



National Audit Office

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Reference FOI-1722

Date 14 June 2024

## NAO GRADUATE ACCOUNTANCY SCHEME

Thank you for your request of 17 May 2024 for information about the NAO Graduate Accountancy Scheme. Your request has been handled under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

Your specific request is set out in **Annex A** in this letter and we have supplied our responses under each question.

**Annex B** sets out the steps you may wish to take if you are not satisfied with the way we have handled your request for information under the FOIA.

We hope you find this response helpful.

Yours sincerely,

**NAO FOI Team**



## Annex A

(Your original request is in italics below)

### Original FOI request received on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2024.

1. ***How many of the January 2024 applicants made it through to the final of the process?***
  - a) ***How many candidates applied in January 2024?***  
250 candidates applied between 01/01/2024 - 04/01/2024 when applications closed.
  - b) ***How many of those applicants were told that they had made it to the final stage?***  
39 candidates who applied in January were successful at passing the telephone interview.
  - c) ***How many of those were actually invited to an assessment centre?***  
14 candidates were invited to the assessment centre.
  - d) ***And how many, like me, were told they had reached the final stage but were then not invited to an assessment centre?***  
25 candidates did not get invited to attend an assessment centre as available positions were filled.
2. ***Did assessment days take place for January 2024 applicants to which I was not invited, and if so, I would like to understand how this is fair and reasonable?***

***Please advise where this is explained to candidates, and also on what basis the list is drawn-up? Is it alphabetical, by date of application, by the date on which a candidate's application was assessed, by reference to a marking structure etc? Please could you provide full details of how this process is a fair and open competition.***

The job listing states "We reserve the right to close vacancies earlier than the closing date should sufficient numbers of applications be received. We recommend prompt submission of your application."

Candidates are assessed on a rolling basis from when applications open and are received. Candidates must pass the initial stages which includes testing, application screening and a telephone interview. Therefore, candidates who apply earlier in the recruitment campaign have a better chance of progressing through the initial stages if successful and be invited to an assessment centre if a position is available.

3. ***Were January 2024 applicants offered positions without attending assessment days, and if so:***
  - a. ***On what basis were these decisions made***
  - b. ***Why was (what appears to be) the standard process not followed on this occasion, and***
  - c. ***How was this fair and reasonable?***

No candidates were offered positions without attending an assessment day. All offers were based on the outcomes of the assessment days attended.

4. ***How many applied in January 2024 and how many of those applicants have been offered positions?***

***I applied at the start of January and I was not given the opportunity to attend so, as above, please explain how these candidates were given priority over others?***

250 candidates applied between 01/01/2024 - 04/01/2024 of which 8 candidates were successful and were offered a position. Candidates are assessed based on their individual applications in the order we receive them. The successful applicants had submitted their application earlier in the recruitment drive, and so had already gone through the various levels of assessments before being offered a position.

5. ***When were January 2024 applicants offered positions?***

***So what I believe you are saying is that it was on a first come first serve basis and that not all candidates who successfully passed the first stages of the application process were then given an equal opportunity to attend for the final stage? Also if offers were made within a few days of the candidates attending assessment centres, when was the last assessment day and why has it taken until May before I was advised that my application for a Spring intake had not been successful?***

Regular reviews are conducted throughout the progress of the scheme, to determine whether offers should be made. Offers to successful candidates are normally made shortly after a candidate has attended an assessment centre and is successful subject to a position being available to fill.

The last assessment centre was completed on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024 after which all positions had been filled. Once the NAO confirmed this was the case, having finalised the outcome of this assessment centre and a review of overall offer numbers, candidates were then notified that all positions had been filled and no further assessment centres would be run.

**6. If all places have now been filled for 2024 (as advised), why was this role advertised again in March 2024 for a September 2024 intake?**

**On what date did you reopen please, and on what date were all of the positions filled? How many positions were filled?**

Recruitment was re-opened for a short period from 22/03/24 - 03/04/24 as candidates were still being assessed and all graduate positions had not been filled. A number of candidates had also withdrawn from the process and/or declined offers that had been made. In total, 108 positions were filled in the 2024 recruitment campaign.

**7. Will none of the applicants who applied by 5th April 2024 be considered for a position in 2024?**

**Please clarify. Are you saying that ALL candidates who applied by 5th April 2024 were advised that they would only be considered for a position in 2025 and that none would attend an assessment day in 2024?**

Any candidate that applied for the 2024 graduate scheme intake and was successful at being shortlisted for an assessment centre, was offered the opportunity to have their application transferred to the 2025 graduate scheme once positions had been filled and assessments had stopped.

#### **Second FOI request received on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2024.**

**1. You stopped running further assessment centres when available positions were filled. Why were positions filled before all January applicants who had reached the final stage had been given an equal chance?**

Applicants were tested against multiple stages of the recruitment process since the recruitment drive opened in September 2023. Stages included application screening, telephone interviews and testing. As we have explained, recruitment for the Graduate scheme is carried out on a rolling basis. Once positions have been filled, we stopped running assessment centres and candidates were then informed.

#### **Third FOI request received on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2024.**

**1.1.1. Was I awarded points for the stage of the process which preceded the assessment day stage and, if so, what score did I obtain and how did this score compare with the scores of others who were notified that they had reached the final stage of the process in my Cohort? What score was needed to progress to the final and 5<sup>th</sup> stage? *N.b., I have not previously asked this question, so it is a new question for the purposes of the FOIA.***

Candidates are scored at every stage of the application process. Your telephone interview score was 20 out of a maximum score of 25. 66% of all successful applicants overall scored a minimum of 20 or above in the telephone interview stage. The benchmark to pass a telephone interview is a minimum of 3 in each competency, and an overall score of 17 to be able to progress to the final stage of the assessment.

**1.1.2. Following on from 1.3.12, how did my score for the previous round of the process (if a score was awarded) compare with the score of all of those who actually attended an assessment day in 2024 both (a) in my Cohort, and (b) for the group who had applied to previous grad schemes? *N.b., I have not previously asked this question, so it is a new question for the purposes of the FOIA.***

- a) 61% of all candidates who attended an assessment centre for the 2024 Graduate recruitment campaign had scored 20 or above at the telephone interview stage.
- b) The FOI Act provides the requester to recorded information held by a public authority. We do not hold data comparing your score to groups who had applied to previous graduate schemes.

## **Annex B**

### **Statement of Policy**

Our policy is to respond to requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 as helpfully and promptly as possible, having regard to the principles set out in the Act. I therefore hope you are happy with the way we have handled your request. If you are not, then you should take the following steps.

In the first instance, within 40 working days, write to the National Audit Office Freedom of Information (FOI) Team at [FOI@nao.org.uk](mailto:FOI@nao.org.uk) or by post to:

FOI Team, Green 2, National Audit Office, 157-197 Buckingham Palace Road, London, SW1W 9SP

The FOI and Correspondence Manager will arrange a review, which will be conducted by a senior member of staff who was not involved in decisions relating to your original request. Once the review has been completed, we will write informing you of the outcome.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The primary way of escalating your concerns to the Information Commissioner is at: [www.ico.org.uk/foicomplaints](http://www.ico.org.uk/foicomplaints)

Alternatively, you can contact the ICO at <https://ico.org.uk/> or Information Commissioner's Office Wycliffe House Water Lane Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF.