

# Under Cover

NCOA: Protecting those who protect the public

Issue 19 / Autumn 2023



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**Under Cover** is the official magazine of the National Crime Officers Association (NCOA), a trade union formed to focus on the needs of members of the National Crime Agency (NCA). Views expressed in this magazine are those of officers, committee members or representatives unless otherwise stated.

Contributions may be sent in confidence to the Editor at **Under Cover Magazine**, 1 Dundonald Avenue, Stockton Heath, Warrington, WA4 6JT

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## Where did that 10 years just go?

Where did that 10 years just go? 7th October 2013 saw the National Crime Agency 'go live' to protect the public – and the National Crime Officers Association 'go live', to protect those protecting the public.

We had gained our trade union listing on 8th July the same year, but this is the date that the NCOA grew up. Today, with over 3,400 members, we are an independent trade union that outstrips other recognised bodies in the Agency by around 15 times!

It has been a rollercoaster of hard work and emotion, but the thing that has kept both the General Secretary and I going is the fact that we have our members' support, who tell us just how we are needed. Without the NCOA, staff in the NCA would simply not have the first class, bespoke trade union they deserve.

So it's ironic that after 10 years of NCOA achievement, the Agency still manages to get its officers' pay so wrong. The frustrations at pay and conditions are set out clearly in the member consultation ballot, with a willingness from members to take the necessary steps to demonstrate their anger and disappointment.



If that wasn't enough, the Government-led instruction to 'man the borders barricades' to backfill where trade union colleagues are struggling to get a fair salary, is both galling and disrespectful. A heartfelt plea by ISU general Secretary Mark Gribbin explains perfectly why NCOA members must

not do the Government's dirty work!

For almost half of the same period we have seen the Agency fritter away millions of pounds on the white elephant that is telematics. It's not comfortable to write the article 'we told you so in 2018', however...

The NCOA Top 10 Fixes is a reality check on matters of real concern and how the Agency could demonstrate to our members that they really do understand and acknowledge many of the real issues faced by staff across all grades of the NCA.

Please enjoy the magazine, see how you can also contribute to its members' section and raise a glass to the next 10 years.



Simon Bashford

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# ISU: ‘Don’t undermine our collective interests’

Immigration Service Union General Secretary Mark Gribbin calls for solidarity from NCOA Members

The ISU is the specialist union for border workers. Our members run immigration and customs controls at all UK ports of entry, consider asylum applications, issue UK visas and enforce removal of illegal entrants. We’ve been deeply and thanklessly involved with the Channel migrant crisis – from sea rescues to on-shore reception and processing. Our members are based throughout the UK and overseas, but most work for the Border Force at major airports (Heathrow, Gatwick, Manchester, Stansted) and UK Channel Controls at Calais, Coquelles and Dunkirk.

The NCOA and the ISU have much in common, not least our histories. We each formed to represent specialist members whose needs were too often overlooked. We each faced and overcame real adversity to prosper and grow into strong, independent trade unions. Our members each deal with the vital national security interests of our country. We share a deep vocational spirit and care deeply about our work to protect the nation.

Sadly, we have also both suffered years of pay freeze and restraint. The decade-long decline in the market value of our salaries has reduced the professional status of our roles and undervalued our vital contribution to national security. The last year has been a time of unprecedented



volatility as the ISU now faces further extraordinary assault on members’ terms and conditions.

Several hundred members at Heathrow Airport who exercised their legal right to retain relatively favourable ‘legacy’ terms and conditions have faced a decade-long campaign of corporate bullying – repeatedly excluded from the meagre pay rises offered, development opportunities withheld, their dignity at work shredded. This has culminated with plans to move these members – the

most experienced Border Control specialists – out of Heathrow and most likely out of the job altogether.

We are now fighting to save their jobs. Any success at Heathrow will embolden similar assaults on terms and conditions nationwide; we can’t exclude the possibility of more Border strikes at Heathrow this winter.

The Home Office playbook to undermine effective industrial action relies on importing staff from other departments to maintain the illusion of ‘business as usual’. During Border Force strikes last Christmas, media coverage focused on queues moving faster than usual at Heathrow. The price for good press was poor border security; strike-busters let people pass quickly, risks were missed and security compromised.

I am urging all Civil Service colleagues – and particularly those working within law enforcement and national security – to be mindful that these cover requests may come from the Border Force. As a matter of solidarity between our trade unions, we ask that you do not respond to those calls. It undermines our collective interest in pressing for increased recognition of national security specialism.

I look forward to many more years of the NCOA and ISU mutually advancing our common cause!

## Call for government commitment on agency strike-breaker ban

The Draconian measures in the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act (as detailed in **Under Cover** Issue 18) were this Government’s mission to use health, national security and the prevention of disorder as its rationale to further limit workers’ rights in the UK.

The plans failed after the Lords Committee scrutinising the legislation reported a “lack of robust evidence”, with “expected limited net benefit which questions the practical effectiveness and benefit” of the new rules.

The Government has since been asked to make a “clear commitment” that it will not attempt to overturn the renewed ban on agency workers replacing those on

strike. This comes as the Government’s strike-breaking agency worker regulations, which allowed agencies to supply employers with staff to cover those on strike, were quashed after the High Court ruled they were unlawful. Trade union-funded legal proceedings were brought against the regulation changes in a bid to protect the right to strike.

The Government recently decided it would not appeal the judgment, but hasn’t confirmed its longer-term plans for the law. The short-lived change in agency worker regulations was heavily criticised by unions, agency employers, and parliamentarians alike.

# Telematics – a very large white elephant

The telematics project was initiated by the Agency in March 2018. The aims of fitting telematics to the NCA fleet included saving both time and money, as the Agency could make better use of a smaller fleet and know at the push of a button where its vehicles were. In addition, it was claimed that the use of telematics would lead to significant improvements in driver behaviour.

## Escalating concerns

Despite best efforts, the telematics project failed to meet the original 'go live' date of November 2018. In July 2019 around £1million of the allocated budget had already been spent, and it appeared that the project was stalling. Therefore, the NCOA formally escalated the concerns of members regarding:

- how personal data would be stored
- whether continuing a project that was aspirational but had produced no tangible benefits was the best use of limited NCA financial resources
- the implications of disclosure in criminal investigations
- how suitable telematics boxes could be fitted to motorcycles in the NCA fleet
- the risk that NCOA members could find themselves subject to misconduct investigations based on unreliable telematics data
- the NCA was progressing with vehicle telematics, even though many police forces had already started to ditch failed projects.

In direct formal engagement with the Director General Capabilities, the NCOA sought immediate suspension of the telematics project until it had been properly reviewed against its original aims, but the project continued.

In early 2023 the NCOA once again engaged with the Agency, as it was evident that the fears outlined in our original submission were coming to the fore. It was clear that fitting telematics to operational vehicles presented insurmountable problems – from the often-reported disruption caused by 'beeping', to the fact that – with the ever-increasing availability and reducing cost of technology – the vehicles had become readily identifiable to OCGs or criminals who could easily purchase detection equipment on the internet.

Our position was unequivocal – the telematics projects should cease, for the following reasons:

- The benefits envisaged had not materialised and removing telematics from vehicles would free up monies which could be better spent elsewhere.
- While the identification of NCA vehicles in an operational context was of concern, equally worrying was the fact that where officers were required to take GP cars home, there was the potential exposure of home addresses to OCGs.
- Telematics could be used inappropriately by the Agency.
- The telematics data was often inaccurate, because with use the

sensor for 'swiping in' became detached due to flimsy Velcro fastenings; such unreliability would also undermine any intent to rely on telematics data as part of any disciplinary proceedings.

More recently, the NCOA also noted that an additional telematics problem linked to the use of electric vehicles currently being rolled out is their limited range. Installing NCA telematics into a vehicle is not only a potential duplication (as it is sometimes already installed by the manufacturer), but this type of retrofit may also provide a potential 'power drain', further shortening a vehicle's already restrictive range.

## Waste of resources

Following these discussions, the whole future of telematics was placed 'under review' until 11th August when the Agency suddenly announced an immediate suspension of the project, with all existing devices to be turned off immediately and removed entirely in due course.

The NCOA is obviously concerned that, had this decision been taken four years ago when our concerns were pointed out (and ignored) significant savings would have been made. Given the current pay woes, this waste of valuable and limited resources cannot be downplayed.

The Agency has yet to provide any official figures, but we estimate around £2 million was spent on a project that, from our perspective (and well documented), was clearly a large white elephant at the outset.



# Privately owned digital devices: why it's usually hands off, not hand over!

Members under investigation (criminal or misconduct) have reported a worrying trend toward being requested to hand over personal mobile phones during an investigation, as part of a professional standards process.

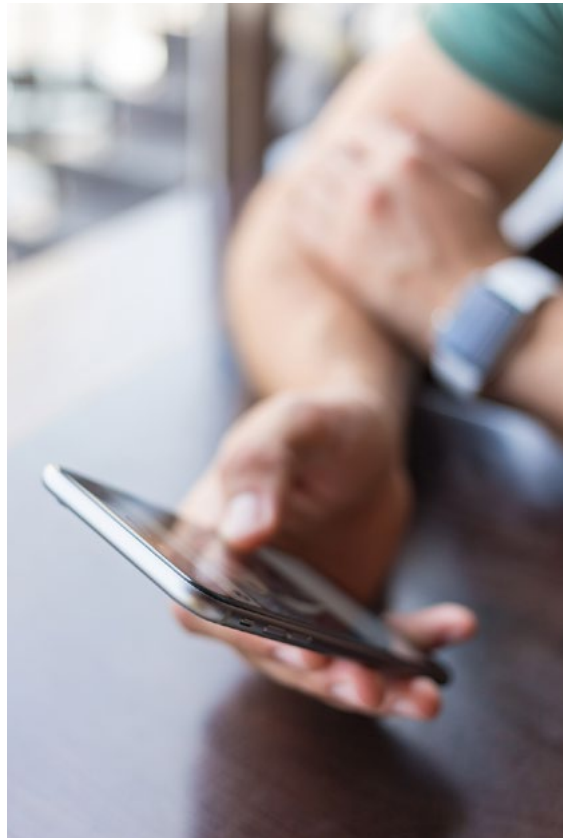
Your own phone contains much more than simply WhatsApp or text messages and many of us manage our banking, medical history and emails, together with personal family information and photos on these privately owned devices.

## Robustly challenging

The benefit of being a member of the NCOA is that we (through our reps or lawyers) are there 24/7 to advise and guide you through what can be very distressing processes linked to any misconduct investigations.

Therefore, we are unapologetic in recently robustly challenging the Agency when, as part of a misconduct investigation, an unambiguous 'request' was put to one of our members that they should not speak to the NCOA before handing over their phone.

While the risks and jeopardy linked to providing



unfettered access to a personal device are clear to us and our lawyers, they may not be to members – hence our role in protecting you when you are at your most vulnerable.

## Total exoneration

The NCOA advice to any member who is asked to relinquish their personal phones by an investigator, as part of a misconduct investigation, is that unless voluntarily handing over of a personal phone will categorically result in total exoneration of the offence alleged against you, or the investigator hands you the written authority to seize personal equipment (ie a warrant or court order), NCOA members should NEVER hand over a personal phone.

This incident should never happen again, but we stress our guidance above, and that

as an absolute bare minimum, you must be afforded the opportunity to seek advice from a suitably trained NCOA rep or one of our lawyers. If anyone suggests you shouldn't speak to us, it can only mean one thing – you must speak to us before you do anything else.

## The Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023:

The Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023, which received Royal Assent in July, removes the requirement of an employee to explain what effect (if any) the flexible working request would have on the organisation and how it could be dealt with.

The Government have also committed to introduce a 'day one' right to request flexible working for employees via secondary legislation.

While employers currently have three months to respond to an employee's flexible working request, the proposed changes will mean that they will need to respond within two months.

Under the changes, employees will now have the ability to make up to two flexible working requests in any 12-month period.

Additionally, employees will not be required to set out the impact their proposed flexible working will have on the business, as they must currently do.

## Right to request

The above does not change the fact that this remains a "right to request and not a right to be granted flexible working".

Also, the eight statutory business grounds on which

# The NCA's drug-testing regime

With the NCA considering the re-introduction of randomised drug testing across the workforce, the NCOA has challenged the Agency to review its policy to ensure it reflects changes in the non-criminal use of cannabis products.

It is recognised that cannabis is a controlled drug, and therefore officers who test positive are likely to be subject of further investigation including potential misconduct proceedings. However, the legal use of cannabis-based products has become more widespread, and it's possible to obtain a prescription for cannabis products containing low quantities of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).

## Beneficial treatment

While THC is a controlled drug, its prescribed use is legal, and users can benefit from its use as a treatment for long-standing conditions including some common disabilities (as defined by the Equality Act 2010).

Conditions such as insomnia, anxiety and depression, together with other mental health and physical conditions such as cancer, Parkinson's disease, MS and Alzheimer's, can often see



Picture © rclassen / Shutterstock

symptoms eased with the use of cannabidiol (CBD). The NCOA has anecdotal information of its use by NCA officers, including following a recommendation by NCA Occupational Health.

CBD oil – now widely available and classed as a food supplement – is a compound extracted from the cannabis plant; but it is not a controlled drug, and is available to purchase for personal use.

While Agency drug tests do not routinely screen for CBD, they are designed to detect THC, and have picked up traces of THC. What remains unclear is what the NCA will do if any officers fail a drug test having lawfully consumed CBD oil.

Without a clear policy change, it seems likely that if an individual using CBD products provides a positive result (indicating the presence of cannabis THC), although there may well be mitigation for the purpose of an investigation, this may be treated as gross misconduct.

In its formal proposal to the Agency, the NCOA recommended that the NCA examines its current drug-testing processes to ensure that officers who legitimately consume CBD and/or THC are not treated unfairly. We will keep NCOA members updated on the outcome of this consultation.

## the changes you should know – and the NCA must know

an employer is entitled to refuse a flexible working request, will remain as:

- planned structural changes
- burden of additional costs
- negative effect on quality
- negative effect on performance
- recruitment of additional staff is not possible
- work cannot be reorganised among other staff
- negative effect on customer demand
- lack of work at times an employee requests to work.

Women are much more likely than men to be in flexible working arrangements, meaning they may work less

hours and take a salary reduction because of part-time and/or term-time only working. The impact this has on gender pay gaps is well known and documented.

Perhaps a lack of good flexible working opportunities, and the unequal division of caring responsibilities in the UK, forces some workers into needing to work flexibly and this has made this legislation essential to harmonise workforces.

The NCOA has been quick to ensure that the Agency is not only aware of the new regulations, but that its Alternative Working Arrangements policies reflect these important changes.



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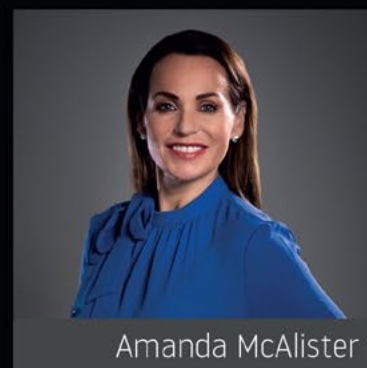
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# Mental health is a human right

World Mental Health Day falls on 10 October and this year, on its 75th anniversary, the theme is 'mental health is a universal human right'.

Reports by the UN Human Rights office highlight that people with mental health conditions experience disproportionately higher rates of poor physical health and reduced life expectancy. Stigma also leads to a lack of quality care and access to appropriate services. We know that discrimination and stigma inhibit healthy relationships and prevent the workplace from being an inclusive environment. Good mental health is a fundamental human right.

Why is this relevant for NCOA members? According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, at any one time, one in six people of working age in Britain experience symptoms associated with mental ill health.

The *Deloitte Mental Health Report* (2022) states that 50% of employees have experienced at least one characteristic of burn out due to greater job demands and expectations, lack of social interaction, and lack of boundaries between work and home life.

**“The NCA is not an exception. Mental health-related conditions are the greatest contributor to long-term sickness and absence in the Agency.”**

And in its Good Work Index (2022) the CIPD found that almost half of workers (46%) say they've worked in recent months despite not feeling physically or mentally well enough to perform their duties.

We know the NCA is not an exception to the rule. Mental health-related conditions are by far the greatest contributor to long-term sickness and absence overall in the Agency, accounting for 44% of long-term cases, and many officers tell us they are experiencing symptoms of burnout.

It's such a prevalent issue that the NEC adopted a 2022 Annual Delegate's Conference motion to challenge the Agency to tackle the issues of burnout.

The ICD classification gives three signs for burnout:

- Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion.
- Increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job.
- Reduced professional efficacy.

All officers within the NCA deserve a working environment that does not adversely impact their wellbeing; remember, good mental health is a fundamental right.

So what can you do if you are experiencing symptoms of burnout, or you feel your mental health is being impacted by your working environment? Consider these issues: are you routinely asked to work above your normal hours? Are you expected to keep your phone or laptop switched on once you have finished for the day? Are

your working hours in breach of the working time directive? If the answers to any of these questions is yes, you will be supported by the NCOA in challenging the employer

The NCOA has a track record in supporting its members with mental health issues, which is why we specifically engaged Health Assured, who provide specialist wellbeing support for any NCOA member, cohabiting partner and dependent children (in full-time education) residing in the family home.

This support includes:

- 24/7/365 counselling and information telephone service
- in-the-moment emotional support
- if clinically appropriate, access to structured telephone, online or face to face counselling
- access to further wellbeing resources via an online health portal and the My Healthy Advantage app.

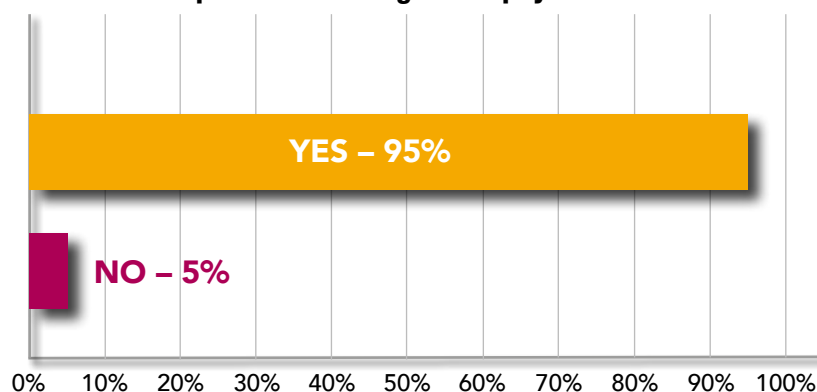
To access Health Assured, contact them on 0800 917 6470 or visit [www.ncoa.org.uk/proud-to-be-associated-with/](http://www.ncoa.org.uk/proud-to-be-associated-with/) and click on the health assured logo. Remember, good mental health is a fundamental human right and you deserve to work in an environment that allows your mental health to flourish.



# Members have their say on the

The recent NCOA ballot delivered unambiguous results from frustrated staff. The comments (there were many) speak for themselves, so it's over to you!

**Q: Do you believe in light of the legal restrictions limiting industrial action that NCA officers should receive additional financial compensation through their pay?**



**“Almost all pay-related issues can be solved with the implementation of pay progression.**

**The NCA has no means to reward and encourage experienced officers to remain in post. This retention issue leaves the Agency short of experts and suitable mentors for new talent. The constant pay delays each year are demotivating and only provide a greater incentive to move jobs to an Agency or police force that actually makes you feel valued. The culture in the NCA is very one sided. We deal with the high end of SOC and yet can't get it right for our own staff.”**

**“Annually shambolic. Senior Command should be professionally embarrassed. It is a catalogue of chaos, yet nobody is culpable. If I could afford to, I would be leaving the Agency; from IT to pay, we are embarrassing.”**

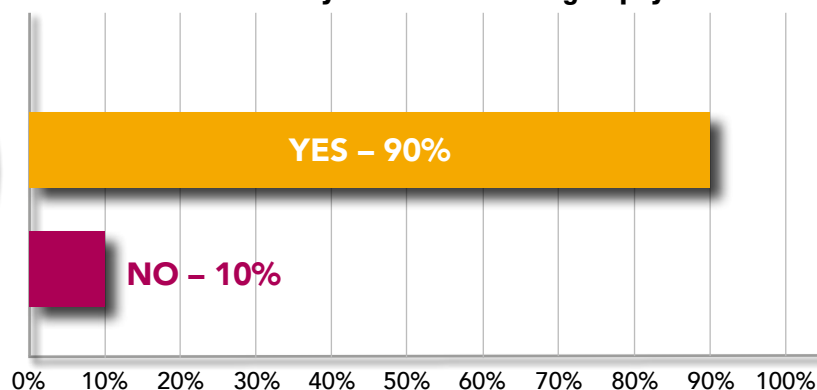
**“I find the pay award process lacking in transparency, and communication from NCA regarding this to be lacking. Explanations for delays are often complex and make the situation more confusing to understand.”**

**“In addition to the annual pay award, we all witnessed the embarrassment and/or lack of knowledge of being told we would get the £1,500 being given to civil servants and then told that there were conditions attached. Not good when hard-working officers had earmarked this money and in some cases made payments on the basis of it. It doesn't inspire confidence, especially when allied with the hardball approach to e-learning and PDS.”**

**“My pay is preventing me from doing anything except survive.”**

**“The lack of increases within the pay scale, to account for gained experience, knowledge, and performance, is unlike anything I've ever seen. Strong performers with 10 years' experience receive the same pay as someone in training. Everyone employed is at the bottom of the pay range, and remains there. I find this unbelievable (and didn't know this was how it was when I joined.)”**

**Q: Do you consider that the legal restrictions which prevent officers with delegated powers from taking industrial action restrict the ability to secure meaningful pay awards?**





# 2023-24 pay process

"NCA staff feel undervalued and vastly underpaid for being supposedly equivalent to the FBI – of which the pay comparison isn't anything close – when we're even lacking behind the police force. Staff will continue to leave when there are fairer pay deals elsewhere."

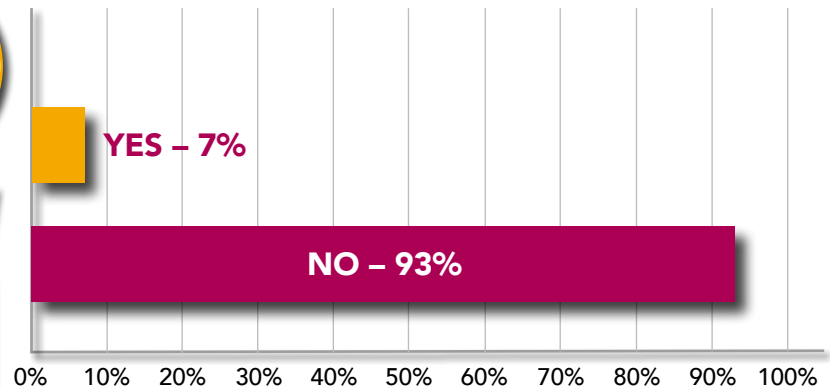
"Other civil servants were awarded £1,500 to help. This would have helped us if given asap. Now that has been delayed along with our pay and I am finding it a daily struggle living in a single household with the cost of living rising beyond my means."

"My faith in the Agency at the moment is at an all-time low; to promise a cost-of-living payment and not deliver and not to be transparent about pay negotiations repeatedly is shocking!"

"Given the 7% announced for police I am now in a position as a G4 where I'm earning less than a constable. This is not a sustainable pay model."

"Those in the SLT on £200k+ salaries cannot relate to staff earning 90% less. There is no acknowledgment that pay is the single most important issue for staff – not strategies, allyship, culture or any of the other current SLT obsessions. Sort pay out and do it on time."

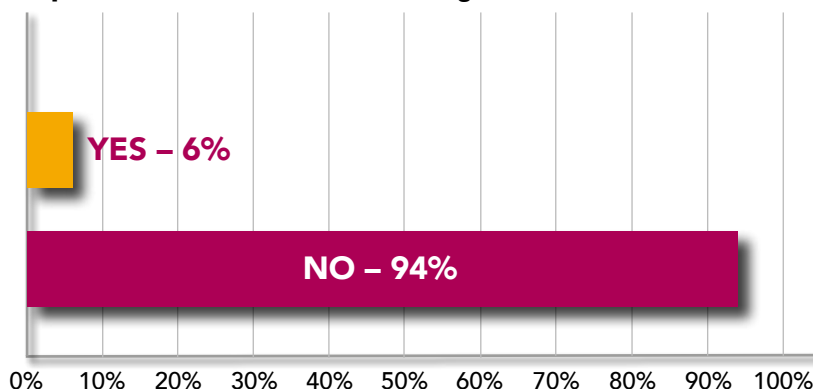
**Q: Do you consider that the Agency is doing everything it should to secure a meaningful pay award for its officers?**



"I cannot understand how the Agency has made such a mess of our pay award yet again, making matters even worse with the debacle concerning the £1,500 cost-of-living crisis payment. Non-powered officers are fully entitled to the payment and should be receiving it in their August pay. Why is that not happening? It should be paid immediately while the Agency 'fights' for the same to be paid to powered officers."

"A resolution for G3 spot rates needs to be finalised. This grade in an operational role carries a significant amount of risk and accountability inferring more stress and strain. Officers are becoming equipped with PIP3 accreditation slowly and this grade feels like the poor relation. There is an imbalance of pay structure between G4 and G3 being approximately £1,700, and G3 to G2 is well over £15,000 for operational roles."

**Q: Do you consider that the Agency is helping its staff to cope with the current cost-of-living crisis?**



"A pay reform programme was introduced by the Agency approximately seven or eight years ago. The Agency has now indicated that it hopes this programme will be completed by 2025, thus 10 years after it began and the equivalent of at least a quarter of someone's professional career. There is no DG or SLT accountability for pay; this should change. This farce of a reform cannot continue in its current meandering state."



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# Are voluntary **National Insurance Contributions** relevant in the **NCA**?

Following a much-publicised campaign by Martin Lewis and the team at Money Saving Expert, the deadline for ‘topping up’ missing years in National Insurance (NI) contributions (2006 to 2016) has recently been extended by HM Government for the second time to 5 April 2025.

By topping up any missing NI contributions, individuals can ensure that they are in a position to secure maximum State Pension provisions when they eventually reach state retirement age.

While there appears to be a broad assumption that ‘having worked within the public sector all my life, my contributions will obviously secure me the maximum state pension’, I’m afraid that is not necessarily true, particularly for those who may have taken career breaks or even enrolled in defined benefit pension schemes.



This was seen as a benefit as it reduced monthly outgoings, in tandem with securing pension benefits beyond the state scheme, thus reducing any future reliance on it.

your NI contributions which affect your state pension entitlements?

While normal members of the public can quickly utilise the Government Gateway portal, as an NCA officer this is not an option for you, given that your details are protected within a specialist HMRC department and not accessible through public routes.

Many of you will see a state retirement age of 67 (or even 68 if the current direction of travel is maintained) as being so far away that it doesn’t warrant any action on your part.

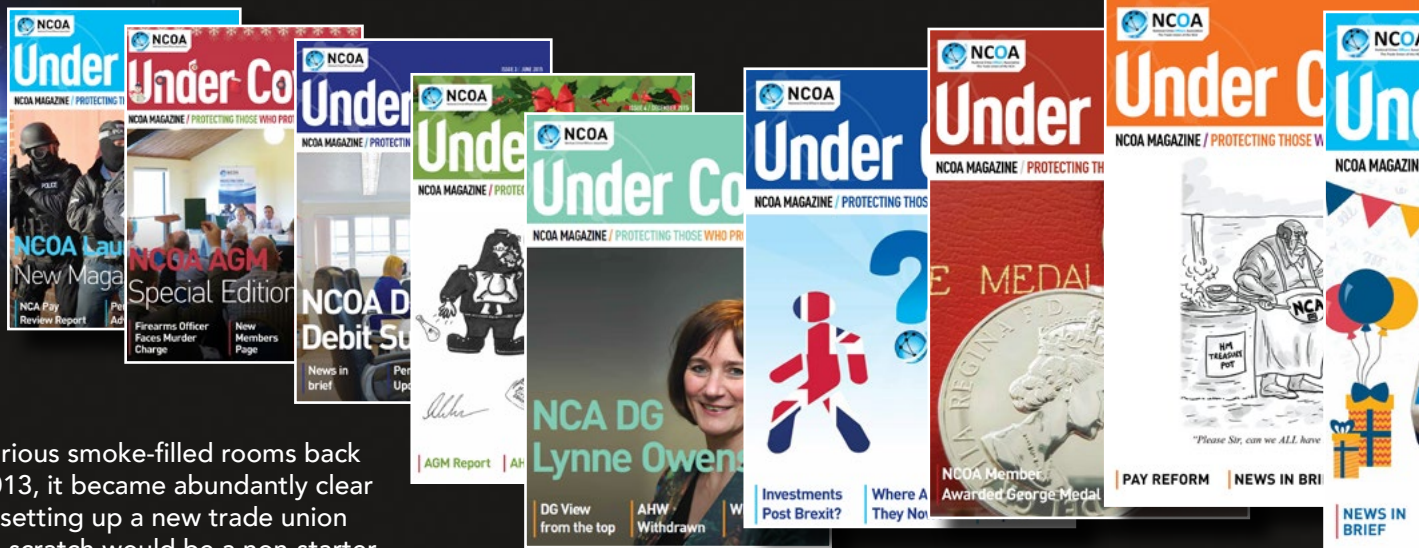
However, if you are approaching retirement in the next few years and think you may have ‘contribution gaps’ which could negatively impact any state pension entitlements, then we would advise you to make some enquiries quickly and where possible, top up any shortfalls while you still can by contacting HM Revenue and Customs, Public Department 1, Ty William Morgan, 6 Central Square CF10 1XS.

**“If you are approaching retirement in the next few years and think you may have ‘contribution gaps’ which could negatively impact any state pension entitlements, then we would advise you to make some enquiries quickly and where possible, top up any shortfalls while you still can.”**

Under the old rules, the State Pension was made up of two elements – the basic State Pension and the Additional State Pension, sometimes called the State Second Pension or SERPS. Up until 2016, individuals joining public sector pension schemes (including within the police and the Civil Service) were able to pay reduced NI contributions by ‘opting out’ of SERPS.

However, we now know that some individuals have found out too late (ie, after retirement) that gaps in their NI contributions meant accessing a full State Pension (the State Pension and Additional State Pension changed to the ‘New State Pension’ in 2016) was no longer within their grasp.

So, if there is an ability to boost your contributions where necessary, how can you tell if you have gaps in



In various smoke-filled rooms back in 2013, it became abundantly clear that setting up a new trade union from scratch would be a non-starter.

The many hurdles strewn ahead at first seemed insurmountable; this was all taking place at possibly the worst time in trade union history, with dwindling memberships and an unhelpful 'socialist' and 'disruptor' badge which did not actually fit all.

Considering our current pay problems, it is worth remembering that the driving force to present a new law enforcement trade union was the Crime & Courts Act which brought with it a new pay review body charged with making recommendations for NCA officers with delegated operational powers.

Those of us who formed the NCOA knew that an alternative and less divisive Agency pay mechanism had also been presented by the Home Office but, given the resistance from the principal SOCA trade union at that time, the deal was withdrawn. Consequently, the legislation was enacted to both restrict industrial action, and introduce the NCA Remuneration Review Body (NCARRB) to deliver its pay recommendations for officers with powers.

### 'Hellbent on your demise'

Such was the strength of feeling at being forced to ignore the best pay award mechanism offer on the table that, despite the many hurdles (and some very blunt messaging from experienced trade union and staff association peers), the challenge was set, and the NCOA began its journey.

The National Crime Officers Association was registered as a trade union in July 2013 with 10 members and a target for voluntary recognition (critical for negotiation

# 10 years of protecting those who

General Secretary Simon Boon reflects on the first decade

and consultation platform) set by the Director General at that time of 450 members. Our first representation case was at a gross misconduct panel in Bristol barely two weeks after the NCA 'go live' date of 7 October 2013.

A recruitment drive began in earnest which saw the NCOA easily secure 1,500 members within three months, followed by a rapid transition to become the principal trade union of the National Crime Agency, with a raft of unique member benefits which has seen us secure members across all disciplines, from G6 all the way up to Director General.

### 'You cannot succeed'

Barely 18 months after its inception, the NCOA was badged as the fastest growing trade union in the UK with ambitions to secure independent status at an early stage in our development (with a very blunt Certification Officer advising us against it at that time). Despite the detailed and critical nature of the application process, 'against all the odds', we obtained our 'Certificate of Independence', unequivocally announcing us as a trade union legally entitled to

recognition by the employer, should it ever consider withdrawing any voluntary arrangements.

Since then, we've successfully led campaigns to improve the working lives of our members, saved numerous careers, worked at resolving disputes, opened the doors to Flint House, improved and focused member benefits, and hopefully broken down barriers by operating as a pragmatic, forward-thinking and passionate 21st century trade union, exerting influence in a specialist area.

### 'An act of madness'

Ironically, 10 years on from the start of the NCOA journey, I found myself sitting in the Director General's office, voicing members' concerns as the head of the trade union of the NCA regarding the repeated failings of the NCARRB process, and a cost-of-living crisis that has seen us repeatedly provide financial support to NCA staff.

Discussing a withdrawal of goodwill by a loyal workforce seemed surreal and a world away from why the NCOA was formed, and its initial objectives back in 2013 – but totally necessary in the circumstances.



# protect the public

of the NCOA

Reflecting on the advice of trade union contacts and friends back at the start of our journey, I can clearly hear them as if it were yesterday: "Forming a new trade union is an act of madness"; "You cannot succeed, it is impossible"; "Others will be hellbent on your demise". I can now say with the voice of experience, that they were right – well, almost.

With hindsight, it truly was a difficult and almost impossible mission, but with a driving ambition to deliver a totally bespoke NCA trade union – with a tenacious team of staff and representatives (all former or current law enforcement professionals) – it turns out that it was possible.

Not only was it possible, but those tasked with protecting those who protect the public have never looked back, increasing our membership year on year and influencing change within the National Crime Agency and beyond.

With only three of the original founder members still at the heart of NCOA business, knowing what we know now, would we do it again? Of course we would, in a heartbeat!



PROTECT THE PUBLIC

2023



COST OF LIVING CRISIS ■ PAY UPDATE ■ DISPUTE RESOLUTION ■  
NCOA MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS ■ SAFEGUARDING ■ LEGAL ADVICE

# *The NCA's Top 10 fixes* **Cancel that, here's**

You will no doubt have seen the recent intranet article in which the Agency updates on their 'Top 10 fixes', many of which, despite having been announced over three years ago, have not yet been resolved.

While the fact that issuing a new NCA warrant card holder – fix number one – has yet to be delivered three years later is

underwhelming, members tell us that, frankly, a new ID card holder is hardly the top issue the NCA should be seeking to 'fix'.

As a result, we have published our own alternative 'Top 10 fixes', dealing with issues that truly matter to our members. We call on the Agency to listen to its largest trade union and shift its focus to prioritising these matters for urgent resolution.

### **FIX 1: A cost-of-living payment for all**

Civil Servants in many departments have already received their one-off, £1,500 payment from the Government to address the rising cost of living. DG Graeme Biggar said that he would deliver this for NCA officers, but later communications from the Agency disappointed NCOA members by rowing back from that position. At a time when inflation has been running at an all-time high, with food inflation at over 15% and mortgage rates increasing month on month, NCA officers should receive this cost-of-living payment now.

### **FIX 2: A fleet fit for purpose**

The Agency's failed telematics project has been well documented, with millions of pounds having been wasted. The knock-on effect is that vehicles have not been replaced, leading to some areas having one in five of their operational vehicles with over 130,000 miles on the clock. Add to that the purchase of electric vehicles to be used as general pool cars but with no charging infrastructure yet delivered on the NCA estate, and you have a major 'car crash' for NCA officers.

The Agency should immediately abandon its telematics white elephant project and invest more funds into purchasing vehicles and infrastructure to enable officers to do their jobs.

### **FIX 3: Treat officers with trust and respect**

The recent 'mandatory e-learning and PDS' debacle ended with the Agency requiring officers to provide screenshots to prove completion of mandatory training at the PDS year-end. This was due to the woeful state of NCA IT which meant that there was no accurate central record of who had completed what training. Before the NCOA's intervention, some departments risked marking 30% of staff as 'must improve' in their PDS.

In an Agency where integrity is a key watchword, officers should be taken at their word that they have completed their mandatory training, rather than punishing them for the lack of appropriate IT to record it.

### **FIX 4: A computer system catch-up**

In recent years, NCA IT has fallen further and further behind policing. There remains no means of submitting digital case files, no cloud system to enable the use of body-worn video, and 'browse down' remains an utterly inadequate method of accessing internet-based resources.

The NCA blue refresh project is in its infancy, but members are concerned that the ability to conduct their work as easily as police counterparts is likely to remain a pipe dream until they have access to hardware and software to enable this. Indeed, the recent delay to the issuing of new green devices to some officers only compounds members' fears that it will still be years before they have adequate IT systems. The Agency should work to prioritise the blue refresh, publish and stick to key completion dates to give officers faith that things will improve, and when.

### **FIX 5: Improve the Agency culture**

The recent HMI-CFRS report into the Agency made for grim reading. The report raises concerns about misogyny within the Agency, but crucially put the responsibility squarely at the door of Senior Leaders who tolerate, and therefore foster, inappropriate behaviour. This will come as no surprise to NCOA members who have been supported through grievances over many years.

The NCOA calls on the Agency to formulate and publish a plan to fix its culture and make it a truly inclusive workplace.

TOP



# a 'proper' set of Top 10 fixes from the NCOA!

## FIX 6: A proper PDS

The Agency performance development system (PDS) has been 'under review' for years now. It has no links to career development or training needs, and many members report that it is, in its current form, a pointless tick box exercise. One of the biggest blockers to changing the process is the limitations of Resourcelink which, just like many of the NCA's IT systems, is outdated and unfit for purpose.

The Agency should prioritise overhauling its PDS so that officers and their managers can see tangible benefits to taking the time to complete it.

## FIX 7: A fair pay deal

The farcical 2022/23 pay round ended with a seven-month delay in officers receiving their pay awards. The DG has already acknowledged that the 2023/24 pay award will also be held up due to the knock-on effect of last year's delays. Members report feeling totally underwhelmed by having had to wait so long for a £1,900 pay increase last financial year and are not optimistic about the prospects for this one either.

The Agency should be robust with the Government to make a case for a fair pay rises for all of its officers this year, bringing in a pay progression mechanism for all officers and work to shorten the time taken to deliver it in order to prevent delays in future years. At this time, we expect nothing less than a 7% award for each officer, in addition to the promised £1,500 cost of living award.

The NCOA continues to fight for a fair pay deal for NCA officers, including increasing on-call allowances, which haven't risen in several years, as well as implementing a tiered shift allowance system to recognise those working unsociable hours short of 24-hour shift patterns.

## FIX 8: A future-proofed regional allowance regime

The NCOA has made, and continues to make, a case for officers in regions such as south-east England and Northern Ireland to receive allowances akin to those received by police counterparts operating in the same areas. By contrast the Agency introduced a new 'south-east allowance' earlier this year for officers at Chelmsford and Stevenage. This allowance, which is a fraction of the regional allowance received by police officers in Hertfordshire and Essex, stoked fears among NCOA members elsewhere in the south-east that their current London Weighting Allowance may be cut in future.

Some areas in the south-east, such as Dover and Solent, still do not receive any regional allowance despite the cost of living being notably increased (with police counterparts receiving an allowance in response). The NCOA also notes the increase in the security risk to law enforcement professionals operating in Northern Ireland this year, and are calling on the Agency to recognise this by providing parity with PSNI colleagues.

## FIX 9: Reform discipline and misconduct procedures

Since 2018, the NCOA has sought a review of the NCA's discipline and misconduct procedures, which we feel discourage officers from reporting matters, due in part to its failure to recognise 'honest mistakes' and treat them as such. Even in the face of the recent HMICFRS report which notes a reluctance among officers to engage in the discipline process, the Agency still has not overhauled its procedures. The NCOA calls on the Agency to start engagement in earnest on its outdated discipline processes.

## FIX 10: The right recruitment

Members continue to report that the amount of work on their caseloads is still increasing, but that the number of people to do the work has not significantly increased. In some areas they have actually seen a huge decrease in staff.

With many vacancies being filled by temporary promotions and lateral transfers, the Agency's workforce planning appears to be 'robbing Peter to pay Paul', with posts failing to be backfilled quickly and effectively when officers move on a temporary basis. The NCOA calls on the Agency to target and speed up its recruitment activity to enable overworked officers to share the workload.



# Delayed HMICFRS **review** of

On 20th June 2023, the Home Office finally released an inspection report from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Fire & Rescue Service (HMICFRS) into the effectiveness of the NCA's vetting, professional standards and anti-corruption investigations.

It's an uncomfortable read for many in the Agency, who were given an early copy to digest, several months before the report went public. In it HMICFRS calls for the Agency to act swiftly and focus attention on specific matters including inconsistency in misconduct investigations, prejudicial and improper behaviour, and misogyny.

Reflecting on the findings of the 2022/23 People Survey, HMICFRS reminded the Agency of an explicit need to focus and address matters of bullying, harassment and discrimination. This of course will come as no surprise to many NCOA members, who will recall as far back as March 2019 in Issue 11, when Under Cover reported on the work area 'Hot Spots' that were

consistently reporting poor feedback across the People Survey.

Our analysis, first shared as far back as 2017 following the 2016 People Survey, was subsequently presented at executive level in the hope that the Agency would work hard to identify the causes and solutions to such low levels of employee satisfaction.

**“An early and consistent response from the Agency with regards to bullying was – quite simply and rather worryingly – that officers didn't really understand what bullying meant.”**

An early and consistent response from the Agency with regards to bullying was – quite simply and rather worryingly – that officers didn't really understand what bullying meant.

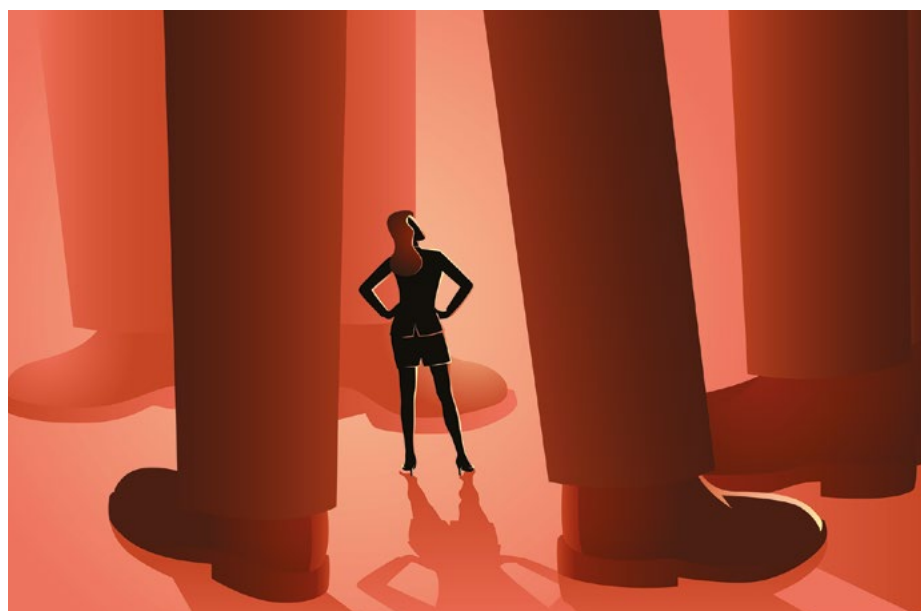
Commenting on misconduct investigations, the HMICFRS report identified there were significant differences in the outcomes between similar cases of sexual misconduct,

with some leading to dismissal while others led to written warnings.

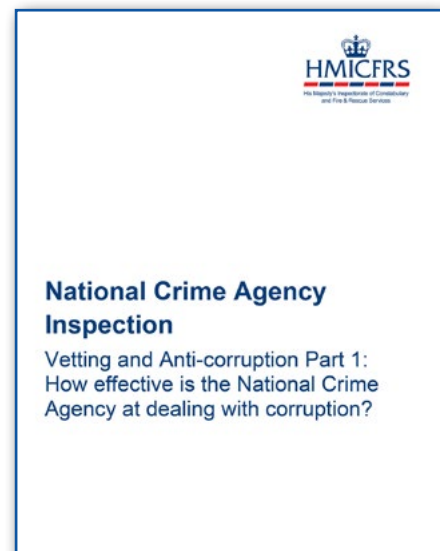
Specifically, in the report HMICFRS found “examples of first written warnings being given for predatory sexual behaviour”. The Inspectorate made its position very clear, stating: “We don't support the rationale for this leniency.”

Having visited NCA premises to view case material, examine data and observe systems in operation, HMICFRS found that ‘senior’ staff under investigation for misconduct were treated differently to those in lower grades.

Junior officers were usually suspended immediately if suspected of sexual misconduct. HMICFRS found examples of officers more senior than their victims, with multiple allegations against them, simply being moved to other departments.



The HMICFRS report highlighted “toxic male cultures” within some NCA teams, with women “feeling outnumbered and fearful” of challenging the behaviour





# NCA misconduct published

Commenting specifically on misogyny, HMICFRS reported that they found: "Toxic male cultures within some teams, with women feeling outnumbered and fearful of the stigma associated to and repercussions of challenging this culture."

With HMICFRS making 19 separate recommendations, change in the Agency will no doubt take place. With an intranet tracker available for officers to access and monitor progress, the NCOA has also been busy engaging with the Agency in the delivery of 10 of the recommendations.

These include:

- reminders of vetting and anti-corruption policies in annual appraisals
- reminders of the 'potentially compromising individual' policy
- production of a clear policy guidance on the use of encrypted applications on mobile phones such as WhatsApp as highlighted in our last edition
- published anonymised details of misconduct case findings.

Pictures © Zaie / Shutterstock



**The report called for the NCA to adopt a definition of improper behaviour that includes "abusive, manipulative, coercive, controlling or predatory behaviour"**

those standards expected of *all* of its senior leaders, with our proposed definition being: "NCA Senior Leaders should exhibit the standards of professional behaviours in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively

already widespread in the police service: "Any attitude and/or behaviour demonstrated by a police officer or police staff that could be reasonably considered to reveal misogyny, sexism, antipathy towards women or to be an indication of, or precursor to, abuse of position for a sexual purpose.

"It may include, but is not limited to; inappropriate, crude or offensive comments; telling sexualised jokes; asking intrusive questions about someone's private life; inappropriate touching; abusive, manipulative, coercive, controlling or predatory behaviour; bullying and harassment; and any other type of behaviour that may give cause for concern over whether a person is fit to serve as police officer or as police staff."

In our engagement to date, we have reminded the Agency that there is difference in not only role and remuneration, but also the legal and employment status of NCOA members, when compared to police officers. Recommendations regarding IT monitoring and confidential reporting – including details of NCA officers on the current police barred list – will need careful consideration. The NCOA will hold the Agency to account on its commitment to transparency.

The NCOA has already raised concerns on any plans to increase the scope of policy regarding business interests and voluntary work, which would have a disproportionate impact on the private lives of our members.

We have also been clear that while the Agency moves forward to a zero-tolerance approach for proven prejudicial and improper behaviour, decisions must involve the establishment of facts, and NCOA members must be treated fairly with access to NCOA reps and legal advice during any investigation.

**“NCA Senior Leaders should exhibit the standards of professional behaviours in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the standards and show leadership in challenging poor behaviour whenever it occurs.”**

Recommendation 14 called for the Agency to "define standards of expected behaviour". Besides including a definition of discreditable conduct and obligations to report, challenge and act against improper behaviour, the NCOA has sought a definition from the Agency for

promote and robustly support the standards and show leadership in challenging poor behaviour whenever it occurs."

Recommendation 19 called for the NCA to adopt the following definition of prejudicial and improper behaviour akin to that



# NCOA

National Crime Officers Association  
The Trade Union of the NCA

## INSURANCE BENEFITS TRUST

### SCHEME BENEFITS with effect from 1 June 2023

#### Serving member aged under 70

Life Insurance	£100,000
Terminal Prognosis Advance on Life Insurance*	20% of sum insured
Critical Illness	£12,500
Child Critical Illness	£2,500
Child Death Grant	£3,000
Permanent Total Disablement (due to accident)	£100,000
Accidental Loss of Use	
Total Loss of sight in one or both eyes	£50,000
Total Loss of one or more limbs	£50,000
Total Loss of hearing in both ears	£50,000
Total Loss of hearing in one ear	£12,500
Total Loss of speech	£50,000
Permanent Partial Disablement (dependent upon severity) % Scale	Up to £50,000
Hospitalisation Benefit up to 7 nights	
Accident/incident/emergency admission	£50 per night
Emergency Dental Treatment (due to accident)	Up to £500
Sick Pay Benefit	
Half Pay up to 26 weeks	20% Scale Pay
No Pay up to 26 weeks	50% Scale Pay
Worldwide Travel Policy	Family
Mobile Phone Insurance	Member & Partner
Health Assured	Family

#### CALENDAR MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION

**£31.95**

#### Cohabiting partner aged under 70

Life Insurance	£50,000
Terminal Prognosis Advance on Life Insurance*	20% of sum insured
Critical Illness	£7,500

#### CALENDAR MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION

**£10.95**

\*Terminal Prognosis Advance only available for members aged 68 and under. The price includes an additional contribution to the Insurance Trusts to pay for administration of the scheme and other member benefits as determined by the Scheme Trustees.



# Determining **spousal maintenance** and **child maintenance** in divorce

George Wilson, Associate at McAlister Family Law, looks at the key issues around spousal and child maintenance in divorce cases



It's no secret that divorce, or separation from a partner, is traumatic and confusing. Often, questions are asked as to what happens to assets such as the family home, other properties, pension(s), car(s), and even the dog(s).

Such issues are complex to navigate without having to think about how you will meet your future income needs or, conversely, having to consider a scenario where you might be asked to share some of your income (or capital cash) with your ex-partner or ex-spouse.

The topic of spousal maintenance and/or child maintenance features in many discussions I have with clients, and is often causes the most animosity and controversy during a case. But it's essential to draw distinctions between spousal maintenance and child maintenance, before outlining whether either would apply in any given case.

## Spousal maintenance

Spousal maintenance is essentially where one party provides their ex-spouse with financial assistance, akin to an income, after the relationship has ended.

Spousal maintenance is not the same as child maintenance and you do not need to share a child with your ex-spouse in order to look to claim spousal maintenance. You do, however, need to have been married to the person that you seek to claim maintenance from. It is possible to seek to claim both spousal maintenance and child maintenance from an ex-spouse.

In short, spousal maintenance is a possible obligation to maintain your spouse/ex-spouse after separation if they are unable to meet their reasonable needs and expenses from their own personal income or assets, in the scenario where the 'paying' spouse has the capacity to pay a sum of money to assist with such expenses. The capacity to pay maintenance is not only assessed by considering the paying spouse's income, but also property, financial resources, and/or future earning capacity.

Often, following a separation and during a divorce, one party may move out of the family home and agree to supply their spouse with funds to cover a share of mortgage repayments

and/or utility bills. This, to some clients' dismay, can be considered spousal maintenance, and the receiving party may seek that these payments continue for a period of time (or, rather scarily, for the rest of their life) so they can meet their reasonable needs and maintain the standard of living they enjoyed during the relationship. As previously mentioned, both the reasonable needs of the receiving party and the capacity of the paying party to maintain their spouse will need to be considered.

Spousal maintenance can either be agreed by way of an informal agreement, by agreement through a financial remedy consent order, or through an imposed financial remedy following contested litigation. It is a complex area of family law, so it's essential to take measured and detailed advice as to whether you might be entitled to receive – or should not be paying – spousal maintenance.

## Child maintenance

Child maintenance claims are entirely separate, and distinct, from spousal maintenance; this is financial support provided by one person with parental responsibility of a child, to someone with parental responsibility for that child following separation.

Child maintenance is non-negotiable in most cases. The amount payable is dictated by the child maintenance service and will be determined by the income of the paying party and how many nights per annum or month they look after the child (unless one party earns over a certain amount of money and the child maintenance service determines that the income is too high for them to deal with).

Child maintenance can be self-managed and agreed between parties. Alternatively, if parties cannot agree a figure for the payments, then the child maintenance service can be requested to decide for the parties. In some cases, as previously mentioned, the court of England and Wales may have the jurisdiction to deal with the issue of child maintenance. In any event, it is always a good idea to take independent legal advice in respect of such a matter.



# Not just in the mountains

Derek (Del) Strugnell spends his valuable spare time as a Mountain Rescue Deputy Team Leader for the North East Wales Search & Rescue, leading a team of around 50, and part of a six-strong cadre handling 700+ callouts per year.

Del says: "I joined the team in 2014 because of a keen sense of community, a love of the outdoors and a drive to help those in need. Since then I've been involved in all sorts of events, from dealing with the aftermath of a helicopter crash in Snowdonia and locating lost, missing or injured people to assisting those with complicated mental health issues. Sadly, the task can involve the recovery of the deceased.

"Mountain Rescue has a well-used tagline, 'Not just in the mountains', and our remit is huge. We are available for the 'standard' mountain and hill roles, recovering fallen and stuck climbers, lost and injured walkers, runners and mountain bikers. In addition to providing the police with a great deal of search specialism we often assist other teams including the Coastguard, Ambulance Service, fire and rescue services and local resilience forums.

"My team offer specialist casualty care on the mountainside, and can give analgesia such as morphine. We provide a flood rescue capability,



swift water rescue, specialist rope access, search management and more. As a team member you gain knowledge in all these skills and get to enjoy working in and alongside helicopters on a regular basis.

## Fitting tribute

"We rely heavily on our vehicles – two Land Rovers, and water response and command and control vehicles. The latter has just been replaced and donated to the Ukrainian war effort after three years of fundraising. The new vehicle was named Charlie in honour of the son of a team member (pictured above) who sadly passed away from spinal muscular atrophy with respiratory depression in February 2020 aged only 17 months.

"I was fortunate to have spent time with Charlie who, regardless of this terrible illness, smiled and laughed all the time. His parents, Andy and Sarah, were incredibly moved that



we had named the vehicle after him and were both with me when it was first deployed. I am certain it will be responsible for saving numerous lives, so it's a fitting tribute to him.

"Lastly, I hope to never meet you in my Mountain Rescue capacity, as it would mean you are probably having one of those days to forget. Stay safe, prepare well for your time in the hills, and importantly, let other people know where you are going."

*If you wish to join or would like more information, you can find your local team at [www.mountain.rescue.org.uk/teams](http://www.mountain.rescue.org.uk/teams). You can also support your local team by donating time as a supporter or donating money to help replace vital lifesaving equipment. It costs approximately £25,000 per year to run a team, all funded by donations.*

## NCOA member represents Agency in Singapore

In June this year NCA JICC officer, INTERPOL Data Protection Officer (DPO) and NCOA Executive Committee member Alan Goodwin was invited to represent the Agency at an INTERPOL Data Protection Conference in Singapore. Al was asked to present on data protection best practice, risk and governance.

There are over 190 DPOs worldwide, so this was an honour for Al and a positive endorsement of his knowledge on the global stage. The conference was part of the INTERPOL centenary celebrations and came ahead of the UK hosting the General Assembly in 2024.

Al said: "I felt so privileged that I had been requested to share my experience and can truly say that it was

one of the highlights of my career. Not only was this an opportunity to showcase our capabilities within the NCA, but also allowed us to forge greater links with our counterparts across the INTERPOL network."

Al manages a team within the JICC who deal with all matters relating to data protection including disclosure, assurance, litigation and risk. To bring him back to reality, Al was presenting to the newly accredited NCOA reps' course, less than 48 hours after landing in the UK.

The NCOA has a strong DPA ethic and protecting members data is always a high priority; to find out more, you can read our security and privacy notice at [www.ncoa.org.uk/media/1101/ncoa-privacy-policy-v1.pdf](http://www.ncoa.org.uk/media/1101/ncoa-privacy-policy-v1.pdf)



# Megan's truly marathon effort

Megan Chinnappa managed to put us all to shame in the name of her favourite charity, Dandelion Time, as she recently told **Under Cover**

This year I took part in one of the hardest challenges I've ever set myself – running two marathons in the space of three weeks, all in aid of the fantastic work of the charity Dandelion Time!

Before this year, I'd never contemplated a marathon, let alone run one. I had though participated in Park Runs, 10K's and two half-marathon events (which I found incredibly hard).

But when the ballot entries for the London Marathon opened last year, my competitive nature got the better of me; my partner (who had already run the Brighton Marathon twice) and friends decided to enter, so I entered but thought no more of it.

## Important work

In September 2022, I saw that local charity, Dandelion Time, were desperately looking for runners for the Brighton Marathon 2023, which was taking place on 2nd April. It's a charity I've supported several times before, as their work is so important.

They focus on supporting children who've experienced past trauma, helping them to build confidence and giving hope for a better future through a range of therapy techniques. They even have animals on site! So I signed up, and the fundraising began.

Typically, a month later I got an email from TCS London Marathon... I'd got a place! Knowing how hard it is to secure a place for the London Marathon, there was no way I could not take part. However, rather than dropping out of the Brighton Marathon and letting Dandelion Time down, I decided (maybe stupidly) to run both.

I started a 20-week training plan over the winter, which consisted of three 'shorter' runs a week, and



one long run at the weekend. The plan built up distances gradually each week until I was running 20-30 miles a week near the end! It was exhausting, wet, cold and challenging mentally to keep pushing myself when I just wanted to curl up and watch TV after work. I had a few setbacks in training due to snow and injuries, as well as those pesky shin splints.

Thankfully, the Brighton Marathon was first up, as this meant I had the support of my partner Martin, as well as his brother and another friend running alongside me. The atmosphere was amazing, and the crowd were incredibly generous and kind – holding out sweets, drinks and keeping the music going.

It was tough. After breezing through the first 11 miles alongside Martin, I cramped up. I let him go on and persisted, gradually getting back into the rhythm. By mile 17 I caught up with Martin, and we ran the rest together (even seeing Fat Boy Slim at the Hove Lagoon). We crossed the line to supportive screams of our friends and family in

an official time of 04:55:34. The free flapjack honestly tasted like the best thing I'd ever eaten.

Over the next few days, muscles that I never knew could ache, ached. I could barely go up the stairs and fell into chairs rather than sat. I begrudgingly spent the following two weeks on R&R before going back into training on the week leading up to the London Marathon.

## Disgustingly wet

The day of the London Marathon (23rd April) was disgustingly wet and cold, but the amazing crowd (six or seven deep at times) made up for it. Hearing someone you don't know screaming your name and giving you supportive advice (and even offering you a beer!) is honestly one of the best feelings. The atmosphere brings out the best in people; I saw runners stopping to check on others who were stretching, as well as two guys carrying a girl they didn't know to the finish line.

It was a massive struggle, but knowing I was running for a fantastic cause – like so many others, I hasten to add – kept me going. I managed to finish in 05:01:43 (and yes, I was annoyed I did not beat my time!)

To date, I have raised over £900 for Dandelion Time by running the two marathons, which will go a long way to supporting children who have experienced things that no child should ever go through.

**Under Cover** congratulates Megan, and invites readers to join us by following the link to Dandelion Time's website (<https://dandeliontime.org.uk>) and contributing to Megan's fantastic Just Giving page (<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/megan-chinnappa2>).

# 'Simply inspirational' Slinda's personal

NCOA Sikh member Slinda Kaur Photay – known to friends as Cindy – spoke to **Under Cover** about the journey that led her to join the NCA, and her life in the Agency

I joined the NCA/NECC from the MOD in 2021, having applied for the Race Equality Working Group (REWG) Talent Programme because I know that these development programmes are good for building support networks with like-minded people. They also provide opportunities for advancing careers and help build confidence to learn more about your organisation.

I was born and grew up in an inner city in the West Midlands at a time when most girls weren't encouraged to have career aspirations. Although born in the UK I couldn't speak any English when I started school, and I was sent for remedial lessons.

## University material

Despite this I left school with an 'A' in both my English Language and Literature exams, but was still not allowed to attend university. I remember my headteacher saying that he would go and talk to my parents and try to persuade them otherwise because "I was university material and that I would do well".

I replied: "There's no point sir because I'll be married by the time I'm 18." I would go to school in the day and mum would teach me how



to cook and clean in the evening; there was no time for homework.

When I got married my husband encouraged me to "chase my dreams", so I joined the Civil Service; I'm very grateful to them for giving me the opportunity to gain my law enforcement qualifications from Portsmouth University and the College of Policing in Manchester.

In the early days I remember getting onto a train full of workers on their way home and wondering

what their day was like because mine had been amazing; I was returning home after delivering a pre-op brief, leading an intervention, property searches, handcuffing, arresting, and interviewing under caution before releasing on bail. To them, I was just another middle-aged ethnic minority woman travelling home from a mundane job, but I felt so proud of myself that I had done all this in a day's work and helped protect all those on the crowded train – without them even knowing.

## Verbal abuse

On another occasion I single handedly interviewed over 50 suspected illegal immigrants during a DWP fraud benefit raid, when all suspects claimed they spoke no English. I volunteered to speak to them in their native Punjabi, and still remember the verbal abuse they gave me, telling me that I should be ashamed of myself for working for "the other side" and not helping my own under-privileged community. Unfortunately my colleagues at the time were all non-ethnic minority and couldn't understand the abuse these men were giving me, so couldn't help.

## PRIDE IN LONDON

On 1st July, I attended London Pride, my first ever Pride march, demonstrating my commitment to be an ally to our LGBTQ+ officers. The marches offer an opportunity to raise awareness about LGBTQ+ history and educate the public about LGBTQ+ topics. It is an event that celebrates the progress that has been made so far, but is also a continued protest.

The history of Pride goes back decades; the first Pride march, in June 1970, marked the first anniversary since the uprising at New York's Stonewall Inn and the LGBT community frustration at police brutality that occurred.

NEC Officer Faye Lowe (and pet dog Harry) says Pride is now an important date in her calendar, as she recently explained to **Under Cover**

The parades have taken place every year since and are a sign of fighting for liberation and equality.

This took on particular significance in the UK with Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988, which banned local authorities and schools from 'promoting homosexuality'. Teachers were not allowed to teach students about same-sex relationships, and anyone who broke this law would face disciplinary action. It meant that LGBT students would not see people like them in books or plays which, in turn, led to an increase in long-lasting LGBT stigma



# journey to the NCA

We need more ethnic minority staff who understand the communities we serve; had there been more people of colour like me at the time, it would have made my life easier. That said, my best allies have been white – white females and more importantly white males – who tried to help and protect me as much as they could; I owe them a great deal.

Talent programmes like EMPOWER are a good way of helping ethnic minority colleagues by providing exposure through job shadowing opportunities within the Agency. I have coached, mentored and reverse mentored senior management who were grateful for the valuable insight into my culture and what my journey has been like in law enforcement.

This is how powerful talent programmes can be: I was nominated for the British Association for Women in Policing (BAWP) 2022 by a fellow REWG participant who I had never met face to face, although we'd talked during virtual MS Teams sessions and shared experiences of the highs and lows of our career journeys during our REWG Action Learning Set meetings.

I thought this colleague was crazy, but she wouldn't take 'no' for an answer so I sent her my biography. I fully expected to be sifted out of over 500 national nominations for

11 awards, so imagine my surprise when I won the Coaching and Mentoring Award.

My career stems from local government, DWP, HMRC, MOD, NECC and the NCA. The main culture difference that I have witnessed is that decades ago colleagues would say things like: "You have two things wrong with you to be working in law enforcement – you're a woman, and you're an Asian woman."

## Mentoring mission

So I made it my mission (on top of my day job) to coach and mentor as many women as I could because previously, I had no ethnic minority women within law enforcement who I could turn to for help. It was a very lonely place to be at that time, especially when people would say what they thought to your face. Nowadays I find discrimination and bias or unfair treatment is more subtle and therefore harder to prove for all protected characteristics.

To win the BAWP award in 2022 and to be nominated for the



international award for Coaching and Mentoring category is truly very humbling and surreal.

The other thing I want to say is that while some of the things I have experienced in my law enforcement career are due to my ethnic minority background, other things – such as sexist and ageist comments – are also experienced by my white female colleagues. We still have a long way to go, but I know the NCOA are helping with this.

Finally, I just want to say a big thank to the NCOA for the help and support they provided when I contacted them recently – you guys know who you are, so thank you.

Pride month marks an important time for the LGBTQ+ community and is a time for reflection of personal experiences. The 2023 Pride in London theme was 'Never March Alone: Championing Trans Allyship'. This theme was chosen to celebrate the trans and non-binary communities. The theme comes in the wake of considerable hostility and adversity from the media. It demonstrates solidarity and focuses on trans allyship, both within and outside the wider LGBTQIA+ community.

Proudly representing the NCOA, I marched with the Agency which this year saw the highest number



of officers ever taking part. This demonstrates the strength of allies within the Agency and the commitment to an inclusive environment that celebrates the contribution of our LGBTQ+ officers.

It was a fantastic event – bright, colourful, fun and very, very loud. I took my dog Harry, as an LGBTQ+ dog ally! He loved the event and had the biggest cheers along the route, greeting his

supporters as if they were there just for him!

I would encourage members from all backgrounds to join me and our EMBRACE colleagues and take part in their nearest Pride March in 2024.





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