Commissioners agreed to the three recommendations and the 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>	5	2	1	1	4
<b>Weight (100%)</b>	40%	25%	10%	10%	15%
<b>Sub Score</b>	40	10	2	2	12
<b>Total Score</b>			66		
<b>Rating</b>	<b>Fair</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.