



NCA Director General Response Statement to HMICFRS National Data Exploitation Capability report

NCA Response

On the **3rd September 2025** HMICFRS published a report of '**An inspection of the effectiveness and efficiency of the National Data Exploitation Capability**'.

This report focuses on the efficiency, effectiveness and value of the National Data Exploitation Capability (NDEC).

The inspection reviewed the following areas:

- how valuable the NDEC's contribution to the NCA is, and how well the NCA uses it;
- whether the NDEC makes effective use of the data it has access to;
- whether the NDEC has the technological capabilities and other resources to fulfil its role; and
- how efficiently and effectively the NCA co-ordinates and prioritises the NDEC's work.

HMICFRS recognised the NDEC's approach to data-handling processes, ethics, standards and frameworks. They praised the team's innovation at providing solutions to the Agency's technology problems allowing officers to continue the fight against Serious and Organised Crime. Over the last few years NDEC has helped the NCA increase the size of its data catalogue. HMICFRS acknowledged the difficulties faced in staffing NDEC as the Agency has to compete with the private sector due to the requirement for highly qualified and specialist personnel. The training for personnel in the NDEC was praised along with the working arrangements with partner organisations. However, the report outlines some areas that require development and refinement. We welcome the scrutiny and assessment of our performance as it allows us to focus on areas of improvement. The NCA therefore accept HMICFRS's recommendations :

- **Recommendation 1:** By 30 September 2025, the National Crime Agency, working with the Home Office, should make sure its ten-year IT strategy includes a timeline, indicative budget and priority order for removing, replacing, developing or merging its legacy IT systems.

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- Recommendation 2: By 30 September 2025, the National Crime Agency, working with the Home Office, should develop a plan, including a timeline, to allow it to automatically move information between the three tiers of government security classification.
- Recommendation 3: By 30 June 2025, the National Crime Agency should review the National Data Exploitation Capability data catalogue and identify other datasets suitable for inclusion. As soon as reasonably possible, it should add those datasets to the catalogue.
- Recommendation 4: By 30 June 2025, the National Crime Agency, working with the Home Office, should develop a plan, including a timeline, to allow it to routinely carry out bulk data analysis of the Law Enforcement Data Service dataset.
- Recommendation 5: By 30 March 2026, the National Crime Agency should make sure that:
 - the datasets in use across the National Crime Agency are correctly version controlled;
 - the National Data Exploitation Capability establishes a data management policy to provide a consistent methodology, and a single structure and pathway for all the datasets it imports.
- Recommendation 6: By 30 June 2025, the National Crime Agency should adopt the Government Digital and Data Profession Capability Framework.
- Recommendation 7: By 30 June 2025, the National Crime Agency should establish partnership arrangements with relevant bodies. These should include:
 - all regional organised crime units;
 - police forces that face major challenges in tackling serious and organised crime; and
 - other government departments and agencies.

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- **Recommendation 8:** By 30 June 2025, the Home Office should secure a systematic, robust arrangement (which may require legislation) for regular audits of the National Crime Agency's use of bulk personal datasets. This should include retention, disclosure, security and destruction.
- **Recommendation 9:** By 30 June 2025, the National Crime Agency should establish a programme of consensual audit by the Information Commissioner's Office, as permitted by section 129 of the Data Protection Act 2018. These audits should meet the requirements of section 229 of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 and its Code of Practice.
- **Area for improvement:** The National Crime Agency should introduce changes to its training, performance and recruitment processes for the National Data Exploitation Capability.

NCA Director General Response:

In response NCA Director General, Graeme Biggar said:

"The report notes that the National Data Exploitation Capability (NDEC) has achieved the majority of its original objectives. It also praises the training provided to its officers, as well as their approach to ethical considerations including data protection.

NDEC has brought substantial benefits to NCA and partner activity. It helps to assess risk among the thousands of child sexual abuse referrals we receive every month, and can analyse a suspect's associations to build up pictures of organised crime groups that would be impossible manually. In one three-month period, NDEC searches identified more than 2,100 potential links to serious and organised crime.

We are taking extensive action on areas identified in the report's recommendations, much of which was well underway at the time of the inspection. This includes an agency-wide technology modernisation programme.

We continue to work with Government to ensure that NDEC, and the entire NCA, have the resources to attract and retain a talented workforce, in order to maximise our impact in the fight against serious and organised crime."

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