



HMICS

HM INSPECTORATE OF
CONSTABULARY FOR SCOTLAND

Thematic Inspection
Selection for promotion in the Scottish police service

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) *People Strategy* was launched in August 2003, providing a ten-year modernising agenda for the police service in Scotland, specifically in relation to leadership, people management and development. An updated action plan was published in January 2007 and the original strategic goals remain:

- Creating and maintaining a positive working environment.
- Recruiting the right workforce, and retaining skills in the Service.
- Managing rewards and recognition.
- Becoming a more diverse and inclusive Service.
- Managing and developing people to deliver excellent results.
- Supporting individuals to fulfil their potential; careers and progression.
- Developing leaders and integrating leadership throughout the Service.
- Using this people strategy to achieve change across the Service.

Following an inspection of selection processes for promotion of police officers and in support of ACPOS' stated strategic goals, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland (HMICS) makes the following recommendations in this report:

Recommendation 1: that Strathclyde Police implements a self-nomination process for promotion to all ranks as soon as possible.

Recommendation 2: that all forces advertise all vacancies externally (across the UK), at least at the rank of superintendent and above.

Recommendation 3: that all force promotion processes are underpinned by a single national competency framework, and that all forces assess the same competencies for promotion to any given rank.

Recommendation 4: that forces introduce scoring mechanisms for all stages of their promotion selection process, and consider each of these stages when determining which candidates are successful.

Recommendation 5: that promotion to central service be substantive, provided that forces support only those candidates whom they would progress to an equivalent selection stage for promotion to the generic rank in force *and* the central service selection process has been revised to reflect the nationally agreed competencies and standards of the generic rank.

Forces may wish to work together under the aegis of the ACPOS Personnel & Training (P&T) business area to deliver these recommendations. HMICS will, however, continue to review the arrangements of individual forces.



Introduction

1. The challenges faced by the police service are continually evolving to reflect developments in the policing environment at a national and a local level. It is increasingly apparent that these challenges can best be tackled by forces working effectively in partnership with the communities they serve. At the same time the growing need to prioritise and manage resources carefully is widely acknowledged. Police managers need not only personal competence in these areas but also the ability to lead, support and develop others to deliver the best possible outcomes. The selection of police officers for promotion is therefore a critical part of delivering an effective service to the public.
 2. For the police service, the promotion process is about identifying those officers with the best ability to deliver what is required at each rank above constable. At an individual level, for many police officers the promotion process is the most obvious means of career advancement. From both perspectives, it is essential that the processes through which promotions are managed and awarded not only identify the best people but are also efficient, effective, transparent and fair.
 3. In a wider context, each force's approach to promotion selection could be considered to be broadly reflective of its internal practices. As employment legislation has evolved in recent years, people have developed higher levels of expectation about standards of employment practice. If the police service in Scotland is to continue to attract high calibre candidates, it must seek to stay abreast of developments in good practice and to keep up with other UK employers in terms of the application of this good practice.
 4. It is clear that most promotion processes are significantly fairer and more effective than they were in the past. Beyond the recommendations in this report, we identified many areas of good practice already initiated or adopted by different forces. Detailed commentary on each stage of a selection process, areas of good practice and suggestions for improvement are detailed in Annex A. In addition to the specific recommendations, forces will wish to consider the content of Annex A in reviewing their promotion processes.
 5. Ideally, in conducting this thematic inspection, we would have compared individual force selection methodologies with the success of the outcomes. Initial research showed that the variation in selection and appraisal processes, and their application across forces, meant that such an evaluation was not possible. This inspection has therefore assessed the fairness, transparency and rigour of processes in individual forces. Further details of the inspection methodology are given in Annex B.
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KEY ISSUES

Access to the promotion process

6. Each of the eight forces has adopted a unique approach to selection, though there are areas of overlap. Seven forces have based their approach on similar principles whilst one force, Strathclyde, has taken a quite different stance. The primary difference is in the method of access to the promotion process itself: typically across Scotland this was via a process of self-nomination, but in Strathclyde it was achieved through line management nomination.

7. In most forces we observed what we considered to be good practice, and were particularly encouraged by those that invited individuals to self-nominate. Some forces saw the initial discussion between potential applicants and their first-line manager about the applicant's readiness for promotion as a part of the application process itself. In our view, this initial consultation is of great benefit to the overall development of the officers concerned, in that it presents an opportunity to review and test the strength of their candidature without presenting a bar to application.

8. Feedback from the Strathclyde Police Federation indicated widespread dissatisfaction amongst members about the existing process. Concerns centred on perceptions of favouritism and were difficult to dismiss due to the lack of transparency in the nomination process. We believe that this lack of transparency could be construed as discriminatory. Therefore, we argue, all officers should have a clear understanding of the requirements of promotion, their current position in relation to the defined standard, and the actions they need to take should they wish to be considered.

9. We noted that Strathclyde had conducted a trial of self-nomination for the promotion process from sergeant to inspector. Having reviewed the trial and identified ways to resolve difficulties that arose, the force has signalled its intention to introduce a self-nomination process. This will be established when resources allow, and after the introduction of the national Performance Development Review process (PDR). We consider self-nomination to be a critical stage if the process is to be described as fair and transparent.

10. HMICS recommend that Strathclyde Police implements a self-nomination process for promotion to all ranks as soon as possible.

Cross-force promotion

11. We consider it highly desirable that officers aspiring to lead the Service have experience of more than one police force and management regime. In 2003 ACPOS agreed to advertise superintendent positions externally, and this now forms part of its HR Strategy Action Plan.

12. Although there is some recent evidence of forces advertising more widely for promotion, typically to superintending level, the overwhelming tendency is to continue to promote from within the force. One force has never advertised externally for promoted ranks, while the irregularity with which most others advertise vacancies suggests at least a preference to select internal candidates here too. We noted reluctance on the part of some forces to advertise externally on a routine basis until all forces in Scotland demonstrated a commitment to more than just the principle of this agreement. This position of stalemate should not be allowed to continue.



13. We also noted that on those occasions when forces did advertise externally for promotion, it was rare that the advert was extended to officers from other jurisdictions in the UK. The main reasons given for this were (a) cost of advertising, and (b) commitment to the development of Scottish officers. We believe that costs can be minimised by using electronic advertising, e.g. a simple email to all forces. While it is of course valid to support the development of Scottish officers, the principal aim of the police service is to provide the highest standard of service to the public. This is best achieved by appointing the best people, whether they are from a Scottish force or elsewhere in the United Kingdom. We conclude that only advertising posts internally is incompatible with the principles of fairness and equality across the police service.

14. HMICS recommends that all forces advertise all vacancies externally (across the UK), at least at the rank of superintendent and above.

Competency-based selection

15. The police service is different from most professions insofar as a person must first hold the office of constable before he or she can be considered for promoted officer posts. Therefore, unlike the selection processes of other organisations who may know little about prospective candidates, the police service already has an insight into the past performance of every officer being considered for promotion, including those from other UK forces. This should be to the advantage of the Service.

16. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) supports the use of a rigorous and structured approach to selecting candidates to ensure that the process is both fair and seen to be fair to successful and unsuccessful candidates. A 'structured interview' means that:

- questions are planned carefully before the interview;
- all candidates are asked the same questions;
- answers are scored using a rating system; and
- questions focus on the attributes and behaviours needed in the job.

17. We observed that seven forces used behavioural, competency-based, assessment processes for selection. The other, Strathclyde, used technical or situational type questioning at interview, with the questions being agreed independently by the panel on each occasion. CIPD guidance on this issue reflects the balance of expert opinion. Consequently we are more convinced by the validity of the structured behavioural competency-based approach, its ability to facilitate consistency through the whole promotion process, from application to interview, and to deliver the transparency and fairness recommended by the CIPD.

18. We also noted that the framework of competencies assessed varied across forces. While some used those allied to the new national PDR system, this approach was not applied universally. Since the competencies and associated definitions of the new PDR have been agreed by ACPOS P&T business area, it would seem logical and prudent to use these for all appraisal and selection processes. Such consistency would help to increase understanding of the process and help to facilitate the transfer of officers between forces.



19. The number of competencies assessed ranged from four in Tayside to 11 in Central Scotland. In some instances, application forms extended to in excess of 65 pages. We consider it impractical to try to assess performance across all competencies through a selection process. For each rank there will be relevant key competencies and all forces would benefit from national agreement on which generic competencies should be tested at each rank.

20. HMICS recommends that all force promotion processes are underpinned by a single national competency framework and that all forces assess the same competencies for promotion to any given rank.

Stages of selection

21. The application forms used in self-nomination processes were assessed by various line managers and used to determine which officers progressed to later selection stages. Typically these later stages involved a competency-based interview and some exercise(s) or presentation, sometimes within an assessment centre format.

22. For some forces, success during the initial stages of the process simply allowed an officer to go on to a subsequent selection stage. The evidence presented in the application form and the assessment of that evidence was not considered further and did not contribute to the final selection decision. In other forces each stage of the process was scored and considered in the final analysis. Whilst there are arguments in support of the former approach, we are persuaded that considering the scores of each stage when deciding which officers are best suited for promotion is a more robust and sustainable approach. The objective is to select the best officers for promotion and, while there is a principle of fairness in basing decisions purely on demonstration of competencies, the process is impaired if past experience and performance are ignored.

23. At the start of a promotion process there should be a clear position statement detailing how each stage of the process will be scored. This should be accompanied by adequate guidance for potential applicants and their supervisors.

24. HMICS recommends that forces introduce scoring mechanisms for all stages of their promotion selection process and consider each of these stages when determining which candidates are successful.

Appointment to central services

25. Appointment to central service posts in the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA) or to HMICS often involves promotion. The majority of forces choose to promote successful applicants on a temporary basis, unless they have successfully completed their force promotion process. Those who have successfully completed their force process, or do so whilst on secondment, will generally receive substantive promotion.

26. Some forces justified promoting temporarily by pointing out that the selection processes of central services are aligned towards the specific posts being advertised. These are usually non-operational or very specialist in nature. Thus, forces argued, the processes did not always test the competencies required for promotion to the generic rank in force. There was also a perception that promotion to central services was a way of circumventing the force process.



- 27.** Within the SPSA, there were difficulties attracting applicants for some vacancies. Members of the SPSA were of the opinion that the tendency to promote temporarily was a contributing factor.
- 28.** Strathclyde does promote officers substantively, on the basis that only those officers whom the force would consider suitable for promotion to the generic rank are supported for central service posts. Central Scotland Police has adopted a slight variation in practice, where officers are substantively promoted provided that they have been successful in the pre-interview stages of the force process. This reflects the view that the central service selection process equates to this final stage of the in-force process.
- 29.** Parts of the SPSA - the Scottish Police College (SPC) and Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency (SCDEA) - to whom the majority of police staff on central service are seconded, have indicated a willingness to adjust their selection procedures to meet the reasonable needs of police forces. By doing so, they can achieve 'accreditation' from all forces. HMICS would also be willing to adopt this practice. This might include, for example, involving forces in selection panels or appointing officers from force pools and would operate on the basis that officers who successfully complete the revised procedures would be promoted substantively.
- 30.** We support the principle that forces should only put forward those candidates whom they would select for a final promotion selection process. We also believe that forces should then trust the 'accredited' central service selection process to identify only the strongest candidates who meet nationally agreed competencies.
- 31.** **HMICS recommends that promotion to central service be substantive, provided that forces support only those candidates whom they would progress to an equivalent selection stage for promotion to the generic rank in force *and* the central service selection process has been revised to reflect the nationally agreed competencies and standards of the generic rank.**
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Annex A

GENERAL FINDINGS AND COMMENTS ON GOOD PRACTICE* AT EACH STAGE OF A SELECTION PROCESS

* Unless otherwise stated we consider all good practice mentioned here to be transferable between forces.

Eligibility for promotion

1. To be considered for promotion above the rank of constable, police officers must meet certain minimum criteria as defined in the Police (Promotion) (Scotland) Regulations 1996 (as amended). The primary criteria are a pass in the relevant qualifying examination or successful completion of the new Diploma in Police Service Leadership and Management.
2. The only further qualification specified in legislation is that officers must have completed two years in the rank of sergeant before they can be promoted to inspector. This comes with the caveat that a chief constable can promote an officer to inspector with less service in the sergeant rank if he or she is satisfied that the officer possesses exceptional ability or special qualifications for the particular duties of the promoted post. We consider this an unnecessary restriction that reinforces the idea that there ought to be a minimum length of experience in each rank, and we would support a proposal to the Scottish Government to remove this qualification.
3. In addition to recognising these statutory limitations on promotion, some forces have introduced criteria of their own:

Service criteria

4. Some forces required officers to spend a period of time in one rank before being considered for promotion to the next. We recognise the need to develop appropriate skills and expertise at one rank before promotion to the next, but setting additional timescales can unfairly prioritise length of service over skills and experience. This may disadvantage some capable officers and present the potential for discrimination if the validity of time periods is not fully justified.
 5. Some force statistics indicated that promotion is traditionally achieved after an unnecessarily lengthy period of service in the rank. Specifying a time period in the preceding rank may therefore be helpful in encouraging officers to apply for promotion at an earlier stage. We would consider it good practice to articulate more clearly the necessary skills and behaviours for the next rank.
 6. Reference has commonly been made to the need for promotion candidates to have some specified level of operational experience and, in most circumstances, this may be desirable. However, forces must ensure that they do not discriminate against officers who for valid reasons may not have recently performed an operational role but who have sufficient previous operational experience to counter-balance this. Some capable officers who have been in specialist posts or have a disability may not meet that test but could nevertheless be the best candidates. The most obvious way of avoiding this situation is for all forces to recognise the different skills that are developed through diverse experience. Human Resources (HR) directors in particular, or their equivalents, should have a duty to monitor this situation frequently and on a force-wide basis, and to advise chief officer colleagues when there is an organisational or individual imbalance.
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Appraisal criteria

7. Some forces considered previous performance appraisals in the overall assessment of an officer's suitability for promotion. Most, however, did not require a specific appraisal grade before an officer could enter the process. This reflected a general lack of faith in the existing appraisal process and the perception that officers tended to be assessed as performing at a higher standard than they merited.

8. Both the current appraisal process in the majority of forces and the new Performance Development Review being rolled out must, of necessity, assess performance in the current rank as opposed to likely performance in the next. However, we consider evidence of past performance to be a useful indicator of candidates' ability for promotion, and their application and commitment to duties. It is therefore appropriate to consider this as a source of evidence, though perhaps it is of limited value as one of the gateway criteria to the process. There is also the danger that relying on the performance review for promotion could tend to corrupt the intention of the appraisal process.

Conduct criteria

9. It is appropriate that the conduct history of officers should have a bearing on their suitability for promotion. It is also essential that decisions to prevent an officer progressing by reason of prior misconduct must be consistently applied. Some forces have policies which state that their deputy chief constable may debar an officer from promotion if there has been a finding of misconduct. In some cases the length of debarment in relation to the overall disposal of the misconduct case is clearly articulated. We find that this good practice is more transparent, consistent and fair than leaving any judgement to the discretion of supervisors or those involved in the promotion process that have not necessarily had access to detail of the misconduct.

10. There is also a challenge when dealing with officers who are the subject of ongoing criminal or misconduct investigations. In such cases it may be inappropriate for a force to promote an officer until the matter is resolved. We recognise the good practice of those forces that allowed officers in this position to complete the selection process and who, if successful, would not be selected for promotion until the matter was concluded positively.

Absence criteria

11. Forces generally considered the attendance records of promotion candidates when assessing their suitability for promotion. In some cases a set number of absences or a Bradford score¹ would trigger further consideration. No force had a fixed level of absence that would prevent an officer progressing, recognising the need for flexibility to avoid discrimination. We support the consideration of attendance and this element of flexibility, but forces must ensure that they are able to apply this test consistently.

¹ Bradford scores are a way of identifying individuals with serious absence and patterns of absence worthy of further investigation. It helps to highlight causes for concern and is often one of the first steps in an attendance procedure.



Notification of processes

- 12.** One cause for concern here was the period of notice given to officers to complete and submit application forms. While all forces gave officers a number of weeks to complete application forms, it was recognised that in some cases the period could be compromised by the leave commitments of either the officers involved or the supervisors who reviewed their applications.
- 13.** Where force procedures had been consistent for some time, this was less problematic. If officers knew they had to complete a competency-based application of a recognised format, they could develop a portfolio of evidence and prepare information in advance. This was not so straightforward where processes had been revised, a situation that was not uncommon.
- 14.** One solution was for forces to run promotion processes to a fixed annual schedule, even though the irregularity of vacancies can require more flexibility. We commend the good practice of those forces that notified staff of the proposed start of the promotion process some weeks in advance, thus allowing officers to prepare before the process began formally.
- 15.** A very different approach was evident in Grampian. Here, the force did not have a fixed promotion process for all prospective candidates to compete in simultaneously. Instead, it ran a form of rolling promotion programme that allowed officers to nominate themselves when they felt ready. Though not without its challenges, we see this as an innovative approach that avoids some of the difficulties of a fixed application period.

Application process

- 16.** All forces operated, or had at least piloted, a self-nomination process for promotion that began with the candidate submitting an evidence-based application form. In many cases this required a significant amount of the applicant's time. In some forces a precursor to the application form was the need for officers to discuss their readiness for promotion with their immediate line manager. Such discussions would identify whether the officer was likely to receive line management support. Officers who were not supported at this initial stage were thus spared the effort of completing the application form, but this outcome would then be the catalyst for discussion about his or her further development needs.
- 17.** It could be argued that such career development discussion should occur routinely as part of good management practice. Nevertheless we believe that having this as a set stage in the promotion process is good practice. For fairness and transparency, however, officers who are told that their application will not be supported should still have the opportunity to submit an application if they wish. Evidence to explain the supervisor's reasons for supporting or not supporting the applicant should be clearly stated and recorded as part of the process. This would give the candidate the opportunity, should he or she wish, to rebut the supervisor's view.
- 18.** A further good practice example of fairness and transparency was apparent in forces where officers submitted application forms directly to their Human Resources department. These would still subsequently be passed to line management for assessment, but this conduit ensured that the process was centrally co-ordinated and that no application forms were misplaced or delayed.



19. Whilst the concept of self-nomination was well established, a variety of approaches had been adopted. Though each process required officers to demonstrate that they had the necessary skills and attributes for the next rank, forces had contrasting views on how this should be done. In general the approaches were competency-based, but the number of competencies used, the basis of those competencies and the degree of guidance given to officers varied greatly.

20. We found none of these methods to be inherently unfair, and for each a rationale could be presented which explained why the process operated as it did. However, there did seem to be scope for a more consistent approach to be developed, which for most forces would require only limited revision of their procedures.

21. A further area of disparity was the amount of information that applicants were expected to submit for each competency, usually controlled by a maximum word count. The specification of a word limit appears appropriate. It makes clear to candidates what level of detail is expected and also limits the amount of information that must be verified and assessed by line managers.

22. Guidance provided to applicants and supervisors was variable, partly because of the different competency frameworks but also due to different views on how it might influence submissions. In the interest of fairness and transparency, it would be good practice for applicants and their line managers to receive clear direction on what developing, meeting or exceeding a particular competency looks like. Formal training may not be required for line managers, but sufficient information must be provided, possibly supplemented by seminars, to allow them to process applications with confidence.

23. While we support the practice of self-nomination, it is important to recognise the risks of basing a selection process on this type of approach alone. An effective process must assess the capability of the individual, not just the quality of his or her application.

24. Completing a competency-based application form to a sufficient standard takes time. The question emerged, during fieldwork, as to whether staff should be given time during their working day to compile their forms. This is a matter for forces locally to consider, though we would emphasise that in seeking promotion an officer is seeking the benefit that comes from personal development. Whilst there is an onus on the force to support staff development, it is difficult to argue that staff should receive time at work (i.e. paid for by the public) to perform activities intended primarily to bring personal benefit.

Application review

25. Where officers submitted evidence-based applications, forces were agreed on the importance of line managers verifying that evidence and of the views of management on the suitability of a candidate for promotion.

26. However, we are concerned about the number of supervisory levels through which an application form must pass. Sergeant and inspector promotion processes in particular routinely passed through three management layers. Whilst recognising the potential bureaucracy, the rationale for this situation and the different input which layers of management can provide is understood. It would be helpful, however, if respective roles were clearly defined and any unnecessary overlap removed.



27. First-line managers are best placed to confirm or dispute any evidence presented in support of an application, though sometimes further verification from other supervisors may be necessary. They are also well placed to comment on a candidate's suitability for promotion. At this stage the involvement of the second-line manager, as someone able either to endorse or challenge the first-line manager's comments, can help to ensure fairness. Typically the application will then be reviewed at divisional or departmental level by the divisional commander, head of department or the wider management team, to ensure consistency of standards.

28. In some forces, line managers were encouraged to supplement the evidence provided by candidates. This could take the form of further supportive evidence that the applicant had omitted, or might refute positive claims made by the candidate. Such practice is consistent with the intention to select the best candidate and should be encouraged. However, as with all parts of the submission, evidence to support any additional information must be supplied.

29. The accuracy and fairness of line manager assessments can be susceptible to bias, either intentional or unwitting. It could be argued that a fair promotion process should not rely on such assessments but should instead allow officers to compete in a process where everyone starts on an equal footing. In this way the best candidate is selected on the basis of his or her performance in interview or exercises. This would certainly support the concept of fairness, in terms of equality. However, in reality it would be extremely difficult to ensure that such a narrow test of candidates delivered the best people.

30. Human nature dictates that flaws will be inherent in promotion systems based on line manager assessment, yet it would be folly to disregard the views of managers who observe the performance of the applicant on a daily basis. Indeed, the demands of managing, assessing and developing staff are some of those basic responsibilities for which line managers should be held to account through the PDR process.

31. In addition to commenting on the evidence presented by applicants and assessing their competence in defined areas, in some forces the line managers also gave candidates scores either for individual competencies or overall. However we believe that this is problematic. Line managers in different areas tend to have different perceptions about what level of performance indicates competence and what merits exceptional.

32. We commend as good practice the approach developed in some forces where any scoring process was applied by a review panel sitting at force level. Such a review panel could assess each application on the basis of the evidence and line manager comment, and apply ratings that were appropriate and consistent. Whilst this would be a demanding process, we believe it should be manageable for all forces. For instance, more than one review panel could be set up, to be co-ordinated by HR staff who could manage and oversee the process.

33. Different review panel systems operated in different ways. In some cases each panel member considered every application in detail, while in others the applications were closely examined by one person and reviewed by others. The time involved in scrutinising a large number of applications makes the latter approach attractive and we are content that if properly administered it could offer a robust and acceptable solution.



34. Some forces have used assessment processes that anonymise applicant information in order to provide greater fairness at least in the initial application stage. However, a subsequent evaluation exercise found the benefits of the approach to be limited and, in some cases, ineffective because officers could be identified from the experience documented in their form.

35. A feature of some promotion procedures that has been criticised is where entry to later selection processes, such as assessment centres or interviews, has not been sufficiently restricted. Specifically it was felt that some line managers' assessments were not sufficiently robust to allow less capable applicants to be identified and then removed from the process. This raised unrealistic expectations among candidates and created an undue burden on the process itself. Appropriate line manager assessment is therefore considered to be vital.

36. The final element of the application stage is a fair and effective sifting process that should allow only those officers considered most suitable for promotion to advance to later selection stages. Earlier comment on scoring systems highlighted the benefits of a force review panel. Such a panel can be fundamental to an effective short-listing process and can provide the necessary consistency of assessment. The development of a scored table of the applicants can add a transparency to the process and clarity about why particular candidates have been allowed to progress to the next stage of the process while others have not.

37. It seems realistic to us to recognise the flexibility of both the number of vacancies and the standard of applicants. This approach was best summed up by forces who were explicit that promotion processes are a competition in which the challenge is to find out not who meets a particular standard but who are the best candidates at that time. This may not be a universally accepted position. However it must be recognised that the Service has a finite number of promoted posts and that to offer best value, forces must do more than simply put suitable people into promoted ranks – they must select the best people they can.

Assessment of candidates

38. All forces operated selection processes that built on line manager assessment with further exercises. These predominantly took the form of structured interviews, often accompanied by a presentation or scenario exercise, while some forces ran what are generically called assessment centres.

39. An assessment centre typically encompasses a number of exercises designed to assess all candidates against pre-determined competencies. The exercises can be practical and reflect the kind of duties that would be expected of an officer in the promoted rank. Alternatively, they can be generic in nature and based around some management or leadership theme. The latter are considered fairer as they do not favour officers with particular technical expertise. Nevertheless they have attracted criticism from candidates about their lack of relevance to the role.

40. A number of the forces that had tried the assessment centre approach had since stopped. The principal reasons for this have been the cost of the process, a lack of support from staff who participated and a lack of consistency in the outcomes. Those forces that continued to use the approach argued that the costs were comparable to those of other processes, but were simply more apparent where external consultants were engaged. As regards credibility among staff, such concerns were not considered so significant as to outweigh the perceived benefits and validity of the process.



- 41.** It is appropriate to highlight the similarities between assessment centres and alternative approaches used by forces. The assessment centre exercises tended to incorporate a structured interview, which is a key element of all the other processes. The additional exercises used by forces, be they presentations or scenario exercises, also reflected what happens within the assessment centre structure.
- 42.** Therefore, despite the different approaches, it could be argued that there was a certain consistency across Scottish police forces about both the need to test the competencies of applicants and the methods of so doing. The focus should perhaps not be on the overall format of such a test, but on how forces can ensure that the bases of the tests are relevant to the process and that sufficient numbers of tests are conducted to ensure that the best candidates are identified.
- 43.** The common thread running through all processes was the interview of candidates. CIPD guidance suggests that such interviews be structured around competencies relevant to the role in question. Our view is that this in turn should be based on competencies nationally agreed by the police service in Scotland, as alluded to earlier. Standard practice in most forces was for the interview to address six competencies. This may be an appropriate guide for the number of competencies to be examined for posts, particularly those in the lower promoted ranks.
- 44.** In general, HR staff prepared the questions for interview panels, though some forces preferred panel members to select their own questions. Whilst there tended to be a mechanism to review the validity of questions from panel members, it appeared to us that questions prepared by HR staff were less likely to present problems of suitability or fairness. Nor did the latter method preclude technical input from police officers when required or questions prepared jointly by police officers and HR staff. The good practice principle involved here is one of fairness and consistency of standard.
- 45.** Some forces ran selection processes that involved two interviews. The first interview, which could be managed at either divisional or force level, would be a qualification stage for a later interview which was likely to take place, or would at least be co-ordinated, at force level. While one force justified this practice in terms of being able to examine an applicant's ability from different perspectives, others made no such distinction. In both cases, though, it was argued that staff benefited from the experience of the earlier interview.
- 46.** It appeared to us that a driving factor for having two interviews was to help sift out candidates and identify the best people to go on to the next stage. Even in this context, this did not appear to be the best use of resources, either in terms of the time spent by candidates preparing for and participating in interviews, or for those on the interview panels. Where forces have application processes that examine competency and seek line manager assessment, particularly where consistency of these assessments is supported by process reviews at force level, this should be sufficient to identify the appropriate candidates to go forward to the later selection processes. As regards the examination of an applicant's ability from different perspectives, our view is that the rank for which the candidate has applied should determine the approach to the interview.
- 47.** It is common for most forces to supplement interviews with some form of presentation or exercise, which is usually completed immediately before the structured interview. A minority of presentations are on topics provided to the candidate in advance. In addition to the core
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communication skills tested by any presentation, this approach aims to test the candidate's ability to research specified topics and ensures that no candidate is favoured by receiving a topic on the day of the interview that reflects their particular area of expertise.

48. The more common approach to a presentation is to provide a subject on the day of the interview. These are either general policing topics or scenario exercises. A typical scenario exercise involves asking candidates to place themselves in the role of an officer in the rank for which application is made. The candidate is given various pieces of information and asked to deliver a presentation, for example outlining his or her solutions to any problems presented, or briefing staff on specified issues.

49. Whatever presentation or exercise is used, the key issue must be whether the task is appropriate to the rank in question, whether it allows assessment of the relevant competencies, and whether it will support a suitably informed decision on who should be considered for promotion. We observed a variety of approaches to presentations or exercises, with some offering more evidence of validity than others. In general terms, the concept of presentations based on scenario exercises provided on the day appeared the most suitable. Examples witnessed were well constructed and this practical approach appeared most relevant to participants. Candidates' ability to prepare under the pressure of a time limit was tested more fairly here than under the alternative approach. In addition, this practice obviated the need for candidates to spend time before the interview preparing a presentation to the potential detriment of other preparation or their daily duties.

50. There is expertise to develop a suitable framework for these exercises in the police service in general and specifically in ACPOS P&T Business Area. A fixed bank of questions or scenarios may not be feasible, but a format that could be tested, used and revised as necessary would ensure the suitability of the exercises and encourage confidence in the process.

51. One force used this exercise stage to sift out candidates between the application review and later assessment centre. Though these exercises, which appeared to mirror those used in the assessment centre, were not in themselves inappropriate to the promotion process, we were concerned that their use in this sifting stage was not as thorough or robust as the processes which preceded or followed them. As proposed in a previous paragraph, a process which showed greater trust in the earlier line management assessment could help to remove stages that add to the cost and bureaucracy of the promotion process without detracting demonstrable value.

52. One perceived advantage of assessment centres over other processes is the use of a bank of assessors who conduct different exercises to examine a different identified competency or group of competencies. The overall effect is that each competency is examined at least twice. The assessment of the same competency, by different assessors and in different scenarios, is considered to add to the fairness to the process. Whilst we support this concept, we also recognise the benefits of one panel assessing an officer in a presentation and then again during an interview to explore relevant issues from the presentation.



- 53.** General practice in forces appeared to be that the panels used to assess either exercises or interviews routinely had three people, though on occasion, particularly in the case of assessment centres, this could fall to two. Unless external consultants were being used, panel members were typically police officers of a higher rank than the post applied for or suitably qualified senior police staff.
- 54.** Some minor questions were raised regarding the appropriateness of using police staff to assess the suitability of police officers for higher rank. Given that the assessments made by these people were on specific competencies rather than professional skills, that they had all received relevant training and were often professional HR staff, we fully support their participation. Such individuals can offer a different or complementary perspective to that of police officers and perhaps even greater independence. A further advantage of this approach is that it offers greater scope for minority group representation on interview and assessment panels, given the proportionately small number of minority groups in higher ranks.
- 55.** An area of good practice that we observed was where applicants and panel members were told in advance about who would be on the interview panel or who was to be interviewed, respectively. This allowed either party to highlight any potential conflict of interest and thereby improved the transparency and fairness of the system.
- 56.** Exercises, presentations or interviews tended to be scored using a variety of scoring mechanisms, principally those based on a three-, five- or seven-point scale. This is once again an area where the Service should adopt a consistent approach based on best practice. The three-point scoring scale effectively identified whether a candidate was developing competence, was competent or exceeded competence. This may be an appropriate method of assessing whether a candidate has certain skills, but in a competitive process to identify the best candidate it does not help to differentiate between good candidates and the best. The five- and seven- point scales reflect the scoring mechanism for the new PDR and old national appraisal process respectively. Both have a sound basis and help to differentiate between candidates. In an effort to deliver consistency with the new PDR process, we would support the use of the five-point scale.
- 57.** A common factor in promotion processes that had the support of staff was the involvement of staff associations in their development and operation. While it is inappropriate for staff association representatives acting in that capacity to participate in a selection procedure, it is clearly good practice that they be consulted in their development and are afforded the opportunity to observe interviews, exercises and assessment centres. This is one way to encourage confidence in the fairness and transparency of systems and their implementation. We would encourage as much staff association involvement as can appropriately be accommodated.
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Selection for list/pool

58. The factors that influenced the final promotion selection decisions differed between forces. In our opinion, the wider the range of reliable information on competencies and experience available to a selection panel, the better. We therefore favour the practice in which all stages of the process contribute to an overall assessment of an applicant's suitability, and in which some reference is made to the applicant's service history and any validated line management assessment. We would particularly encourage forces to make it clear to candidates, from the outset, how each stage of the process will be reflected in the scoring system.

59. A further issue concerns the number of places available for successful candidates. The majority of forces operated a pool or list of officers for promotion and aimed to put a number of officers on the list according to the number of projected vacancies. No force operated a promotion process from which a fixed number of officers would automatically progress. Instead they recognised that the performance of officers going through the process can be too close to differentiate between and that it may be appropriate to place more or fewer officers on the list than planned.

60. In one force, officers had to reach an established standard in order to be considered for promotion. Though we appreciate the attraction and transparency of this approach, we also recognise some attendant problems. Ideally a standard could be set which would broadly reflect the capability of staff and available vacancies. In reality, the standards of officers seeking promotion will fluctuate, as will the frequency of vacancies. Where the standard is set too low then more officers will be successful than can be accommodated, which raises expectations and causes disappointment. Alternatively, if the standard is set too high, the number of officers who successfully negotiate the process will fail to meet demand and thus a more frequent process would be needed. As outlined earlier, promotion selection must be less about meeting a defined standard and more of a competition to identify the best people available for promotion at any given time.

61. In the majority of cases, once an officer was placed in a promotion pool or list he or she would remain there until promoted, conduct and performance permitting. In one force, officers remained on the list only until a further process was run. This reflected the view that the process was designed to identify the best candidates and people who remain in the pool may no longer be the best candidates at a later time. We understand this outlook, but equally we believe that there are significant issues of credibility and morale to consider. Without contradicting our comment above, if the parameters for the selection process are properly defined and the procedure itself sufficiently robust, forces should have no concerns about promoting someone who has remained on their list for a year or more. We would therefore concur with those forces that leave officers on their list, even after it has been repopulated through a new process.



Appointment

62. Once forces have developed a list of officers to be considered for promotion, they must decide how to select officers for vacancies that arise. Where a scoring system has been adopted, selecting officers on the basis of that scoring appears the simplest and most transparent method, since those who score highest are arguably the most capable and therefore most deserving of promotion. In general terms we would encourage this approach. There will be vacancies, however, that require particular skills or there may be business continuity reasons for selecting other officers. Provided that a consistent and transparent approach is adopted and officers do not remain on a promotion list for an extended period of time, this is reasonable and understandable.

63. What forces should seek to avoid is a process where robust initial selection procedures to identify officers for promotion are then compromised by a less robust final selection process. This is less likely to occur in cases where the initial selection process is limited to identifying the projected number of officers required. Where the process selects all candidates that meet a defined standard, irrespective of actual numbers required, a further transparent stage may be necessary to minimise any risk of subsequent selection bias.

64. The authority to promote officers rests with chief constables, and in the past it has not been unusual for a promotion to take place outside a formal process. The need for forces to adopt clearer selection processes does not preclude the ability of chief constables to nominate individuals of exceptional ability who come to their attention. We still assert that, for the process to maintain credibility, the final decision to recommend promotion should remain with the standard panel.

Feedback and appeals

65. Providing adequate feedback to unsuccessful candidates is key to a successful process. Not every police officer can be promoted, but each can expect to develop their skills to maximise their potential. All too, are entitled to learn why they have been unsuccessful. Perceptions of the success or failure of promotion processes can often rely in turn on the perceptions of those that participate. Where officers are rejected without due explanation, it is inevitable that they will consider the process to be flawed.

66. Ideally, feedback should be provided by someone who was directly involved in the decision to reject a candidate's application. If this task is delegated to immediate line managers, it is unlikely that they will be able to answer every question. Giving candidates access to all the documentation concerning their application, including comments by all line managers and assessors, is considered good practice.

67. Most forces had appeals processes in place. Others had dispensed with these, on the basis that their processes had safeguards to ensure that all applicants are fairly treated. While some may see appeals processes as a burden, these are crucial to a fair and transparent process. It is reasonable, however, to place certain restrictions on their use. One principal factor should be a link to feedback procedures. That is, an appeal should not be considered unless the candidate has had the opportunity to discuss the reason for their lack of success with someone who was involved in considering their application, and they have specific grounds for an appeal. Where an appeal could allow an officer to re-enter an ongoing process, timescales for feedback must be taken into account – something that



some forces had already considered. In addition, an appeal should be considered by someone who is both independent and senior in rank/position to those involved in rejecting the application.

External appointment

68. We believe that the lack of consistent, transparent and fruitful opportunities for staff to move between police forces is a serious barrier to professional development within the Service, to the work/life balance of officers who wish to move for domestic reasons, and to the cross-fertilisation of good policing. ACPOS has agreed that forces should open up appointments at superintending ranks to other forces. Similar transfers at lower ranks are rare but, in our opinion, the argument applies here too.

69. There seems little reason for forces not to have processes in which officers from other forces can compete. Greater consistency of approach across the Service, as outlined in this report, would certainly make this easier to achieve. Understandably there are concerns about the effect of external applicants on the morale of internal officers. However, experience to date suggests that the numbers of external candidates who apply are not excessive. Moreover, extending the advertisement of promoted posts to all forces can only create *more* opportunities for *all* officers looking to advance. Appointments tend to be a mix of internal and external candidates, and in any case the process is about identifying the best person for the job. Greater movement between forces should also give forces more options when they have specialist posts to fill.

Consistency of standards across Scotland

70. We observed that, with the range of approaches to selection for promotion came an inconsistency of standard. Some forces had very clearly identified standards, linked to competencies, for progression to the next rank. Other forces' standards were less clear, relying instead on the professional judgement of the assessors.

71. In its response to comments on the selection processes across Scotland, the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents (ASPS) expressed concern about this inconsistency of standards and indicated its preference for a Scotland-wide promotion policy. This desire for standardisation was echoed by some forces.

72. A more consistent approach to promotion might also help with the application process for the new Diploma in Police Service Leadership and Management. Though there is a national standard of application, the different approaches to assessing the potential of officers for development can lead to inconsistency in selection. This is likely to become increasingly important when the Diploma replaces the exam process in its entirety.

Succession planning

73. The increasingly specialist nature of certain management roles in the police service requires that officers receive adequate training or development before they take up those positions. Whilst such posts may often be filled by officers who already hold the rank in question, this inspection sought evidence of any procedures involving promotion to these posts.



74. Our findings revealed that a number of forces had developed or were in the process of developing processes to establish succession planning, but that these did not incorporate promotion to relevant posts. This illustrates the potential challenge to existing promotion processes, if officers were to be identified to fill posts at the next rank without having negotiated the promotion process.

75. There is scope to include within succession planning arrangements those officers who have been successful in the promotion process but await promotion. But business continuity cannot rely on processes delivering a pool of people who have the required skills for key posts. It is therefore appropriate that options to fill posts on promotion form part of succession planning arrangements, in order to provide a choice of competent candidates against which a transparent selection may be made. A national approach to elements of career management and succession planning could support the establishment of clear and consistent standards and afford increased promotion opportunities to officers.

76. The challenge for forces is to create career development procedures that can supply a suitable pool of officers with the diverse range of skills necessary to meet the demands of specialist roles at each rank, and to supplement this with inter-force advertisement of specialist posts at whatever rank needed. This is not a question of ‘poaching’ expensively trained professionals: experience elsewhere shows that the market for specialist skills levels out over time, often with specialists returning to their force of origin with wider experience. In any case, Scotland is too small a country to be force-centric about such matters. We will monitor this situation, as well as inter-force movement on promotion, over the coming two years. No change may result in a recommendation for greater central intervention.

Career development

77. Forces must consider whether their systems of career development adequately help officers to achieve their potential. A small number of officers enter the Accelerated Career Development Programme (ACDP) each year. Others, who also have potential for promotion, do not. Ensuring that the promotion process is fair and transparent is an important first step, but this needs to be supported by other management processes, including appraisal, counselling, feedback, action planning and development opportunities. These opportunities should include secondments to specialist units, other police forces or even external organisations if there is a demonstrable benefit to the individual and the service.

78. We believe that the police service in Scotland would also benefit from more consistently applied career development practices across forces. These should encompass selection for promotion as well as greater national management of the most promising talent (including ACDP), and include opportunities for short-term secondments to other forces and longer-term movement between forces. We would support the practice of nominating a senior member of staff, possibly a chief officer, with responsibility for overseeing career development in each force. We also see benefit in forces collectively considering the possibilities for managing the future leaders of the Service nationally.



Diversity

79. This inspection also considered the diversity impact of promotion policies and focused in particular on the effects on female officers and those from black and minority ethnic communities (BME). Examination of the statistics on female officers participating in promotion processes revealed an apparent under-representation in recent years, though more recent figures suggest that the situation has improved. For BME officers, it was difficult to draw any conclusions from the statistics due to the small number of officers eligible for promotion.

80. There was a perception among forces that female officers were generally unlikely to apply for promotion until they felt that they had *all* the desired skills. By comparison, male officers were likely to apply when they felt that they had *most* of the skills required. This may help to explain the comparatively lower number of qualified female officers applying. From our discussions with the Women's Development Forum (WDF) we understand that steps that have been taken to address this imbalance.

81. Neither Semper Scotland, which represents BME officers in Scotland, nor the WDF found anything inherently discriminatory about the promotion processes in place. That said, concerns were raised about the fairness of Strathclyde Police's reliance on line manager nomination.

82. Though numbers are still very low, female representation at senior levels in the police service is increasing. Indeed, it was observed that the presence of these role models may be a factor in the rising number of females seeking promotion. It has been further suggested that this improving situation has also relieved others of the pressure that comes with being among the most senior female officers in the service. By way of contrast, the absence of senior BME police officers in Scotland may be working to the detriment of potential BME candidates. This situation highlights the importance of fair career development processes and promotion policies, and the potential benefits of external advertising.

83. It is crucial that forces continue to guard against discriminatory practices for all strands of diversity. Additional efforts to reach under-represented minority groups must be encouraged. It is also important that all promotion policies receive an equality impact assessment, to ensure adherence to the fundamental standards.

Temporary/acting ranks

84. Forces exercised different approaches to the use of officers in acting or temporary rank. Some made no use of acting ranks, while others used these positions to backfill posts in the short-term. Decisions on temporary rank, used for longer-term roles, tended to be made by chief officers. Here too there were discrepancies in selection processes, with some procedures being more rigorous than others.

85. Whilst it will not always be possible or appropriate to use acting or temporary ranks as development opportunities for officers seeking promotion, this should be a consideration when such decisions are made. Examining promotion assessments revealed that officers felt they had benefited from the experience, and this in turn had helped line managers to assess the officers' competence in the role. We support the consideration of the career development aspects of acting or temporary rank within promotion selection procedures.



Annex B

METHODOLOGY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. HMICS' thematic reports are prepared after careful but focused inspection of the subject matter. Our broad methodology is explained on our website. This shorter report contains far less detailed evidence than has been presented in past thematic inspection reports; this is a deliberate effort on our part to present accurate but concise and focused reports on a wider range of issues than has previously been the case.
 2. The project initiation document (PID) was adapted from our standard inspection format, based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model and circulated to forces. Following an initial consultation exercise and desktop research, we visited all eight police forces in Scotland, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and HMIC (England and Wales). We also liaised with the British Transport Police, sought professional opinion from Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) guidance and gained an external HR perspective from Boots the Chemists.
 3. Liaison was established with the following: representatives of ACPOS; the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents (ASPS); the Scottish Police Federation; UNISON; Semper Scotland; the Women's Development Forum; the Scottish Police College; the SCDEA; and, the national PDR team.
 4. Analysis of the responses provided a wealth of detailed information, permitting the inspection team to focus on the most relevant issues during the fieldwork visits. Fieldwork consisted of interviews with police officers and police staff across human resources and career development functions. We are grateful for the valuable assistance of the nominated liaison officers and all those involved in the fieldwork.
 5. The report focuses very specifically on the areas related to the five recommendations. In addition to these recommendations, we identified significant areas of good practice and opportunities for further improvement. These are listed in Annex A. We anticipate that forces will consider all of the comments in the report and the annex in reviewing their own internal selection processes.
 6. The inspection was carried out by HMICS staff under the direction of Paddy Tomkins QPM, HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland.
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