

*MCSI Inspection of Court Services*

*Children and Family Court Advisory  
and Support Service (CAFCASS)*

**Recruitment for Service Delivery**

*Report of an inspection carried out during*

*December 2004*

# *MCSI Inspection of Court Services*

MCSI has a remit to inspect and report to the Secretary of State in the Department for Constitutional Affairs. Its legal powers and duties covering inspection of CAF/CASS are set out in section 17 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

Following changes announced in June 2003, departmental responsibility for CAF/CASS moved to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Under the Transfer of Functions Order 2003, MCSI reports on CAF/CASS to the Minister for Children, Young People and Families in DfES.

MCSI undertook a programme of baseline inspections in 2002 and 2003, which were summarised in two Overview Reports, *Setting a Course* and *Towards Year Three*, published in March 2003 and April 2004 respectively. In 2004, MCSI embarked on a new programme of inspections. *Recruitment for Service Delivery* is the second part of the MCSI report published in July 2004, called *Training and Quality Assurance for Service Delivery*. MCSI was not able to report on recruitment at that time, due to CAF/CASS staff absence.

The report is based on evidence gathered from CAF/CASS Headquarters and across the organisation.

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## *Chief Inspector's Foreword*

This inspection report focuses on recruitment practices in CAF/CASS. It was originally planned to be part of our inspection report on training and quality assurance for service delivery, but CAF/CASS staff absence led to its postponement for a few months.

The timing of the inspection, in December 2004, coincided with a period of significant and rapid change for CAF/CASS, both in terms of strategic direction and Headquarters' personnel. This particularly applied to the human resources function. The judgements contained in this report, although set in that context, are based on what Inspectors found in December. Since then, inevitably, the situation has moved on. For example, CAF/CASS has appointed experts in workforce development and performance management, and issued new human resources policies. It is important that the report is read with these developments in mind.

We found that recruitment decisions flowed from vacancies and backlogs in cases, rather than strategic considerations or assessment of cost effectiveness. This issue is picked up in the first recommendation. Turning to the recruitment process itself, delays, and other examples of poor administration, occurred in many cases. On the other hand, we found that the process was generally effective in safeguarding children and identifying capabilities, although further improvements in the procedures and practices should be made. These are the subject of Recommendations 3 and 4.

Finally, this report contains a number of observations on the recruitment of black and minority ethnic practitioners. This is an area in which CAF/CASS will need to focus its energies. The second recommendation in this report seeks to support CAF/CASS in doing this.

I am grateful to staff in CAF/CASS for their co-operation throughout the inspection process. In particular, I would like to thank Kathryn Alston, who acted as the liaison officer, gathered together the briefing material in advance of the inspection and arranged on-site meetings.



**Dr Stella Dixon**  
**HM Chief Inspector**  
**MCSI Inspection of Court Services**  
**March 2005**

## *Inspection Findings: Recruitment for Service Delivery*

This inspection assesses the degree to which CAFCASS recruitment strategies, policies, procedures and practices ensure:

- ❑ that focus and priority is given to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who may be the subject of family proceedings, or who are in receipt of other CAFCASS services
- ❑ the provision and deployment of practitioners capable of delivering CAFCASS's objectives cost effectively.

In order to fulfil this key function, CAFCASS is expected to ensure that:

- ❑ recruitment strategies, policies, procedures and practices for practitioners demonstrate child-focus and achieve better outcomes for children who are in receipt of its services
- ❑ human resources needs are systematically and continuously planned
- ❑ practitioner staff structures and numbers enable work to be carried out cost effectively
- ❑ due regard is given to racial equality in carrying out the recruitment of practitioners
- ❑ recruitment strategies, policies, procedures and practices for practitioners help to prevent exclusion from services, for whatever reason
- ❑ statutory obligations are met, and good employment practice is demonstrated, in respect of the recruitment of practitioners
- ❑ recruitment policies, procedures and practices for practitioners ensure the safeguarding of children
- ❑ practitioner capabilities are identified during the recruitment process.

## *Overall assessment*

During Autumn 2004, CAFCASS embarked on a programme of change, including reform of the human resources function. Given the timing of this inspection, Inspectors are unable to comment on the programme, other than to acknowledge relevant aspects of it in footnotes to this report. In December 2004, Inspectors found uncertainty and confusion among staff about their jobs and roles, and the overall direction of CAFCASS. Although it was predictable that staff would have these feelings, Inspectors were concerned by the extent of the uncertainty and confusion.

Aspects of the recruitment process show a child-focus, although there is no overall strategy on this. The procedures and practices for safeguarding children and assessing applicants' capabilities show an intention to achieve better outcomes for children; although this is not something that CAFCASS, in keeping with other parts of the Family Justice System, presently measures.

CAFCASS has a planning cycle and has taken some initiatives that could form part of a strategy on recruitment. However, CAFCASS does not systematically and continuously plan its human resources needs. The absence of a workforce strategy, combined with lack of data, for example on cost effectiveness, mean that decisions about frontline recruitment are primarily driven by vacancies and backlogs in cases.

CAFCASS has a wide range of documents relating to the recruitment process and employs skilled Human Resources Advisers across the organisation to take human resources issues forward. In spite of this, CAFCASS does not consistently follow good practice in many areas of recruitment, resulting in frequent examples of delay and poor communication. In terms of safeguarding children and identifying capabilities, CAFCASS recruitment practices and procedures are generally consistently applied and reasonably comprehensive in nature, although some weaknesses exist.

Black and minority ethnic persons are appointed in a significantly lower proportion than their presence in the population at large and amongst service users. CAFCASS does not fully understand the reasons for this, partly due to incomplete data and partly due to the limited use made of the available data. As a result, CAFCASS is hindered from identifying effective measures to attract more black and minority ethnic recruits.

## ***Recruitment strategies, policies, procedures and practices for practitioners demonstrate child-focus and achieve better outcomes for children who are in receipt of its services***

- 1 At a strategic level, CAFCASS has not developed plans which explicitly link recruitment to child-focus. This is unsurprising, given that CAFCASS has neither an overall vision on practitioner recruitment nor a recruitment plan (see paragraph 7). However, it would be wrong to conclude from this that there is no link between recruitment and child-focus at the present time.
- 2 The recruitment criteria – that applicants must be social workers with at least three years' post-qualification experience of working with children – is a powerful indicator that the welfare of children is at the heart of the process. The recruitment procedures and practices provide further evidence of child-focus. For example, the interview questions and case studies examine applicants' ability to listen and respond appropriately to the concerns of children. Conversely, the application form does not specifically request evidence of an applicant's knowledge, ability and skills about working with children.<sup>1</sup>
- 3 Inspectors also give credit to CAFCASS for looking at ways to do more in terms of linking recruitment to child-focus. For example, CAFCASS has considered how it might involve children in the recruitment process. In particular, it has examined the experience of local authorities in involving children. On the basis of this evidence, it has ruled out using children on recruitment panels for the time being, but it has undertaken to find other ways of obtaining feedback from children. Furthermore, CAFCASS is planning to use children, through a national involvement group, to assist in identifying the practitioner competencies, which will be used in the selection process.<sup>2</sup>
- 4 In terms of achieving better outcomes for children, CAFCASS's assessment of capabilities and the pursuit of safeguarding (see paragraphs 35-39 and 40-44) are indicative of an intention to do so. At present, however, CAFCASS does not measure outcomes. As such, it would not be able to demonstrate the impact of its recruitment strategies, policies, procedures and practices. In this regard, CAFCASS is similar to other parts of the Family Justice System, where stakeholder measurement of outcomes is undeveloped. This agenda, which is set out in *Every Child Matters* (2004), will be taken forward with the full implementation of the Children Act 2004.

## ***Human resources needs are systematically and continuously planned***

- 5 CAFCASS has some of the building blocks in place for planning human resources needs. It has an annual planning cycle, where the Business Plan and the Delivery Plans are appropriately linked with strategic objectives that have implications for recruitment. These Plans set out a timetable for action in support of the strategic objectives. To ensure compliance, provision is made for progress reports, although it is not clear where accountability for delivery lies and how frequently these progress reports are given, and to whom.

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<sup>1</sup> Update February 2005: CAFCASS plans to produce a new application form, which will require candidates to provide evidence of knowledge, ability and skills that support a new Family Court Adviser (FCA) job profile, which will be based on competencies linked to working with children.

<sup>2</sup> Update February 2005: CAFCASS plans to create the post of Children's Rights Director. To support this post, it also plans to appoint a National Development Worker.

- 6 In addition to the planning cycle just outlined, CAFCASS has taken a number of initiatives on recruitment, which could form part of an overall strategy. The drive to recruit a core workforce of employed FCAs is complemented by the use of self-employed, bank and agency staff, to provide flexibility and deal with peaks and troughs in demand. The bank scheme also aims to alleviate the impact of the retirement of practitioners specialising in private law work.<sup>3</sup>
- 7 However, the Corporate Plan does not provide an overall vision of where the organisation wants to be on practitioner recruitment and how it is going to get there, nor is there a national workforce or recruitment plan. As a result, recruitment is not shaped by an organisation-wide strategic plan. Systems for collecting and analysing data for use in planning are limited, so that there is a reliance on assumptions, which are counted as facts. For example, it is a widely-held belief that the difficulty in recruiting practitioners in the South Division is due to the better salaries on offer in local authorities. Although this assumption may be true, the only evidence that CAFCASS has to support it is anecdotal.<sup>4</sup>
- 8 In the absence of a national framework, the majority of the regions have drawn up Workforce Plans based solely on the national Workload Planning Formula. As a result, the Plans show limited ambition in terms of reshaping the workforce. A minority of the regions, e.g. the North West, have produced more creative plans based on regional strategic objectives, which aim to change and develop the workforce and match it to local needs in a more radical way. The South Division, with its particular problems around recruitment, has drawn up a Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2004/05. To its credit, this Strategy draws upon data, albeit only of a quantitative nature, collected from a recruitment campaign. It also outlines plans to collect and analyse more data, of both a quantitative and qualitative nature. (Progress on implementation of this Strategy is unclear. This is discussed in paragraph 11.)
- 9 Significantly, the impact of these Plans, whatever their content, appears to be limited. In reality, decisions about recruitment are mostly driven by vacancies or backlogs in work. For example, Yorkshire and Humberside's recent bid for new staff was primarily based on the backlogs in that region. The Vacancy Authorisation Form, which was designed as a tool to ensure recruitment, was linked to CAFCASS's strategic aims, became a tool for financial management and, therefore, did not achieve its original purpose.
- 10 In Autumn 2004, CAFCASS produced proposals on its future culture & structure and a framework on the recruitment & retention of staff, which were out for consultation at the time of the inspection in December. A research project, looking at the comparative salaries of CAFCASS and local authorities, was also underway. These activities represent a first step towards the formulation of a cohesive and comprehensive workforce and recruitment strategy. As further progress is made, CAFCASS should build, as far as possible, on the structures already in place. This will avoid unnecessary replication of work and help maintain stability in a time of significant change.

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<sup>3</sup> Update February 2005: CAFCASS has recently decided to vary the person specification for FCAs, so that a wider range of people will be eligible to apply to undertake private law work.

<sup>4</sup> Update February 2005: CAFCASS appointed a consultant in workforce development in January 2005, whose task is to work with the organisation to put a comprehensive workforce strategy in place.

- 11 Meanwhile, there is considerable confusion among staff about the current state of play; to what extent the old structures and plans apply, and to what extent they have been superseded by the consultation documents referred to already. For example, Inspectors found a lack of consensus among senior staff members as to their current role, and were given conflicting answers as to whether the South Division Recruitment and Retention Strategy was still operative. This confusion is compounded by poor paper management, so that it is often not possible to ascertain a document's author, date or status. As a matter of urgency, CAFCASS Headquarters needs to make clear its timetable for action and the position pending implementation. In so doing, it should ensure that there are proper systems in place for document management.

### *Practitioner staff structures and numbers enable work to be carried out cost effectively*

- 12 The principal tool for assessing the cost effectiveness of practitioner structures and numbers is the Workloads Policy. This Policy sets out the number of reports which a practitioner is expected to complete in a year. Although some regions, such as Eastern and East Midlands, have developed alternative tools, they are based on the Workloads Policy and are similar in nature.
- 13 The Workloads Policy is a crude tool for measuring productivity. Other than differentiating between public and private law cases, the data it provides is quantitative, rather than qualitative, in nature; i.e. it shows the number of reports completed by each practitioner, team and region, without taking any account of the nature of each individual case. In the absence of a facility for monitoring casework activity, however, it appears to be the best available tool at the present time.
- 14 There are some examples where the Policy is being used to measure individual & team productivity and achieve more effective & efficient distribution of work. For example, the Policy has been used in Yorkshire and Humberside to equalise work across two teams and, thereby, clear backlogs. However, it is not being systematically and consistently applied. Whereas some regions, such as Eastern and East Midlands, have developed their own policies, other regions, such as CAFCASS Legal, have not adopted the Policy at all. Some practitioners told Inspectors that they effectively control their own workload.
- 15 The failure to apply the Workloads Policy systematically, coupled with its inherent shortcomings, means that CAFCASS is not able to demonstrate that the current practitioner structures and numbers enable work to be carried out cost effectively. Although the mixed economy of employed, self-employed and bank staff is intended to achieve the efficient distribution of work, there is no statistical evidence to support this.

- 16 During Autumn 2004, the CAF/CASS Board signalled its desire to replace the Workloads Policy, which is based on formulaic allocations, with a more sophisticated productivity measure. This has led to confusion at a senior level within CAF/CASS as to whether the Workloads Policy continues to be operative. Meanwhile, no other tool for measuring productivity appears likely to be available in the near future.<sup>5</sup>

*Recommendation 1: that, in order to be able to measure productivity and, therefore, be able to accurately assess staffing needs, CAF/CASS Headquarters systematically applies the Workloads Policy or equivalent tool for measuring cost effectiveness.*

### *Due regard is given to racial equality in carrying out the recruitment of practitioners*

- 17 CAF/CASS has produced a number of documents which link diversity to recruitment. These documents include key plans, e.g. the Corporate Plan and the Delivery Plans, and policies relating specifically to diversity, e.g. the Diversity Policy, the Diversity Monitoring Policy and the Race Equality Scheme, although the latter does not appear to have been reviewed since it was drafted in 2002.
- 18 Flowing from these plans and policies, CAF/CASS has taken certain actions intended to support diversity in recruitment, for example:
- CAF/CASS has made efforts to monitor the ethnicity of its practitioners and service users, to obtain data for use in recruitment planning
  - divisional and regional teams receive information on a regular basis on the diversity profile of the workforce
  - the classification of the ethnic origin of candidates for posts is monitored through a confidential questionnaire sent out with application forms
  - a recent advertising campaign has been designed to reach out to potential applicants from black and minority ethnic groups.
- 19 However, in spite of these actions, CAF/CASS is still in the position where it does not hold comprehensive data on its practitioner workforce, having failed to ensure that individual practitioners comply with requests to provide details of their ethnicity. The outcome is that CAF/CASS lacks solid evidence on which to develop a strategy for ensuring that the recruitment process promotes racial equality.
- 20 Furthermore, CAF/CASS is not making full use of the information which it currently holds. The diversity recruitment data is reported in the form of rolling figures from an unspecified date (no later than the beginning of 2002) and is not broken down into particular groups of employees. As such, it is not possible to undertake an accurate and specific analysis of FCA recruitment.
- 21 Without such an analysis, an assumption has emerged in CAF/CASS that the disproportionately low number of black and minority ethnic recruits reflects the disproportionately low number of black and minority ethnic applicants. This, in turn, has led CAF/CASS to develop a strategy around encouraging more black and minority

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<sup>5</sup> Update February 2005: CAF/CASS has appointed an Interim Head of Performance, with an expertise in the development of performance methodologies, whose task is to produce a comprehensive performance management and quality assurance scheme, which is intended to encompass workload management and cost effectiveness.

ethnic applicants. For example, CAFCASS has commissioned an outside agency to redesign its job adverts so that they appeal to a more diverse group of people.

- 22 An analysis undertaken by MCSI of the diversity recruitment data raises some questions about this strategy and the assumption on which it is based. It appears that people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are applying to CAFCASS in a number that is in proportion to the population. They are being short-listed in a slightly lower proportion. Significantly, they are being appointed in a much lower proportion.
- 23 Because of the way in which the data is reported, as outlined in paragraph 20, it is not possible to draw from MCSI's analysis specific conclusions about FCA recruitment. However, the analysis shows the need for CAFCASS to revisit the way in which it reports its recruitment data. Also, CAFCASS may wish to check its recruitment process, in order to guard against any possible disadvantaging of black or minority ethnic candidates. In this context, it is noteworthy that practitioners told Inspectors they were struck by the all-white composition of their recruitment panels. This is particularly significant given that recruitment panels have not received specialist training on diversity.
- 24 Where applicants from black or minority ethnic backgrounds are appointed, CAFCASS does not provide them with consistent support. Indeed, Inspectors did not find evidence that managers are anticipating what it might feel like for black or minority ethnic practitioners to work within predominantly white teams, or the impact on them. Although the Black Workers' Support Groups, which are located in several regions, are to be commended, they do not operate across the whole of CAFCASS; nor are they responsible for ensuring that black and minority ethnic recruits are appropriately welcomed and supported by the organisation.
- 25 During Autumn 2004, CAFCASS produced its Managing Diversity Action Plan 2004/05. This was put together in response to a report submitted by diversity consultants in June 2004 and MCSI's report, *Managing CAFCASS*, published in August 2004. This report highlighted the need to "develop plans of action to take forward the organisation's response to the wider issues of diversity, including the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000".
- 26 Under the Managing Diversity Action Plan, as a means of attracting a diverse workforce, CAFCASS undertakes to:
  - achieve 100% monitoring of all staff and service user diversity
  - appoint an organisation to manage recruitment advertising
  - develop a Recruitment Code of Practice
  - provide selection criteria for interview panels, ensuring all interview panel Chairs are trained.

27 Other than the appointment of an outside agency to manage recruitment advertising (see paragraph 21), the implementation date for these measures was after the inspection in December 2004, although a draft Recruitment Code of Practice was out for consultation. It is, therefore, too early to assess whether or not these measures are effective. On the one hand, they appear to address some of the issues outlined above, for example, the poor data on the ethnic origin of practitioners and service users. On the other hand, it is disappointing that there is no evidence that these measures are based on a comprehensive analysis of available data. There are also no proposals for having a black or minority ethnic adviser on the recruitment panels, or providing additional support to newly-recruited black and minority ethnic practitioners.

***Recommendation 2: that, in order to give due regard to racial equality in carrying out the recruitment of practitioners and to comply with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, CAF/CASS Headquarters:***

- *establishes and maintains full details of the ethnic breakdown of its practitioner workforce*
- *collects and analyses evidence to clarify the reasons for the under-representation of ethnic minorities in the practitioner workforce, and takes action to address the findings*
- *provides systematic support for newly-recruited practitioners from ethnic minorities.*

***Recruitment strategies, policies, procedures and practices for practitioners help to prevent exclusion from services, for whatever reason – gender, race, religion, and disability***

28 A key objective in the Annual Report is to ensure that staff members are equipped to work with all the communities they serve. There are some recruitment policies and procedures in place that support this objective. For example, the case studies at interview test applicants on diversity issues and the Policy for Diversity Monitoring is intended to provide information on the profile of service users. However, the data CAF/CASS collects on the ethnic make-up of its service users, like the data it collects on the ethnic make-up of its practitioner workforce, is incomplete.

29 The implementation of the Managing Diversity Action Plan (referred to in paragraphs 25-27) is intended to attract a more diverse workforce. If successful, it should contribute to the prevention of exclusion from services.

***Statutory obligations are met, and good employment practice is demonstrated, in respect of the recruitment of practitioners***

30 CAF/CASS has a wide range of documents, available on its Intranet, relating to the recruitment process. Chief amongst these, are the Recruitment and Selection Procedures and their appendices. The Human Resources Advisers, who are specialists based in the regions, not only demonstrate an understanding of these processes, but also the Advisers' role in the context of a social work organisation. In spite of this, CAF/CASS has rightly assessed that it does not follow good practice in many key areas. An internal paper,

produced in Autumn 2004, summed up the situation with the statement “...CAFCASS needs a suite of key HR policies and the accompanying How-to Guides to advise managers on how-to-handle”.<sup>6</sup>

- 31 The practical impact of the shortcomings in CAFCASS’s recruitment policies and processes is difficult to ascertain from internal quality assurance systems. At the time of the inspection, Inspectors were led to believe that there were no relevant performance indicators or systems for monitoring the recruitment process. After the completion of the inspection fieldwork, CAFCASS produced documents relating to key performance indicators (KPIs) for recruitment. These indicators measure recruitment before, but not after, the offer of employment and, as such, they are incomplete.<sup>7</sup> Complaints from applicants, which would be another way for CAFCASS to monitor its recruitment policies and processes, are not logged, possibly because there is no set procedure for doing this.
- 32 However, feedback given to Inspectors during the inspection was clear. Staff at all levels said that the administration of the recruitment process was at times slow, cumbersome and unwieldy. This evidence is supported by the results of MCSI’s questionnaire to newly-recruited practitioners where, in almost one third of cases, it took six months or more between someone making an application and starting in post. Numerous comments were endorsed on the individual questionnaires, complaining about delays, poor communication and mishaps.
- 33 In Autumn 2004, CAFCASS identified the development of a Recruitment Code of Practice and Guidance Manual, as a major priority. At the time of the inspection, it was already consulting on the Code, as well as a complaints procedure for applicants. This is to be commended.
- 34 In interview, the view was expressed at a senior level that the new Code was already operative on the basis that it represented best practice. This is of concern to Inspectors, as it shows that there is some confusion within CAFCASS about the status of the new and old procedures. To overcome this confusion, CAFCASS should publish a timetable for the implementation of the new Code and Guidance and, pending their implementation, make clear to staff members the procedures to which they should work.

### ***Recruitment policies, procedures and practices for practitioners ensure the safeguarding of children***

- 35 CAFCASS recruitment procedures contain a comprehensive range of measures designed to ensure the safeguarding of children. Below is a list of some of these measures, requiring candidates to:
- present birth certificates and passports as proof of identity at interview
  - present original certificates as proof of their qualifications at interview
  - complete a form on their medical history and give permission for their medical records to be disclosed
  - provide two references, including their current, or most recent, employer
  - give permission to be police-checked.

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<sup>6</sup> Update February 2005: CAFCASS has produced a range of new human resources policies.

<sup>7</sup> In view of the late submission of these documents, MCSI is not able to comment on the performance data arising from these KPIs.

- 36 It is apparent from interviews with staff members who sit on recruitment panels that they understand their responsibilities with regard to children’s safeguards. The evidence collected by the Inspectors, such as the results of MCSI’s questionnaire to newly-recruited practitioners and the analysis of individuals’ personal files, demonstrates that the safeguarding procedures are consistently applied.
- 37 However, there are some gaps in the procedures which impact on the overall quality of safeguarding, including:
- the application form does not ask candidates to give CAF/CASS the right to approach any previous employer
  - the application form does not ask candidates to identify and explain any gaps in their employment history
  - the recruitment panel members are not given training on interviewing and selection. This means, for example, they may accept answers, e.g. about gaps in employment history, at face value and fail to ask probing supplementary questions
  - although references are read, they are not consistently followed up, but accepted at face value. Where they are followed up, there is no set procedure for staff to follow
  - there is no probationary period, nor robust arrangements, for overseeing the work of new recruits
  - there is no values-based interview to screen out unsuitable candidates at an early stage.
- 38 At the time of the inspection, work was underway to develop new procedures which, it was intended, would address some of these gaps. For example:
- the new application form will require candidates to identify and explain gaps in employment, and give CAF/CASS the right to approach any previous employer
  - recruitment panel members will receive training
  - guidelines will be given on references and how to follow them up
  - the proposal to introduce a probationary period is out for consultation.
- 39 This work is to be commended. However, it is important that it represents the start of a systematic process, at the end of which CAF/CASS is able to demonstrate that its recruitment procedures and practices fully comply with the relevant recommendations on safeguarding children, contained in the Warner Report 1992<sup>8</sup>.

***Recommendation 3: that, in order to safeguard children, CAF/CASS Headquarters ensures that its recruitment policies, procedures and practices comply with the relevant recommendations on safeguarding children, contained in the report on safe recruitment practices (the Warner Report 1992).***

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<sup>8</sup> Full title: *Choosing with Care: The Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Selection, Development and Management of Staff in Children’s Homes.*

## *Practitioner capabilities are identified during the recruitment process*

- 40 CAFCASS has a set of selection procedures for the recruitment of practitioners. Inspectors came across a few instances where this procedure is not being followed. For example, in some regions, applications were by application form only whereas, in other regions, a curriculum vitae was acceptable. In general, however, the procedure is operating across the organisation, albeit with some regional amendments.
- 41 The selection procedure is fairly comprehensive in range and content. The core documents, such as the application form, short-listing checklist, suggested interview questions and scoring system, are effective tools for identifying capabilities. The use of case studies, involving both public and private law work, provides valuable information about an applicant's potential to undertake the full range of CAFCASS work, in keeping with CAFCASS's long-term aims.
- 42 Although the selection procedure is fairly rigorous, Inspectors have identified the following weaknesses:
- as mentioned in paragraph 37, staff members sitting on recruitment panels are not given specialist training in interview skills. This increases the possibility of poor or inconsistent practice, especially where the Human Resources Adviser is not part of the panel
  - panels responsible for recruiting social work practitioners to CAFCASS Legal do not include members with a social work qualification. This is likely to limit the range and depth of questioning
  - applicants are assessed against the person specification for the post of FCA, rather than against competencies. This creates the risk of appointing someone who fits the person specification, but who does not have the appropriate capabilities. For example, the recruitment process does not assess report writing, although this is a key skill and recognised as such by CAFCASS
  - the case studies have not been independently validated to assure quality
  - there is no probationary period or robust mechanism for assessing capabilities after a practitioner has joined CAFCASS. This point was made not only by staff responsible for recruitment, but also by new practitioners, who expressed concerns about lack of support and supervision. As a result, there is no systematic means for validating the selection process.<sup>9</sup>
- 43 CAFCASS Headquarters has been remiss in not addressing these weaknesses in the selection procedure. Of most concern, is the gap in testing report writing skills; this has been identified for some time yet, on a national level, no action to fill it has been taken. Some regions, such as Yorkshire & Humberside and London, have overcome this by amending the recruitment procedure to include an assessment of report writing. Although this is to be commended, it is no substitute for an organisation-wide assessment programme, which is externally validated and used consistently.

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<sup>9</sup> See MCSI's report, *Training and Quality Assurance*, published in July 2004.

- 44 During Autumn 2004, CAFCASS has reviewed its recruitment procedures and has identified for itself most of the weaknesses outlined above. Plans to introduce a Recruitment Code of Practice, develop a Competency Framework and provide training for recruiters are intended to address these weaknesses and ensure consistency.

*Recommendation 4: that, in order to ensure that practitioner capabilities are identified during the recruitment process, and subsequently validated, CAFCASS Headquarters reviews its selection and induction procedures and, in particular:*

- *requires all members of recruitment panels to be trained in interviewing skills*
- *introduces competencies against which to assess applicants, using robust techniques for testing the full range of capabilities*
- *introduces robust systems for checking the capabilities of new recruits, including considering the introduction of a probationary period.*

## Practitioner questionnaire analysis

MCSI sent out a questionnaire to all practitioners appointed since 1 January 2003.

In total, 193 questionnaires were sent out. One hundred and forty (73%) were sent to employed FCAs, 31 (16%) were sent to FCAs on the bank scheme and 22 (11%) were sent to self-employed guardians.

Seventy seven questionnaires (40%) were completed and returned. This return rate, within a margin of 2%, applied to employed FCAs, FCAs on the bank scheme and self-employed guardians.

Fifty six (73%) of the completed questionnaires were from employed FCAs, 12 (16%) were from FCAs on the bank scheme and 9 (12%) were from self-employed guardians.

**The results from the completed questionnaires are set out below:**

How did you find out about the job?	Advertisement	Word of mouth	Other
	56 (72%)	16 (21%)	6 (8%)

### Length of time between application and starting in post

	Number	Percentage
Same month	12	13%
1 month	0	0%
2 months	3	3%
3 months	10	11%
4 months	13	15%
5 months	20	22%
6 months	9	10%
7 months	4	4%
8 months	1	1%
9 months	5	6%
10 months	1	1%
11 months	1	1%
12 months	0	0%
Over 1 year	8	9%
No dates given	2	2%

## Safeguarding

Prior to your appointment, were you required to:	Yes	No	Don't know
Produce proof of your identity	77 (99%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Produce proof of your qualifications	77 (99%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Provide references	78 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Give permission to approach a previous employer	73 (95%)	2 (3%)	2 (3%)
Give permission to conduct a Criminal Records Bureau check	71 (93%)	4 (5%)	1 (1%)
Undergo an interview	76 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Provide a full employment/training history	70 (91%)	6 (8%)	1 (1%)
Undertake written tests	37 (49%)	37 (49%)	1 (1%)
Undertake role play	4 (5%)	71 (95%)	0 (0%)
Undertake personality tests	0 (0%)	75 (99%)	1 (1%)

## Skills and competencies

	Was assessed poorly	Was assessed satisfactorily	Was assessed well
Listening and responding to children	7 (9%)	50 (67%)	18 (24%)
Safeguarding children and promoting their welfare	1 (1%)	47 (62%)	28 (37%)
Making assessments of children and families	1 (1%)	45 (61%)	28 (38%)
Report writing	17 (23%)	49 (66%)	8 (11%)

## Diversity

During the recruitment process, were you asked to provide information on:	Yes	No	Don't know	
Gender	61 (79%)	6 (8%)	10 (15%)	
Race	67 (91%)	5 (7%)	2 (3%)	
Religion	24 (32%)	25 (34%)	25 (34%)	
Disability	66 (87%)	3 (4%)	7 (10%)	
	<b>Poorly</b>	<b>Satisfactorily</b>	<b>Well</b>	<b>I had no particular needs</b>
Please indicate how effectively the recruitment process addressed your particular needs	5 (7%)	25 (37%)	6 (9%)	32 (47%)

## Overall

	Poor	Satisfactory	Good
How would you assess the recruitment process as experienced by you?	24 (31%)	38 (49%)	16 (21%)
	Yes	No	Don't know
Were you informed about how to register complaints, compliments or comments about the recruitment process?	10 (13%)	40 (51%)	28 (36%)
Did you lodge a complaint arising out of the recruitment process?	3 (4%)	75 (96%)	0 (0%)
	Poorly	Satisfactorily	Well
If you answered yes to the previous question, how effectively did CAF/CASS respond to your complaint?	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

## Methodology

The inspection of CAF/CASS recruitment strategies, policies, practices and procedures in respect of practitioners was conducted by a team of five Inspectors and two inspection assistants. CAF/CASS was given four months' notice of the start of the main fieldwork and of the topics to be inspected. (The notice period was less than the usual six months because the aim of the inspection was to cover those human resources issues that Inspectors had been unable to complete in the March 2004 inspection (*Training and Quality Assurance for Service Delivery*) due to CAF/CASS staff absence.)

CAF/CASS provided the inspection team with documentary evidence, together with their own analysis of performance.

The inspection team visited CAF/CASS Headquarters and offices in Derby and London.

The inspection team carried out a series of structured interviews with the following persons:

- senior management and staff at CAF/CASS Headquarters
- the Divisional Directors and Divisional Human Resources Managers
- a selection of Regional Managers, Service Managers, Human Resources Advisers and frontline practitioners drawn from across CAF/CASS.

The inspection team carried out a discussion based on a specific recruitment campaign with the Deputy Director of Human Resources and the relevant Human Resources Adviser.

The inspection team carried out discussions with two Human Resources Advisers, based on individual practitioners' personnel files.

Practitioners appointed since 1 January 2004 completed an MCSI questionnaire covering their experience of the recruitment process.

MCSI reports do not normally record the views of identifiable individuals.

CAF/CASS has seen this report in draft form. Any comments on factual inaccuracies have been taken into account in this final version.

## *MCSI Recommendations and CAFCASS action plan*

### **1 MCSI recommendation:**

*In order to be able to measure productivity and, therefore, be able to accurately assess staffing needs, CAFCASS Headquarters systematically applies the Workloads Policy or equivalent tool for measuring cost effectiveness.*

#### **CAFCASS response**

CAFCASS will:

- develop a better, more effective way of measuring if staff are working to their best capacity
- develop and introduce a new systematic performance improvement and quality assurance scheme
- link the allocation of resources for staffing to workload targets
- ensure the Workloads Policy is applied systematically across the organisation, until the first two of the above are in place and delivering.

**Overall improvement target:** To introduce a planned and systematic approach to the measurement and allocation of CAFCASS human resources needs, directly related to workload demand.

**By date:** Development by December 2005  
Full implementation by June 2006

## 2 *MCSI recommendation*

*In order to give due regard to racial equality in carrying out the recruitment of practitioners and to comply with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, CAFCASS Headquarters:*

- *establishes and maintains full details of the ethnic breakdown of its practitioner workforce*
- *collects and analyses evidence to clarify the reasons for the under-representation of ethnic minorities in the practitioner workforce, and takes action to address the findings*
- *provides systematic support for newly-recruited practitioners from ethnic minorities.*

### **CAFCASS response**

CAFCASS will:

- establish and maintain full details of the ethnic breakdown of its practitioner workforce
- collect and analyse evidence to clarify the reasons for the under-representation of ethnic minorities in the practitioner workforce, and take action to address the findings
- provide systematic support for newly-recruited practitioners from ethnic minorities.

**Overall improvement target:** Establish a system to improve representation and support of ethnic minorities in the workforce.

**By date:** Completion by December 2005

### 3 *MCSI recommendation:*

*In order to safeguard children, CAFCASS Headquarters ensures that its recruitment policies, procedures and practices comply with the relevant recommendations on safeguarding children, contained in the report on safe recruitment practices (the Warner Report 1992).*

#### **CAFCASS response**

CAFCASS will ensure that the new Recruitment Code of Practice takes on board recommendations on safeguarding children, contained in the Warner Report 1992.

**Overall improvement target:** To have in place reliable and robust recruitment procedures and a Code of Practice, to ensure effective vetting of practitioners.

**By date:** Completion by September 2005

### 4 *MCSI recommendation:*

*In order to ensure that practitioner capabilities are identified during the recruitment process, and subsequently validated, CAFCASS Headquarters reviews its selection and induction procedures and, in particular:*

- *requires all members of recruitment panels to be trained in interviewing skills*
- *introduces competencies against which to assess applicants, using robust techniques for testing the full range of capabilities*
- *introduces robust systems for checking the capabilities of new recruits, including considering the introduction of a probationary period.*

#### **CAFCASS response**

CAFCASS will:

- require all members of recruitment panels to be trained in interviewing skills
- introduce competencies against which to assess applications, using robust techniques for testing the full range of capabilities
- introduce robust systems for checking the capabilities of new recruits, including considering the introduction of a probationary period.

**Overall improvement target:** To have in place comprehensive selection and induction procedures, supported by a set of practitioner competencies.

**By date:** Completion by October 2005

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This report can also be made available, on request, in Braille or large type formats.

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