

Under Cover

NCOA: Protecting those who protect the public

Issue 22 / Spring 2025

YOUR VIEWS ON WORK & WELLBEING AT THE NCA



**SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS IT, WORKLOAD AND PAY
AMONG NCOA MEMBERS' KEY CONCERNS**

CHALLENGING PERCEPTIONS TRAINING ■ ANONYMITY FOR AFOS
WORKER PROTECTION ACT ■ PENSIONS UPDATE ■ REFORM DELAYS



NCOA

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The Trade Union of the NCA

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Reform delays mean more stress

Spring is here again, and with that warm days and long evenings hopefully just around the corner. I welcome Steve Bond in his first spell as General Secretary (GS). A vastly experienced former Rep, NEC Chair and National Officer, his appointment should be a comfort to all that care who took the reins after Simon Boon’s successful leadership.

Sadly, Steve’s first **Under Cover** report as GS is that the long-awaited Pay & Contract reform (PaCR) that promised to redress the blighted salary scales and absence of any progression, may not materialise. Even with apparent Home Secretary backing for PaCR, HM Treasury have not supported Agency reform plans so far. Perhaps the Home Office concerns over the NCA workforce strategy have not helped gain the confidence of wider government for the proposed changes!

In the last few years there have been unfathomable increases to Grades 1 (up 39%) and Grades 2 (up 42%), whilst at the other end of the workforce, Grades 5 are down 13% and Grades 6 down 22%. Is it any wonder that the Work and



Wellbeing Survey (p14) shows many members feeling depressed, stressed and unwell over increased workload and tight schedules.

In other articles, following on from the Angiolini editorial a year ago, we once again dare to ‘open the can’ that is sexual harassment. The police and law enforcement family are not without offenders and sufferers; our bespoke NCOA Rep training to recognise and challenge perceptions around sexual harassment, assault and violence sees the NCOA lead on this issue.

It wouldn’t be **Under Cover** without member stories and this is no exception. With about 50 years between them – one at the start of their career, the other long-since retired – we read about some inspirational charity challenges for great causes.

Enjoy the read and please feel free to contribute at any time by emailing membership@ncoa.org.uk

Simon Bashford

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2024 Worker Protection Act: the NCA is now responsible for your safety and wellbeing

The NCOA has always been a trade union that promotes wellbeing and safety of members at the heart of its foundations. Additionally, NCOA reps are trained to identify and challenge any behaviour at work which falls short of expected standards.

Thankfully, the Government has woken up to the fact that training is simply not enough, and that legislation is needed to put preventative measures in place to ensure the workplace is a safe place.

The Worker Protection Act imposes a duty on the employer to tackle workplace sexual harassment. For years, employees have been fearful of the repercussions of reporting sexual harassment and the impact it may have on them and their careers.

While some have previously chosen to remain silent, others have taken the ultimate option to leave and find another job. An absence of reporting does not mean there is an absence of sexual harassment or the culture which enables it.

“ An absence of reporting does not mean there is an absence of sexual harassment or the culture which enables it.

For the first time, it is no longer the responsibility of the victim to come forward and report the wrongdoing before employers are obliged to act; the new duty means that the employer (in this case the NCA) must take reasonable steps to mitigate or minimise the risk of harassment occurring in the first place. This includes risks that may be posed by third-party clients or organisations.

There are 15 key risk factors identified by the Act:

- Power (male v female) imbalances.
- Job insecurity, for example, use of agency staff or contractors.



Picture © PA Images / Alamy Stock

- Lone working and night working.
- Out-of-hours working.
- The presence of alcohol.
- Customer-facing duties.
- Events that raise tensions locally or nationally.
- Lack of diversity in the workforce, especially at a senior level.

Rights Commission (EHRC) – the UK's independent equality and human rights regulator – has concluded that an Employment Tribunal finding in favour of a victim, where the employer has failed in their duty of protection, should receive an increase in compensation by up to 25%. Similarly, the EHRC will investigate suspected breaches of the employer responsibility.

The NCOA has a pivotal role to play in ensuring that the new duty is effective; we challenge sexual harassment wherever it exists.

The 2024 Annual Delegates Conference CPD event drew upon the expertise of guest Bob Cooper, NCA Interview Co-Ordinator, to deliver relevant input to NCOA Representatives training.

Tackling workplace sexual harassment and building a preventive culture is not easy, but this legislation came about as a result of trade union lobbying over many years. We accept it is a responsibility of this union to ensure that the NCA is a safe place of work for our members.

- Workers placed on secondment.
- Travel to different work locations.
- Working from home.
- Attendance at events outside of the usual working environment, for example, training, conferences or work-related social events.
- Socialising outside work.
- Social media contact between workers.
- The workforce demographic, for example, the risk of sexual harassment may be higher in a predominantly male workforce.

In a bid to enforce employers to take notice, the Equality and Human

Goodwin and Walker rulings – survivor benefits pension update

Following the Walker v Innospec Supreme Court ruling, the UK Government decided that in public service pension schemes, surviving male and female same-sex spouses and civil partners will – in certain cases – receive benefits equivalent to those received by widows of opposite sex marriage.

A separate Employment Tribunal case in the name of Goodwin, who challenged the Teachers' Pension Scheme, identified that male survivors of opposite-

sex marriages and civil partnerships are treated less favourably than survivors in same-sex marriages and civil partnerships.

The NCOA is currently in consultation with the Cabinet Office regarding proposed changes to Civil Service Pension Schemes to address direct sexual orientation discrimination following the Goodwin and Walker claims. We will keep members updated as and when more information is known.



Picture © PeopleImages.com - Yuri A / Shutterstock

Health Assured: NCOA ends contract due to loss of trust

The NCOA has terminated its contract with Health Assured following concerns over its loss of British Association of Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP) re-accreditation, leading to a loss of trust and confidence.

NCOA members within the National Crime Agency are quite unique in that their association of, and affiliation to, external partners is something that must not breach internal security requirements or give cause for concern.

After a separate whistleblowing disclosure the NCOA immediately sought guarantees that the long-standing counselling practice was to the standards that we demand for our members.

Following an investigation by the BACP into Health Assured's working practices, the NCOA believes there are areas where remedial work is still required before full trust and confidence can be restored. For this reason, we have not renewed our 2025 contract. It should be noted that no areas of concern affected NCOA users past or present.

From our engagement with the NCA, the developing Employee Assistance Package (EAP) now available to officers has seen significant improvement since COVID, and our members should have confidence in utilising it.

A new head office for the NCOA

With effect from 1 June 2025, the NCOA Head Office is relocating to new premises. It will be found at 25 West Tenter St, London, E1 8DT, where we will be co-locating premises with SMG, our trusted (and vetted) IT and database provider. The building is a five-minute walk from Aldgate East tube and 26 minutes from the NCA

new premises at Stratford.

General Secretary Steve Bond said: "Having reached our 10-year anniversary, it was right that the NCOA National Executive Committee reflected how far we had come. It was clear that, having served us well, the Stockton Heath office was no longer fit for purpose. The move to our own purpose-built

office in London is very exciting, and is validation that the NCOA is very much established and can justifiably call itself the trade union of the NCA."

NCOA members will not experience any service issues during the transition, and our contact telephone number remains 0845 3142070.

Domestic abuse – sadly more common than many of you may think

NEC Officer Faye Lowe opens up this often-invisible crime.

Domestic abuse is prevalent across the UK, even within families of those investigating these offences. A recent Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated that 2.3 million people aged 16 years and over (1.6 million women and 712,000 men) had experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2024.

These statistics show us that it is likely that some of our own members will be experiencing domestic abuse. Most members would not qualify for legal aid and may therefore find it difficult to pay for legal

advice. Consequently, the NCOA has decided to extend our legal advice to members experiencing domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse can consist of, but is not limited to, physical violence, emotional and psychological harm, financial abuse, and coercive control. Not all victims even realise they are being subjected to domestic abuse. Any member experiencing domestic abuse can apply in the family courts for an injunction to help protect them. The two types of injunctions are non-molestation orders and occupation orders.

Often, abusers continue with their control even as cases progress through the family courts, with threats of taking their partner's home and children away. As an extension to our member services, long-standing NCOA partners, McAlister Family Law, offer one hour (free of charge) of legal advice to our members.

McAlister Family Law is Beyond Law Group's specialist Family and Children Law practice. They are an award-winning, niche practice and one of the top UK family law practices, with a national (and international) reputation for their work in children and family law. While this advice is not extended to providing legal representation, McAlister will now provide members with guidance as to the rights of the victim and the next steps they can take.

**Physical abuse
is never okay**

The following numbers can be dialled for advice and support on domestic abuse and sexual assault:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> National Domestic Abuse Helpline 0808 2000 247 (24/7) | <input type="checkbox"/> Leeway Domestic Violence & Abuse Services (Norfolk based) 0300 561 0077 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lighthouse Domestic Abuse Safety Planning 07516 124536 (Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm) | <input type="checkbox"/> Lighthouse Domestic Abuse Helpline (Suffolk based) 01473 228270 (Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> National Centre for Domestic Violence 0800 970 2070 | <input type="checkbox"/> Support for victims of sexual assault or abuse – the Survivor Trust, www.thesurvivorstrust.org , info@thesurvivorstrust.org , 0808 800 5005 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline 0800 999 5428 | <input type="checkbox"/> Galop – for members of the LGBT+ community – https://galop.org.uk , Tel: 0800 999 5428, Email: help@galop.org.uk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Samaritans 116 123 (24/7) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Men's Advice Line, for male domestic abuse survivors 0808 801 0327 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Women's Aid, live chat and email, helpline@womensaid.org.uk | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Respect Helpline 0808 802 4040 | |



THE DOMESTIC ABUSE ROADMAP

SUPPORTING NCOA MEMBERS AND STAFF

McALISTER FAMILY LAW™



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WhatsApp: 07990050743

Email: hello@mcalistervfamilylaw.co.uk



Victim of Abuse

Identify the Abuse

Our dedicated team will work closely with you to identify the abuse you've been subject to, find you the support you need and take action.



Support Network

Connect to a support network

We will help you find the right support you need. We work closely with men's and women's mental health charities to help guide and support our clients through their toughest times.

Take Action

Making a Plan

Our specialists will work with you to form a plan for how we're going to proceed and take action together.



What are your funding options?

Finding a Funding Solution

There are two routes you can take to find a funding solution. You can go through an assessment to see if you are eligible for legal aid, or make the most of our fixed fees



Legal Aid Assessment

Legal Aid Funding

You may be eligible for Legal Aid Funding. Funding is based on factors such as income and savings.

Funding Access to Fixed Fees

Payment Solutions for you

We can support you in funding access to our fixed fee rates to find the right financial solution for you which will enable you to budget and plan.

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Beyond Law Group's specialist Family and Children Law practice



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FOR NCOA MEMBERS.**

NCOA

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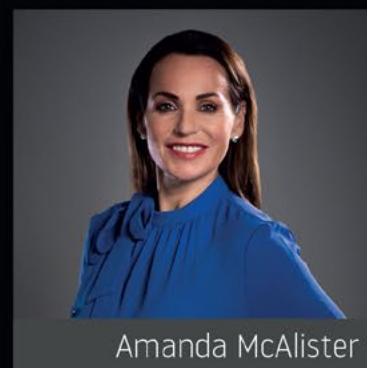
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Amanda McAlister

MANAGING PARTNER

FAMILY AND CHILD LAW SPECIALISTS

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Challenging Perceptions training

NEC Officer Faye Lowe lifts the lid on how the NCOA is dealing with issues some may find hard to discuss.

As previous magazine articles attested, the Angiolini Inquiry highlighted the uncomfortable truth that many women have experienced sexual harassment, sexual assault and violence. Sadly this also occurs in the workplace, and the NCOA recognises that there is more to do to help protect our members. Members going through traumatic experiences like this need support from trauma-informed reps.

NCOA is supporting the accused, there is a conflict of interest and they cannot receive our support. This is absolutely not the case, and we have made concerted efforts to notify our members, through articles in this magazine that our support is readily available to all member parties.

We have also made it clear through CPD sessions for our reps that members are most definitely entitled to this support. The NCOA is very

that supports anyone who is experiencing, or has experienced, domestic abuse or sexual violence.

This was very engaging training, where the reps learned about unconscious bias, victim blaming, and how it affects victims of sexual and domestic abuse. This really helped reps understand why victims respond in the way they do and the impact of the abuse they have experienced.



Although few members have requested support from the NCOA while going through the process of reporting a colleague, previous experience has told us that this is not just because few have these experiences in the workplace, but that sometimes, members aren't aware they can receive such support. The NCOA reflected on this and decided to take action to improve support to our members.

Firstly, we are making it clear that members are absolutely entitled to the support of a rep while going through the process. Members have told us they have been incorrectly informed by third parties that if the

experienced in managing conflict of interest cases and can expertly represent members on both sides.

We know crimes such as sexual assault, sexual harassment and abuse impact on the victim in specific ways. These experiences are traumatising and can lead to a feeling of shame and wanting to minimise their experience. Victims may be reluctant to open up about the events due to feeling vulnerable.

To ensure that we can offer appropriate support to all our members, on 19 and 20 November 2024, eight NCOA reps attended 'Challenging Perceptions' training, delivered by First Light, a charity

Our reps provided really positive feedback, with everyone stating that they all felt better equipped to support members reporting experience of sexual assault, harassment, or abuse by a colleague to the NCA.

The NCOA already equips all of our reps to be able to support members who are experiencing poor treatment in the workplace, but this additional training means they are now also equipped to support members through these specific experiences.

Anonymity will provide welcome

The NCOA welcomes recent announcements that give officers anonymity when directly involved in any death or serious injury, following the discharge of a firearm by an armed officer.

After years of concerns regarding the unfair 'trial by media', and fears around accountability standards and confidence, when announcing reforms Home Secretary Yvette Cooper said there would be a "presumption of anonymity for firearms officers subject to criminal trial". The Home Office added that the right was still "subject to judicial discretion in individual cases".

The key points from the Home Secretary's revisions included advancing three proposals from the previous government:

- Strengthening and speeding up the system, by aligning the threshold for referring officers from the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) with that used by the police
- Allowing the IOPC to send cases to the CPS when sufficient evidence exists, without waiting for a final investigation report.

- Putting the IOPC's 'victims' right to review' policy on a statutory footing.
- The Home Secretary also revealed her plans regarding:
- presumption of anonymity for firearms officers in criminal trials following police shootings
 - ensuring the highly specialised nature of certain policing tactics and tools is reflected in investigative guidance

guidance and processes for charging officers with offences committed on duty

- setting up a national 'lessons learned' database for deaths and serious injuries to prevent future incidents.

She has also proposed that there would also be an 'appeal mechanism' for bereaved families when a decision is made not to seek a charging decision.

“We can’t have officers fearing ‘what if?’ when they are faced with using force to arrest someone or prevent them acting to protect the public. Education is key, as the public need to understand how we police.”

Mark Williams, CEO, Police Firearms Officers Association

- rapidly reviewing two areas – the legal test of use of force in misconduct proceedings, and the threshold for determining unlawful killing findings in inquests
- inviting the Director of Public Prosecutions to review CPS

A review into thresholds for inquests and inquiries into deaths will be led by Adrian Fulford, a former senior judge, and Tim Godwin, the Acting Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police during the 2011 riots, which took place after the police shooting of Mark Duggan. The review will consider whether the standard required for an inquest to conclude someone was unlawfully killed should be raised.

The Home Secretary said the measures were "practical steps to rebuild confidence, tackle delays, provide clarity and ensure high standards are maintained".

Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley, whose force was involved in the recent death of Chris Kaba by a police officer – which led to the Home Secretary's statement – welcomed the "crucial" proposed changes to the current system.

He described this as currently "unbalanced" and failing to secure the confidence of the public and



Pictures © Bell Photography 423 / Svet foto / Shutterstock

protection for firearms officers

officers. Sir Mark also went on record by stating that no officer was above the law, but added that “the system holding police to account is broken”.

Under current law, all police and NCA armed officers are personally responsible for their own actions. Importantly, officers cannot use more force than is necessary to neutralise a threat. Moreover, a more senior officer can only instruct our members to fire their weapon in exceptional circumstances (authorised critical shot).

Under Cover contacted Mark Williams, CEO of the Police Firearms Officers Association, who said: “Being a firearms officer is a specialised area of law enforcement and needs to be seen for what it is. Officers have to deal with challenging and dangerous incidents daily so we need protections in place, or we risk losing officers from this area of policing, which will make protecting the public more difficult.

“We can’t have officers fearing ‘what if?’ when they are faced with using force to arrest someone or prevent them acting to protect the public. Education is key, as the public need to understand how we police.”

The NCOA maintains a strong cadre of representatives who are specifically trained in the Post Incident Management (PIM) processes that follow any shooting and other death or serious injury events following police contact. These reps undertake an initial pass/fail course and then regular refresher training to maintain their accreditation. In addition, the NCOA legal provision is specifically designed to support our members through any PIM process.



Desperate for pensions information?

NCOA CEO Simon Boon navigates the issue for us!

It may surprise you to know that it is questions about pensions that hit us most regularly at HQ. Some are pretty generic, others are far more specific, and although we always try our best to give factual information (as opposed to advice), the NCA workforce still has an unusual mix of both Police Pension Scheme members (numbers are dwindling fast) and Civil Service Scheme members, which also includes Partnership Scheme members – so this is far from easy, and ‘one size’ most definitely does not fit all.

Added into the mix is the recent McCloud judgment and the agreed ‘Remedy’ which, while positively tackling the discrimination which saw many members being forced onto the Alpha Scheme (and other career average earnings pensions) in 2015, brings with it much doubt and ambiguity. As a result, many people are now asking: “So what does my pension actually look like now?”



As NCA employees, if you are currently contributing to either the Police Scheme, Civil Service Scheme or Partnership Scheme, whilst they may be internally managed by the Agency through payroll (ie they deduct contributions and arrange lump sum payments etc) the very unique information relating to your pension may not always be readily available at the press of a button – or in response to a politely worded email. That’s because the wider management of your pension takes place beyond the NCA.

The Civil Service Pensions website really does have very useful information which is updated regularly and focused on key issues such as McCloud. It can also provide more personal perspective via the My CSP Pensions Portal – the go-to place to understand the state of your pension, how much you have contributed, and what you might get out at the time you decide to retire.

As an Agency employee, you can easily set up an account very quickly. The only information you need to register is your date of birth, your National Insurance number, a mobile phone number, and the name of your employer.

In doing so you will quickly be able to access unique information about you and your Civil Service Pension, from annual pension statements to

As an Agency employee, you can easily set up an account very quickly. The only information you need to register is your date of birth, your National Insurance number, a mobile phone number, and the name of your employer.

In order to prevent routine access to personal data held at HMRC, because of the Agency security stance, its employees are currently unable to access the HM Government Gateway system which creates a level of inconvenience (and frustration) not experienced by members of the public when dealing with run-of-the-mill self-assessment tax returns, child benefit payments etc. Fortunately, this is not the case for pension information, and for most of you who are active, contributing members of any of the Civil Service Pension Schemes – there is hope!

nominations/beneficiaries (don’t forget to make sure these are up to date, particularly following death or divorce).

Usefully, the portal will also allow most members to accurately plan and predict what benefits might look like when they intend to retire. That said, there are currently a very small proportion of members who are unable to secure the information they need using this tool, such as members who are not actively contributing, members who are in a Partnership Scheme, members with a pension sharing order, and a few other more niche exceptions.



It's now there at the **touch of a button**



Returning to McCloud, the Remedy is now being applied and there is a new version of the retirement modeller to help both active and deferred members decide which scheme they would like their Remedy benefits to be calculated under.

The retirement modeller will present benefit projections for both legacy and Alpha schemes for the Remedy period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2022. This also includes the ability to obtain a retirement benefit projection under each scheme (certain exclusions apply) and the modeller will use the latest available payroll and employment information to produce your retirement benefit projections.

If you are an active member, your 2024 Annual Benefit Statement

should already have been uploaded to the Pension Portal. As this is the first year that Remedy-affected members will be able to see rolled back statements (ie including contributions 'rolled back' into your old 'legacy' scheme – Classic, Classic Plus, Premium or Nuvos) for the Remedy period (1 April 2015-31 March 2022) your figures will look slightly different this year.

From the Police Pension Scheme group, for those of you who have been able to secure a police pension already, the various pension scheme companies have been reaching out to ensure you understand how the pension you took compares now that the Remedy options are available. For the vast majority, while it would seem unlikely that officers will look to

switch away from PPS 87 benefits, at least you can now see side-by-side comparisons and make decisions with better information to hand.

There are also some officers who are NCA employees but actively contributing into the Police Pension Scheme. Once again, pension management companies like XPS (they are responsible for NCA employees with police pensions) are now proactively reaching out to understand whether or not you need/wish to consider making additional contributions to make up any potential shortfall for the relevant Remedy period (2015-2022), when your contributions were reduced to reflect the amended benefits under the Career Average Earnings (CARE) scheme.

For the vast majority of NCA officers though, if you have not yet activated your Civil Service Pensions online account (which utilises twin factor authentication to add an additional layer of security when accessing your private information), we would encourage you to do so as soon as possible and put this important information and knowledge in your own hands, at the press of a button. Head to www.civilservicepensionscheme.org.uk/

“For the vast majority of NCA officers though, if you have not yet activated your Civil Service Pensions online account (which utilises twin factor authentication to add an additional layer of security when accessing your private information), we would encourage you to do so as soon as possible.

YOUR VIEWS ON WORK

Work and wellbeing – a critical issue for those targeting high-level serious and organic subject; some of the answers might surprise you – but some might not.

April is stress awareness month and an opportune moment to scratch under the surface of a workforce which has repeatedly reported to us the pressures of increasing workloads, often with far fewer resources.

Given the Agency's apparent eagerness to pivot and redirect its staff at the next 'big issue', come what may, should there be a greater focus on staff to ensure they are both well-equipped, and well-supported, to carry out their important role?

In order to find out, the NCOA decided to run its first ever Work and Wellbeing survey between the 19 February and 14 March to assess the mood 'on the ground' across all grades and commands. Staggeringly, almost half our membership felt the issue was important enough to get involved by sharing their thoughts and experiences with us – and now you too.

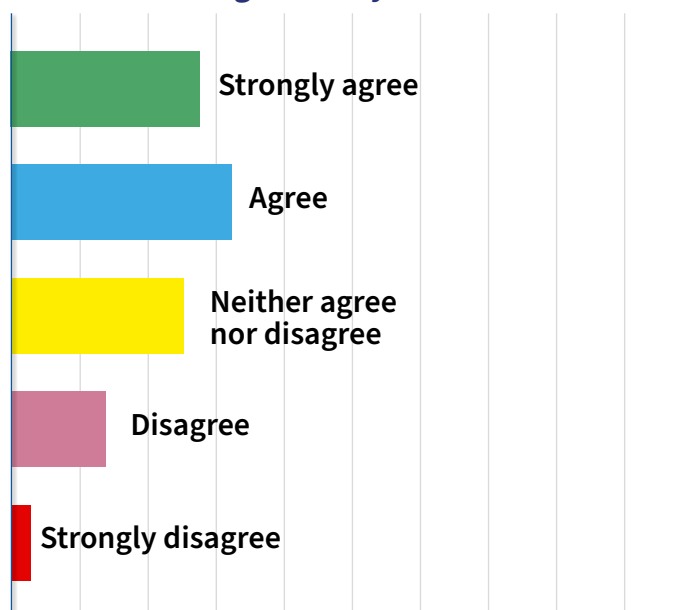
Significant increases in workload

As the results started to roll in, it was useful to see that each of the commands were proportionately represented, which means the end picture reflected an organisational position, rather than a disgruntled area of the workforce dominating the outcomes. Similarly, the grade and powers/non-powers distribution response generally mirrored the organisational grade structures, adding to the credibility of the results.

Focusing on one of our triggers for running this survey, it seems early reports were confirmed, with 61% of respondents stating that since last year, their workload had increased significantly.

BUREAU
RESPECT
EXPECTATIONS
UNDERSTAFFING
TECHNOLOGY
REALISTIC
MENTAL
WELL
TECHNICAL
WORKLOAD
TRAINING
SUPPORT

Q: Since this time last year, my workload has increased significantly



WORK AND WELLBEING

organised crime. To find out more, we asked you to open up on this sensitive

AUCRACY
Y MANAGEMENT
Y CULTURE
NG RESOURCES
LBEING
OLOGY
LOAD HEALTH
PORT ORGANISATION
RECOGNITION

Half of the respondents also felt that their workload was now unacceptable, with only 3% strongly disagreeing with this statement. To compound matters, a massive 76% of you had no problem telling us that there are elements of your work which are actually causing you to feel low, depressed, stressed or unwell.

When digging a little deeper to identify what these work-related triggers are, it was unsurprising that the most significant work factor affecting the wellbeing of our members is... an excessive workload.

Organisational and management pressure

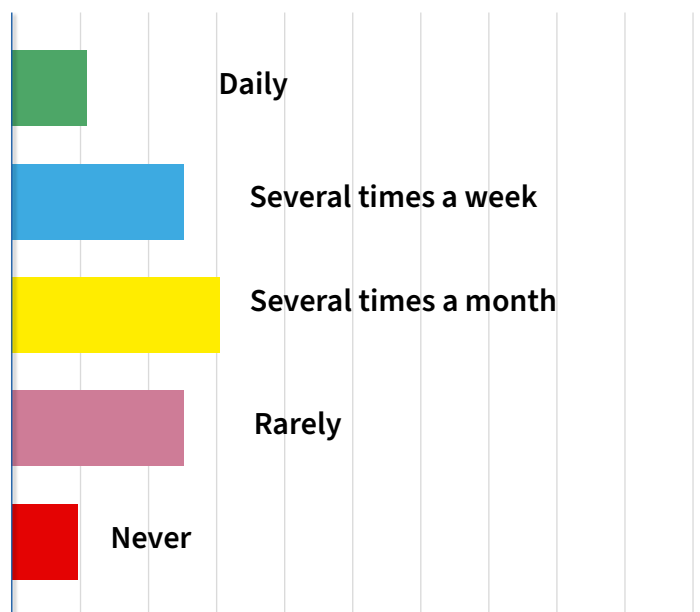
Worryingly though, despite the burden of an increased workload and the majority reporting that they rarely if ever have enough time to get the job done, more than 26% of members also felt pressure at organisational and management level, which has led to a negative impact on their health.

Knowing that work pressures are real (and with just 9% of respondents rarely or never working to tight deadlines), it is extremely important that officers are

able to switch off. Sadly, for many of you, that does not appear to be the case, with 53% reporting to us that they rarely/never take sufficient breaks throughout the working day (lunch, toilet, screen breaks etc).

To compound matters, even when clocking off, it seems that the majority of you are worrying about work-related problems when winding down, with a third telling us it now happens all or most of the time when away from the work environment, and supposedly, 'off-duty'.

Q: How often have you worked in your free time to meet work demands?



Given that working for the NCA is clearly affecting the health and wellbeing of a significant group of staff, across all grades and business areas, it is important to look at how the Agency responds and what mitigation and support is available when concerns are identified.

When asked about whether or not you felt the organisation had an inclusive working environment which encourages talking about mental health problems, the response was split equally, with just over a third of respondents saying they agreed it did, a third with no real opinion, and the remainder saying they did not agree that it did.

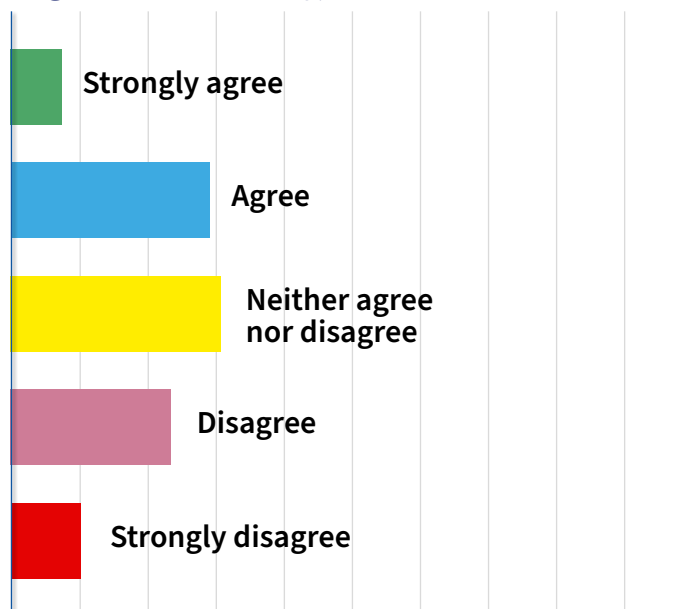
This rather contradictory response was mirrored when respondents were asked to give their views on the Agency's support for those experiencing stress, anxiety and other poor mental health.

Concerning Agency response

Whilst it was great to see that almost 70% of staff knew where to get help when their mental health was being impacted, that did not necessarily mean that they thought the Agency took positive action on health and wellbeing, with only 38% in agreement that it did. More positively, 55% of respondents said they felt comfortable approaching their line manager to discuss a mental health problem.

Practically, a significant group of respondents (57%) told us that they have previously felt compelled to actually raise a concern about the issues affecting their wellbeing; however, the response from the Agency was a little concerning, given that having seen their concerns acknowledged, only 10% saw action taken.

Q: My organisation supports employees who experience mental health problems (which might include anxiety, stress or depression)



Even more troubling is that of the vast majority of members who had raised a concern, some individuals were either told nothing could be done, or were promised action which never materialised; worse still, 7% had their concerns dismissed outright.

Given the responses of the individuals who took the time to take part in this important survey, whilst it is heartening to know that 38% are generally happy with

At the end of the survey, we invited officers to succinctly tell us made within the organisation to bring about positive wellbeing

“ A proper, paid and structured on call system so I don't feel I have to be looking at my phone when I'm not paid to.

“ To recruit sufficient support required to

“ Honest management who address issues without fear of losing their job.

“ Most frustration stems from doing the job without the tools. SLT talk improvement but little seen at the coal face.

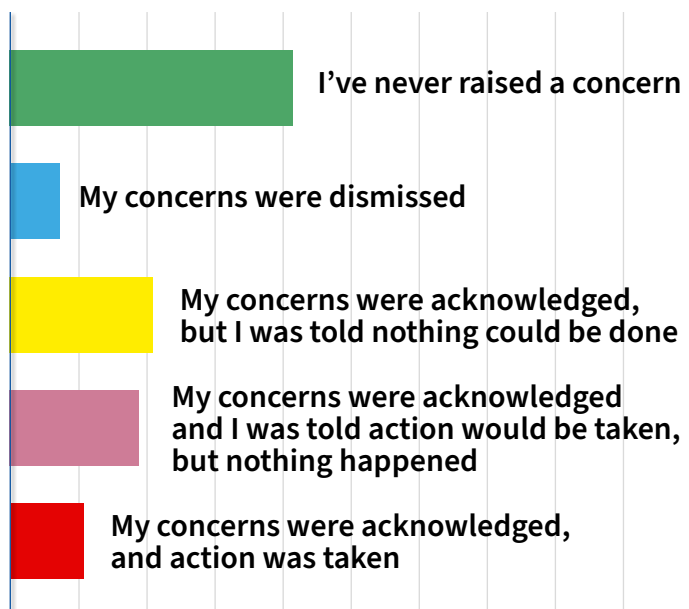
“ Better highest stress I

“ Better workload distribution among staff – whether that looks like increasing staff levels or reducing demand.

“

For further information on the NCOA Work and Wellbeing Survey

Q: If having raised a concern, which statement best described the outcome?



their lot – it is pretty sad to see that almost 44% remain dissatisfied or mostly dissatisfied in their present job.

It is very clear to us that the thought of delivering even more with less through Pay and Contract Reform would push many officers and teams to breaking point. Therefore, moving forward, the NCOA commits to engaging with the Agency to ensure workloads are manageable and that sufficient support, listening to and recognising and understanding the concerns of staff, will become a key element of NCA culture.

what improvements could be changes:

staff at G6 to G4 to provide the meet the demands of operational work

IT. This is the factor behind any feel.

“ *Challenging old attitudes towards wellbeing.*

Just stop working us above capacity.

2025, please head to www.ncoa.org.uk

Top 10 wellbeing fixes

-  **1: Better IT to enable efficient day-to-day working**
-  **2: More frontline staff and resources to deliver core business**
-  **3: Better pay**
-  **4: Reduced workload and pressure**
-  **5: Better support for staff**
-  **6: Cultural change – recognising and responding to mental health concerns**
-  **7: Less micromanagement and unnecessary bureaucracy**
-  **8: Management training linked to staff wellbeing**
-  **9: More realistic expectations of staff at organisational level**
-  **10: Recognition and proper response at organisational level when problems exist**

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**Evidence That Gendered Wording in Job Advertisements Exists and Sustains Gender Inequality, by Danielle Gaucher, Justin Friesen and Aaron C. Kay*

Reform delays highlight workforce woes

With Pay and Contract Reform seeming increasingly unlikely any time soon, even the Home Office questions the NCA workforce strategy.

NCOA members are becoming increasingly perplexed why there has been no tangible progress in NCA Pay and Contract Reform (PaCR) in the last 12 months – especially as amongst the 5% cost of living pay award as part of the NCA Remuneration Review Body (NCARRB) 2024/25 recommendations, this was also proposed: “A redesign of the Agency’s job architecture and evaluation of all roles to ensure parity with police officers, civil servants and the private sector.”

Meaningful reform

The Home Office partially accepted this recommendation in anticipation that there would be meaningful pay and contract reform planned and even potentially concluded prior to the 2025/26 NCA pay process.

The most recent update from the Agency is that, supposedly after two years of engagement with the Government on its proposed reforms, the NCA must now include its proposals in its submission to the spending reviews currently taking place across the public sector.

It is not surprising that members are increasingly angry and frustrated, as not only have they not been kept updated on the Agency’s pay and contract reform plans, but the spending review process is in preparation for the 2026/27 NCA budget settlement.

In its most recent NCARRB written evidence, you can also sense the palpable concern from the Home Office as to why the Agency’s front-line operational strength has decreased during a period of both increased budget and growth in the size of its workforce.

On the imbalance of recruitment activity, which has resulted in an

increase of more senior management positions, the Home Office commented: “Over a three-year period, workforce data shows a significant increase in the number of NCA officers identifying as senior management, particularly Grade 1 (up 39%) and Grade 2 (up 42%). This contrasts sharply with a decrease in NCA officers at Grade 5 (down 13%) and Grade 6 (down 22%). This should elicit concern as these particular cohorts predominantly make up frontline operational officers staffing intelligence and investigations commands, widely regarded as the operational engine of the Agency.

“The NCA has explained that this proportional increase in senior management is necessary to meet operational goals. It is unclear to what extent this trend is driven by underlying factors such as a shift in the type of work the Agency is undertaking, or by grade inflation within the Agency caused by issues in recruitment. This imbalance may be diverting significant resources away from junior grades in critical roles. It will be important to understand and address this trend if the operational effectiveness of the Agency is to be maintained.”

Uncomfortable reading

In its recent oral evidence to the NCARRB, the NCOA also highlighted that the NCA Senior Civil Service cadre of Deputy Directors, Directors, and Director Generals had grown to 50 officers, at a time when the 2024 People Survey results will make uncomfortable reading for this group.

When asked to respond to the statement, “I believe that my organisation’s senior leaders have a clear vision for the future of the organisation”, NCA officers

delivered an overall approval rating of only 35% – down 19% from the benchmarked results from the wider civil service, and a drop of 8% from the Agency’s own 2023 People Survey results.

The Agency will also have access to free text comments and only they will know whether the failure to deliver pay and contract reform has fundamentally impacted on this reduced confidence in NCA leadership.

No longer sustainable

In its assessment provided to the NCARRB, the Home Office went further and reported that: “The main cost pressures affecting the NCA’s affordability ceilings are pay awards, grade inflations and contingent labour, alongside procured services. In particular the NCA’s evidence states that its contingent labour and professional services currently takes about 27% of the Agency’s pay bill, which is c.£368m.”

In its evidence to the NCARRB, the NCOA pointed out that it was no longer sustainable to spend 27% of the pay bill on only 250 officers – barely 4% of the NCA workforce.

The NCA, Home Office and NCOA come together in agreement, with the Home Office being very clear that “it is important that workforce spend is targeted and cost effective to ensure value for money for the UK taxpayer”.

We too have been clear that the most effective way of targeting this considerable spend on behalf of NCOA members is in the delivery of a fair and equitable pay mechanism – by way of immediate reform.

Let us hope that the Agency recognises this and makes the case clear and unambiguous in its spending review proposals.

The Ben Fund – supporting the

The NCOA has long been closely associated with promoting the wellbeing of its

The Ben Fund is a charity dedicated to promoting the health and wellbeing of police officers across the north-west of England. With over 18,000 members, it also offers services designed to support National Crime Agency officers in managing physical, mental, and financial challenges – no matter what their role.

Jerry said: “Our services are accessible to everyone in the Agency and are delivered by experienced professionals who understand the unique demands of working in law enforcement and its support structures. With a team that includes individuals with direct experience in, or alongside, the law enforcement family, we provide tailored support to meet your needs

“The demands of working in the National Crime Agency can sometimes take a toll on wellbeing, whether you’re on the front line, managing casework, or supporting operations. The Ben Fund offers services that are flexible, practical, and designed to promote recovery and resilience for all staff.”



Physiotherapy: Personalised treatments to help members recover from injuries, manage pain, and regain mobility. With clinics and satellite offices across the region, it ensures flexible appointments and short waiting times.

Advanced therapies – such as shockwave therapy, which stimulates blood flow, repairs tissue, and reduces pain, and hydrotherapy, which uses warm

water to enhance mobility and reduce strain in cases where load-bearing exercises are not possible – are also available as part of your tailored physiotherapy plan.

Remember, NCA staff can utilise the Special Leave Operating procedure (Rehabilitation 14) to take time away from work for much-needed treatment without the need to use annual leave or sickness absence.

Mental health support:

Emotional challenges such as anxiety, bereavement, trauma and relationship difficulties are common in stressful working environments; no one should face these difficulties alone.

The Ben Fund provides access to confidential counselling and therapy designed to address the specific pressures of law enforcement work. With flexible options for in-person sessions at our treatment centres and regional sites, or virtual appointments via Zoom or Teams, members can access support in a way that works for them.

Financial assistance: Unexpected financial challenges can add stress to already demanding roles. The Ben Fund offers financial support to help alleviate your financial burden – Financial Hardship Assistance, where members, dependents, and surviving partners in severe financial need can receive grants of up to £5,000.

Respite and recovery breaks:

Wellbeing stays are residential programmes lasting up to four nights, set in the tranquil Ribble Valley. These stays are designed to promote physical and mental recovery, with personalised care from experienced therapists to help you relax, reduce stress, and recharge.



wellbeing of NCA staff

members; CEO Jerry Graham tells *Under Cover* about The Ben Fund's work.



Accessible services for all

Jerry continued: "Flexibility is at the heart of what we offer, ensuring all NCA staff – no matter their role – can join The Ben Fund and access our services. With regional satellite offices, virtual support options, and a commitment to short waiting times, we make sure you get the care you need without significant disruption to your work or personal life.

"For just £6.72 a month, after tax relief has been applied, you can secure access to our comprehensive range of treatments and contribute to the wellbeing of your colleagues. Membership unlocks tailored support, ensuring affordable, sustainable care for everyone in the NCA. Whether it's recovering from an injury, managing emotional

challenges, or taking time to relax and recharge, The Ben Fund is here to support you at every stage of your career".

The NCOA supports the great work carried out by the team of specialists at Langho, and you too can join The Ben Fund using the QR Code here, or by contacting us at enquiries@nwpgbf.org, or phoning 01254 244980.



TheBenFund
SUPPORT WHEN YOU NEED IT

Henry Rocks – literally!

Retired 'founder NCOA member' Henry Rocks decided to get in touch and update us on what has been happening since retiring in July 2014 and his 'retirement plan'.

Henry told Under Cover: "First was a house move which was achieved when we upsized, and my daughter and her family joined us. This has so far worked very well. Next was to play more golf. Achieved, but any improvement in my game was another matter!

"Whilst finalising the house move and settling in, I was looking for something else to do in the voluntary charity sector. I plumped for the St Vincent de Paul Society, a charity that I knew from when I was growing up in Belfast and which was very accessible, being locally based at my parish church. I have not looked back since making that decision, and it has certainly ensured that I am never bored.



end – some say my best side. I subsequently ended up joining the board of their charity.

"Everything was hunky dory until late in 2018 when, during a routine check I had initiated, a lump was discovered on my prostate.

conjunction with some quarterly hormone injections. Thankfully, I had no side effects from the radiotherapy, but the two years of injections brought about weight gain, brain fog and hot flushes.

Land's End to John O'Groats

"In 2024 a routine MOT at the doctors gave an indication for pre-diabetes from a blood test. This led to an enrolment on a preventative course on which they educate participants about diet and exercise.

"Part of this is increasing and counting steps, hence the attached poster. I thought that if I was going to do it, then some good may come from it, as well as losing a couple of stone.

"The course sets a challenge of walking the equivalent of Land's End to John O'Groats, and at the time of writing, I have just gone past 1.25 million steps (75% of the way) which leaves me just south of Kinlochleven in the Scottish Highlands."

Henry's advice to all his NCOA colleagues?

- Plan for your retirement, not just financially.
- Look after your health and do not ignore routine tests... get those PSA and physical tests done!
- Don't ignore the bowel screening tests, for peace of mind if nothing else.
- Enjoy the fruits of your financial plans.

You can follow Henry's progress on the Just Giving website (<https://www.justgiving.com/page/svp-england-and-wales-henrys-steps-challenge>) where he posts his progress reports, you might also consider a donation for a very good cause via the QR code on the poster.

“In 2022 my PSA levels started to increase which was a sign that the cancer was back. Treatment was a course of radiotherapy in conjunction with some quarterly hormone injections. Thankfully, I had no side effects from the radiotherapy, but the two years of injections brought about weight gain, brain fog and hot flushes.

"As well as a round of home visits and helping people furnish homes after leaving care settings or fleeing domestic violence and human slavery, I also started volunteering at a soup kitchen in St Pio Franciscan Friary, Bradford. This is a facility run by a group of Franciscan Friars of the Renewal.

"This led to me being involved in a BBC documentary titled Bronx to Bradford. It is still available on YouTube, where you can catch a few glimpses of my retreating rear

"Then began all the tests and consults culminating in keyhole surgery and recovery. This was rapid, and I was back on the golf course within five weeks. Post-op procedures included quarterly prostate specific antigen (PSA) blood tests. I had no side effects from treatment and went back to my busy schedule.

"In 2022 my PSA levels started to increase which was a sign that the cancer was back. Treatment was a course of radiotherapy in

Henry's Step Challenge



SVP Member Henry has started a virtual journey of walking from Lands End all the way to John O'Groats to raise vital funds for the SVP Bradford District Council. This comes to around 1.7 million steps and close to 1,000 miles.

Bradford District Council helps support local people in need of immediate assistance, including the elderly, vulnerable, and families.

Some of the ways that we help:

- Visiting the isolated
- Food parcels and vouchers
- Clothing
- School uniforms
- Furniture
- Household appliances



Pictured left: SVP Member Henry.

Picture above: map showing the planned route.

Please support our work

If you would like to sponsor Henry, you can make a donation by scanning the QR code on the right. Any contributions will be greatly appreciated and will be used to support people in the Bradford area.

Registered charity number 1053992



From Newcastle to New York —



Son of NCOA member Kenny, Leodhais Macpherson is a truly remarkable man. Leodhais (Scottish Gaelic for Lewis) lost his brother Conor to suicide in November 2018 and a short while later he lost his best friend Charlie. Leodhais was just 18 years old at the time and had to deal with loss and suffering such a tragedy at a young age.

To his credit he has taken on the monumental task of running a marathon a day for 128 days in memory of Conor. Yes, you read it right; Leodhais is running 3,332 miles in 128 days in memory of his dear brother – the equivalent of running from Newcastle to New York!

Extraordinary challenge

Leodhais took his first steps on this extraordinary challenge on 25 January this year and is not scheduled to finish until 2 June. That is equivalent to a marathon each day for 128 days, and all whilst fitting in his 9-5-day job.

Why is 3,332 miles significant? Because New York is where Conor dreamed of living one day, and Leodhais could think of no more fitting tribute to raise awareness for suicide prevention and mental health support, in Conor's memory.

Leodhais said: "I'm raising funds for two incredible organisations: the RNLI and If U Care Share. The RNLI saves lives at sea, and I want to thank them for their efforts in looking for my brother. If U Care Share, based in the North East, offers mental health training, 24/7 support, and help to families affected by suicide. Both organisations carry out life-saving work, and their efforts are deeply connected to Conor's story.

"This challenge will end on Conor's birthday. Every mile I run is for him, for those struggling silently, and for the families who know the pain of such a loss. Others' support means

by running 128 marathons!

everything – whether it's a donation, a share, or following my journey. Together, we can make a difference and save lives."

Asked if he ever joins his son on this astonishing challenge, Kenny said: "I haven't run with him for a couple of days. Our brains must have synchronised together because like Leodhais, I was thinking of his

reasons for doing this mammoth task of 128 marathons in 128 days.

"More men under 50 die from suicide in the UK than any other reason or disease. On average 19 people take their own life every day in the UK. In my old job on the railway, nearly a person a day takes their own life by throwing themselves in front of trains. Imagine

the trauma for the family, but also think of the poor train driver who lives with the vision for the rest of their lives.

"Too many police officers are taking their own lives, it's scary how often. It's a permanent solution to a temporary problem which can always be avoided. As human beings we are susceptible to harming ourselves, we have all had black days when the clouds don't lift, the illness isn't getting better, mental health is raging inside you, and a feeling of loss and foreboding won't go away.

"It's like the game of Jenga – eventually the tower collapses; but by just pushing a block back in you steady the tower and keep its structure. That's all you need to do, push a block back in, instead of pulling it out."

Dark places

Kenny added "It's tough to admit but at times in our lives we have all been in a dark place. If you are feeling down, talk to someone; if your default is tablets, tell someone and get the tablets removed from your reach. If you think of jumping in front of a train, think of the train crew who must witness it. Talk to someone. Confide in a friend. Phone the Samaritans. The sun will rise on a better day. As Charlie Chaplin said, 'the six best doctors in the world are exercise, sun, rest, diet, self-respect and friends'.

At the time of writing this, Leodhais is halfway. With an intake of 5,000 calories a day and a new pair of £160 trainers every three weeks, he deserves all the support he can get. If you would like to support this epic journey or track Leodhais' progress, you can do so by using the link to Just Giving Leodhais' fundraiser for the If U Care Share Foundation at www.justgiving.com/team/ncl-to-nyc.





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