National Crime Agency
Remuneration Review Body

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Twelfth Report 2026

Chair: Zoë Billingham CBE

CP 1630

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by the Secretary of State for the Home Department
by Command of His Majesty

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NCA Remuneration Review Body

The National Crime Agency Remuneration Review Body is an independent body which advises the Government on the pay and allowances of National Crime Agency (NCA) officers designated with operational powers.

Terms of reference[1]

In considering its recommendations in relation to NCA officers designated with operational powers the Review Body must have regard to the following considerations:

- the operational crime-fighting role of NCA officers;
- the prohibition on NCA officers with operational powers taking strike action;
- the need to recruit, retain and motivate suitably able and qualified officers;
- the funds available to the NCA, as set out in the Government's departmental expenditure limits;
- the Government's wider public sector pay policy and the Government's policies for improving public services;
- the Government's inflation target;
- relevant legal obligations on the NCA in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, including the Equality Act 2010.

The Review Body is also required to consider other specific issues as directed by the Home Secretary, and will be required to take account of the economic and other evidence submitted by the Government, professional representatives and others.

Reports and recommendations of the Review Body should be submitted to the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister, and they should be published.

Members[2] of the Review Body

Zoë Billingham CBE (Chair)
Andrew Bliss QPM
Dr Rebecca Driver
Frances Hill
Pamela Kelly QPM
Jacqui Siggers
Stephen White

The secretariat is provided by the Office for the Pay Review Bodies.

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[1] The terms of reference were set by the Home Office following consultation with the parties on the National Crime Agency (Remuneration Review Body) Regulations 2013, Statutory Instruments 2013 No 1958.
[2] Members of the Review Body are appointed through an open competition adhering to the Governance Code on Public Appointments. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/governance-code-for-public-appointments/governance-code-on-public-appointments-html [Accessed on 22 May 2026]

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List of abbreviations

AWE	Average Weekly Earnings
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CPI	Consumer Prices Index
CPIH	Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers’ housing costs
CTP	Counter-Terrorism Policing
DDaT	Digital, Data and Technology
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FYE	Financial Year Ending
IDR	Incomes Data Research
ILO	International Liaison Officer
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LRD	Labour Research Department
MPS	Metropolitan Police Service
NCA	National Crime Agency
NCARRB	National Crime Agency Remuneration Review Body
NCOA	National Crime Officers Association
NHS	National Health Service
NITA	Northern Ireland Transitional Allowance
NPS	National Police Service
OBR	Office for Budget Responsibility
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PAYE	Pay As You Earn
PCS	Public and Commercial Services Union
PRRB	Police Remuneration Review Body
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
ROCU	Regional Organised Crime Unit
RRA	Recruitment and Retention Allowance
RTI	Real Time Information
SOC	Serious and Organised Crime
SR	Spot Rate
UK	United Kingdom

Foreword

This is our 12th Report to the Home Secretary on National Crime Agency ('NCA' or 'Agency') pay. The Security Minister's remit letter of 27 October 2025 asked us to make a formal recommendation on the remuneration of NCA officers designated with operational powers. It also asked us to consider the implications for the whole workforce.

Since our last report, the Government has published its White Paper on Police Reform, which sets out an ambitious programme aimed at modernising law enforcement in England and Wales and improving outcomes for the public. In our last report, we expressed our hope that the Government would consider whether a different organisational form for the NCA would better enable it to act flexibly and establish a single, unified pay structure. We therefore welcome, in principle, the proposal in the White Paper that the NCA should become part of a new National Police Service (NPS), probably early in the next Parliament.

For the NCA, 2026 represents an exceptional year. The coming transfer will mean a profound change in the strategic context for the Agency. This coincides with acute operational pressures. The 2025 National Strategic Assessment confirms that harms linked to child sexual abuse, drugs, illicit finance and organised immigration crime have increased, while technological change is enabling offenders to operate and scale their activity in ever more sophisticated ways. At the same time, the threat is diversifying, with growing overlap between online criminality, exploitation of vulnerable people and serious violence, and an increasingly prominent international dimension. These pressures are heightened by the current geopolitical context, driving additional operational demand.

The delivery of the reforms in the White Paper is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape how policing recruits, trains, structures and develops its workforce, including rank structures, progression pathways and entry routes. The NCA needs to be at the heart of plans to develop a workforce strategy for policing if the NPS is to draw together the best of policing and the NCA to create a single, coherent national capability. However, the transition also creates material risks. The absence of clarity on future workforce status, career pathways and terms and conditions is already contributing to anxiety among officers and staff, raising the risk of both 'flight' and 'blight' at a critical point in the reform timetable.

In this context, we consider it essential that the NCA takes forward its plans, as a matter of urgency, for a comprehensive job evaluation exercise in conjunction with the policing partners that are shaping the future workforce strategy for the police service. Without this, it will be difficult to map roles appropriately to police officer or staff equivalents and provide NCA officers with confidence about their future status and career pathways. We therefore also advise that the Government and the Agency should set out, at pace, a coherent retention and communication plan for the transition period, including clarity on the intended workforce model, the approach to transfer, and the treatment of pay and pensions.

Regardless of this uncertainty, the direction of travel is now clear: the NCA will become part of the police service. We agree with the evidence from the Home Office that the increasing pay gap with policing risks undermining efforts to attract and retain officers with critical operational expertise needed to sustain the Agency's operational capacity. This is even more the case given the context of policing and the NCA coming together into the NPS. In our view, work to close the gap between NCA and police remuneration must begin now.

Over the last ten years, we have pressed for action on pay reform because of the immediate challenges the Agency is facing, and these remain. The NCA continues to struggle to recruit officers in both operational and specialist roles, driven in part by the widening gap between NCA pay and that of key comparators, including policing and the private sector. These pressures are particularly acute in technical and specialist functions, where market rates significantly exceed NCA salaries, and in core investigative teams, where it is difficult to recruit mid-career police officers and vacancy levels and churn are impacting resilience.

To these issues must be added the impact on officers themselves. Many remain stranded on the grade minimum for years and are leapfrogged by new entrants from other labour markets. The Agency itself highlights the implications for equality. At our request, given that they are not yet agreed with central government, no details of the NCA's pay reform proposals were included in the evidence submitted to us. This means we remain unable to comment on the substantive proposals or take these into account in framing our recommendations this year. We continue to judge that in the absence of central government approval and before the start of formal consultation and collective bargaining with the recognised unions, it is inappropriate for us to comment on, or appear to pre-empt, detailed design choices within the Agency's proposed pay and contract reform package. However, we point out that the NCA has been discussing various versions of the current pay and contract reform business case for the last three years. We consider both the failure of the NCA to plan and the failure of central government to reach a definite decision in this time to be wholly unacceptable.

Urgent progress on the NCA's pay and contract reform case is essential to stabilise the workforce in the near term before the transition to the NPS, to support recruitment and retention, and to prepare the ground for convergence with policing pay and reward arrangements. Against this transition backdrop, and with progress on the pay and contract reform business case remaining uncertain, we also consider timely action to start to narrow the pay gap with the police to be a critical further stabilising measure.

In considering a pay award for NCA officers in 2026/27, we have therefore given significant weight to the proposed transfer of the NCA to the NPS, and the risks associated with the transition that we set out above.

Since parties submitted their written evidence, there have again been a number of largely unexpected geopolitical events, which have led to a new period of heightened economic uncertainty. As we complete our 2026 Report, the most recent outturns for inflation in April showed the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rate of inflation at 2.8% and CPIH (including owner occupiers' housing costs) at 3.0%. In its most recent Monetary Policy Report, published in April 2026, the Bank of England assessed the likely inflation risks from recent events and considered three potential scenarios, which showed that inflation was expected to range between 3.6% and 6.0% in the fourth quarter of 2026, depending on the length of the current crisis and the extent to which energy price rises fed through to other prices, such as in retail and hospitality, and to pay bargaining. This contrasts with the expectation in the Bank's February 2026 Monetary Policy Report, which forecast that inflation in the fourth quarter of 2026 would be 2.0%, as well as evidence submitted by HM Treasury to the Pay Review Bodies in December 2025, which set out the Office for Budget Responsibility's forecast for inflation of 2.2% in the financial year ending 2027. NCA officers also continue to experience the cumulative effects on their living costs of the period of high inflation over the last five years. We remain mindful of the continued heightened uncertainty in the economic outlook and note the likely impact on inflation of the planned increase to the energy price cap in July. We note that, as we submit our report in late May, the conflict in the Middle East continues and that even if a ceasefire were to be agreed there is likely to be a continued inflationary effect on the economy. We observe that, in its evidence, HM Treasury advised us to take full account of the latest data and forecasts.

In reaching a pay recommendation for 2026/27, we also considered wider developments in pay. The latest median pay settlements, which HM Treasury described as the most comparable data with Pay Review Body decisions, ranged between 3.0% and 3.8% as we finalised our recommendations. We note the civil service pay remit guidance for 2026/27 which states that departments are able to make average pay awards up to 3.5%. We are aware of the 2026/27 pay awards recently announced by the Government over the last few months for other parts of the public sector. These included: 3.3% for NHS Agenda for Change staff; 3.5% for prison officers and doctors; and 3.75% for dentists in primary care.

While the NCA's overall attrition rate is currently comparable with many public- and private- sector organisations, we highlight two major concerns. The NCA continues to face challenges in recruiting and retaining both experienced mid-career police officers with critical operational expertise and specialists with niche technical skills that are highly sought by both the public and private sectors. We highlight the significant churn in some of these teams as scarce resources are moved to meet Government priorities. We have also been particularly concerned by the significant vacancies, levels of churn and morale issues observed during visits to the NCA. These pressures are already having implications for the wellbeing of staff and their families and operational effectiveness and, in our view, are placing disproportionate strain on the NCA compared with other parts of the law-enforcement system that are not facing transition on this scale.

Our remit letter asked us to consider the pay differential between NCA officers and police officers, and we give weight to the evidence from the Home Office that the increasing pay gap with policing risks undermining efforts to attract and retain officers with critical operational expertise. Our recommended awards in 2024/25 and 2025/26, which Government accepted, were slightly higher than those received by police officers. However, NCA pay continues to lose pace in monetary terms with that of police officers due to the latter's higher salaries. We judge that more significant action is required to halt the increasing monetary gap and begin the process to reduce it.

Finally, we remain conscious of the prohibition on powered officers taking strike action. It remains our strong view that the NCA, the Home Office, and ourselves as the Remuneration Review Body have a moral obligation to deliver a fair, just and equitable pay award. We observe that at least one public sector group, for which the Government has announced a pay award of 3.5%, is already taking industrial action partly in response to that award. We have therefore attached importance to the inability of powered officers to take equivalent action in considering our approach this year.

We balanced all these factors with affordability. We note any pay award will have to be met from within the Agency's budget. The NCA has budgeted for a 2.5% pay award, and we acknowledge the likely impact of a higher percentage uplift. However, the Home Office has told us that there is scope for further efficiencies within the Agency. We were also struck by the Home Office evidence that the growing median pay gap between the NCA and police officers risks undermining efforts to attract and retain officers with critical operational experience. However, we observe that it must be clear to all government parties that it will be impossible to even begin to tackle the pay gap if only 2.5% has been made available for an uplift to pay. Moreover, the Agency's current spend on contingent labour does not deliver value for money. Enabling the Agency to permanently recruit and retain its own staff would be a better approach. Finally, the pay rises for other parts of the public sector that have recently been announced have been significantly above 2.5%. We observe that affordability is about choice and that, across central government budgets as a whole, there will be some flexibility as to how any award is funded.

We conclude that, given all the factors we have set out, 2026 represents an exceptional year for the National Crime Agency. While wider economic and labour market conditions form an important part of our deliberations, added to this are the continuing delays and uncertainties surrounding the NCA's pay and contract reform business case, which, if approved, we understand should begin to tackle some immediate pressures, boost morale, and allow real progress to be made in narrowing the gap between NCA and police pay. The NCA is facing a unique convergence of structural reform, heightened operational demand (partly as a result of shifts in the geopolitical landscape) and workforce uncertainty, alongside the urgent need to start to address the pay gap with policing. We judge these factors to be materially relevant to this year's pay decision and to have significant and immediate implications for recruitment, retention, officer wellbeing, motivation, and morale.

Therefore, after taking the above factors into account, combined with the prohibition on powered officers taking strike action, and balancing them against affordability, we recommend that an annual pay award of 4.7% across all grades in 2026/27 is a suitable approach. This is 0.8 percentage points higher than the award that the Police Remuneration Review Body has recommended for police officers. We judge that this will help to address some of the issues we set out above and, while not sufficient to narrow the gap in monetary terms between NCA and police median salaries at all grades, will at least limit the extent to which the gap further increases in advance of the implementation of pay and contract reform. In particular, the award will reduce the monetary gaps at NCA Grades 4 and 5, which are critical operational grades. This should help to stabilise recruitment and retention. However, this is still only a beginning, and using the annual pay award to attempt to address the issue of the pay gap between NCA officers and the police over the long term is not sustainable. Real progress needs to be made on pay reform and on planning the transition to the NPS.

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Andrew Bliss
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Frances Hill
Pamela Kelly
Jacqui Siggers
Stephen White

29 May 2026

NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY REMUNERATION REVIEW BODY

12th Report 2026

Executive Summary

Our 2026/27 recommendations (from 1 August 2026):

1. **A consolidated pay award of 4.7% for all NCA officers within our remit group. The spot rates for Grades 1 to 5 and the minima and maxima of the standard pay ranges for Grades 1 to 6 should be raised by 4.7%.**
2. **An increase of 4.7%, in line with the pay award, to the London Weighting Allowance and South East Allowance for all NCA officers within our remit group.**
3. **The NCA undertakes a review of the purpose, design and uprating mechanisms of the London Weighting Allowance and South East Allowance. In parallel, the NCA should work with policing partners and trade unions to consider the long-term future of these allowances in the light of the wider reforms set out in the Police Reform White Paper and the NCA's transition to the National Police Service.**
4. **An increase of 4.7%, in line with the pay award, to the International Liaison Officer Allowance and Diplomatic Compensation Allowance for officers in our remit group.**

1. In addition our formal recommendations, there are various other areas where we advise that further work should be undertaken and on which we seek an update in future pay rounds. We highlight these issues in bold throughout the report, and they are listed at the end of this Executive Summary.

2. We received the Security Minister's remit letter on 27 October 2025 asking us to commence the 2026/27 pay round and to make recommendations on the remuneration of National Crime Agency ('NCA' or 'the Agency') officers designated with operational powers. As in previous years, the remit letter also asked us to consider the implications of our recommendations for the wider NCA workforce, with due regard to civil service pay and affordability considerations. Again, the remit letter asked us to consider the pay gap differential between NCA officers and police officers.

3. We are writing this year's report against the backdrop of significant reform across policing and national law enforcement. Since our last report, the Government has published the Police Reform White Paper, which commits to the establishment of a new National Police Service (NPS) and to the eventual transfer of the NCA into that

organisation as part of a unified national operational response. For the NCA, this creates an exceptional context. The Agency is simultaneously required to sustain delivery against a complex and evolving serious and organised crime (SOC) threat, while preparing for a fundamental transition in its organisational status and workforce model. We set out our early views on the implications of this development for pay and reward, and we highlight the importance of ensuring that reforms within the NCA are aligned with the wider programme of police reform.

4. The NCA and the Home Office again described the SOC threat to the UK's national security, economic prosperity, and the safety of its people. The Agency highlighted the findings of the 2025 National Strategic Assessment, pointing to continued increases in child sexual abuse, drugs, and illicit finance; the reversal of previous decreases in fraud and organised immigration crime; and the increasing diversification of the threat, including growing overlap with online radicalisation, serious violence, and extremism. Both parties emphasised the role of technological change in enabling offenders to scale their activity, and the consequent requirement for the NCA to maintain specialist capability and operational agility.

5. The NCA is also central to the Government's priority of tackling organised immigration crime, including tackling human trafficking and people-smuggling gangs facilitating small-boat crossings. Given the Agency's international reach and its network of International Liaison Officers, we are conscious that to these priorities have been added the additional pressures and demands arising from further unexpected shifts in the geopolitical landscape.

6. In Chapter 2, we focus on two connected strands of reform. First, we consider the implications of the Police Reform White Paper for the NCA, including the commitment that the Agency will transfer into the NPS on a phased basis following the passage of primary legislation. Secondly, we consider the NCA's progress in taking forward pay reform within the Agency, and how that reform may support the transition to a new policing landscape. Taken together, these strands reflect the challenge of 'converge and merge' as the NCA moves towards becoming part of the police service. We note the Government's intention, in advance of formal transfer, to strengthen joint working across national threat areas and to lay the foundations for a more integrated workforce model.

7. As part of our evidence gathering, we again undertook a programme of visits to the NCA. In November 2025, we carried out in-person visits in the North West and South East of England, where we met powered and non-powered officers undertaking a wide range of operational and enabling roles. As in previous years, these visits provided valuable insight into officers' lived experience of pay, reward and workforce pressures. We were struck by officers' continued commitment to the Agency's mission, but also by persistent concerns about the impact of the NCA's two-tier pay structure, the absence of pay progression, differences with police pay

arrangements, and the effects of sustained vacancies and churn on morale and workload.

8. We again highlight the continuing operational risks associated with recruitment and retention pressures, particularly in specialist and technical roles. The evidence this year points to continued reliance on overtime, and on contingent labour and professional services, to sustain delivery. The Home Office emphasised that market rates for some digital, data and technology roles can materially exceed NCA pay, especially at senior levels, contributing to recruitment and retention challenges and a reliance on contingent labour that it regards as costly and unsustainable in the longer term. We also note concerns, reflected both in oral evidence and during our visits programme, about the implications of vacancies, turnover and workload pressures for officer wellbeing and motivation. We are concerned that, in the absence of greater clarity and timely action, the Agency faces both 'flight' risks, as experienced staff choose to leave, and 'blight' risks, as potential recruits are deterred from joining, with consequences for capability.

9. We continue to observe that the NCA's structural pay issues compound these workforce pressures. The evidence again points to an enduring pay gap with policing across grades, alongside a two-tier system and limited progression, which can result in experienced officers remaining on grade minima while some new recruits join higher up the pay ranges. We remain concerned about the implications for morale, retention and equality, and the risks this poses to the Agency's operational effectiveness over time. In an exceptional year, these longstanding issues carry heightened operational risk.

10. On pay reform, we note that the NCA has developed a pay and contract reform business case, which it expects could take effect from 2026/27, subject to central government approval. The case has been revised to reflect the implications of the Police Reform White Paper, and progress remains uncertain. This uncertainty reinforces the importance of decisions taken in the current pay round as a stabilising measure ahead of transition. However, as in our last report, in the continued absence of central government agreement, we requested that no details of the proposals be included in the evidence submitted to us for this pay round. We therefore remain unable to comment on the substantive proposals or endorse them. We do, however, reiterate our view that any reform must be sufficiently ambitious and aligned to the future workforce model implied by the creation of the NPS.

11. Finally, we observe that the publication of the Police Reform White Paper, and the proposed transfer of the NCA into the NPS, has introduced a further layer of uncertainty for the workforce. Evidence from the Agency, the trade unions and our visits programme points to unease about future status, terms and conditions, pension arrangements and career pathways. We judge that greater clarity on these issues – alongside timely decisions on pay reform – would help to reduce avoidable anxiety, support recruitment and retention in the period ahead, and maintain the

NCA's operational effectiveness as it prepares for a significant period of transition. In this context, we recommend that the NCA undertakes, as a matter of urgency, a comprehensive job evaluation exercise, in conjunction with policing partners shaping the future workforce strategy for the police service. We also advise that the Government and the Agency should set out, at pace, a coherent retention and communication plan for the transition period, including clarity on the intended workforce model, the approach to transfer, and the treatment of pay and pensions.

12. In Chapter 3, we summarise the issues we took into account in making our recommendation for a basic pay award for NCA officers in 2026/27, and for changes to NCA allowances. In doing so we emphasise that 2026 represents an exceptional year for the National Crime Agency and that we have given weight to the implications of the NCA's transfer into the NPS early in the next Parliament

13. We focus first on the performance of the economy. We note that inflation is expected to rise during the year and that NCA officers continue to experience the cumulative effects on their living costs of the period of high inflation over the last five years. We point out that there continues to be heightened uncertainty about the economic climate, particularly given the recent geopolitical events. We also note trends in median pay settlements, the latest figures for which ranged from 3.0% to 3.8% as we finalised our recommendations. Finally, we highlight the pay awards recently announced by the Government for other parts of the public sector from April 2026. These included: 3.3% for NHS Agenda for Change staff: 3.5% for prison officers and doctors; and 3.75% for dentists in primary care. We also point out that the Pay Review Body reports on which these were based were submitted to Government either shortly before or shortly after the current conflict in the Middle East began and well before the Bank of England issued its latest Monetary Policy Report in late April outlining three possible scenarios for the future path of inflation this year.

14. We acknowledge the diversity of the markets from which the NCA recruits and that not all NCA officers are powered officers. We note the civil service pay remit guidance for 2026/27 which states that departments are able to make average pay awards up to 3.5%. However, we give particular weight this year to the proposed transfer of the NCA to the NPS, the need to begin closing the gap with police pay, and the risks to capability arising from vacancy levels, churn and morale. We highlight that, in due course, it will be a transformative change for the Agency. We acknowledge that it will take time for the Agency and the police service to work through the details, but we point out that the direction of travel is clear: the NCA will become part of the police service. We explain that this confirms the conclusion of our previous reports that the police should be seen as the key comparator for the Agency. We therefore give weight to these factors, and to the NCA's statement that one of the main aims of its pay and contract reform is to reduce the gap between police pay and NCA pay, in formulating our pay award this year.

15. While the NCA's overall attrition rate is currently comparable with many public and private sector organisations, we highlight two major concerns. The first is the immediate challenges the NCA continues to face in recruiting and retaining officers with certain specific skills. These include both the critical operational expertise that experienced mid-career police officers can bring to the Agency, and the niche technical skills which are highly sought by both the public and private sector. Both skill sets are key to the Agency's operational capacity. Given the NCA's importance in tackling SOC and to the delivery of the government priorities, action addressing these issues cannot be delayed until the Agency is transferred to the NPS. Our second concern is the likely impact on recruitment and retention of the transition to the NPS. We observe that the uncertainty around the new pay and conditions will inevitably lead to some churn in the organisation at least in the short term at a time when the government is committed to strengthening joint working across law enforcement in advance of the creation of the NPS. We note that it will be some years before the transfer takes place, and emphasise that it is important that officers continue to feel valued during this transition as details are worked through. We warn that this transition creates both 'converge and merge' challenges, as the NCA prepares to join the police service, and 'flight and blight' risks, whereby experienced officers may leave the Agency or potential recruits may choose not to join because of uncertainty. We therefore give weight to the evidence from the Home Office that said that the increasing pay gap with policing risked undermining efforts to attract and retain officers with critical operational expertise needed to sustain the Agency's operational capacity.

16. Finally, we remain conscious of the prohibition on powered officers taking strike action. We note that this presents particular challenges when an organisation is facing a period of transformative change. We reiterate our strong view that the NCA, the Home Office, and we, as the Remuneration Review Body, have a moral obligation to deliver a fair, just, and equitable pay award. We have therefore attached importance to the inability of powered officers to take equivalent action in considering our approach this year.

17. We explain that we balanced all these factors with affordability, and we draw attention to the differing evidence we have received on this issue. We note the increases in the NCA's budget described to us by the Home Office, which it described as the largest funding package the Agency has received since it was established. We note that the NCA has told us that it has budgeted for a 2.5% pay award effective from 1 August 2026. We acknowledge the pressures on the Agency's budget described to us by the Home Office and the NCA, and the Home Office's assertion that any pay award agreed by the NCA would have to be met from within the Agency's budget. We also recognise the Home Office's position that any increase above the planned level of 2.5% would require the NCA to introduce further cost-reduction measures or risk impacting operational delivery. However, we draw attention to the Home Office evidence that the persistent and growing median pay

gap between the NCA and police officers risked undermining efforts to attract and retain officers with critical operational experience. We therefore point out that it must be clear to all government parties that it will be impossible to even begin to tackle the pay gap if only 2.5% has been made available in the Agency's budget for an uplift to pay. We also draw attention to NCA expenditure on contingent labour and professional services. We set out our view that this volume of spend on contingent labour does not appear to deliver value for money, and that enabling the Agency to permanently recruit and retain its own staff would, in most cases, be a better approach. Finally, we draw attention to the fact that the UK Government has recently announced pay rises for other parts of the public sector which were significantly above levels within its affordability evidence of around 2.5%. We conclude that affordability is about choice and that, across central government budgets as a whole, there will be some flexibility as to how any award is funded.

18. After taking the above factors into account, including the economic situation (notably increased uncertainty in the inflation outlook, upward pressure on energy, transport and food prices, and the likelihood that inflation will remain above earlier expectations), recent public sector pay settlements, our analysis of recruitment and retention, affordability, the prohibition on powered officers taking strike action, the increasing gap in monetary terms between NCA and police pay, and motivation and morale, we conclude that an annual pay award in 2026/27 of 4.7% across all grades is a suitable approach.

19. We point out that this is significantly higher than the award the Police Remuneration Review Body (PRRB) has recommended for police officers. We explain that in our view 2026 represents an exceptional year for the National Crime Agency. We highlight that the organisation is facing a unique convergence of structural reform, heightened operational demand (partly as a result of shifts in the geopolitical landscape), and workforce uncertainty. We explain that we consider these to be materially relevant to this year's pay decision and that they have significant and immediate implications for recruitment, retention, officer wellbeing, motivation, and morale. We also draw attention to the Home Office evidence that the growing median pay gap between the NCA and police officers risks undermining efforts to attract and retain officers with critical operational experience. We also point out that, in addition, decisions have still not been taken regarding the NCA's pay and contract reform business case, which, if approved, should begin to tackle some immediate pressures, boost morale, and allow real progress to be made on narrowing the gap between NCA and police pay.

20. We explain that the pay award, which is 0.8 percentage points higher than that which the PRRB has recommended for police officers in England and Wales, will help to address some of these issues. While this higher award in itself is not sufficient to narrow the gap in monetary terms between NCA and police median salaries at all grades, it will at least limit the extent to which it further increases in

advance of the implementation of pay and contract reform, and will reduce the gaps at NCA Grades 4 and 5, which are critical operational grades. However, we acknowledge that this is still only a beginning, and using the annual pay award to attempt to address this issue is not sustainable. We emphasise that real progress needs to be made on pay reform and on planning the transition to the NPS.

21. We recommend that the International Liaison Officer Allowance, Diplomatic Compensation Allowance, London Weighting Allowance, and the South East Allowance all be uprated in line with basic pay. However, we also recommend that the NCA undertakes a review of the purpose, design, and uprating mechanisms of the London Weighting Allowance and the South East Allowance. We also propose that the NCA should work with policing partners and the trade unions to consider the long-term future of these allowances in the light of the wider reforms set out in the Police Reform White Paper, and the NCA's transition to the NPS.

22. Finally, we propose that the NCA works with the National Crime Officers Association (NCOA) and the other trade unions to redesign the NCA allowances within the framework of the work to take forward the pay and contract reform business case. We emphasise that this should include measures to strengthen the ability of the NCA to attract and retain specialists in niche technical roles. We observe that it will be important to ensure that any work on allowances supports, and is consistent with, work to facilitate the eventual establishment of the NPS and the need to 'converge and merge' a number of organisations.

Proposals for further work

23. In addition to our formal recommendations, we have identified a number of areas for further work in this report:

- **We reiterate that urgent progress on the NCA's pay and contract reform case is essential to deal with some of the immediate issues with the existing pay framework, to stabilise the workforce in the near term before the transition to the NPS, to support recruitment and retention, and to prepare the ground for convergence with policing pay and reward arrangements. We expect the Home Office and NCA to provide us with a substantive update in advance of the next pay round. (Paragraph 2.76)**
- **We strongly advise that the NCA takes forward, as a matter of urgency, its plans for a comprehensive job evaluation exercise in conjunction with the trade unions and also policing partners who are shaping the future workforce strategy for the police service. Without this, it will be difficult to map roles appropriately to police officer or staff equivalents and provide NCA officers with confidence about their future status and career pathways. (Paragraph 2.80)**
- **We advise that the Government and the Agency should set out, at pace, a coherent retention and communication plan for the transition period,**

including clarity on the intended workforce model, the approach to transfer and the treatment of pay and pensions. (Paragraph 2.84)

- **We observe that the proposed transfer of the organisation to the NPS has implications for the Agency's 'One NCA' policy, including in the period leading up to the transition. We advise the Agency to reflect on this carefully in preparation for the next pay round. (Paragraph 3.46)**
- **In our 2025 Report, we said that the NCA needed to communicate clearly to all NCA officers in Northern Ireland: the outcome of its review of allowances for NCA officers in the country; its rationale for not extending the environmental allowance to all officers in Northern Ireland; and the rationale for not aligning the environmental allowance with the NITA. We would like an update from the NCA on this in the next pay round. (Paragraph 3.78)**
- **We expect the NCA to work with the NCOA and the other trade unions to redesign the NCA allowances ideally within the framework of the work to take forward the pay and contract reform business case. That should include measures to strengthen the ability of the NCA to attract and retain specialists in niche technical roles. We observe that it will be important to ensure that any work on allowances supports, and is consistent with, work to facilitate the eventual establishment of the NPS and the need to 'converge and merge' a number of organisations. (Paragraph 3.94)**

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 The National Crime Agency Remuneration Review Body (NCARRB) is an independent advisory body which operates within the regulations of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 and in accordance with the Framework Document for the National Crime Agency. We provide advice to the Home Secretary on remuneration and various matters relating to officers designated with operational powers ('the remit group') working within the National Crime Agency ('the NCA' or 'the Agency'). This is our 12th Report on the remuneration of officers within our remit group. In previous years, our pay recommendations have also been applied to non-powered NCA officers.

Our 2025 Report

1.2 Our 11th Report was submitted to the Home Secretary on 6 June 2025 (Appendix A).

Our recommendations on pay and allowances

1.3 Our 2025/26 recommendations (from 1 August 2025):

- A consolidated pay award of 4.4% for all NCA officers within our remit group. The spot rates for Grades 1 to 5 and the minima and maxima of the standard pay ranges for Grades 1 to 6 to be raised by 4.4%.
- An increase of 4.4% to the London Weighting Allowance and South East Allowance for all NCA officers within our remit group.
- The allowances of International Liaison Officers in the NCA to be reviewed.

The Government's response

1.4 On 22 July 2025, the Home Secretary announced the Government's decision on pay for the NCA in 2025/26 and published our report. The Home Secretary accepted our recommendations in full.

Our remit for 2026/27

1.5 We start work each year on the basis of the remit letter received from the Home Office. We received the Security Minister's remit letter on 27 October 2025 (Appendix B) asking us to commence the 2026/27 pay round and provide independent advice on the remuneration of NCA officers with operational powers.

1.6 The Security Minister told us that, as the NCA advanced its 'One NCA' policy, it was crucial that all staff, both those with and without operational powers, were treated equitably in matters of pay. He therefore asked us to take this into consideration when providing recommendations on the proposed NCA pay award, while giving due regard to civil service pay and relevant guidance.

1.7 In considering our recommendations for 2026/27, we were asked to have regard to the following:

- The NCA's productivity, efficiency improvements and the affordability of any proposals within the Agency's existing budget constraints, noting the particularly challenging fiscal environment.
- The pay gap differential between NCA and police officers.
- Pay in the civil service, aligning recommendations with the average pay across civil service departments.

Our approach to the 2026/27 pay round

1.8 We have reached our recommendations and made observations this year following our close examination of several different sources of evidence, including:

- the context provided by the remit letter and our visits to the NCA;
- the written and oral evidence submissions that we received from all the parties; and
- our analysis of the economy, labour market, earnings and pay settlements.

Parties giving evidence

1.9 Our deliberations are supported by the submission of written and oral evidence from the parties. We received written evidence from the parties listed below. This is available through the links in Appendix C.

- HM Treasury;
- the Home Office;
- the NCA;
- the National Crime Officers Association (NCOA);
- the Public and Commercial Service Union (PCS); and
- the FDA.

1.10 We held a series of oral evidence sessions with the parties in March and May 2026. These were attended by Home Office officials, the NCA and representatives from the NCOA, PCS and FDA.

1.11 We are grateful to all those who provided written evidence and attended oral evidence.

Visits to the NCA

1.12 In November 2025, we conducted two in-person visits: one in the North West and one in the South East of England. Powered and non-powered officers carrying out a wide variety of NCA functions took part in our visits and we are grateful to all those who took part.

1.13 We regard these visits as a vital part of our evidence-gathering process as they help to enhance our understanding of the NCA's role, officers' pay priorities and the challenges they face, and factors influencing recruitment, retention and motivation. Key points from our visits included:

- There was little awareness among officers of the 2025/26 pay award, but it was largely welcomed by those who were aware.
- Many officers were focused on other aspects of pay, such as the range of problems that arose from the NCA's two-tier pay structure (standard pay ranges and spot rates) and the differences between NCA and police pay arrangements (chiefly pay progression).
- Workforce morale levels had been affected by key changes to the NCA's core priorities and mission. Furthermore, while understaffing was a serious problem in many teams, the number of senior managers had grown.
- NCA officers hoped that the NCA's pay and contract reform proposals would resolve the ongoing pay structure problems but were aware that the proposals might not be approved by the Government.
- Officers demonstrated real enthusiasm and commitment to the work in spite of all the issues.

Environment for our considerations

1.14 On 24 June 2025, the Government published a new National Security Strategy. In addition, on 26 January 2026, it published a Police Reform White Paper. Both of these have significant implications for the NCA and are being developed in the context of wider geopolitical changes and global uncertainties.

1.15 The work of NCA officers is important, difficult, complex and sometimes dangerous. We would like to acknowledge our remit group for their invaluable work in protecting the nation. We would also like to express our gratitude to all the parties for engaging with us this year and for the high quality of their input.

Chapter 2 – Reform

Introduction

2.1 In Chapter 1, we set out the guidance we had received in the remit letter from the Security Minister. In this chapter we consider the implications of the Police Reform White Paper for the NCA and the NCA’s plans for pay reform.

The two strands of reform

2.2 In our previous reports, we have focused on the NCA’s plans to reform its pay structures. As part of that, we raised the question as to whether a new organisational form for the NCA was required to enable it to maximise its operational potential. In parallel in our Police Remuneration Review Body reports we have pressed the police service to consider a programme for pay and workforce modernisation at the heart of which would be a workforce strategy for the police service. A commitment to the development of such a strategy is central to the recently published White Paper on Police Reform.

2.3 In this chapter, we therefore focus on two aspects of reform. The implications of the proposals in the Police Reform White Paper for the NCA and in particular the commitment that it will transfer to a new National Police Service (NPS). We set out our early thoughts on the implications of this for pay and reward. We also set out our views, as far as we are able given we have no detailed knowledge of the NCA's proposals, on the NCA's progress to deliver pay reform within the Agency and how this will fit with the wider police reform agenda. We begin by setting out the current operational context for reform and the 2026/27 pay round.

Operational context

2.4 The NCA and the Home Office described the nature of the serious and organised crime (SOC) threat to the UK’s national security, its economic prosperity and the safety of its people. The NCA explained that the effects were felt across the whole population, either directly in the form of violence, fear and other harms (including financial loss and psychological harm), or indirectly in the form of associated criminality, increased strain on public services and the undermining of legitimate businesses.

2.5 The NCA highlighted the National Strategic Assessment published in March 2025. It told us that child sexual abuse, drugs, and illicit finance had increased and that previous decreases in fraud and organised immigration crime had been reversed. It said cybercrime growth had slowed due to major law enforcement activity, but risks remained high. It concluded that the criminal exploitation of vulnerable people was rising. It added that one of the most striking themes emerging this year was how the threat was diversifying between and beyond these threats, with a growing overlap with online radicalisation to serious violence and extremism. It added that certain technological trends were allowing offenders to scale their offending more readily.

2.6 The Agency told us that it had set a target in 2021 to increase its ‘high-impact’ disruptions by 50% by 2025. It reported it had exceeded that target and that disruptions had increased by 72%. It also emphasised that the Agency was central to the Government’s priority to tackle people-smuggling gangs running small boats.

2.7 In oral evidence, the NCA told us that the Agency had achieved its best performing year yet. It said that its main effort was on organised immigration crime, in line with the Government’s strategic priorities, but it was very active in other areas too. It explained that organised immigration crime was particularly challenging to address because it concerned crimes committed overseas where the NCA did not have powers of arrest, and that the work took a long time. The NCA reported that while the level of disruptions was greater than the previous year, there had been a lessening of the highest-impact work.

2.8 The Home Office said that, as the UK’s operational leader in tackling SOC, the NCA continued to develop its use of advanced technology and investigative techniques to keep pace with modern threats. It explained that it delivered governmental priorities through initiatives such as its work with the new Border Security Command, while leveraging its niche capabilities and highly trained workforce to tackle the most serious organised crime groups and networks. The Home Office told us that the NCA’s intelligence-led approach and international reach underscored its critical role in safeguarding the UK from SOC.

2.9 The Home Office said that operational skills were a key element for roles and that officers should be able to move between commands. It said that the increasing pay gap with policing risked undermining efforts to attract and retain officers with critical operational expertise needed to sustain the Agency’s operational capacity. The Home Office observed that while overall turnover had remained broadly stable at around 7% this apparent stability masked persistent challenges in recruitment and retention, particularly in specialist and technical roles. It said that with regard to specialist skills, market rates for digital, data and technology (DDaT) roles could exceed the Agency’s pay by up to £15,000, especially at senior levels, making it challenging to attract and retain the skilled professionals required to counter increasingly sophisticated criminality. It said this had resulted in the NCA’s continued reliance on contingent labour, which the Home Office observed was costly and unsustainable in the long term.

2.10 The NCA said that its workforce requirements were complex and included significant demand for a wide range of skillsets and specialisms, with candidates needed from a variety of labour markets. It explained that since 2022, 25% of its recruits had come from policing, 24% from the private sector and 28% from the civil service. It highlighted that a number of niche skillsets were required for technical and specialist roles which were primarily available in the private sector. It explained that it experienced difficulties in recruiting from the private sector and police because its salaries did not compare favourably with those offered by the private sector, regulators, policing or the intelligence agencies. It described in detail the disparity between the NCA's pay and that of the police and it outlined the challenges it faced in competing with the civil service. The NCA also highlighted that its offer to social workers was much lower than Local Government which had led to the need to use contingent labour to fill vacancies in child protection teams.

2.11 The Agency described the civil service pension arrangements as a helpful benefit, but it explained that the salary differences were still a barrier in competing for staff in organisations where either the pension arrangements were similar, or with the private sector where the difference in salary outweighed any advantages. The Agency reported that it continued to experience significant turnover within both specialist roles and those that provided enabling functions. It explained that in some instances, Recruitment and Retention Allowances (RRAs) were used to target roles which were hard to recruit to or had associated retention risks. However, it told us that, even with that additional remuneration the turnover in some areas remained unsustainable. The NCA highlighted the financial and operational implications of high turnover. It said that the impact of the turnover rate on delivery was currently being masked by the productivity gains created through the use of overtime and all types of contingent labour and professional services. Overtime accounted for 5% of the Agency's pay bill, while contingent labour and professional services accounted for 17%.

The National Strategic Assessment 2025 of Serious and Organised Crime

2.12 The 2025 National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime provided an annual assessment of the SOC threat in the UK, focusing on changes during 2024. The assessment concluded that the SOC threat to the UK increased in 2024, albeit at a slower rate than previously. We set out the details of the assessment in our 2025 Report. .

The Police Reform White Paper

From local to national: a new model for policing[3]

2.13 The Police Reform White Paper outlined plans for the establishment of a NPS. One of its roles will be to create a national operational response. The new organisation will eventually incorporate counter-terrorism policing (CTP), the NCA and Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCUs) for a unified national response. The NPS will be led

[3] Home Office (January 2026), *From local to national: a new model for policing*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/from-local-to-national-a-new-model-for-policing [Accessed 22 May 2026]

by a National Police Commissioner and the Home Secretary will hold the NPS to account and will be able to issue directions.

2.14 The White Paper proposed a phased approach to the establishment of the NPS enabling it to mature before significant operational assets were moved under its control probably early in the next Parliament. In advance of the NCA, CTP and ROCUs coming into the NPS, the Government planned to undertake a programme to strengthen joint working across organised crime fighting and counter-terrorism.

2.15 The White Paper outlined the benefits of the move of organisations such as the NCA and CTP into the NPS as:

- providing policing with greater agility to keep pace with overlapping and everchanging threats;
- enabling the greater sharing of people across the threat picture;
- building data and intelligence capabilities in a single organisational home; and
- managing more coherently the growing international dimension of these crime types as happens in other countries and enabling the UK to improve its ability to act globally to reduce crime locally.

2.16 With regards to the NCA joining the NPS, the White Paper committed to agreeing an approach that sustained a number of the Agency's strengths:

- its ability to lead the operational system, including its legal powers to task police forces, its role in analysing and presenting the national intelligence picture on SOC;
- its legal gateway to receive data and information from Section 7 of the Crime and Courts Act;
- its experience of working with the private sector to prevent crime and pursue criminals, its provision of an intercept capability and an international network that serve all of policing;
- a workforce model that brings together talent from all sectors of society; and
- an ability to work right across the UK.

2.17 The White Paper observed that the move of the NCA into the NPS would provide the opportunity to apply these strengths, where appropriate, to other crime types.

2.18 The NPS will include Regional Crime Hubs. These will contain capabilities from the existing ROCUs. The White Paper said that, in the end state, the NPS' Regional Crime Hubs would be on the same boundaries as the new merged forces and the two would be interoperable and often co-located. The White Paper anticipated that the locally-facing capabilities that currently sit within the ROCUs would sit with the merged police forces, but stated that there would be close cooperation between the forces and the NPS in tackling SOC.

2.19 In the White Paper, the Government committed to reviewing the workforce model of the NPS to ensure it built on the best of policing and the NCA, and was fit for the challenges of the future. It said that the organisation should “from day one recognise the accreditations and experience of all officers and specialist staff who form the new service, allow for the designation of the full range of powers, and provide career pathways that promote movement across roles and a ‘one workforce’ culture”.

View from parties on the implications of the Police Reform White Paper

2.20 In oral evidence, the Home Office told us that there was a plan to introduce a Police Reform Bill in summer or early autumn 2026 to bring the NCA within the functional police service. It said that Royal Assent was not expected until 2027. The Home Office noted that the transition could create significant opportunities, but that there were immediate uncertainties for the NCA. It confirmed that the NPS would be designated as a police force, and observed that the move would clarify one aspect of NCA pay arrangements: NCA staff would become part of a police force.

2.21 The Home Office said it recognised the importance of providing staff with a sense of certainty during the change. It explained that it was discussing with the NCA how much of its culture, core identity and branding should be preserved on the move to the NPS. It noted that deciding how current NCA officers, particularly specialists, would be designated in future would be challenging, and that discussions were under way on whether officers would transfer to the NPS as police staff or under an alternative employment model. The Home Office said it would do everything it could to support the NCA through the transition. It also emphasised the importance of wellbeing, and of sustaining the goodwill and commitment of NCA staff during the period of change. It therefore considered it important for the Home Secretary and Security Minister to communicate directly and positively with staff, and to support the NCA Director General throughout the transition.

2.22 The NCA told us that it continued to work with the Home Office, CTP and the National Police Chiefs’ Council to ensure that its future reforms were consistent with plans for police reform.

2.23 In oral evidence, the NCA said that the NPS would be a police organisation, like a police force and led by a police officer. However, it explained that thinking on the transition of the NCA to the NPS was evolving, including on the future workforce model. The NCA and the police side had emphasised that the NPS would be a new, big organisation and that it would be good to take the opportunity to design a different workforce model. The NCA reported that a number of options were being considered. It observed that this was not straightforward given the current mixture of skills and powers in the NCA. The NCA pointed out that the final decision on the status of the workforce was ultimately for the government to make but the Home

Office expectation was that it would have officers and staff as found in a traditional police organisation. The NCA highlighted that the ‘One NCA’ culture, in which the breadth of necessary skills had been embraced, had been developed to ensure that all skills within the organisation were valued. The NCA said that it was keen to see fulfilment of the vision, set out in the White Paper, for an NPS that took the best of both the NCA and police.

2.24 The NCA reported that it would need to conduct a job evaluation exercise as it prepared to move to the NPS. It observed that there were 96 possible different police staff comparator pay points that did not map over neatly. It explained that all NCA roles would be evaluated using the Korn Ferry framework which was also used in the police service. It pointed out that while powered officers were aligned to policing and could be mapped across to the police service, getting the data on police staff roles was the first challenge. It added that one major difference between the NCA and the police service was that the Agency did not have an inspector rank equivalent. It said that Grade 4 was the equivalent of sergeant and Grade 3 was equivalent to chief inspector. It said that apart from the length of the working week, NCA terms and conditions were broadly in line with the police service.

2.25 The NCA reported that there was great variation across the workforce in how officers were feeling about the Police Reform White Paper and the move to the NPS. It said that overall, officers were unsettled. It noted that some of those who had chosen to leave the police service in the past were concerned. The NCA explained that those officers with non-powered roles that were aligned more to the civil service would be considering whether to become part of the new organisation, or not. It added that there was uncertainty about the future status of the workforce after transfer and the terms and conditions. It explained that the NCA leadership did not know and it was not the NCA’s decision. The Agency also reported that there was uncertainty and unease around what would happen to officers’ current civil service pension arrangements on transfer to the NPS.

2.26 The NCA observed that some officers regretted that an amazing organisation that had built its performance, credibility and brand would not exist in future. Others, including the NCA leadership, saw it as a natural evolution from the NCA tackling crime successfully to a new organisation with great opportunities to be even more effective.

2.27 The NCA said that the trade unions had been engaged throughout the development of the Police Reform White Paper, as far as the leading parties had been able to do this.. The Agency reported that before the Police Reform White Paper announcement, the NCA had met the trade unions to explain to them how the media was going to be briefed. The NCA explained that the its leadership met the trade unions monthly and police reform was a standing item.

2.28 The NCA noted that its plan to recruit 1,000 officers in the financial year ending (FYE) 2027 might be affected by the move to the NPS. It observed that some potential applicants would reflect carefully whether to join the NCA because of the risks associated with the transition to a police-type organisation and the uncertainty over future pay arrangements.

2.29 The NCOA observed that the implications of the move to the NPS were not fully understood. It reported that the announcement was creating anxiety among its members. It told us that it was calling for the NCA to engage early with the unions on changes to terms and conditions. The NCOA told us that it was asking for bold decisions on pay now to create a level playing field with the police.

2.30 It observed that delaying pay reform for five years (or more) before bridging the pay gap with police in a single move would result in a more significant financial impact for the Government, be unfair to officers and stand as yet another example of “kicking the can down the road”.

2.31 In oral evidence, the NCOA set out the factors behind the “avoidable anxiety” being experienced by its members due to the uncertainties created by the Police Reform White Paper and in particular the proposed transfer of the NCA to the NPS. The NCOA explained that the first step might be for the Home Office to issue a statement confirming that the transfer would be based on the Cabinet Office standard guidance which was based on Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) legislation. It said that it was possible that the first ‘version’ of the NPS could be in place by 2027. The NCOA reported that steps were being taken to secure recognition for the trade unions post 2027.

2.32 The NCOA observed that for the last 20 years, Agency staff had been struggling with NCA pay and conditions. They now wanted to know what the move to the NPS would mean and their position within it. The NCOA warned that the absence of clarity and firm information meant there was a lot of misinformation in the Agency among staff. The NCOA observed that in general, most people expected that the transfer to the NPS would mean that they would become police officers but in reality most of them would probably become police staff. It said that a key next step was for the Agency to do a job evaluation exercise.

2.33 The NCOA reported a spike in membership since the publication of the White Paper. This reflected current levels of uncertainty within the Agency. The NCOA pointed out that, among the organisations that would be transferring into the NPS, the NCA faced a unique challenge because of its mix of law enforcement officers and civil servants. It added that the situation the NCA faced was further complicated by the fact that it had officers in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

2.34 It observed that there was a risk that a number of those civil servants did not want to become either police officers or police staff. It also explained that those NCA officers that had originally been police officers were concerned about the implications of the move to the NPS for their pension. The NCOA observed that some NCA officers recognised that the move to the NPS could offer some significant opportunities, but this would not be clear until there was clarity on terms and conditions.

2.35 The NCOA argued that current levels of uncertainty within the NCA would only be reduced if there was clarity on the method of transfer to the NPS, the status of NCA officers within that new organisation and an agreement on terms and conditions. The NCOA noted that the actual transfer of the NCA to the NPS was not due to take place until at least 2030. However, it said that early clarity on the issues that the NCOA had highlighted was vital not just because of levels of uncertainty but because it affected the choices that officers were making now in terms of career moves within the Agency. The NCOA said that the Agency had been as candid as it could be with the NCOA in the run up to the publication of the White Paper.

2.36 The NCOA said that it was unclear whether there would be significant attrition during the transition. It observed that NCA officers that were currently in enabling commands were probably most concerned. It pointed out that applicants looking to join the Agency would definitely want to know what their future career might look like in the NPS before joining the NCA.

2.37 The FDA highlighted that the Police Reform White Paper stated that the transition of the NCA into the NPS would only take place when the NPS was “mature and ready”. The FDA’s told us that its assessment was that the NCA would not be ‘ready’ until it had a competitive pay structure in place.

2.38 In oral evidence, the FDA said that the creation of the NPS would present the NCA with a dual challenge. It explained that not only was there an urgent need to resolve the ongoing pay issues, but also a significant risk of loss of talent. The FDA said that the prospect of change meant the NCA might now struggle to recruit staff with police powers, or retain those in enabling services. The FDA noted the NCA planned to recruit 1,000 officers but it was unclear at what grades or into which functions. It said that the Agency was desperately in need of lower grade officers in intelligence and investigations.

2.39 The FDA observed that, given the degree of uncertainty around the transfer, some officers might decide to act quickly and transfer back into the civil service. It told us that NCA officers would decide individually whether it would be best for their career to stay in the civil service or to become part of the new police force. It observed that the retention of officers at Grades 1 and 2 would be a particular challenge for the NCA. The FDA also told us that there was also concern that the ‘special’ culture and values of the NCA would be replaced by certain behaviours that were not entirely in line with them.

2.40 In oral evidence, the PCS said that the publication of the Police Reform White Paper had created significant uncertainty among officers and it was not clear what was going to happen. It told us that there was also significant uncertainty about trade union representation in the new organisation. It explained that the terms and conditions for the NPS were unknown. The PCS stressed that the job evaluation exercise that we had previously recommended needed to be undertaken. It highlighted that there were also concerns about where the NPS would be geographically located. The PCS explained that there were lessons to be learned by the NCA from other organisations, such as the Department for Work and Pensions, about the creation of a new organisation through a series of mergers.

2.41 The PCS told us that the levels of uncertainty around the transfer were making recruitment harder as it would be unclear to new officers what terms and conditions they were really signing up to when they joined. It noted that there was also anxiety about officers' continuity of service if they joined the NPS. The PCS explained that it wanted civil servants in the Agency to be able to move back to the civil service if they wanted to transfer out of the NPS.

Our observations on pay reform last year

2.42 In our 2024 Report, we welcomed the NCA's submission of a business case to central government for pay reform but observed that it was long overdue. At the time we submitted our 2025 Report, the business case for pay and contract reform was still with central government. In the absence of central government agreement to the NCA's pay and contract reform business case we had requested that no details of the proposals be included in the evidence submitted to us. Therefore, we were unable to comment on the substantive proposals. We judged that, in the absence of central government approval and before the start of formal consultation and collective bargaining with the recognised unions, it would be inappropriate for us to comment on, or appear to pre-empt, detailed design choices within the Agency's proposed pay and contract reform package. However, we observed that it was vital that these proposals were in lock step with the NCA's workforce strategy which we understood was being refreshed.

2.43 We advised that in considering the NCA's current proposals for pay reform, the Government would want to satisfy itself that the solutions proposed were both comprehensive and sufficiently ambitious to enable the Agency to recruit and retain the staff it needed to deliver the Government's priorities on SOC. We noted that the Government had announced its plans for a Police Reform White Paper and that one of the focuses for that work was considering national capabilities needed by UK law enforcement. We said that we hoped that, in thinking about those national capabilities, the Government would consider whether a different organisational form for the NCA would better enable it to act flexibly to set common terms and conditions and to establish a single unified pay structure in order to recruit staff with the skills it required.

2.44 Finally, we again emphasised the need for urgent action on NCA pay reform. We observed that the ongoing delay was inevitably reflected in the continuing cost to the Government and Agency of the NCA's expenditure on contingent labour. We also noted that, to date, the NCA had taken the view that it would be better not to share its reform proposals with staff and the trade unions in advance of securing the agreement of central government. However, we judged that this lack of communication risked heightening staff concerns about the proposed changes and thereby further damaging morale.

2.45 Since we submitted our last report, the publication of the Police Reform White Paper and the Government's commitment to establish a NPS represent a significant change in the strategic context for the NCA. We also understand that the Agency's pay and contract reform case remains under consideration. A key issue for the Government, and for the Agency's workforce, is how these two strands will be reconciled: delivering near-term pay and contract reform to stabilise recruitment and retention and reduce reliance on contingent labour, while also preparing the ground for eventual transfer to, and alignment with, the NPS workforce model.

Pay reform

2.46 The NCA observed that our reports in recent years had highlighted the need for the Agency to submit a case for multi-year transformational reform in order to address the workforce and pay issues. The NCA said it was keen to address the following challenges:

- problems with recruitment and retention in hard-to-fill roles;
- tensions in industrial relations and low employee motivation and engagement;
- legal risks associated with equal pay claims (estimated to be over £338 million risk);
- lack of workforce agility and movement between roles; and
- a misalignment with the pay of policing and the UK Intelligence Community.

2.47 The NCA said that it had developed a pay flexibility case which could take effect from 2026/27. However, it explained this would be adjusted in light of the Policing White Paper. It hoped that it would be considered by HM Treasury in the coming months. It explained that if the proposals were approved by central government, the intention was to implement the reforms via collective agreement. This was because the changes and savings would be reliant on contractual reform. Reform to terms and conditions such as overtime, on-call payments or hours worked would need to be agreed via a negotiated outcome. The NCA explained that it would need to secure a majority agreement to the reforms via collective bargaining.

2.48 In oral evidence, the NCA reported that HM Treasury had asked the NCA to consider pay and contract reform in a police reform context. The NCA observed that the announcement of the decision to transfer the NCA to the NPS meant that the implications for the rest of the civil service arising from different pay arrangements for the NCA no longer applied. The NCA said that it hoped the case would now be approved but the decision process was moving slowly and there was no clarity on when a decision would be made.

2.49 The NCA pointed out that if approved, the pay and contract reform proposals would start to narrow the gap with police pay. It observed that the creation of the NPS was expected to take three to four years. The NCA said that the NPS would be set up in two phases, with the NCA, CTP and ROCUs being the focus of the second phase which was expected in 2030. The NCA pointed out that its pay and contract reform was also a four-year programme that could move quickly and become established to take the NCA well on its way to parity with police pay. It explained that the employment framework and contracts could then be more aligned to the NPS.

2.50 The Home Office told us that pay reform was a crucial part of the delivery of the NCA's strategy. It explained that the Agency considered that its proposals would be cost neutral, and as a targeted pay award it was expected to strengthen retention in specialist and operational roles, reducing staff turnover and the need for contingent labour. The Home Office said that the reform would be implemented as a contractual reform via collective agreement.

2.51 In oral evidence, the Home Office stated that it was committed to resolving the case as fast as possible. It said it strongly supported any cost-neutral initiative that enabled the NCA to improve its pay arrangements and narrow the pay gap with policing. It described the pay flexibility case as an important mechanism both to support convergence with the NPS and to reduce the NCA's reliance on consultancy and contingent labour. It said the case was cost neutral but required further testing with HM Treasury and Cabinet Ministers before the NCA could proceed, as part of the Agency's 'merge and converge' agenda. It added that approval was critical to managing the 'flight risk' of good staff during transition and that discussions with HM Treasury were ongoing.

2.52 The NCOA highlighted the slow pace of reform and the "Groundhog Day" discussions taking place between HM Treasury and the NCA. It cast doubt on whether the new pay mechanism would in any case be sufficiently attractive to its members to secure sufficient support for it to be introduced, especially given the uncertainty created by the proposed move to the NPS. It described the ongoing problems created by the existing pay system. The NCOA emphasised the role that it could play in building confidence in potential reform through engagement with the Agency regarding the proposals.

2.53 The NCOA told us that it was keen to ensure that action on pay reform was not delayed by the proposed transfer of the NCA to the NPS. It therefore proposed that the NCA, in consultation with the NCOA, redesigned its job architecture and evaluated all NCA roles in order to consider which grades and posts were comparable with police staff and police officers.

2.54 It said that in advance of that redesign and evaluation, the NCOA would like action on spot rates. It described what it categorised as recent uncoordinated and disjointed changes in spot rates, with increases in some areas and sharp falls at other grades. It also criticised the NCA's failure both to tackle certain long-running problems at Grade 3 with spot rates and to deliver on its commitments in relation to the expansion of the expert spot rate. The NCOA proposed the immediate extension of spot rate pay to specialists at Grades 4 and 5 who remained trapped on the standard pay scales.

2.55 In oral evidence, the NCOA said that it understood that the Agency had now been asked to provide further information about the implications of the Police Reform White Paper for the NCA's pay and contract reform business case.

2.56 The NCOA said that its members had no confidence that pay reform would actually be implemented. The NCOA reported that it had been briefed on the high-level principles relating to the pay and contract reform case but it had not seen the detail. The NCOA suggested it could see pay reform could be a benefit – and that in principle it was keen to get on with improvements to the NCA and work jointly with the NCA leadership to deliver. The NCOA said that it wanted to be briefed on the detail so that it could articulate the case to its members. It said that it was not clear whether NCA officers would support pay reform if it was approved by HM Treasury. The NCOA highlighted one possible change to terms and conditions that would take place under pay reform but explained that it was not clear whether that change would transfer over to the NPS.

2.57 It told us that, following our 2025 Report and comments on the need for the Agency to work with the trade unions to agree new arrangements for Shift Allowance, the issue had been successfully resolved. The NCOA said that it wanted to repeat that type of engagement in order to tackle other issues.

2.58 The PCS explained that its members continued to be concerned by the delays to pay reform. They feared that plans for police reform would prevent progress. The PCS said that it remained unsighted on the details of the proposed pay and contract reform. It recommended that the NCA shared the detailed pay and contract reform proposals with the PCS and the other recognised trade unions. It argued that all parties should be made aware of pay and contract reform timings and any impact on the 2026/27 pay award. It asserted that ample consultation time on pay and contract reform (at least two months) was needed to allow for a members’ ballot on contractual changes. It told us that it also wanted the NCA to complete the job evaluation exercise as we recommended in 2024.

2.59 The PCS said that it wanted differentiated pay and spot rates to be replaced by a fairer and long-term pay framework. It called for a 37-hour working week for all staff, and observed that such a change would start to move the NCA towards the PCS national position of a 35-hour week and enable the easier contractual transition outlined in the Police Reform White Paper. The PCS also sought annual leave pro-rated for the extra hours worked for staff in spot rated roles.

2.60 The FDA said it welcomed the fact that the NCA had submitted a pay and contract reform business case to central government. However, it noted that the business case remained with HM Treasury, with a decision on authorisation held back pending release of the White Paper. From the FDA's perspective, it was essential that the case was authorised and work on pay reform completed before any transition to the NPS took place. It again explained that it favoured a system which enabled progression through pay ranges based on officers developing competency within a role. It told us that such an approach would facilitate better visibility of how decisions on pay were linked to the knowledge, capability and experience of each staff member.

2.61 In oral evidence, the FDA told us that the pay progression problem also existed in other civil service organisations, but the NCA had an extra dynamic in comparison with the rest of the civil service: other civil service organisations did not have to worry about the relationship with police pay. It reported that the NCA had specific problems when working with its policing colleagues. It remained the case that only older ex-police officers were able to take on NCA roles.

2.62 During the visits programme there was a general concern among officers that pay reform would not happen. A number of staff said that there was a need for a proper job evaluation process as there had not been one for a number of years.

Our comment on reform

<u>The risks to operational effectiveness</u>

2.63 We welcome the evidence the NCA has presented this year on its achievements against its key targets. However, given the evolving threat—particularly the shift of lives and crime online—and the diversification identified in the 2025 National Strategic Assessment, we are very concerned that some of the recruitment and retention challenges facing the NCA could undermine the Agency's ability to tackle certain threats. We observe that there were more than 600 vacancies in the Agency in August 2025 at a time the NCA reported that it had 6,215 officers. We note that the Home Office told us in oral evidence that the Agency was addressing this by streamlining its human resources process. However, as we set out below, the uncertainty created by the prospective move to the NPS is likely to compound these challenges as existing officers consider other career options and applicants hesitate to join an organisation going through such a significant transition.

2.64 We also note the importance that both the Home Office and NCA attach to the Agency's ability to leverage technology, including digital infrastructure upgrades and the adoption of artificial intelligence, to drive productivity and offset rising costs. However, given the Agency's reliance on technology-driven productivity improvements, any failure to achieve these efficiencies at pace risks further undermining operational effectiveness and compounding pressures on a workforce that is already under severe strain.

2.65 In that context, we highlight the continuing unsustainable gaps and higher turnover in some specialist teams. We recognise the challenges the NCA faces in competing with the private sector for niche skills. We note the Home Office's concern that. with regard to specialist skills, market rates for DDaT roles can exceed the Agency's pay by up to £15,000, especially at senior levels. We are concerned that turnover exceeds 40% in one specialist NCA team receiving RRAs, and 20% in a number of others.

2.66 Therefore, while we welcome the steps the Agency has taken to develop its in-house talent – for example, through its apprenticeship schemes – we observe these initiatives have yet to make a substantive impact on the challenges it faces. As a result, we note the NCA's ongoing reliance on contingent labour and we continue to share the Home Office's concern about the amount of resources being expended on contingent labour by the Agency. We welcome the NCA's ambition to tackle this problem, however, we also agree that the use of fixed-term contracts is not a long-term solution.

2.67 We observe that the NCA is by no means the only public sector organisation that finds recruiting and retaining these specialist skills challenging. However, the NCA also faces significant vacancies in its key investigative teams. During our visits this year, we were concerned by officers' reports of significant vacancies and operational churn. These are the core teams driving delivery of the Agency's and the Government's priorities. We highlight in particular that the difficulty, which we have mentioned in previous reports, the Agency faces in recruiting mid-career police officers remains acute. We also observe that high vacancy and turnover levels have implications for officer wellbeing and morale.

Impact of current pay structures

2.68 It continues to be our view that, leaving aside wider market pressures and demand for specialist skills, recruitment and retention in the NCA is being undermined by the Agency's pay structures. We note the evidence provided by the NCA on the gap between Agency pay and that of the police. The NCA told us that its median pay is lower at each grade than the police rank that the Agency currently uses as the closest comparator. All the standard pay range maxima are below the police equivalent rank maxima and, with the exception of Grade 5, all the minima are also below that of the police. Spot rate levels are fixed below the NCA pay range maxima and are therefore below the police maxima. We observe that this pay gap means that the Agency is struggling to recruit the mid-career police officers from diverse backgrounds that it needs to maximise its operational effectiveness. We highlight the Home Office observation that “while the Agency draws on a diverse range of sources… the increasing pay gap with policing risks undermining efforts to attract and retain officers with critical operational expertise. Addressing this divide is essential to sustaining the Agency’s operational capacity”. In 2025, NCA officers again received a slightly higher percentage uplift to their pay than police officers in England and Wales. However, we agree with the NCA that while this signalled our ambition to address the pay gap, the practical impact has been limited. We observe that, across most grades, the pay gap between the Agency and its main comparators, including the police, continues to grow in monetary terms.

2.69 We judge that the difficulties presented by this pay gap are compounded by the NCA’s two-tier pay system of spot rates and standard pay scales and, in particular, the lack of pay progression and the unduly long pay scales. It remains the position that 71% of officers remain at grade minima and 78% are in the lowest quartile. As a result, experienced NCA officers can remain on the grade minima while some newly recruited candidates from a range of labour markets join higher up the pay range. We also note that, even on the spot rates, progression is limited because the use of the expert rate is confined to firearms teams. We note the NCA’s concern that this internal pay imbalance is having a negative impact on morale and, we assume over the longer term, on retention. We also heard during our visits that some staff felt the existence of long pay scales created an expectation of progression among applicants to the Agency that did not materialise in practice, which risked further undermining trust and morale.

2.70 We also remain concerned about the implications of the current pay systems for equality. In particular, we note with concern the NCA’s estimate that the legal risks associated with equal pay claims exceed £338 million. We note that this represents a substantial contingent liability for the Agency and government and reinforces the case for a timely resolution of the structural issues underpinning pay disparities.

<u>The prospects for pay reform</u>

2.71 We observe that we first received proposals for pay reform from the Agency in 2016. In our last two reports, we welcomed the NCA’s submission of a business case to central government for pay reform and emphasised the importance of the case proceeding at pace to enable the Agency, subject to collective agreement with the trade unions, to implement reforms and address longstanding pay and reward issues. Our call for urgent action was made in the context of the recruitment and retention challenges facing the Agency, in particular the difficulty it faces in recruiting mid-career police officers.

2.72 We note the NCA's decision to submit additional information to HM Treasury regarding the implications of the proposals in the Police Reform White Paper for the pay and contract reform business case. We understand that the business case is intended to ensure that the Agency can continue to function effectively during transition as well as prepare the ground for the future.

2.73 As in our last report, we are unable to comment in detail on, or endorse the substantive proposals. In the continued absence of central government agreement to the NCA's pay and contract reform proposals, we again requested that no details be included in the evidence submitted to us for this pay round. However, we observe that it is vital that these proposals prepare the ground for the Agency's eventual transfer to the NPS.

2.74 We recognise the concerns expressed by the NCOA and PCS that the plans to transform the strategic landscape for law enforcement will delay pay reform yet again, with one party describing the issue as being "kicked down the road" while wider plans are developed. We also observe that the likely reaction of NCA officers themselves to the proposals is unclear especially given the general uncertainty about future pay and conditions in the NPS. We observe that swift and positive action by central government on the business case would go some way to reducing one element of uncertainty facing NCA officers and might boost morale and retention. We also observe that pay and contract reform is one of the few potential concrete retention levers available to the Agency at this stage; continued delay risks further demotivating staff and could reduce the likelihood of securing timely collective agreement to contractual changes, thereby jeopardising implementation and undermining retention.

2.75 We understand that, to date, the NCA has taken the view that it would be better not to share its reform proposals with staff and the trade unions in advance of securing the agreement of central government. However, we judge that this lack of communication risks heightening staff concerns about the proposed changes. We recognise that this position, in part, is a result of the protracted delays in securing central government clearance which has limited the substantive updates that could be shared with trade unions. We reiterate the point we made in our previous reports about the trade unions being a valuable source of innovative ideas and that they provide a direct link to frontline officers. We observe that in our discussions with the trade unions they were keen to engage with the NCA and contribute to the reform process. We recognise that the Agency has sought to keep the trade unions informed of developments; however, we observe a clear distinction between being kept informed and being meaningfully involved in the design of change, and it is the latter that is required to build confidence and secure collective agreement. In our view, good employee relations will sit at the heart of successful reform; any prolonged uncertainty risks further damaging morale and increasing the 'flight' risk at a particularly sensitive point in the Agency's transition.

2.76 **We reiterate that urgent progress on the NCA's pay and contract reform case is essential to deal with some of the immediate issues with the existing pay framework, to stabilise the workforce in the near term before the transition to the NPS, to support recruitment and retention, and to prepare the ground for convergence with policing pay and reward arrangements. We expect the Home Office and NCA to provide us with a substantive update in advance of the next pay round.**

The Police Reform White Paper and the challenges of transition of the NCA to the police service and the NPS

2.77 Since we submitted our last report, the Government has published a White Paper on Police Reform. The proposals in the White Paper have significant implications for the police service and the NCA. In our 2025 Report, we said that we hoped that in thinking about the national capabilities needed by UK law enforcement, the Government would consider whether a different organisational form for the NCA would better enable it to act flexibly, to set common terms and conditions, and establish a single unified pay structure in order to recruit the skills it requires.

2.78 We therefore welcome, in principle, the proposal that the NCA should become part of a new NPS. We also note that the White Paper commits to a phased approach to the establishment of the NPS, enabling it to mature before significant operational assets are moved under its control. We understand that this means that the transfer of the NCA to the NPS will probably take place early in the next Parliament. However, we also note the Government's commitment to strengthen joint working across organised crime fighting and counter-terrorism in advance of the NCA, CTP and ROCUs moving into the NPS.

2.79 We observe that the transition of the NCA into the police service, through its transfer to the NPS, will not be straightforward. The NCA and police service each have their own distinct regulatory framework under which their officers operate. We note the evidence we have received on the Agency's unique mix of skills, that since 2022 it has recruited 25% of candidates from policing, 24% from the private sector and 28% from the civil service. We recognise the challenges the NCA has articulated in moving from what is essentially a civil service organisation to a police service model that distinguishes between police officers and police staff. We are also aware that NCA officers who have been recruited from the civil service, especially those working in enabling commands, will be reflecting carefully on what this means for their future careers. We agree with the NCA about the complexity of mapping to police staff posts, particularly in the absence of a national grading structure for police staff.

2.80 We observe that, at the inception of the Agency, it adopted the grading structure of its precursor organisation, the Serious and Organised Crime Agency. Leaving aside the absence of an NCA grade equivalent to the rank of inspector, it is unclear whether any recent work has been undertaken to validate the assumption that NCA's rank structure at Grades 1 to 5 "broadly mirror that of policing", as described in the Agency's evidence. We point out that not all Grade 5 officers have powers and not all officer with powers hold those of a constable. **We strongly advise that the NCA takes forward, as a matter of urgency, its plans for a comprehensive job evaluation exercise in conjunction with the trade unions and also policing partners who are shaping the future workforce strategy for the police service. Without this, it will be difficult to map roles appropriately to police officer or staff equivalents and provide NCA officers with confidence about their future status and career pathways.** We encourage this work to be taken forward at pace.

2.81 We observe that pace is particularly important, given the White Paper's commitment to strengthen joint working between the NCA and the police service in advance of the formal transfer. We understand that the police service envisages a more porous organisational model, with increased movement of individuals from outside policing working alongside it, including those with specialist safeguarding expertise or technical skills. It also envisages easier movement between national, regional and local roles, as well as into and out of partner organisations, supporting portfolio careers and increasing workforce flexibility. We observe that the NCA's plans for a job evaluation exercise and work to clarify terms and conditions will provide a vital foundation for the Agency to fully engage with wider law enforcement as the programme for police reform develops over the next few years.

Convergence with the police service

2.82 We recognise that the complexities we set out above will have significant implications for the new NPS operationally as well as for pay and reward structures. There are a myriad of terms and conditions that will need to be addressed, beyond the disparity in pay and allowances that we have highlighted in this and previous reports.

2.83 However, in our view the direction of travel is clear: the NCA will become part of the police service. We note the view of the Home Office that the civil service will remain an important comparator for the Agency given the composition of its workforce. Nevertheless, we advise that central government, the Home Office and the NCA should give priority to ensuring that plans are put in place as quickly as possible to begin bridging the gap between NCA officer pay and police pay. We note that the Home Office was clear in its evidence that addressing this divide is essential to sustaining the Agency's current operational capacity.

2.84 We note the call of the trade unions for early action on clarifying the implications of the move to the NPS for pay and reward and officers' terms and conditions. We strongly agree that action is required now to think through the detailed implications of the transfer, and to identify what can be done quickly to prepare the ground for the transfer of capabilities to the NPS and, in the short term, to facilitate greater joint working. Clarity is needed now on the new workforce model for the NPS and the terms and conditions on which officers will transfer into the new structures and become part of the police service. We note that this should include pension arrangements, which are a material part of the overall reward package and therefore an important consideration for recruitment and retention. The absence of such clarity is, as the trade unions have stated, creating avoidable anxiety. We judge that this lack of clarity will also undermine the Agency's ability to recruit and retain staff in the short term. We agree that, without it, new applicants to the NCA will be reluctant to join and current NCA officers may delay internal moves or look for opportunities outside the Agency. **We therefore advise that the Government and the Agency should set out, at pace, a coherent retention and communication plan for the transition period, including clarity on the intended workforce model, the approach to transfer and the treatment of pay and pensions**.

2.85 We again observe that the NCA faces considerable difficulties in recruiting key technical skills, given competition from the private sector, and that tackling this issue through pay reform will be a very significant challenge. We also note that the transfer of the NCA to the NPS will not, in itself, resolve this problem. The new workforce strategy for the police service will need to consider how best to secure the specialist skills that both the NCA and the police service have, to date, struggled to attract and retain.

2.86 In taking forward this work, it is our strong view that the Agency should fully involve the trade unions. We consider that transparency can only help to reduce anxiety among NCA officers about the future. As is the case with the proposals for pay reform, we judge that any lack of communication risks heightening staff concerns about the proposed changes and could further damage morale.

Chapter 3 – Pay Proposals and Recommendations for 2026/27

Introduction

3.1 In this chapter we make our recommendations on the annual pay award for NCA officers within our remit group and review NCA allowances. Our conclusions in this chapter are informed by our analysis of the economic context, NCA workforce, and morale and motivation (Appendix D), and the evidence that we received relating to our standing terms of reference (Appendix E).

Basic pay award

3.2 The NCA proposed that powered and non-powered officers should receive a pay award cognisant of the police pay award for 2026/27. It told us that this was necessary, in part, to improve the shortfall in officer pay at each grade compared with policing colleagues, due to the lack of pay progression in the NCA. It reported that around 60% of officers were on the standard pay ranges, and of these 71% were paid at the minimum and 78% were in the lowest quartile. The NCA said that around 40% of officers were on spot rates, and pointed out that these gave some operational roles slightly higher pay and a longer working week (40 hours). It said that the spot rates were all significantly below the average pay for roles at the same grade in the police. It pointed out that this made the pay of spot rate roles insufficient to attract serving police officers, who would take a substantial pay cut if they joined the NCA. It also described the difficulties it faced in retaining technical specialists and staff in enabling functions.

3.3 The Agency argued that it was central to delivering Government priorities, particularly tackling organised immigration crime and small boats facilitators and equipment suppliers. It told us that these high priority operational demands required additional officers. It said that the proposed pay award was essential to ensuring the Agency had sufficient capability to deliver these national security and public protection priorities.

3.4 The NCA emphasised that its workforce strategy depended upon offering a ‘One NCA’ approach to careers and development; recognising the contribution of all roles to delivering the strategic and operational priorities. It said movement between commands was encouraged and enabled a multi-skilled workforce which could respond to emerging threats in an agile manner. It explained this was the reason we were being asked to consider both powered and non-powered officers in recommending a pay award for the NCA.

3.5 The NCA explained that it had budgeted for a 2.5% pay award effective from 1 August 2026. It informed us that the cost of increasing basic pay and location allowances by 1% next year was £4.34 million, which included Employer’s National Insurance and pension contributions.

3.6 In oral evidence the NCA told us that its modelling showed that a 0.6 percentage points award above the police pay award was the minimum needed to stop the pay gap with the police getting worse. However, it told us that this varied by grade (the NCA Grade 5 minimum was slightly higher than police starting pay). It said that in the interests of simplicity, it was seeking a uniform pay award across all grades. The Agency told us that in preparing its evidence, it had modelled for a slightly higher pay award than 2.5%. It also cautioned that the financial position would be more constrained in the second and third years of the current Spending Round. Following oral evidence, the NCA sent through figures showing its modelling that, if the 2026/27 police pay award was 2%, the NCA needed a pay award that was at least 0.7 percentage points higher in order to reduce the gaps in median pay between policing and the NCA.

3.7 The Home Office outlined the NCA proposals for a pay award for its officers in 2026/27. It said that this should address ongoing difficulties in recruiting from policing, as well as attracting and retaining officers from other law enforcement partners.

3.8 The Home Office emphasised that the Agency had stated in its evidence that its recommendations were affordable within its existing budget. It warned that any pay award that the NCA agreed for 2026/27 would have to be met from within the Agency's budget. It added that any increase above the planned level would require the NCA to introduce further cost-reduction measures or risk impacting operational delivery. It emphasised that the Home Office's own budget remained under considerable pressure, leaving limited scope for supplementary financial support to the Agency. However, the Home Office also underlined that addressing the gap between NCA and policing pay was essential to sustaining the Agency's operational capacity.

3.9 In oral evidence, the Home Office said that the Government expected organisations to plan on the basis of a 2.5% pay award in 2026/27. It agreed that it was important to balance public safety, retention of NCA staff and closing the pay gap with policing. It said that any recommendation above 2.5% would need to be funded from the NCA's existing budget, which would be challenging. It also said it was important that the NCA could reward staff, but within government pay restraint requirements. It explained that an award above 2.5% would require the NCA to make trade-offs and choices, although it noted that the NCA still had scope for further efficiencies.

3.10 It said that, if the pay recommendation were above 2.5%, the NCA Director General would need to work through the operational implications. The Home Office said it would expect, and support, the Director General to identify efficiencies that did not affect operational delivery, and that it would discuss the position with the NCA in the context of the new performance management framework. It noted that this could mean work slowing in some areas. The Home Office confirmed that it was not suggesting that an award above 2.5% would create risks to national security, nor that it would affect police reform plans. It said the NCA pay and contract reform business case was more likely to be affected, but that the overall affordability of the case was unlikely to be materially undermined given its cost-neutral basis. The Home Office emphasised that the pay and contract reform business case was seen as the main vehicle for closing the pay gap with the police.

3.11 The PCS sought an uplift in line with its national pay campaign proposals. It explained that it wanted a pay rise that at least matched the civil service pay remit and the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rate of inflation which it pointed out was 3.4% at the time of it submitting its evidence. It also sought an element of pay restoration, and added that if the pay award for the police was higher than the rate of inflation then it would like to see the award for the NCA match, and slightly exceed, the award for policing. It explained that NCA officers should receive an additional amount on top of any award for the police so that the actual salary gap between NCA officers and police officers was narrowed rather than widened.

3.12 The PCS was also seeking, as part of its national campaign, progress towards greater coherence at delegated level and action to restore grade differentials. In oral evidence, the PCS added that at national level it was seeking a living wage of £18 in London and £15 outside London.

3.13 The FDA sought an increase to salaries that was 1% above any increase recommended for the police. It said that it was important that work continued on closing the gap between police and NCA pay, especially in the light of the proposals in the Government’s White Paper on Police Reform.

3.14 In support of their proposals, the FDA and PCS drew attention to the real-terms decline in public sector pay and the continuing gap between the pay of NCA officers and that of police officers. The FDA and PCS pointed to a report from the National Audit Office which had found that, across almost all civil service grades, real-terms median salaries had fallen since 2013. The PCS also set out the findings of a report it had commissioned on civil service pay which had found that by 2023, civil service pay had dropped back to levels seen 20 to 40 years ago, depending on the inflation measure.

3.15 The NCOA proposed an 8% uplift for powered and non-powered officers to improve the shortfall in officer pay as compared with police officers. A shortfall which it observed was compounded by the lack of pay progression in the NCA. In support of its proposals, it highlighted the gap with police pay, heavy workloads, and the complexity of the work of NCA officers.

3.16 In oral evidence, the NCOA noted that its proposal this could be funded through a reduction in the number of contractors. The NCOA described an example of how the NCA had persuaded contractors in one area to transfer to being permanent staff. This had reduced the number of contractors and expenditure on contingent labour in that area. The NCOA considered that the Agency could adopt a similar approach to secure resources to fund the 2026/27 pay award.

3.17 The NCOA explained that an 8% pay award would start to close the gap between the pay of NCA officers and police officers. It would begin to move those on the middle spot rates closer to police pay. It said that at the moment given that the police had pay progression, the gap between NCA and police pay continued to widen.

3.18 On the visits programme, officers told us that the 2025/26 pay award had been well received. However, pay did not reflect levels of responsibility and risks.

Our comment and recommendation on the basic pay award

3.19 We consider that 2026 represents an exceptional year for the National Crime Agency. In making our pay award recommendation we considered a number of short- and longer-term factors. We have assessed the pay proposals we received from parties in the context of our terms of reference, the Security Minister's remit letter and the wider evidence received. In assessing these factors we have given weight to the implications of the NCA's transfer into the NPS early in the next Parliament.

Economic factors

3.20 The wider economy including the increased cost of living and the level of pay settlements are factors in our deliberations. Since parties submitted their written evidence, there have again been a number of largely unexpected geopolitical events, which have led to a new period of heightened economic uncertainty. As we complete our 2026 Report, the most recent outturns for inflation in April showed the CPI rate of inflation at 2.8% and the CPIH (including owner occupiers' housing costs) rate at 3.0%. In its most recent Monetary Policy Report, published in April 2026, the Bank of England assessed the likely inflation risks from recent events and considered three potential scenarios, which showed that inflation was expected to range between 3.6% and 6.0% in the fourth quarter of 2026, depending on the length of the current crisis and the extent to which energy price rises fed through to other prices, such as in retail and hospitality, and to pay bargaining. This contrasts with the expectation in the Bank's February 2026 Monetary Policy Report that inflation in the fourth quarter of 2026 would be 2.0%, as well as evidence submitted by HM Treasury to the Pay Review Bodies in December 2025, which set out the Office for Budget Responsibility's forecast for inflation in of 2.2% in FYE 2027. NCA officers also continue to experience the cumulative effects on their living costs of the period of high inflation over the last five years. We remain mindful of the continued heightened uncertainty in the economic outlook and note the likely impact on inflation of the planned increase to the energy price cap in July. We note that, as we submit our report in late May, the conflict in the Middle East continues, and that even if a ceasefire were to be agreed there is likely to be a continued inflationary effect on the economy. We observe that, in its evidence, HM Treasury advised us to take full account of the latest data and forecasts.

Labour market

3.21 Recent data suggest that the labour market has continued to weaken, with vacancies falling, unemployment rising and the number of Pay As You Earn jobs falling. At the same time, earnings growth has been falling although it remains above inflation: annual growth in Average Weekly Earnings excluding bonuses was 3.4% for the whole economy in the three months to March 2026. We note that the latest estimates for median pay settlements at the time we finalised our recommendations ranged between 3.0% and 3.8%, and that these settlements remain the most relevant comparators for the annual pay awards we consider. We also note that as the vast majority of pay settlements happen in January to April, expected increases in inflation are unlikely to be reflected in pay settlement data until next year. As in previous years, we take account of these labour market developments as part of the wider context for our recommendations, alongside the specific recruitment, retention and workforce challenges facing the NCA.

NCA operating environment and the geopolitical landscape.

3.22 The NCA is under significant pressure to deliver against a number of priorities that are key to strengthening the UK's border and reducing the harm caused by SOC. In our previous reports, we have set out some of the harms caused by SOC, and the leading role the Agency plays in countering these threats. We note the evidence we received this year showing that the threat has continued to grow and become more harmful. We were particularly struck by evidence of an increasing overlap between online radicalisation and serious violence and extremism. We agree with the Home Office that the NCA's intelligence-led approach and international reach underline its critical role in safeguarding the UK from SOC.

3.23 The NCA is also central to the Government's priority of tackling organised immigration crime, including human trafficking and people-smuggling gangs facilitating small-boat crossings. Given the Agency's international reach and its network of International Liaison Officers (ILOs), we are conscious that, to these priorities, there have been added additional pressures and demands arising from further unexpected shifts in the geopolitical landscape.

3.24 We again observe that the NCA needs people with the right skills, alongside the right technology, to tackle these challenges. We remain concerned that the Agency's inability to recruit and retain certain niche skills will make it harder for the NCA to operate effectively.

Competitiveness with key comparators

3.25 Our remit letter asked us to consider the pay gap differential between NCA officers and police officers. In our previous reports, we have given weight to the evidence we have received from all parties about the importance of police officers as a comparator for the Agency, while recognising the wide range of specialisms and skills the NCA requires. Once again this year, the Agency and the Home Office have highlighted the difficulty the NCA faces in recruiting mid-career police officers into vital operational roles. We understand that the NCA attributes these recruitment challenges to both the size of the pay gap with the police and the absence of pay progression within the Agency. The Home Office said that the growing gap in median pay between the NCA and police officers risked undermining efforts to attract and retain officers with critical operational experience

3.26 We also note that the NCA has previously told us that the main aim of the Agency's pay and contract reform is to reduce the gap between NCA and police pay. In its evidence this year, it has identified misalignment between the Agency's pay and that for comparable roles in policing, as well as the UK Intelligence Community, as one of the key challenges that pay reform needs to address. We observe that the decision to transfer the NCA to the NPS has increased the importance of policing pay as a comparator for the Agency.

3.27 We note the relatively positive position of the Agency in relation to civil service pay. In this context we note the civil service pay remit guidance for 2026/27 which states that departments are able to make average pay awards up to 3.5%. However, we are aware of the disparity between the NCA's RRAs and those available elsewhere in the civil service. As we have said previously, this is an issue that needs to be addressed through pay reform rather than the annual pay award. We also recognise that the annual uplift to pay will not significantly increase the NCA's ability to attract specialist skills for which the private sector is prepared to pay a premium. This is an issue with which the new NPS will need to grapple. Nevertheless, we observe that a pay award in 2026/27 that is above median pay settlements may, in some cases, prevent the pay gap with the private sector from widening significantly.

3.28 We attach importance to the evidence provided by the NCA that the pay gap between the Agency and police officers has grown over the last decade. We observe that the Government accepted our recommendations for slightly higher pay awards for NCA officers than for the police in 2024/25 and 2025/26, thereby reducing the pay gap slightly in percentage terms for all grades except Grade 1. These represented the first small steps on a journey to improve the competitiveness of NCA pay in relation to that of police officers. However, despite this, the gap between pay for NCA officers and police officers increased in monetary terms for all grades, with the exception of the top of Grade 4. We observe that the gap that will need to be closed in advance of the Agency transfer to the NPS differs by grade but is significant at all grades. In our view, that journey needs to begin now.

Recruitment and retention: vacancies and skills gaps

3.29 We agree with the NCA that it is essential for it to attract, retain and develop a highly skilled workforce. We recognise that the specialist skills it requires are not unique to the Agency; rather, it is the extent and diversity of the skills it draws from its three primary market sectors that present such a significant challenge for the NCA. We attach weight to the fact that the NCA considers that it is the breadth of this experience that enables it to deliver its mission.

3.30 We observe that the NCA's overall turnover compares well with other organisations and, according to the NCA, has reduced slightly since December 2024. We note that the size of the NCA workforce fell slightly between August 2024 and August 2025. However, our main immediate concern remains the challenges the NCA faces in recruiting and retaining certain skills and experience. These include the operational expertise that experienced police officers can bring to the Agency, and niche technical skills that are highly sought in both the public and private sectors. Both are key to the Agency's operational capacity. We remain concerned about high turnover and vacancies in a range of teams, particularly DDaT and a number of intelligence-driven teams within the Agency. While we are aware of the steps the Agency has taken to develop its in-house talent – for example, through its tech apprenticeship scheme – we observe these initiatives have yet to make a substantive impact on the challenges it faces. We point out that the Intelligence, Investigations and DDaT commands have all seen further reductions in headcount over the past year. We observe that there were more than 600 vacancies in the Agency in August 2025, which is a significant number, given that the NCA reported at the time that it had 6,215 officers.

3.31 We judge that, in this exceptional year, these longstanding vacancies and skill gaps present heightened risks to operational capability. This is particularly the case given the Agency's central role in meeting current Government priorities and the additional pressures arising from the geopolitical context and the evolving threat picture.

3.32 It is our strong view that the Agency's importance in tackling SOC and delivering the Government's priorities means that these issues, including the challenge of attracting mid-career police officers, cannot be delayed until the organisation is transferred to the NPS. Action is required now to ensure that the Agency can recruit and retain the staff it needs to continue to operate effectively over the next few years. As we said in our last report, the ability to recruit experienced mid-career police officers from a range of communities would help strengthen the Agency's frontline capabilities, particularly as it needs an increasingly diverse workforce to enhance its operational effectiveness.

3.33 We are conscious that the Government's announcement that, in due course, it intends to transfer the Agency to the NPS is likely to affect recruitment and retention. We note that this has created significant uncertainty among NCA officers. It will be some years before the transfer takes place, and it is important that officers continue to feel valued during this transition as details are worked through. We observe that this transition creates both 'converge and merge' challenges, as the NCA prepares to join the police service, and 'flight and blight' risks, whereby experienced officers may leave the Agency or potential recruits may choose not to join because of uncertainty.

3.34 One of the reasons the Government has given for the phased approach is that "the NPS will need to be mature and ready, and operational disruption must be avoided." In the meantime, the NCA needs to retain the capabilities it requires to fulfil its mission and to participate fully in the Government's programme to strengthen joint working across threat areas in advance of the creation of the NPS. We are concerned that, without timely stabilising action, the transition period itself risks contributing to the very operational disruption the phased approach is designed to prevent.

Morale, motivation and officer wellbeing

3.35 NCA productivity depends partly on the goodwill and discretionary effort of its officers, which in turn requires them to be properly motivated. Good morale also supports retention and shapes behaviour. We observe that retaining experienced and motivated officers will be vital if the Agency is to maintain operational effectiveness during the transition to the NPS.

3.36 We note that the satisfaction rate for NCA pay and benefits in the Civil Service People Survey has improved. It was 45% in 2025, which was 9 percentage points above the 2024 figure and 22 percentage points above the 2023 figure, although we understand from the unions that this improvement is driven by the significant improvement in the timeliness of staff receiving their pay award since 2023. We observe that the pay and benefits theme was no longer the lowest-scoring theme in 2025 and was 2 percentage points above the civil service benchmark. We note that, according to the survey, around a fifth of respondents wanted to leave the NCA either as soon as possible or within the next twelve months, a similar proportion to the previous year.

3.37 However, we were struck by the results of the trade union surveys on morale and wellbeing. In particular, we were concerned by the findings of the NCOA's Work and Wellbeing Survey, in which half of respondents felt their workload was unacceptable and 76% stated that elements of their work were causing them to feel low, depressed, stressed or unwell. We also note that the PCS told us its members felt a long-hours culture created health and safety risks.

3.38 We have been particularly concerned by the significant vacancies, levels of churn and morale issues observed during visits to the NCA. These pressures are already having implications for staff wellbeing and for operational effectiveness, and in our view are placing disproportionate strain on the NCA compared with other parts of the law enforcement system that are not facing transition on this scale.

3.39 We are concerned about the impact of the practicalities and pressures of life in the NCA on officers' personal lives. We acknowledge that organised crime can be fast moving and that NCA officers must be available to respond to unforeseen events, but we observe that this is likely to disrupt the personal and family lives of NCA officers. Not all this disruption is compensated for by the allowances system. We also point out that heavy workload and the constant pressure created by high levels of vacancies and churn will have an impact on mental health. To this have been added the uncertainties created by the announcement of the move to the NPS. The trade unions have emphasised that, understandably, the proposed transfer of the NCA to the NPS in the next Parliament, and the attendant uncertainties, is causing anxiety among their members. Collectively, these factors are likely to affect morale and retention.

3.40 The most common reason given in exit interviews by those leaving the NCA remains career promotion and development, followed by leadership and technology. However, the NCA's evidence shows that many of those leaving the Agency, particularly for the wider civil service, are seeking promotion. We observe that, given the lack of pay progression within the Agency, the desire for a pay rise may be driving some departures. As in previous years, we heard on our visits programme that the same issue was leading staff to seek internal promotion, often before they were ready.

3.41 We observe that employees often associate pay with fairness and value. As we observed last year, a pay award that is judged unfair by NCA officers – particularly in comparison with other parts of the public sector, especially the police – will do nothing to ameliorate the existing low state of morale and motivation or offset anxieties about the future of the organisation.

3.42 In this context, we highlight the 2026/27 pay awards recently announced by the Government for other parts of the public sector. These included: 3.3% for NHS Agenda for Change staff; 3.5% for prison staff and doctors; and 3.75% for dentists in primary care. We note that the Pay Review Body reports on which these were based were submitted to Government either shortly before or shortly after the current conflict in the Middle East began, and well before the Bank of England's latest Monetary Policy Report, issued in late April, outlining three possible scenarios for the future path of inflation this year.

Convergence with the NPS

3.43 We observe that the proposed transfer of the NCA to the NPS will, in due course, be a transformative change for the Agency, both operationally and for its officers. As we said in Chapter 2, given the complexity of the Agency's existing pay arrangements and the breadth and diversity of the skills it recruits and relies on, we expect this to present a range of challenges. Leaving aside the operational challenges, we recognise the scale of the task involved in transferring staff to a new organisation and the implications for terms and conditions. We acknowledge that it will take time for the Agency and the police service to work through the details. However, the direction of travel is clear: the NCA will become part of the police service, and we have given weight to this in formulating our recommendations this year. We consider that this clarity of direction strengthens the case for beginning substantive convergence now, and at the least taking action to prevent the gap further worsening, rather than deferring action until the point of transfer.

3.44 We have also given weight to the NCA's statement that one of the main aims of the Agency's pay and contract reform, in addition to addressing equality issues, is to reduce the gap between police and NCA pay. However, at the time of submitting our report, central Government approval for the business case has not been secured. It is therefore unclear whether and how quickly the NCA might be able to begin to tackle the pay gap and reduce the risk of 'flight and blight'.

'One NCA' policy

3.45 In our previous reports, we have strongly supported the principle that all NCA officers should receive the same annual uplift to pay. We agree with the Home Office and the NCA that operational skills are a key requirement for many roles, and that officers should be able to move between commands. We are conscious that NCA teams often consist of a blend of officers drawn from the civil service, the police, the intelligence community and the private sector.

3.46 We note that the remit letter we received from the Security Minister asked us again to give consideration to the Agency's 'One NCA' policy in formulating a pay recommendation for the Agency. The letter stated that it was crucial that all staff, both those with and without operational powers, were treated equitably in matters of pay. We agree with this position in respect of the annual pay award for 2026/27. **However, we observe that the proposed transfer of the organisation to the NPS has implications for the Agency's 'One NCA' policy, including in the period leading up to the transition. We advise the Agency to reflect on this carefully in preparation for the next pay round**.

Affordability

3.47 We note that, in its evidence, the Home Office told us that the NCA's budget will increase to £1.06 billion in FYE 2027, with further increases to approximately £1.1

billion by FYE 2029. We understand from the Home Office that this includes an increase in the Agency's core budget of at least 5%. We highlight that the Home Office told us that this was the largest funding settlement the Agency has received since it was established.

3.48 The NCA told us in its written evidence that it had budgeted for a 2.5% pay award, effective from 1 August 2026. It also told us that each 1% increase in pay and location allowances in 2025/26 would cost £4.34 million, including employers' National Insurance and pension costs.

3.49 We recognise that both the NCA and the Home Office have told us about pressures on the Agency's budget. These include rising operational costs, higher pay awards – driven by recruitment and retention pressures as well as wider economic factors – and increased commercial and programme expenditure, all of which contribute to ongoing budgetary strain. In addition, we are aware that recent pay awards have exceeded the levels originally budgeted for. The Home Office has told us that this has required the reprioritisation of budgets and the implementation of challenging efficiency and savings targets across the NCA.

3.50 We note that both HM Treasury and the Home Office have told us that there would be no additional funding available from HM Treasury for a pay award above the amount budgeted for by the NCA. We understand from the Home Office that any pay award that the NCA agrees in 2026/27 will therefore have to be met from within the Agency's budget. The Home Office informed us that any increase above the planned level would require the NCA to introduce further cost-reduction measures, or risk impacting operational delivery. We note the description of the likely process to identify additional resources set out by the Home Office in oral evidence, and observe that the first step would be for the NCA to look at further efficiencies rather than measures that directly impact operational delivery.

3.51 We are aware of the Agency's assertion that recommendations for an uplift in 2026/27 and beyond must be affordable and sustainable. We also note that the pay award should be considered in the context of the NCA's productivity and efficiency improvements, and the affordability of proposals within the Agency's existing budget constraints, particularly in the current challenging fiscal environment.

3.52 However, we observe that the Home Office evidence also highlighted the persistent and growing median pay gap between the NCA and police officers. It stated that the NCA's workforce profile showed that, while the Agency drew on a diverse range of sources, the increasing pay gap with policing risked undermining efforts to attract and retain officers with critical operational experience. We point out that it must be clear to all government parties that it will be impossible even to begin to tackle the pay gap if only 2.5% has been made available in the Agency's budget. We judge that, in this exceptional year, these risks to capability must be weighed carefully against affordability constraints, particularly given the potential cost of increased reliance on contingent labour and the further loss of experienced staff.

3.53 We note that the Home Office told us in oral evidence that there was scope for further efficiencies within the NCA. We again draw attention to the Home Office's comments about contingent labour and professional services, which it told us together accounted for around 17% of the Agency's pay bill. It also said that it was essential that workforce spend was targeted and cost-effective, to ensure value for money for the taxpayer. In our view, this level of spend on contingent labour does not appear to deliver value for money, and enabling the Agency to recruit and retain its own permanent staff would, in most cases, be a better approach. We are also mindful that the NCA needs a pay award that does not further reduce the attractiveness of its pay offer and thereby increase its requirement for contingent labour.

3.54 In conclusion, given the range of evidence we have received, reaching a view on affordability is not straightforward. We also draw attention to the fact that the UK Government recently announced pay rises for other parts of the public sector that were significantly above the level implied by its affordability evidence of around 2.5%. We observe that affordability is, in part, a matter of choice and that, across central government budgets as a whole, there should be some flexibility in how any award is funded.

Fairness and the absence of the ability to take strike action

3.55 We are conscious of the prohibition on powered officers taking strike action. We note that this presents particular challenges when an organisation is facing a period of transformative change. As we have said in our previous reports, it is our strong view that the NCA, as the employer, the Home Office and we, as the Remuneration Review Body, have a moral obligation to deliver a fair, just and equitable pay award.

3.56 We highlighted above that a key test of how fairly NCA officers are treated and the extent to which they feel valued will be how the pay award compares with that received by other parts of the public sector. We also drew attention to the 2026/27 pay awards recently announced by the Government for other parts of the public sector. We observe that at least one of those groups is already taking industrial action, partly in response to a pay award of 3.5%. We have therefore given weight to the inability of powered officers to take equivalent action in formulating our recommendation for a pay award for 2026/27.

Pay recommendation

3.57 After taking the above factors into account, including the economic situation (notably increased uncertainty in the inflation outlook, upward pressure on energy, transport and food prices, and the likelihood that inflation will remain above earlier expectations), recent public sector pay settlements, our analysis of recruitment and retention, affordability, the prohibition on powered officers taking strike action, the increasing gap in monetary terms between NCA and police pay, and motivation and morale, we conclude that an annual pay award in 2026/27 of 4.7% across all grades is a suitable approach.

3.58 This is significantly higher than the award the Police Remuneration Review Body (PRRB) has recommended for police officers. For the reasons we outline above, we consider that 2026 represents an exceptional year for the National Crime Agency. The organisation is facing a unique convergence of structural reform, heightened operational demand, partly as a result of shifts in the geopolitical landscape, and workforce uncertainty. We judge these to be materially relevant to this year's pay decision and to have significant and immediate implications for recruitment, retention, officer wellbeing, and motivation and morale. The transition creates both 'converge and merge' challenges, as the NCA prepares to join the police service, and 'flight and blight' risks, whereby experienced officers may leave the Agency or potential recruits may choose not to join because of uncertainty. We were struck by the Home Office evidence that the growing gap in median pay between the NCA and police officers risks undermining efforts to attract and retain officers with critical operational experience. We also note that our remit letter asked us to consider the pay differential between NCA officers and police officers. To this is added the continuing delays and uncertainties to the NCA's pay and contract reform business case which, if approved, should begin to tackle some immediate pressures, boost morale, and allow real progress to be made on narrowing the gap between NCA and police pay.

3.59 We therefore judge that the pay award, which is 0.8 percentage points higher than that which the PRRB has recommended for police officers in England and Wales, will help to address some of these issues. While this higher award in itself is not sufficient to narrow the gap in monetary terms between NCA and police median salaries at all grades, it will at least limit the extent to which it further increases in advance of the implementation of pay and contract reform, and will reduce the gaps at NCA Grades 4 and 5, which are critical operational grades. However, we recognise that this is still only a beginning, and using the annual pay award to attempt to address this issue is not sustainable. Real progress needs to be made on pay reform and on planning the transition to the NPS.

Recommendation 1. We recommend a consolidated pay award of 4.7% for all NCA officers within our remit group from 1 August 2026. The spot rates for Grades 1 to 5 and the minima and maxima of the standard pay ranges for Grades 1 to 6 should be raised by 4.7%.

3.60 We observe that, in our remit letter this year, the Security Minister told us that, as the NCA advanced its 'One NCA' policy, it was crucial that all staff, both those with and without operational powers, were treated equitably in matters of pay. The letter asked us to take this into consideration in our annual review. It is our strong expectation that this recommended award will be applied to all NCA officers both powered and non-powered.

Geographical allowances

London Weighting Allowance and South East Allowance

3.61 The NCA described the disparity between its London Weighting Allowance and the location allowances of the police and parts of the public sector. It proposed that the London Weighting Allowance and the South East Allowance should be uplifted by a higher percentage than the main pay award to reduce the gap with police allowances, particularly those offered by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). The NCA told us that it was exploring an alternative name for its South East Allowance.

3.62 In oral evidence the NCA told us that nearly a third of the organisation received the London Weighting Allowance of £4,218 a year, while the MPS paid allowances totalling around £10,000 and provided free Transport for London travel. It said that it was hard for the NCA to recruit in London and it lost staff when they saw what the MPS and others offered. It told us that there was a 31% drop-out rate in London when individuals being recruited to the NCA learned about the pay differentials with other London employers. The NCA said it had undertaken to consider location allowances as part of pay and contract reform but had not yet done so.

3.63 The Home Office noted the NCA's proposal on its location allowances. It said that the Agency recognised that the primary purpose of these allowances should be to compensate for the cost of living, and not to serve as a substitute for targeted recruitment or retention strategies. It told us that the NCA acknowledged that a more sustainable approach to addressing pay disparities would involve a combination of pay reform and role-specific incentives.

3.64 The PCS again argued that officers working in a particular NCA site in the South East who were not currently eligible for the South East Allowance should receive a geographic allowance that matched the South East Allowance. It also highlighted that at national level the PCS was pushing for London Weighting provision to be a minimum of £5,000 per year and that it should be incorporated into consolidated pay.

3.65 The NCOA proposed a general design of NCA allowances that would be delivered via collective bargaining, this would include the NCA London Weighting Allowance and NCA South East Allowance. As in previous years, the NCOA proposed that the current system of geographical allowances should be replaced by a zonal model for payment of geographical allowances in London and South East England. We described this proposal in detail in our 2024 Report.

3.66 In oral evidence, the NCOA said that it recognised the implications of the move to the NPS for the Agency's location allowances. It observed that the gap between NCA allowances in London and those of the MPS might well have implications for the recruitment of police officers into the NCA and retention, as officers considered the implications of transferring to the NPS. The NCOA said that the zonal model that it had proposed for a number of years would be one way of starting to move the Agency towards alignment with the police service.

3.67 The FDA told us that it was looking for an increase to location allowances that was 1% above any increase recommended for the police, in line with its proposal for the pay award, as a reflection of the need to close the gap between police and the NCA.

3.68 In oral evidence, the FDA acknowledge the disparity between NCA and police allowances in London and the South East. However, it said that its preference was to uplift the basic salary as this was consolidated and pensionable. It said that the scale of the challenge for the NCA meant that core salary was where the NCA should focus its attention. The NCA and police pay gap was pivotal and there had been a failure to close it over the years. The FDA accepted that the allowances gap was part of the problem and related to some areas of the UK being more expensive to live and recruit in. However, the FDA's view was that the rationale for increasing salaries was stronger than that for a higher increase in location allowances.

3.69 On the visits programme, officers told us that something needed to be done about regional allowances, as they were a 'mess'. There was a concern that the MPS, Essex and Kent police all paid a higher location allowance. Officers told us that NCA London Weighting was too low. Officers also pointed out that in the South East, two NCA locations only 20 miles apart meant a £3,000 difference because one of them was ineligible for location allowances. They also observed that some locations where the cost of living was high did not get an allowance.

Our comment and recommendations on London Weighting Allowance and South East Allowance

3.70 As we have observed in previous reports, geographical allowances form part of the overall remuneration package that helps the Agency retain existing officers and attract new recruits. We again note the NCA's concerns that its location allowances in London do not compare well with those of the MPS and some parts of the wider public sector. We also observe that, from April 2025, the Commissioner of the MPS has had additional flexibility on starting salaries to assist with recruitment. This flexibility was in addition to a £1,250 increase to the London Allowance for officers appointed on or after 1 September 1994. We understand that, from April 2025, the London Allowance for MPS officers has been paid at its maximum for all officers up to and including the rank of chief superintendent. In addition, the PRRB has recommended that the maximum limit of both the London Allowance and South East Allowance for police officers be uplifted in September 2026.

3.71 We note that the NCA is planning to review its geographical allowances as part of pay and contract reform if that is approved. We understand that this will include the particular site in the South East about which the PCS has expressed concern. As part of that review, we advise that the NCA reconsider, from first principles, the purpose of its South East Allowance and consider the implications for how it should be described and applied. We note that location allowances are also among the allowances that the NCOA would like to see examined as part of a general exercise, delivered through collective bargaining, to redesign the Agency's allowances. (See paragraph 3.94)

3.72 However, we have wider concerns around the approach to uprating these allowances, which operate as flat-rate payments across pay bands. In our view, there is a lack of clarity in practice about whether these payments are intended principally to address cost-of-living pressures or broader recruitment and retention challenges. In our view, form should follow function: the purpose of any allowance should be clearly defined, and only then should consideration be given to the appropriate mechanism for uprating it – whether by reference to pay awards, inflation, or other measures.

3.73 In addition, we also observe that, over the medium term, the proposals in the Police Reform White Paper for force mergers, alongside wider reforms including the creation of the NPS, are likely to have significant implications for the future role, structure and consistency of regional allowances in both the police service, the main comparator for the NCA, and the Agency itself as it transitions to the NPS.

3.74 For these reasons, while we are recommending uplifts to the London Weighting Allowance and South East Allowance in 2026, we consider that work is required to resolve issues around the purpose, design, uprating mechanisms, and equalities impacts of these allowances. We recognise, of course, that a similar review may be planned, or that both this and other changes affecting these allowances may form part of the business case for pay and contract reform.

Recommendation 2. We recommend an increase of 4.7%, in line with the pay award, to the London Weighting Allowance and South East Allowance for all NCA officers within our remit group from 1 August 2026.

Recommendation 3. We recommend that the NCA undertakes a review of the purpose, design and uprating mechanisms of the London Weighting Allowance and South East Allowance. In parallel, the NCA should work with policing partners and trade unions to consider the long-term future of these allowances in the light of the wider reforms set out in the Police Reform White Paper and the NCA's transition to the National Police Service.

Northern Ireland

3.75 In our 2024 Report, we recommended that the allowances of NCA officers in Northern Ireland should be reviewed by the NCA with a view to those NCA officers who were subject to similar risks to Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) officers receiving the same allowance as PSNI officers. Officers in the PSNI receive the Northern Ireland Transitional Allowance (NITA). We considered this review in our 2025 Report.

3.76 The NCOA remained unconvinced by the outcome of the NCA's review of the Northern Ireland environmental allowance and did not accept its conclusions. The NCOA said that it also was not confident that the current NCA pay reform plans would sufficiently consider the implications of an ever-changing threat to its members in Northern Ireland. The NCOA told us that it would continue to monitor this matter and when appropriate would escalate specific concerns to the NCA Executive Leadership.

3.77 In oral evidence, the NCOA told us that it had no information that suggested that the NCA had communicated to all its officers in Northern Ireland the rationale for not extending the environmental allowance to all its officers in Northern Ireland nor for not aligning it with the NITA.

Our comment on Northern Ireland

3.78 **In our 2025 Report, we said that the NCA needed to communicate clearly to all NCA officers in Northern Ireland: the outcome of its review of allowances for NCA officers in the country; its rationale for not extending the environmental allowance to all officers in Northern Ireland; and the rationale for not aligning the environmental allowance with the NITA. We would like an update from the NCA on this in the next pay round.**

International Liaison Officer allowances

3.79 The NCA noted that in our 2025 Report we requested that it review the allowances of ILOs to potentially enable recruitment from a more diverse pool of officers. The Agency told us that it remained its intention that the review of the ILO allowance would be taken forward through the pay and contract reform process. The NCA confirmed that it had accepted our recommendation and that it would complete the review in the near future, once the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) had concluded its review of the Government International Service overseas pay arrangements. The Agency also proposed that the ILO Allowance and Diplomatic Compensation Allowance should be uplifted by the same percentage as the pay award in 2026/27.

3.80 In oral evidence, the NCA said that the FCDO needed to conclude its review of the Government International Service overseas pay arrangements. A decision on ILO allowances was a matter for the FCDO and Ministers. The completion of the FCDO review was expected this year and then the NCA could complete its review in a couple of months and then implement it. The Agency said that ILO posts in the NCA were attractive roles that were oversubscribed with no recruitment problems. It observed that it was important that ILOs were remunerated fairly and in line with the rest of government.

3.81 In oral evidence, the PCS supported the NCA's proposal that ILO allowances be uplifted in line with the pay award in 2026/27. The NCOA noted the NCA's recommendation and observed that the measure should be affordable as it only applied to a small number of officers. It said that the allowances had not been reviewed since 2006. The intention was to hold a more fundamental review of ILO allowances in due course.

3.82 The FDA said that ILOs already received a good package and the roles were oversubscribed. It said that the FDA's priority was to concentrate on improving the pay of Grade 5 and 4 officers, particularly those based in London and the South East.

Our comment and recommendation on International Liaison Officer allowances

3.83 We note the NCA's decision to review elements of the ILO allowance through the pay and contract reform process, once the FCDO has concluded its review of the Government International Service overseas pay arrangements. In the meantime, pending the outcome of the NCA's review we recommend the ILO Allowance and Diplomatic Compensation Allowance be uplifted in line with the pay award.

Recommendation 4. We recommend an increase of 4.7%, in line with the pay award, to the International Liaison Officer Allowance and Diplomatic Compensation Allowance for officers in our remit group from 1 August 2026.

Other allowances

3.84 The NCA told us that it had a non-consolidated pot of funding to support the performance and retention of officers. It said that RRAs accounted for a significant portion of this funding and they were used to target roles that were difficult to fill or that carried significant retention risks. It explained that these allowances were allocated to officers to encourage them to remain in hard-to-fill roles. It told us that these were relatively small payments, with an average value of £1,800 a year. It observed that this was insufficient to support the necessary recruitment and retention. It said that some roles that attracted a RRA experienced greater turnover than the NCA average. It told us that an alternative approach was being considered for 2026/27 onwards. However, in oral evidence it explained that although it had modelled a different approach, dealing with impact of the possible changes on officers was too challenging in advance of pay reform. Instead, the NCA had decided to deal with the situation through pay and contract reform and the provision of a better, more balanced, overall pay package.

3.85 The PCS told us that a review of RRAs was expected to take place in February to March 2026. It said that details were limited. The PCS told us that the NCA should engage at an early stage with the trade unions to ensure that any new process was fair and that there was a proper evaluation of any consequences of pay and contract reform and police reform.

3.86 The PCS sought an increase of at least 15% to the Border Investigator Allowance. It explained that in 2017 a number of investigators had been transferred from the Border Force to the NCA and that they were assimilated onto Agency terms and conditions. It told us that the allowance had not been raised since it was established.

3.87 The PCS further proposed that the current rate of the On-call Allowance (£25.28) should be increased to £35 per period and its scope expanded to cover more grades. It also said that as part of its national campaign it was seeking an increase in annual leave and a reduction in working hours for all PCS members.

3.88 In oral evidence the PCS said it remained very concerned about RRAs. The NCA's non-consolidated pot was relatively small and RRAs were spread thinner and thinner. The PCS told us that the NCA offered a £1,500 allowance to its DDaT staff but that in comparison, the Home Office offered allowances of around £5,000 to £6,000. It explained that the NCA therefore found it very difficult to compete for specialist skills. The PCS said that pay and allowances should be reviewed in the round.

3.89 The NCOA proposed that the NCA should enter a period of collective bargaining with the NCOA to deliver a redesign of the Agency's allowances. It explained that the redesign would include but not exclusively be limited to: location allowances, ILO allowances, the On-call Allowance and the Northern Ireland environmental allowance. It said that the exercise should include a review of the NCA's non-consolidated reward budget. In support of its proposed approach, it highlighted the recent positive outcome from its negotiations with the Agency on the reform of the NCA's shift allowance.

3.90 In oral evidence, the NCOA told us that its position was that allowances needed to be looked at in the round. The priorities were the RRAs and Special Duties Bonus Payments. These could have a significant impact on recruitment and retention. It said that these payment were not being used in an agile way. The NCOA explained that the remuneration committee looked at the payments each year; however it did not undertake a fundamental review of the system. It said that under the current arrangements a lot of NCA officers received relatively small amounts of money and had done so for a large number of years. It observed that this made it very difficult to make any substantive changes. It said that at the moment, non-consolidated payments were being used to supplement base pay whereas such allowances really needed to be targeted at hard-to-fill and hard-to-retain roles.

Our comment on other allowances

3.91 We are aware, from evidence we have received in previous years, that the NCA has intended to review various allowances as part of change programmes linked to either its estate programme or its pay and contract reform business case. However, slow progress on pay and contract reform has meant that some allowances have remained unchanged for a number of years. We note the challenges that this is creating in a number of areas including in relation to RRAs. We observe that there are issues around the effectiveness of those allowances and the process for allocating them. However, we judge that the real barrier to progress on refreshing allowances has been the lack of progress and the uncertainty regarding the pay and contract reform business case. Without these delays, we observe that the NCA would have been able to begin remodelling its allowances, particularly its RRAs, to increase the attractiveness of its roles in DDaT and other areas highly reliant on niche skills that attract a premium in the private sector.

3.92 If the business case is not approved, we suggest this issue is tackled as a matter of urgency. We judge that inaction is not an option. However, we note the NCA's non-consolidated pot is smaller, as a percentage of pay bill, than the equivalent pots in a number of other Whitehall departments. We judge that the pot would need to be increased in order to reform RRAs effectively. We accept that increasing the non-consolidated pot could reduce the amount of resources available for consolidated pay. However, we observe that a larger non-consolidated pot – enabling larger RRAs – might reduce the resources required to fund contingent labour, thereby freeing up additional resources. We also observe that the best solution would be a restructured pay scale or potentially a special pay scale for technical or DDaT staff, as exists in other departments. Regardless of the outcome of the pay and contract reform business case, this issue needs to be addressed including, if necessary, the size of the NCA's non-consolidated pot. Any change must, of course, take account of the implications of the transfer to the NPS.

3.93 We note the NCOA's proposal to work with the Agency, through collective bargaining, to redesign NCA allowances. In support of this, it highlighted recent changes to the NCA's Shift Allowance, on which we commented in our previous report; we note that those changes have now been successfully implemented.

3.94 **We expect the NCA to work with the NCOA and the other trade unions to redesign the NCA allowances ideally within the framework of the work to take forward the pay and contract reform business case. That should include measures to strengthen the ability of the NCA to attract and retain specialists in niche technical roles. We observe that it will be important to ensure that any work on allowances supports, and is consistent with, work to facilitate the eventual establishment of the NPS and the need to 'converge and merge' a number of organisations.**

Appendix A – Previous NCARRB Reports

2025 Report

We submitted our 2025 Report on 6 June 2025 and the Government responded on 22 July 2025[4]. The recommendations were as follows:

Our 2025/26 recommendations (from August 2025):

- **A consolidated pay award of 4.4% for all NCA officers within our remit group. The spot rates for Grades 1 to 5 and the minima and maxima of the standard pay ranges for Grades 1 to 6 to be raised by 4.4%.**
- **An increase of 4.4% to the London Weighting Allowance and South East Allowance for all NCA officers within our remit group.**
- **The allowances of International Liaison Officers in the NCA to be reviewed.**

Previous recommendations

All our previous recommendations, along with the Government responses, are set out below.

Report	Recommendation	Government response
1st (2014)	NCA officers designated with operational powers assessed as at least 'good' under the NCA's performance management system should receive consolidated pay increases from 1 August 2014 at the following values: below target range £540; within target range £270; and above target range £135 (non-consolidated where above the pay range maxima).	Accepted
	Border Investigators (former UK Border Agency officers) designated with operational powers not offered assimilation should receive a pay increase of 1% (non-consolidated where above the pay range maxima) from 1 August 2014.	Accepted
	No changes in the values of NCA allowances within our remit.	Accepted
	The NCA should conduct a full review of the design, purpose and value of the London Weighting Allowance and present proposals in evidence to us.	Accepted

[4] Letter from Home Secretary to Chair, Home Affairs Select Committee (22 July 2025). Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/687fb9cffdc190fb6b8468ee/HS-HASC_NCA_Pay_letter.pdf [Accessed on 22 May 2026]

Report	Recommendation	Government response
2nd (2015)	NCA officers designated with operational powers assessed as at least 'good' under the NCA's performance management system should receive consolidated pay increases from 1 August 2015 at the following values: below target range £540; within target range £270; and above target range £135. The pay range maxima should be increased by £135 to ensure consolidated pay increases for those at the pay range maxima.	Accepted
	For those officers yet to be assimilated: (i) those offered NCA terms but electing to remain on precursor terms should remain on their 2014/15 pay rates; and (ii) Border Investigators not offered assimilation should receive a pay increase of 1% (non-consolidated where above the pay range maxima) from 1 August 2015.	Accepted
	London Weighting Allowance should increase by 1% from 1 August 2015.	Accepted
	No changes in the values of other NCA allowances within our remit.	Accepted
3rd (2016)	A 1% consolidated pay increase (including Border Investigators) from 1 August 2016.	Accepted
	Other officers offered NCA terms but electing to remain on precursor terms should remain on their 2015/16 pay rates.	Accepted
	A 1% increase to London Weighting Allowance from 1 August 2016.	Accepted
4th (2018)	A variable pay award, reflecting the NCA proposal for 2017/18, is implemented, and backdated to 1 August 2017. The award should be modified so that officers on the existing pay ranges receive a minimum consolidated pay award of 1%. The maxima of all the pay ranges should be uplifted by 1% and the minima of Grades 1 and 2 should be uplifted by 1%.	A minimum 1% award for all officers not eligible for the new pay structure and not already receiving the pay range maximum for their grade. A 1% award made up of consolidated and non-consolidated elements for officers not eligible for the new pay structure and already in receipt of the maximum for their grade or reaching it.
	A variable pay award, reflecting the NCA proposal for 2018/19, is implemented from 1 August 2018. The award should be modified so that officers on the existing pay ranges receive a minimum consolidated pay award of 1%. The maxima of all the pay ranges should be uplifted by 1% and the minima of Grades 1 and 2 should be uplifted by 1%.	A minimum 1% award for all officers not eligible for the new pay structure and not already receiving the pay range maximum for their grade. A 1% award made up of consolidated and non-consolidated elements for officers not eligible for the new pay structure and already in receipt of the maximum for their grade or reaching it.
	NCA officers designated with operational powers electing to remain on precursor terms should remain on their 2016/17 pay rates.	Accepted

Report	Recommendation	Government response
	London Weighting Allowance for 2017/18 for NCA officers designated with operational powers should be increased by 2% to £3,291 and be backdated to 1 August 2017.	Increased London Weighting Allowance by 1%.
	We make no recommendation as to the London Weighting Allowance for 2018/19, on the understanding that the NCA management will carry out a review of the allowance.	London Weighting Allowance for 2018/19 to be determined following a formal review.
5th (2019)	An overall pay bill uplift of 2.5% from 1 August 2019.	Accepted
	The pay band minima for Grades 5 and 6 should be uplifted by 4.25% and 4.5% respectively from 1 August 2019.	Accepted
	All officers should receive a consolidated pay uplift of at least 1% and the NCA should aim to provide all officers with a minimum consolidated uplift as close as possible to 2% from 1 August 2019.	Accepted
	London Weighting Allowance for 2019/20 for NCA officers designated with operational powers should increase by 2.5% to £3,339 from 1 August 2019.	Accepted
	Shift Allowance is revised to 15% of base pay from 1 August 2019.	Accepted
6th (2020)	From 1 August 2020, the standard pay ranges should be revalorised as follows: a. the pay range minima for Grades 1 to 4 increase by 2.5%; b. the pay range minima for Grades 5 and 6 increase by 4.25% and 4.5% respectively; and c. the pay range maxima for Grades 1 to 6 increase by 1.5%.	Accepted
	In conjunction with Recommendation 1, from 1 August 2020, all officers on the standard pay ranges should receive a consolidated pay award of at least 1.5% that maintains their percentile position on the pay range.	Accepted
	The spot rates for Grades 4 and 5 should increase by 3% and 4.5% respectively from 1 August 2020.	Accepted
	London Weighting Allowance should increase by 2.5% to £3,424 from 1 August 2020.	Accepted
	Shift Allowance should increase to 20% of base pay from 1 August 2020.	Accepted
7th (2021)	No recommendations made.	
8th (2022)	By 30 November 2022, the NCA should provide a plan outlining the next steps in its reform strategy to NCARRB. This should set out the workforce component of its transformation programme, and in particular the relationship between the NCA's expenditure priorities, organisational priorities and strategy, its HR strategy, and its reward strategy. It should also provide an update on discussions with HM Treasury regarding a multi-year pay agreement.	Accepted
	All officers in our remit group should receive a consolidated increase of £1,900 to their full-time equivalent annual salary from 1 August 2022. The spot rates for Grades 1 to 5 and the minima and maxima of the standard pay ranges for Grades 1 to 6 should be raised by £1,900.	Accepted

Report	Recommendation	Government response
	London Weighting and South East Allowances for 2022/23 for NCA officers designated with operational powers should increase by 5%.	Accepted
9th (2023)	A consolidated pay award of 7% for all NCA officers within our remit group from 1 August 2023. The spot rates for Grades 1 to 5 and the minima and maxima of the standard pay ranges for Grades 1 to 6 should be raised by 7%.	Accepted
	An increase of 7% to the London Weighting Allowance and South East Allowance for all NCA officers within our remit group from 1 August 2023.	Accepted
10th (2024)	The NCA should redesign its job architecture and evaluate all roles to consider which grades and posts are comparable to police officers and which are comparable to the civil service, police staff or the private sector.	Partially accepted – while the Home Secretary was supportive of the central premise of this recommendation, measures were already underway to develop a set of comprehensive proposals which the Government would seek to implement in a timely fashion.
	A consolidated pay award of 5% for all NCA officers within our remit group from 1 August 2024. The spot rates for Grades 1 to 5 and the minima and maxima of the standard pay ranges for Grades 1 to 6 should be raised by 5%.	Accepted
	An increase of 5% to the London Weighting Allowance and South East Allowance for all NCA officers within our remit group from 1 August 2024.	Accepted
	The allowances of NCA officers in Northern Ireland should be reviewed by the NCA with a view to those NCA officers who are subject to similar risks to Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) officers receiving the same allowance as PSNI officers.	Partially accepted – while the Home Secretary was supportive of the central premise of this recommendation, measures were already underway to develop a set of comprehensive proposals which the Government would seek to implement in a timely fashion.
11th (2025)	A consolidated pay award of 4.4% for all NCA officers within our remit group. The spot rates for Grades 1 to 5 and the minima and maxima of the standard pay ranges for Grades 1 to 6 to be raised by 4.4%.	Accepted
	An increase of 4.4% to the London Weighting Allowance and South East Allowance for all NCA officers within our remit group.	Accepted
	The allowances of International Liaison Officers in the NCA to be reviewed.	Accepted

Appendix B – Security Minister's Remit Letter

OFFICIAL

Home Office

Dan Jarvis MBE MP
Security Minister
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF
www.gov.uk/home-office

Zoë Billingham
Chair of the National Crime Agency
Remuneration Review Body
By Email Only

27 October 2025

Dear Zoë,

NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY REMUNERATION REVIEW BODY REMIT 2026/27

I am grateful to you and the other NCA Remuneration Review Body (NCARRB) members for your hard work over the years and valuable recommendations on the 2025/26 pay round. I would like to express additional thanks to those NCARRB members who have reached the end of their tenure, and welcome those joining the committee. I look forward to receiving the 12th NCARRB report, which I am confident will provide the expert, independent advice necessary to fairly compensate NCA officers as they continue their critical and tireless work in the fight against serious and organised crime.

I am writing to commence formally the 2026/27 pay round and set out how the Government intends to work with the NCARRB over the coming year. In accordance with the provisions of the Crime and Courts Act 2013, and with your terms of reference, it is important that I receive independent advice on the remuneration of NCA officers with operational powers.

We were pleased to be able to accept your recommendations for 2025/26 pay awards. However, since they came in above the figures we set out as affordable within evidence, they required trade-offs, including a slowdown in NCA's planned recruitment activity. As the Spending Review confirmed, all pay must be funded from Departmental budgets and there will be no additional funding available for pay settlements. My Department's evidence will set out the funds available to the Home Office for 2026/27, following the Spending Review, as well as the recruitment and retention context alongside and earnings data.

We know that public sector workers delivering our vital public services deserve timely pay awards. I would be grateful if you could support this by submitting your report at the earliest point that allows you to give due consideration to the relevant evidence. I recognise that changing the timeline from recent years will present challenges for you, but I am sure you also share the Government's belief in the importance of returning to more timely annual pay processes. To enable you to submit your report as early as possible, our department will submit written evidence in a timely manner.

During this pay round, you will receive evidence from my department, HM Treasury, and key stakeholders (including trade unions). My department's evidence will cover the recruitment and retention context for NCA, including the expected position following the implementation of the 2025/26 pay award. It will also set out the funds available to the Home Office and NCA for 2026/27, which will be finalised through the internal departmental allocations process.

Furthermore, as the NCA advances its 'One NCA' policy, it is crucial that all staff, both those with and without operational powers are treated equitably in matters of pay. I would, therefore, ask that the NCARRB annual review takes this into consideration and provides clear recommendations on the proposed NCA pay award, while giving due regard to Civil Service pay and relevant guidance.

In considering your recommendations, you should therefore have regard to the following:

1. NCA's productivity, efficiency improvements and the affordability of any proposals within the Agency's existing budget constraints, noting the particularly challenging fiscal environment.
2. The pay gap differential between NCA and Police officers.
3. Pay in the Civil Service, aligning recommendations with the average pay across Civil Service departments.

Additionally, I would be grateful for the NCARRB to note that NCA will be seeking to address the structural pay and contract issues that you have highlighted in previous reports.

We remain committed to continuing to ensure that the 2026/27 pay awards reach pay packets in time for the start of the pay year. For the NCA, this means building on the momentum of two consecutive timely pay awards to establish a positive cycle into the future, reflective of the value that this Government places on critical and tireless work of NCA officers.

To this end, where possible I would be grateful if NCARRB would deliver its recommendations to the Government on the 2026/27 pay award for the National Crime Agency at its earliest convenience, whilst ensuring the Agency can implement the pay award by 1 August 2026, in line with the pay year. To support this, my Department will aim to cooperate with all your deadlines and submit evidence in a timely manner.

Thank you once again for your dedication to this important process. I look forward to reviewing your recommendations in due course.

Yours sincerely

Dan Jarvis MBE MP
Cabinet Office and Home Office
Security Minister

2

Appendix C – The Parties’ Website Addresses

The parties’ written evidence should be available through these websites.

Home Office	https://www.gov.uk/homeoffice
HM Treasury	https://www.gov.uk/hm-treasury
National Crime Agency	http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/
National Crime Officers Association	http://www.ncoa.org.uk/
Public and Commercial Services Union	https://www.pcs.org.uk/
FDA	https://www.fda.org.uk/

Appendix D – Our Analysis of the Economic Context and NCA Workforce Data

D.1 In this appendix we set out our analysis of the economic context and the NCA workforce data.

The economic context

D.2 As with many of our recent reports, this report has been produced in a period of heightened economic uncertainty. This year, the conflict in the Middle East has changed the economic outlook since the parties submitted evidence and the latest Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecasts were made.

D.3 We set out below the latest economic and labour market indicators (summarised in Table D.1) as at 20 May 2026, available to us when finalising our recommendations.

- *Inflation.* Inflation was rising as we wrote our last report and continued to do so until September 2025, before starting to fall. The CPI increased by 3.8% in the year to August 2025 (when the 2025/26 NCA pay award took effect), and the CPIH increased by 4.1% over the same period. In the year to April 2026, the CPI increased by 2.8% and the CPIH increased by 3.0%.
- Core CPI inflation (which excludes the effects of price changes in energy, food and alcohol) was slightly lower at 2.5% in the year to April 2026, while core CPIH inflation was 2.8%.
- The Bank of England base interest rate decreased from 4.25% in May 2025 to 3.75% from January 2026 as inflationary pressures were easing. However, it will take time for the full effect of falling interest rates to affect mortgage payments due to the high proportion of fixed-rate mortgages.
- In its March Economic and Fiscal Outlook[5], the OBR expected CPI inflation to average 2.3% in 2026, falling from 3.1% in the first quarter, to 2.1% in the second and third quarters, and 1.9% in the fourth quarter of the year.
- In its April 2026 Monetary Policy Report[6], the Bank of England reported that the conflict in the Middle East had led to a sharp rise in oil and gas prices, reflecting disruption to current and expected future energy supply. It presented three scenarios to illustrate a range of possible outcomes for the UK economy. These scenarios differed in their assumptions about the paths of global energy prices and the extent of any second-round effects on domestic price and wage-setting. Across all three scenarios, CPI inflation was projected to be significantly higher in the near term than in the Bank's February forecasts, driven by the direct and

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[5] OBR (March 2026), Economic and Fiscal Outlook. Available at: https://obr.uk/efo/economic-and-fiscal-outlook-march-2026/ [Accessed on 22 May 2026]
[6] Bank of England (April 2026), Monetary Policy Report. Available at: https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy-report/2026/april-2026 [Accessed on 22 May 2026]

indirect effects of higher energy prices. Under two of these scenarios, the Bank forecast inflation to peak at 3.6% to 3.7% in the fourth quarter of 2026, while under the third scenario it would peak at 6.2% in the first quarter of 2027. This contrasted with the Bank's expectation in February that inflation would be 2% in the fourth quarter of 2026.

- *Economic growth.* UK real gross domestic product (GDP) figures showed that the UK economy grew by 1.4% over 2025 as a whole, but growth was weak over the second half of the year. The first estimate of GDP for the first quarter of 2026 showed growth of 0.6% on the previous quarter and 1.1% on a year earlier. Real GDP per head of population grew by 1.1% over 2025 as a whole, and the first estimate for the first quarter of 2026 showed increases of 0.6% on the previous quarter and 0.9% on a year earlier.
- In March 2026, the OBR estimated that annual real GDP growth would be 1.1% in 2026 and 1.6% in 2027. It estimated that real GDP per head would increase by 0.8% in 2026 and 1.3% in 2027.
- In April 2026, the Bank of England expected real GDP growth to slow to between 0.7% and 0.8% in 2026 but to then increase to between 0.8% and 1.0% in 2027.
- *Labour market.* Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI) indicated that the number of employees on payrolls in April 2026 was 30.2 million, 0.7% lower than a year earlier. Estimates from the Labour Force Survey[7] (LFS) put total employment at 34.4 million in the three months to March 2026, 1.2% higher than a year earlier, with annual increases in both the number of employees (up 0.8%) and self-employment (up 3.9%). The LFS unemployment rate (for those aged 16 and over) was 5.0% in the three months to March 2026, 0.5 percentage points higher than a year earlier. The Claimant Count rate in April 2026 was 4.4%, the same as a year earlier. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) recorded 705,000 job vacancies in the three months to April 2026, 7.1% lower than a year earlier.
- *Average earnings.* In the three months to March 2026, Average Weekly Earnings (AWE) annual growth for the whole economy was 4.1% for total pay (including bonuses) and 3.4% for regular pay (excluding bonuses).
- Including bonuses, AWE annual growth in the three months to March 2026 was 4.9% in the public sector and 3.9% in the private sector. Excluding bonuses, the figures were 4.8% in the public sector and 3.0% in the private sector.
- In March 2026, the OBR estimated that average earnings growth would fall from 5.3% in 2025 to 3.4% in 2026 and 2.4% in 2027.

[7] The ONS advises that increased volatility of LFS estimates, resulting from smaller achieved sample sizes, means they should be treated with additional caution, and it recommends using them as part of a suite of labour market indicators.

- In April 2026, the Bank of England expected growth in private sector AWE excluding bonuses of 3.2% to 3.5% in 2026.
- *Pay settlements.* The latest estimates for median pay settlements in the three months to April 2026 ranged from 3.0% to 3.3%, while the latest Labour Research Department (LRD) median pay settlements were at 3.8% in the three months to March. Our analysis of Brightmine data indicated that just over one-quarter (28%) of the pay awards recorded so far in 2026 were worth 4% or more. The National Living Wage increased by 4.1% from 1 April 2026.
- In March 2026 the Government announced 2026/27 pay awards for some parts of the public sector. These included: 3.3% for NHS Agenda for Change staff; 3.5% for prison officers and doctors; and 3.75% for dentists in primary care.

Table D.1: Latest economic and labour market indicators, as at 20 May 2026

	Figure
Inflation indicators	
Annual CPI inflation	2.8%
Annual CPIH inflation	3.0%
Pay settlement indicators	
Brightmine median pay settlement	3.0%
Incomes Data Research (IDR) median pay settlement	3.3%
LRD median pay settlement	3.8%
LRD lowest basic rates median pay settlement	3.8%
Average earnings indicators	
Annual growth in AWE – private sector excluding bonuses	3.0%
Annual growth in AWE – whole economy excluding bonuses	3.4%
Annual growth in AWE – private sector	3.9%
PAYE median annual change in pay	3.9%
Annual growth in AWE – whole economy	4.1%
Annual growth in AWE – public sector excluding bonuses	4.8%
Annual growth in AWE – public sector	4.9%
PAYE annual change in median pay	4.9%
Labour market indicators	
PAYE employees on payroll annual growth	−0.7%
LFS annual employment growth	1.2%
Claimant Count rate	4.4%
LFS unemployment rate (aged 16 and over)	4.0%
LFS employment rate (aged 16 to 64)	75.0%

Source: ONS – Labour Market Overview[8], Consumer Price Inflation[9], Claimant Count[10], and Earnings and Employment from PAYE RTI[11]; Brightmine[12]; IDR[13]; and LRD[14].

Notes: The employment rate measures the proportion of the population (aged 16 to 64) in employment; the unemployment rate gives the number of unemployed people as a proportion of the total number of people (aged 16 and over) either in work or unemployed; and the Claimant Count rate is the number of people claiming unemployment benefits as a proportion of the total number of workforce jobs and claimants of unemployment benefits.

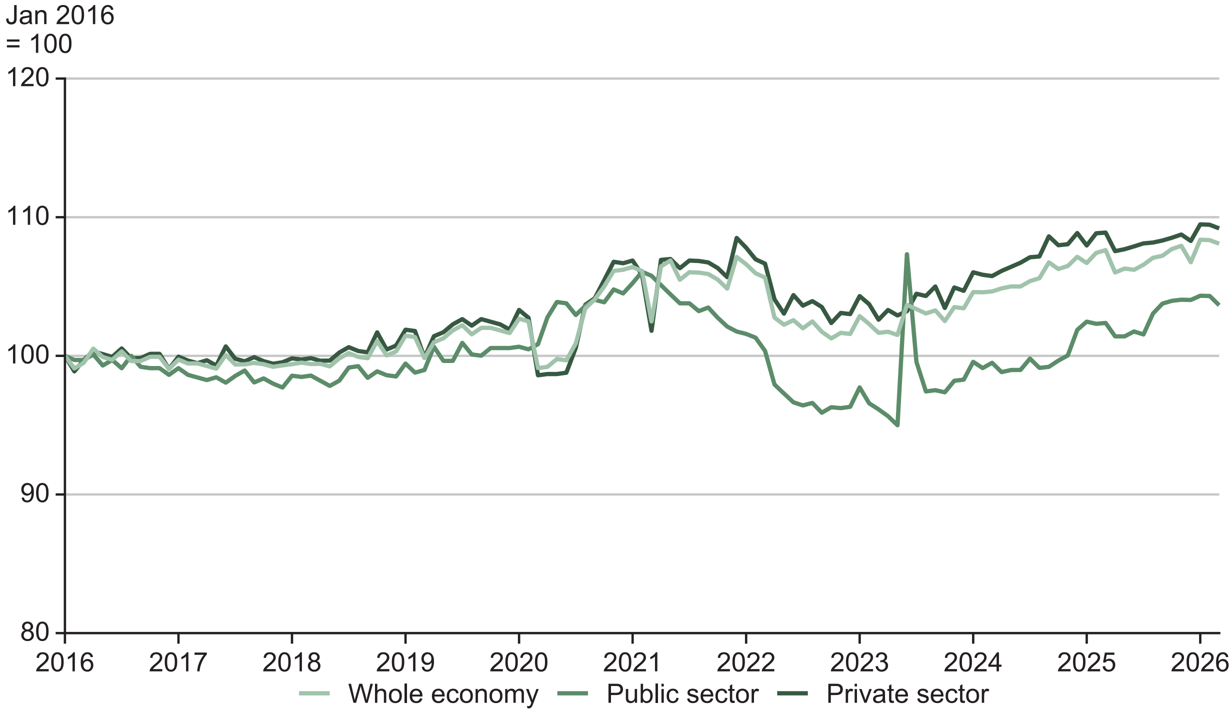
D.4 We note that inflation fell between September 2025 and February 2026, but it has started increasing as a result of increasing fuel prices. However, we continue to emphasise that falling inflation only represents a slowing in the rate of overall price increases and not a fall in prices, and that NCA officers continue to experience the effect of past high inflation in their cost of living. We observe that transport price inflation figures are higher than the overall rate.

[8] https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/may2026 [Accessed on 22 May 2026]
[9] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/april2026 [Accessed on 22 May 2026]
[10] https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/outofworkbenefits/datasets/claimantcountcla01/current [Accessed on 22 May 2026]
[11] https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/realtimeinformationstatisticsreferencetableseasonallyadjusted/current [Accessed on 22 May 2026]
[12] https://www.brightmine.com/uk/products/hr-compliance-centre/ [Accessed on 22 May 2026]
[13] https://www.incomesdataresearch.co.uk [Accessed on 22 May 2026]
[14] http://www.lrd.org.uk/index.php?pagid=29 [Accessed on 22 May 2026]

D.5 We are conscious that HM Treasury's evidence placed more emphasis on the use of forecast data this year. However, we observe that the conflict in the Middle East has changed the economic outlook since the latest OBR forecasts in March, and increased the uncertainty around other forecasts. The Bank of England's latest Monetary Policy Report presented three potential scenarios, all of which pointed to higher inflation than had previously been expected. We have focussed on the general trend of these forecasts rather than any specific values.

D.6 We also observe that measures of average earnings growth and median pay settlements have been more stable than inflation. Furthermore, there has been a significant increase in the gap between private and public sector pay over the last decade, with Average Weekly Earnings in the private sector having grown by 9.2% in real terms since 2016, compared with an increase of 3.7% in the public sector (Chart 3.1). We note that these comparisons can be sensitive to starting year, and that over the last three years real AWE have generally been growing slightly faster in the public sector than the private sector.

Chart D.1: Real Average Weekly Earnings (January 2016 = 100), by sector, 2016–2026



Source: Office for the Pay Review Bodies analysis of AWE and CPI, ONS.

D.7 Developments in private sector pay continue to play a role in our considerations. However, AWE figures are only a part of these developments and we are mindful that pay settlements are more akin to the pay award recommendations we make each year, as pay settlements look at recent pay awards whereas average earnings figures reflect historic pay growth. Furthermore, average earnings figures are affected by structural changes in the workforce and hours worked in addition to changes in underlying rates of pay. The latest median settlements available to us as we finalised our recommendations ranged from 3.0% to 3.8%.

NCA workforce, recruitment and retention

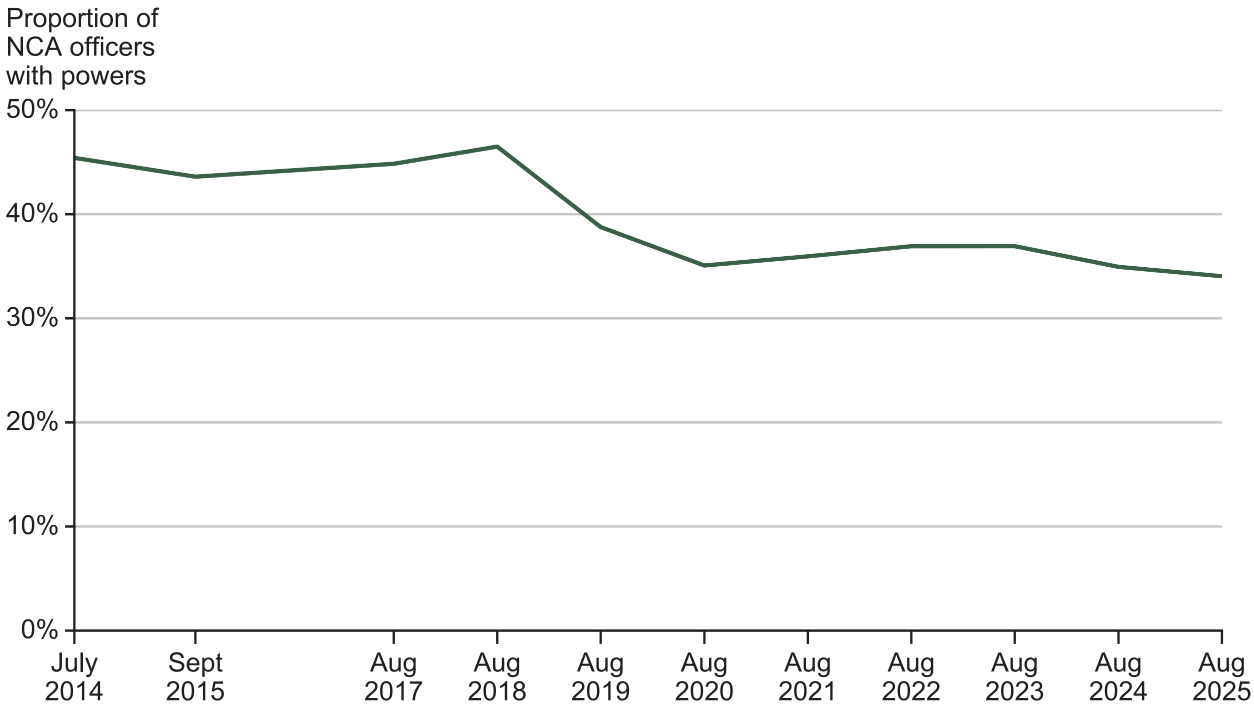
D.8 The NCA provided workforce data as at August 2025 in an annex to its evidence submission. In this section we present our analysis of some of the key points from this dataset and those provided in previous years.

NCA workforce overview

D.9 The NCA reported that, on 31 August 2025, it had 6,215 officers (on a headcount basis) in Grades 1–6[15]. This was 0.8% lower than a year earlier when there were 6,264 officers.

D.10 The number of officers within our remit group (those officers with powers) stood at 2,116 (headcount) on 31 August 2025. This represented just over one-third (34%) of the NCA workforce (Chart D.1), 1 percentage point down on a year earlier.

Chart D.2: Proportion of NCA officers with powers, 2014–2025

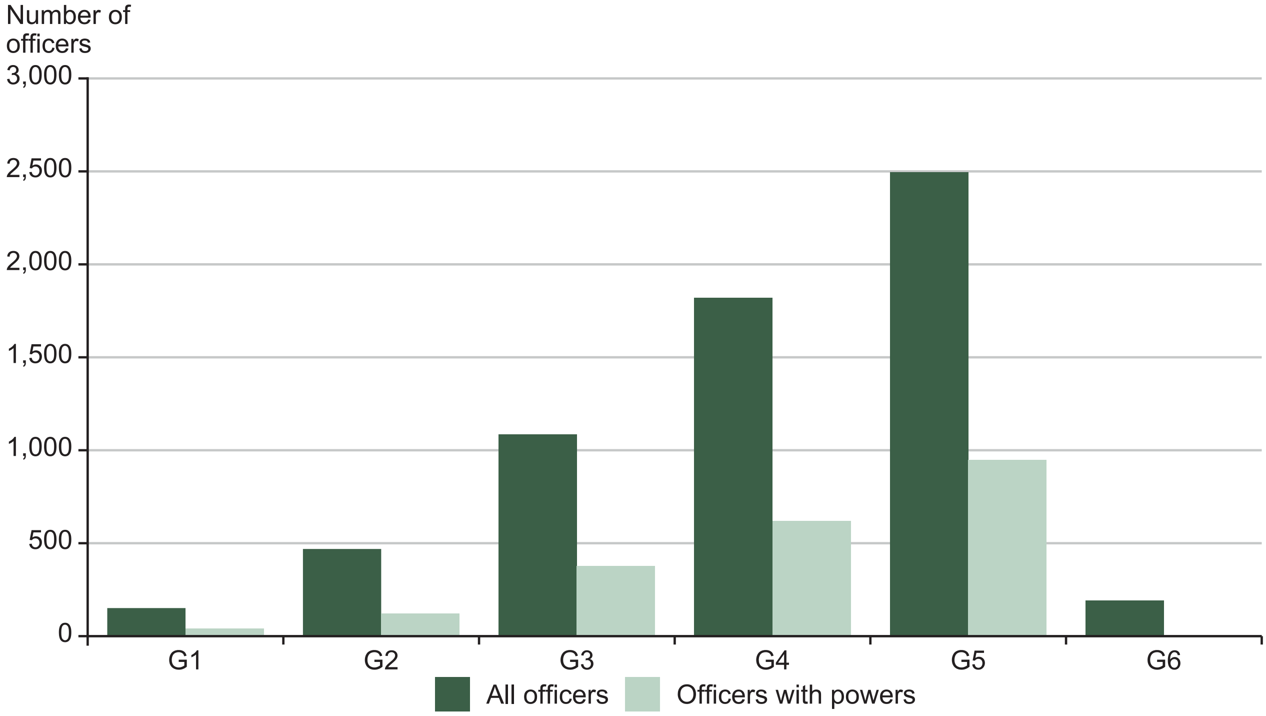


Source: NCA evidence submissions 2015–2026.
Note: NCA did not provide 2016 data to the NCARRB.

D.11 Grade 5 contained the highest number of officers (2,497 or 40% overall), and nearly two-fifths (38%) of officers in this grade had powers (Chart D.2). Grades 3-5 contained 92% of all officers with powers.

[15] Throughout this analysis 'workforce' relates to Grades 1 to 6 and excludes senior civil servants (who are covered by the Senior Salaries Review Body).

Chart D.3: Number of NCA officers, by grade, August 2025



Source: NCA evidence.

Note: Numbers of officers with powers are not available for Grade 6 due to low numbers.

D.12 Part-time workers accounted for 10.8% of the overall workforce. However, this proportion was lower among officers with powers, at 8.8%.

D.13 Officers in operational roles made up 72% of the NCA workforce. Most officers with powers (94%) were in operational roles, and those with powers accounted for nearly half (45%) of officers in such roles.

Diversity

D.14 The proportion of female officers has been increasing since August 2018, and in August 2025 they accounted for 47% of the workforce, 9 percentage points higher than in 2018. However, the proportion of female officers in the remit group was much lower, at 33%. This also represented an increase since 2018 (up 9 percentage points).

D.15 The following diversity figures have been provided for the whole workforce but not for the remit group more specifically:

- 14.8% of officers had declared themselves to be from an ethnic minority. This was 4 percentage points higher than a year earlier, and higher than any other period for which the NCA has provided us with data.
- 5.4% of officers had declared a disability, slightly lower than the previous year.
- 4.8% of officers declared their sexuality as lesbian, gay, bisexual or other. This was slightly higher than any other period for which the NCA has provided us with data.

- 40.9% of officers declared their religion to be Christian, a slightly higher proportion of officers (45.6%) declared themselves as having no religion, and 6.9% had another religion. All these figures were higher than a year earlier.
- 39.3% of officers were under the age of 40, 0.5 percentage points lower than the previous year.

D.16 The NCA provided data showing the distribution of officers on the standard pay ranges and spot rates, it also broke these down by gender and ethnicity. These figures showed that higher proportions of males and white officers were on spot rates than females and ethnic minority officers, and that the proportions of officers on the lower 'Developing' spot rates and at the minima of the standard pay ranges were higher for females and ethnic minority officers for most grades.

Officers on spot rates

D.17 Spot rates were introduced for Grades 4 and 5 in 2017/18, and for Grades 1 to 3 on 1 August 2020. Officers on spot rates have different terms and conditions of employment to those on the standard pay ranges, the most notable non-pay difference being a 40-hour working week (compared with a 37-hour working week for officers on the standard pay ranges). When spot rates were introduced, existing NCA officers in qualifying posts were given the option to move onto spot rates or remain on their existing terms and conditions. New recruits to qualifying roles were put directly onto spot rates.

D.18 In August 2025, 38.2% of the workforce (around 2,400 officers) were on spot rates, 0.7 percentage points lower than a year earlier. A further 4.3% of officers were eligible for spot rates but had chosen to remain on the standard pay ranges (down from 5.4% a year earlier).

D.19 Nearly two-thirds (63%) of officers with powers were on spot rates, an increase of 2 percentage points on the previous year, and over half of officers on spot rates had powers (56%).

Recruitment

D.20 The data provided by the NCA on recruitment only cover the number of applicants, offers made and candidates in its pipeline, without giving any indication of how many went on to take up a role in the NCA. Furthermore, the NCA has only been able to provide recruitment data up to March 2025, due to the implementation of a new online recruitment system in April 2025. The NCA added 738 candidates to its pipeline in the year to March 2025, 989 (57%) fewer than in the previous twelve months.

D.21 The NCA has provided data on the sectors which candidates are coming from for the period from 2023 to 2025. Overall, the main sources of candidates were the civil service (33%), the police (26%), and the private sector (22%). For operational commands, 33% of candidates were from the police, 25% from the civil service and 23% from the private sector.

Retention

D.22 The NCA attrition rate rose year-on-year from 6.2% in FYE 2017 to 9.0% in FYE 2020. Following a significant reduction as a result of COVID-19, it rose to 8.8% in FYE 2023 but dropped to 6.9% in FYE 2024 and remained at a similar level in FYE 2025.

D.23 In 2023, the NCA redesigned its exit questionnaire with an aim to provide more valuable data. Pay and benefits was the seventh highest leaving factor between February 2024 and August 2025 (Table D.2), although the NCA reports that this tends to be a linked factor for officers with promotion and new opportunities which were the top two factors. The NCA highlighted that the pay and benefits score had improved from 2.92 in 2021 and 2.50 in 2023.

Table D.2: Top 10 leaving factors from exit interviews, February 2024 – August 2025

Leaving factor	Likert Scale (out of 5)
Career development/promotion	2.52
To gain new opportunities or experience	2.42
Leadership	2.31
Technology	2.26
Work life balance/workload	1.84
To seek different working conditions	1.83
Pay and benefits	1.82
Workplace stress	1.66
NCA values not adhered to	1.63
Retirement	1.47

Source: NCA evidence.

D.24 In a separate question, however, pay featured as the second reason for being attracted to the new organisation (Table D.3).

Table D.3: Top 10 reasons for joining new organisation as given in exit interviews, February 2024 – August 2025

What attracted you to that organisation	Percentage of respondents
The role/responsibilities	12.2%
Pay and wider benefits	10.4%
Learning and development opportunities	10.4%
Promotion prospects	8.9%
Feeling valued/recognition	8.3%
Equipment of tools (e.g. technology)	7.9%
Location	7.3%
Working arrangements (e.g. flexible working)	6.7%
Organisational culture	6.5%
Reputation of organisation	5.5%

Source: NCA evidence.

Motivation and morale

D.25 The 2025 Civil Service People Survey[16] took place in September and October 2025. In this section we provide our analysis of some of the NCA results.

D.26 The overall NCA engagement index was 58% in 2025, similar to a year earlier. The NCA engagement index was 7 percentage points below the civil service benchmark[17] of 65%. The civil service benchmark was also similar to a year earlier.

D.27 The survey is split into various themes, most of which saw NCA results that were similar to 2024 but remained below the civil service benchmark. The pay and benefits theme remained one of the lowest scoring themes within the NCA, but saw an increase of 9 percentage points between 2024 and 2025 which took it slightly ahead of the civil service benchmark.

D.28 The results on officers' intentions to stay in the NCA were similar to the previous year:

- 46% of respondents said they wanted to stay working in the NCA for at least the next three years;
- around one-third of respondents wanted to stay working for the NCA for at least the next year; and
- just over one-fifth of respondents wanted to leave the NCA either as soon as possible or within the next twelve months.

[16] Cabinet Office (February 2026), *Civil Service People Survey: 2025 results*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-people-survey-2025-results [Accessed on 22 May 2026]

[17] Defined as the median across all participating civil service organisations where data were not suppressed.

Appendix E – 2026/27 Evidence from Parties

E.1 In this appendix we set out the key points from the evidence provided to us by parties on matters that form part of our standing terms of reference.

The NCA operating environment

E.2 The Home Office said that SOC was a major threat to the national security and prosperity of the UK. SOC cost lives, blighted communities, hampered economic growth, and corroded the global reputation of the UK and its institutions, with an estimated annual cost running into tens of billions of pounds. The Home Office also told us that criminal networks were increasingly adaptive and sophisticated, and that the criminal landscape remained dynamic, shaped by global challenges and the rapid evolution of technologies.

E.3 The Home Office explained that the NCA was the UK's strategic leader for tackling SOC, and that it continued to develop its use of advanced technology and investigative techniques to keep pace with modern threats. The Home Office informed us that the NCA had continued to focus on the high end of high harm, and that in FYE 2025 the Agency had taken nearly 7,000 actions to disrupt criminal threats, prevented over 400,000 frauds and issued over 400 cyber protect notifications. It also helped UK policing make around 800 child sexual abuse related arrests each month and safeguard approximately 1,100 children. The Home Office considered that these results highlighted the Agency's pivotal role in maintaining the UK's security and prosperity through effective law enforcement. It stressed that the Government recognised the valuable work being carried out by the NCA and remained committed to supporting the Agency to fulfil its essential role in tackling serious organised criminality in and impacting on the UK.

E.4 The NCA said SOC was a threat to national security, economic prosperity and the safety of citizens, and had a devastating impact on the lives of victims and communities across the country. The Agency was the system leader in disrupting and bringing to justice SOC criminals who posed the highest risk to the UK.

E.5 The NCA informed us that SOC was increasing in scale in response to a number of drivers, including geopolitical instability, economic challenges and most significantly advances in technology. The Agency said that SOC actors were highly capable adversaries and the NCA needed to constantly adapt to the ever-changing threat posed by the most harmful offending. The NCA highlighted that the majority of SOC threats had several aspects in common: they had substantial international elements; they were enabled by technology; and, for growing threats such as cyber and fraud, they were taking place increasingly online.

E.6 The FDA noted that the NCA was a pivotal law enforcement agency with national and international reach, and the mandate and powers to work in partnership with other law enforcement organisations to bring the full weight of the law to bear in cutting SOC. The FDA highlighted that NCA employees were civil servants subject to the civil service code and may be designated with one or more of the powers and privileges of a constable, powers of a customs officer and powers of an immigration officer.

E.7 The FDA highlighted that the Government's White Paper on Police Reform had proposed the setting up of a National Police Service which would incorporate a number of existing bodies, including the NCA.

Government pay policy and affordability

E.8 HM Treasury said that the 2025 Spending Review had set departmental budgets up to FYE 2029, but that the Government had since announced in the 2025 Budget that it would seek to make further savings and efficiencies of £2.8 billion in FYE 2029, rising to £4.9 billion in FYE 2031. These additional savings and efficiencies were equivalent to 0.5% of Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit budgets.

E.9 HM Treasury highlighted that there would be no additional funding for pay if recommended awards exceeded what departments could afford including from the Reserve or by switching funding from capital budgets into resource budgets. It explained that if Pay Review Bodies recommended awards above the level departments had budgeted for, then departments would have to consider whether further efficiencies or cuts were possible, and recommendations would have to be rejected if they proved unaffordable.

E.10 The Home Office told us that the NCA's budget would be £1.06 billion in FYE 2027 and would increase to approximately £1.1 billion by FYE 2029. The Home Office also reported that the NCA's budget had increased in recent years and that for FYE 2027 it would be nearly £200 million higher than it was in FYE 2024. However, the Home Office highlighted that the Agency continued to face significant affordability challenges, with rising operational costs, higher pay awards, and increased commercial and programme expenditure all contributing to budgetary strain. The Home Office added that its own budget remained under considerable pressure, which left limited scope for supplementary financial support to the Agency.

E.11 The NCA stressed that recommendations for changes to pay this year and in the longer term needed to be affordable and sustainable for the future. It informed us that it had budgeted for a 2.5% pay award effective from 1 August 2026. The Agency explained that the accumulated impact of accommodating high inflation in previous and future years represented budgetary pressure which it would have to manage, and that increased prioritisation of activities would be required in order to balance long-term affordability and sustainability with necessary investment in order to achieve productivity gains and ensure operational priorities were fulfilled.

E.12 The NCOA advised that the constraints placed by HM Treasury in its evidence, if followed, could result in a below inflation pay award for NCA officers.

E.13 The FDA cited several reports, which is said presented mounting evidence that many of the most significant risks to government plans and commitments, including efforts to control costs, were the result of gaps in civil service skills and expertise. The FDA argued that these reports demonstrated that attempting to find fiscal savings by holding down the pay of civil servants was a counterproductive false economy.

The economy and labour market

E.14 HM Treasury highlighted that inflation had come down from the peak seen in 2022. It explained that the Government was targeting inflation at its source, and that the OBR expected the CPI measure of inflation to have peaked at 3.9% in the third quarter of 2025 and had forecast that it would fall to 2.2% in FYE 2027.

E.15 HM Treasury said that demand for labour had softened, reflected in falling vacancies and a slowing in private sector pay growth. It pointed out that wage growth was expected to continue to decline over the next year – the OBR was forecasting average weekly earnings growth of 3.2% and hourly earnings growth of 2.6% in FYE 2027.

E.16 The FDA noted that CPI inflation had risen to 3.4% in December 2025, and that the OBR had forecast that it would be 2.5% in 2026 and would not fall below the Bank of England's 2% target until 2027.

E.17 The FDA pointed out that the latest forecast from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research had put earnings growth at 3.9% in 2026 and 3.6% in 2027. It also highlighted that the Brightmine median pay settlement for the three months to January 2026 was 3.2%, which represented a marginal increase from the 3% level recorded over 2025 as a whole. The FDA suggested that this was the start of a shift towards higher pay deals in 2026 as businesses competed for staff.

NCA earnings and pay comparators

E.18 The Home Office said that the persistent and growing median pay gap between NCA and police officers continued to present challenges for recruitment and retention, particularly for mid-career officers. The Home Office highlighted that this risked undermining efforts to attract and retain officers with critical operational capacity.

E.19 The Home Office also told us that the Agency's median salaries were above civil service comparisons at all grades. It said that as NCA pay sought to be competitive with policing, it risked imbalance with civil service pay. The Home Office considered that there was a need for balance between aligning with police pay and maintaining competitiveness within the civil service, recognising that satisfying both comparators may not be possible without significant long-term reform.

E.20 The NCA said that it played a vital role within a set of overlapping communities: the law enforcement community with wider policing, HM Revenue and Customs and other executive agencies; the National Security Community along with the UK Intelligence Community and defence; and the Government strategic community as part of the Home Office family and constitutionally within the civil service. The Agency recognised that the specialist skills it required were not unique to itself but that what was unique was the extent and diversity of skills which were drawn from the civil service, police, UK Intelligence Community and private sector.

E.21 The NCA said that its reward strategy did not seek to completely replicate police pay, but that it needed to be able to support the retention of specialist officers through matching pay for comparable roles. It explained that its pay arrangements were not attractive enough to enable the Agency to recruit serving police officers at an early- or mid-stage of their career. However, the NCA highlighted that there were inherent differences between the status of police and NCA officers since the latter were designated as civil servants.

E.22 The NCA highlighted that neither the standard pay range nor spot rate pay arrangements were sufficient to improve recruitment from policing, as moving from the police to the NCA would result in a reduction of several thousand pounds in pay. The Agency reported that differences between NCA and police salaries had been exacerbated in the last three years despite NCA pay awards that were comparable or higher than those for policing. This was due to police pay progression and existing higher salaries for police. Following oral evidence, the NCA sent through figures showing its modelling that, if the 2026/27 police pay award was 2%, the NCA needed a pay award that was at least 2.7% in order to reduce the gaps in median pay between policing and the NCA.

E.23 The NCA told us that its median salaries were higher than civil service comparators at all grades except Grade 6. However, it observed that officers with skills which were marketable across the civil service were attracted to take promotion to other departments for a further pay increase with similar levels of responsibility that they had at their previous grade in the Agency.

E.24 The NCA advised that its salaries did not compare favourably with those offered by the private sector, regulators, policing or the intelligence agencies and that this created recruitment challenges. It considered that civil service pensions were a helpful incentive, but salary differences remained a barrier with organisations where the pension arrangements were similar, and with the private sector where the difference in salary outweighed any pension advantages. The NCA also reported that higher specialist allowances were offered within the civil service.

E.25 The NCOA highlighted that the difference between the achievable salaries in the NCA and police ranged from 12% at Grade 5 to 26% at Grade 1.

E.26 The PCS and FDA cited a report on the civil service workforce by the National Audit Office which had found that real-terms median salaries had fallen between 2013 and 2022 for almost all civil service grades.

E.27 The PCS also referenced a report by the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy which had stated that “The NCA’s resourcing challenges are exacerbated by the Government’s failure to allow them to offer salaries that might attract those with specialist skills. It will always be difficult for the NCA to compete with the private sector, particularly for roles requiring high-level cyber skills, but it is unacceptable that NCA officers are paid less than their policing counterparts. As the elite national squad for serious and organised crime, the public would rightly expect the NCA to offer a competitive pay package, in recognition of the more specialist skills required for defending the UK against serious organised crime. The Home Office and HM Treasury should urgently revisit the funding available for NCA pay and progression, which has been an obstacle to achieving pay parity between police forces and NCA officers.”

E.28 The FDA explained that as the NCA delivered a prominent role in combatting the challenge of SOC, it was appropriate to compare the position of NCA staff with similar roles in the police and other law enforcement agencies. The FDA said that pay in the NCA remained significantly behind comparable pay in the police, and that the Agency’s overall employment offer was increasingly becoming less competitive for senior skilled staff in the wider civil service.

E.29 The FDA also highlighted that the Public Accounts Committee had reported that morale in the civil service was being lowered by chronic pay issues which risked an inability to recruit and retain skilled staff. The Public Accounts Committee had also raised concerns that inadequate pay damaged departments’ ability to attract and keep staff.

E.30 The FDA argued that the poor relative position of the civil service in competing for the skills that the NCA needed meant that the argument that NCA pay compared well against other civil service departments was not persuasive.

E.31 The FDA advised that there was significant disparity in pay levels between senior NCA officers and their comparable grades in the police service, and that this disparity had widened since 2016. The FDA also stressed that police scales allowed for incremental progression, but there was a lack of pay progression in the Agency.

Workforce, recruitment and retention

E.32 The Home Office said that the NCA’s workforce requirements were complex and required a wide range of skillsets and specialisms. The Home Office reported that the Agency's workforce had decreased slightly between August 2024 and August 2025. The Home Office also highlighted that overall turnover had been broadly stable at 6.96%, but that this masked persistent challenges in specialist and technical roles.

E.33 The Home Office told us that the NCA was investing in upskilling and training existing officers, expanding apprenticeship pathways, and increasing the junior officer pipeline to support career progression and improve retention. The Home Office said that these initiatives aimed to help reduce dependency on external contractors and strengthen the Agency's long-term capability and resilience.

E.34 The NCA reported that its total workforce had decreased from 6,264 in August 2024 to 6,215 in August 2025. However, the number of permanent employees had increased from 5,744 to 5,783 over the same period as commands had sought to hire permanent employees to replace contingent labour. NCA data showed that 34% of the total 2025 workforce had operational powers, but the Agency explained that non-powered officers were not excluded from carrying out operational work and its Strategic Workforce Plan was reliant on a significant level of movement between roles.

E.35 The NCA said that its functions and workforce requirements were complex and included significant demand for a wide range of skillsets and specialisms which meant that it needed candidates from a variety of labour markets.

E.36 The NCA explained that its recruitment and enhanced vetting processes could take up to twelve months due to the specialist nature of its workforce. It said that improvements had been made to the recruitment process, but there was still a lengthy lead in time.

E.37 In oral evidence, the NCA told us that it had reduced its recruitment due to funding uncertainties following the Spending Review announcement in June 2025. However, it was now aiming to recruit over 1,000 officers in the next year.

E.38 The NCA informed us that its turnover had decreased between December 2024 and August 2025, but that it continued to experience significant turnover within both specialist roles and those providing enabling functions. It explained that even with the use of Recruitment and Retention Allowances the total turnover was unsustainable in some areas. The Agency said that the impact of the turnover rate on delivery was currently masked by the use of overtime, contingent labour and professional services.

E.39 The NCOA considered that police reform was unlikely to act as a driver for mid-career police officers to choose to move to the NCA without clarity on what their career futures might look like. It reported that the Agency accepted that certain skills could not be recruited from core labour markets and used overtime and contingent labour to fill some critical operations gaps, both of which were high-cost, temporary solutions.

E.40 The FDA said that the NCA competed for staff with the private sector and the civil service, and faced a disadvantage against both. It told us that although pay scales in the NCA were higher, many other civil service departments were able to offer enabling capability roles at more senior grades which allowed officers to leave the Agency on promotion.

E.41 The FDA expressed concern that staff in senior roles may prefer to remain civil servants and take earlier opportunities to move from the NCA rather than remain and take up a police career when the NCA transferred into the new NPS.

E.42 The FDA reported that the NCA had struggled in recent years to attract the staff it needed and that the Agency continued to experience significant turnover within both specialist roles and those that provided enabling functions. The FDA said that it was not clear that efforts by the Agency to develop its staff would generate sufficient promotion to more senior ranks and that providing career development for junior staff for that purpose would take several years to bear fruit. The FDA said that this would leave the Agency with a significant challenge to fill the roles it currently needed.

Motivation and morale

E.43 The NCA said it had continued to develop a culture where officers felt safe, respected and valued and to support their recruitment and retention. It explained that the importance of a diverse workforce and inclusive culture continued to be an Agency priority. The Agency considered that a workforce diverse in background, thought and experience was fundamental to its ability to degrade the threat posed by SOC and arrive at creative solutions in doing so.

E.44 The NCA advised that its teams routinely comprised a blend of officers with civil service, police, intelligence community or private sector backgrounds, and that pay differences in those markets could result in differences in pay within the Agency as some officers were able to negotiate higher starting salaries. The NCA explained that this had led to a pay imbalance, whereby experienced NCA officers remained on the grade minimum while some new recruits joined further up the pay range, and that this negatively impacted morale due to the lack of any pay progression.

E.45 The NCOA reported that the vacuum in what was known about the implications of the Police Reform White Paper was causing anxiety for its members who did not know where their long-term futures in law enforcement might take them.

E.46 The NCOA informed us that in its 2025 Work and Wellbeing Survey, 61% of respondents said that their workload had increased significantly since the previous year, half felt their workload was unacceptable, and 76% said there were elements of their work which was causing them to feel low, depressed, stressed or unwell.

E.47 The PCS said that the key issues its members had highlighted this year were:

- An over-reliance by the Agency on staff goodwill which was unsustainable and masked structural workforce pressures.
- A persistent long-hours culture that counteracted wider UK employment trends and posed health and safety risks.
- A broken pay system where spot rates were used to compensate for slow progression through the pay ranges, but required staff to increase their working hours.
- Rising uncertainty linked to the Police Reform White Paper. This was causing concerns over job security, changes to roles and warranted powers, and whether pay reform opportunities would be enacted promptly.

Relevant legal obligations on the NCA

E.48 The NCA informed us that the latest published gender pay gap figures had shown decreases on the previous year, and that further analysis would be included in its annual gender pay gap report. The Agency had published its first internal ethnicity pay gap report in March 2025, and civil service figures had been published in October 2025. The NCA explained that information on its disability pay gap had not been published due to it not meeting the minimum declaration level of 60%.

Appendix F – NCA Pay Ranges, Spot Rates and Allowances for the 2025/26 Pay Year

The pay ranges, spot rates, and allowances for the 2025/26 pay year for officers within our remit are set out below:

Standard pay ranges

Grade	Minimum	Maximum
G1	£82,317	£100,625
G2	£67,609	£82,580
G3	£55,575	£68,037
G4	£45,326	£54,909
G5	£36,057	£46,507
G6	£26,920	£33,904

Spot rates

Grade	SR1	SR2	SR3	SR4
G1	£85,021	£91,735	–	–
G2	£73,767	£79,568	–	–
G3	£55,575	£59,681	–	–
G4	£49,392	£53,493	£55,629	–
G5	£40,670	£42,270	£44,941	£46,721

Allowances

Allowance	Rate
London Weighting Allowance	£4,218 per annum
South East Allowance	£3,375 per annum
Overtime[18]	
– In excess of weekly contracted hours	Time and a half
– Rest day and bank holiday working with less than 14 days' notice	Double time
Shift Allowance[19]	
– Tier 1	30% of basic pay
– Tier 2	20% of basic pay
On-call Allowance[20]	£25.28 per period
International Liaison Officer Allowance	£5,000 per annum
Diplomatic Compensation Allowance	£7,000 per annum

[18] Overtime is only payable to officers on the standard pay ranges in Grades 3 to 6 and officers on spot rates in Grades 4 and 5.
[19] From 7 October 2025, Tier 1 covers 24/7 shift working and Tier 2 covers 365-day rosters that include rostered on call, early and late shifts at specific times, and working a minimum of one weekend in four.
[20] On-call Allowance is only payable to Grades 3 to 6.

Appendix G – NCA Pay Ranges, Spot Rates and Allowances for the 2026/27 Pay Year

The recommended pay ranges, spot rates, and allowances for the 2026/27 pay year that are within our remit are set out below:

Standard pay ranges

Grade	Minimum	Maximum
G1	£86,186	£105,355
G2	£70,787	£86,462
G3	£58,188	£71,235
G4	£47,457	£57,490
G5	£37,752	£48,693
G6	£28,186	£35,498

Spot rates

Grade	SR1	SR2	SR3	SR4
G1	£89,017	£96,047	–	–
G2	£77,235	£83,308	–	–
G3	£58,188	£62,487	–	–
G4	£51,714	£56,008	£58,244	–
G5	£42,582	£44,257	£47,054	£48,917

Allowances

Allowance	Rate
London Weighting Allowance	£4,417 per annum
South East Allowance	£3,534 per annum
Overtime[21]	
– In excess of weekly contracted hours	Time and a half
– Rest day and bank holiday working with less than 14 days' notice	Double time
Shift Allowance[22]	
– Tier 1	30% of basic pay
– Tier 2	20% of basic pay
On-call Allowance[23]	£25.28 per period
International Liaison Officer Allowance	£5,235 per annum
Diplomatic Compensation Allowance	£7,329 per annum

[21] Overtime is only payable to officers on the standard pay ranges in Grades 3 to 6 and officers on spot rates in Grades 4 and 5.
[22] Tier 1 covers 24/7 shift working and Tier 2 covers 365-day rosters that include rostered on call, early and late shifts at specific times, and working a minimum of one weekend in four.
[23] On-call Allowance is only payable to Grades 3 to 6.

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