



UK Export Finance

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 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 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

UK Export Finance (UKEF) is a ministerial department. Its role is to advance prosperity by ensuring no viable UK export fails for lack of finance or insurance, doing that sustainably and at no net cost to the taxpayer.

- **Headcount:** 577 (August 2024)
- **Appointments:** 125 (last four quarters)
- **Exceptions:** 7 (last four quarters)
- **SCS1+2 / Commissioner led competitions:** 2 (last four quarters)

The UKEF audit was in August 2024.

The UKEF Complexity Score is 1. This reflects a standard score for the smallest departments with a focused remit. UKEF was content with this score.

UKEF was engaged throughout the audit process and audit meeting, and staff have attended the CSC Recruitment Principles training.

Audit Findings

The audit reviewed six campaigns.

Good Practice

UKEF provided a good level of detail in what would be assessed at the sift and interview stages individually, which helps candidates prepare. UKEF are currently reviewing and updating their candidate packs to make sure they are more in line with the Recruitment Principles. This is reflective of their overall proactive approach to fair and open recruitment. For each campaign, UKEF includes an End of Campaign Review Form to collate all the key information of the end to end recruitment process.

Areas for Improvement

The use of the reserve list was not advertised in any of the published material on one of the campaigns. UKEF asked whether this should be in the job advert or the candidate pack and CSC confirmed that it is better placed in the job advert.

Across some campaigns there was no reference to the essential criteria in the job advert. In these cases, the criteria were listed in the job pack, but this was not made clear in the advert.

One campaign advertised the behaviour Communicating and Influencing, however it was not assessed. UKEF should only include behaviours that will be assessed to avoid altering the candidate pool.

Queries Raised

- The Commission noted that throughout the campaigns the term 'technical ability' was used to refer to a candidate's holistic aptitude for a role. CSC explained to UKEF that this was misleading as 'technical ability' ordinarily refers to a specialised skill.

UKEF explained that they were looking for a term to distinguish such aptitude from the Civil Service Success Profiles 'ability.' UKEF will consider and contact CSC if further clarification is needed.

- The Commission referred to paragraph 4 of the Recruitment Principle FAQs which outlines that the rationale for the use of desirable criteria must be stated.

UKEF responded that they are updating their candidate packs and would seek further CSC guidance.

- CSC noted that a presentation was advertised, but did not take place.

UKEF confirmed that they sent communications to all candidates prior to the interview that such a presentation would not take place.

Breaches of the Recruitment Principles

There were five Technical breaches recorded in the audit. UKEF did not record any breaches outside of the audit.

Two Technical breaches related to record keeping on final campaign reports, which were incomplete and marked none of the candidates as being progressed.

Two Technical breaches were incurred by UKEF advertising behaviours, but not assessing them. UKEF explained that this is part of their standard practice if UKEF does not have the resources to carry out assessment of all advertised behaviours. CSC confirmed that such practice is not compliant and that all advertised criteria must be assessed.

One Technical breach related to record keeping on the sift sheet being incomplete, which meant CSC could not identify if candidates progressed to the interview stage. UKEF confirmed this was an administrative error.

Exceptions

The audit reviewed the following six exceptions:

- **Exception 1:** EO temporary appointment (Exception 1) for 6 months.
- **Exception 2:** EO temporary appointment (Exception 1) for 6 months.
- **Exception 3:** G6 temporary appointment (Exception 1) for 12 months.
- **Exception 4:** G6 temporary appointment (Exception 1) for 12 months.
- **Exception 5:** G6 temporary appointment (Exception 1) for 12 months.
- **Exception 6:** SEO fixed term appointment (Exception 1) for 2 years.

Exception 1 usage

- **Total (last 4 quarters):** 6

UKEF made six Exception 1 appointments. These were audited and evidenced as being used in line with its intended purpose.

UKEF does not have a permanent headcount for paralegals and so, in some cases, use Exception 1 to ensure that they have an adequate number of paralegals supporting the organisation. UKEF uses Exception 1 for Legal Advisers because it is a difficult role to fill.

UKEF explained that they have a recruitment tracker used by the whole team. It is an automated system that notifies the team when an exception appointment is coming to an end. This is then checked to see if there is still a business need for the appointment. HR notifies the Line Manager that the Exception can be extended to a maximum of 24 months. UKEF will seek CSC approval if they need to extend beyond this, but this is rare.

Diversity, Innovation and SCS Recruitment

Diversity

UKEF is engaged with: Women in Finance Charter; the Disability Confident Scheme; Mental Health at Work; and the Race at Work Charter.

UKEF has rebranded their candidate pack and made it fully accessible with more engaging content and detail in relation to diversity.

Innovation

UKEF is designing an Employee Value Proposition to better attract candidates. UKEF expanded from a team into a department and is proactively upscaling its recruitment processes in line with other government departments.

UKEF has engaged with Vercida, which is a platform to help UKEF diversify the reach of their vacancies.

SCS Recruitment (including External by Default)

For 2023/24, with the exception of one campaign, 22 SCS recruitment campaigns were advertised externally. Ministerial approval was obtained for the one vacancy that was advertised across government. Two appointments were offered to external candidates.

Conclusions and Recommendations

UKEF had a high number of breaches relating to poor recording keeping and not assessing behaviours advertised. There was low use of Exception 1 and justification/rationale provided for all. There was moderate demonstration to improve diversity but minimal evidence of innovation. Good SCS recruitment, only one advertised across Government and Ministerial approval obtained beforehand.

Management Action Plan

The audit identified two recommendations:

	Recommendations	Priority	Implementation Date
1	UKEF should take steps to improve structure and accuracy on job adverts to ensure candidates are provided with greater clarity on the application processes.	High	June 2025
2	UKEF should take steps to ensure all behaviours are assessed as advertised.	High	June 2025

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

Moderation Meeting

The Moderation Meeting, held on 29 October 2024, noted the five breaches were low severity, largely as these were administrative errors.

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	1	4	3	2	4
Weight (100%)	40%	25%	10%	10%	15%
Sub Score	8	20	6	4	12
Total Score			50		
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.