

## Partnership agreement framework - Our agreement, purpose & guiding principles

The Partnership Forum exists to support effective partnership working between Audit Scotland and the Audit Scotland Branch of the Public & Commercial Services Union (PCS). We work together across areas such as business planning and business performance monitoring, with a particular focus upon the importance of our workforce - resourcing, terms & conditions of employment, development, engagement and wellbeing.

Members of the Partnership Forum have created a set of guiding principles which inform how we work together:



### Open Communication

key messages for all colleagues, tone not adversarial  
relevant to all, making a difference  
shared sense of purpose – partners not ‘sides’  
when we disagree let’s say so



### Constructive Culture

informal or formal, as needed but signal this beforehand  
constructive, we have a future tomorrow  
proactive not just reactive  
highlight our joint successes, our wins & our brand



### Creating opportunities & solving problems

forum is for big, cross-cutting, strategic issues  
business group engagement, via our people leads  
personal staff issues need 1-1 dialogue  
invest in our relationships as forum members

# Partnership Forum Agreement

<b>Owned and maintained by:</b>	Human Resources on behalf of the Partnership Forum
<b>Date checked/ created:</b>	June 2024
<b>Next review date:</b>	June 2026

This document provides a shared sense of purpose and objectives of the Partnership Forum (PF) between Audit Scotland and the Audit Scotland Branch of the Public & Commercial Services Union (PCS). The agreement covers:

1. Purpose of the agreement
2. Parties to this agreement
3. Methods of communication
4. Principles underpinning the partnership forum
5. Scope of effective consultation and negotiation
6. Arrangements for reviewing the PF agreement

## 1. Purpose of agreement

Audit Scotland's management and PCS have a strong record of successfully sharing information, working to improve the impact of Audit Scotland's work for the public sector and engaging in productive consultation / negotiating upon certain terms & conditions of employment.

Since Audit Scotland was formed in April 2000 both parties have consistently worked together. Since 2002 this has included regular Partnership Forum meetings and more informal communication.

This agreement records the main principles of the way in which Audit Scotland's management and Audit Scotland's PCS Branch Executive Committee ("BEC") communicate, provide information to each other and negotiate. The document is therefore classified as a partnership agreement.

## 2. Parties to this agreement

Audit Scotland's Executive team represent the employer organisation.

The PCS Branch Chairperson and members of the BEC represent a significant number of colleagues across Audit Scotland and is therefore well placed to act as the primary employee representative group. Employees who are not PCS members may still raise issues of concern with Audit Scotland's management, through the Human Resources team and/or through the wide range of forums we have in place, for example our People Development and Wellbeing Group. .

Issues will be dealt with through the most appropriate forum or method.

### 3. Methods of communication

Audit Scotland will continue to communicate with colleagues through a broad range of direct and indirect channels. Examples of these are shown below. This list is indicative of the commitment that Audit Scotland makes to effective communication with employees. It is not intended to be exhaustive.

#### Indirect communication channels through representative groups:

##### The Audit Scotland / PCS Partnership Forum

- The objective of the Forum is to allow communication of information and consultation with PCS on all critical and strategic issues affecting all employees of Audit Scotland.
- This represents the main, scheduled method of communication with PCS and meets no less frequently than every three months. Items for discussion are tabled by both parties and, whenever possible, necessary information is provided in advance.
- Annually, during Q3 of Audit Scotland's financial year, the Secretary will schedule a meeting of the Partnership Forum to allow members to review the past performance of the Forum and consider future priorities for the year ahead.
- Audit Scotland is represented by the Chief Operating Officer, the Head of Human Resources, a business group Director and a member of the HR team who fulfils a Secretariat role.
- PCS is represented by the PCS Chairperson and three additional members of the BEC (elected by the BEC annually). Wherever possible all business groups will be represented, and this may occur on a rotational basis. Occasionally, as and when required, a full-time official from PCS HQ may also attend.
- Summary information of each meeting is sent to all attendees via email or a Viva Engage post following the meeting. Minutes are published through Sharepoint thereafter for all colleagues to access.

##### Local Business Group / PCS Partnership Meetings

- PCS BEC members will have free, informal access to Audit Scotland senior management (known as the Leadership Group) to raise and discuss any issues at any time.
- If required, PCS may choose to request that an Executive Director and other Directors /CSG Managers meet with local PCS representatives no less frequently than twice a year to engage in dialogue about matters which affect that Business Group. This could include local travel issues, staff allocation to audit clients when there are major changes to audit appointments, trainee auditor scheme, local restructuring etc.

- A member of the Human Resources team will attend these meetings if requested, to ensure that any discussions and agreement is aligned to corporate policies and to identify any implications for other parts of Audit Scotland.

### **People Development and Wellbeing Group**

- The People Development and Wellbeing Group meets no less frequently than every three months. Membership is made up of the Director of Corporate Support, a Director from Audit Services Group, Director from Performance Audit and Best Value and a Director from Innovation & Quality who hold people lead responsibilities, the Head of HR, the Head of Professional Support and Learning, the Business Support Services Manager. In addition, one member of the PCS BEC (elected annually) are a member of this group.
- Details of how this committee operates are shown on Sharepoint. Minutes are published on Sharepoint and are available to all colleagues. This will include discussion on health, safety and wellbeing matters along with learning and development of our colleagues.

### **Other Committees/Project Groups**

- The Partnership Forum may determine that limited life committees or project/ working groups are established to deal with specific issues arising (eg reviewing lease car scheme, employee benefits). Membership of such groups will be drawn from the appropriate employees and managers in relation to the matter being dealt with, including member(s) nominated by the PCS Chairperson.
- As an example, it is usual for a short-life team to form and meet for the purpose of negotiating the annual review of pay and other financial elements of the Audit Scotland remuneration package. The implementation date for any changes is usually 1 April each year. Typically, the team meet during Q4 of Audit Scotland's financial year so that negotiations can be concluded in good time and the annual award implemented for the April payroll.
- Other groups may be established across Audit Scotland in connection with Strategic Improvement Programme projects and operational matters (e.g. specific issues connected to individual business groups). Membership will be drawn from the most appropriate groups of colleagues and managers depending on the nature and scope of the issue. PCS representation is welcomed in these groups.

### **Direct Communication**

#### **Team Meetings**

Between business unit management team members and local teams. These will take advantage of cascading information and feeding

information back from employees to more senior business group management.

- **Abacus**

Audit Scotland's online magazine that carries a mix of news and information including past performance, future developments, charity updates etc.

- **Corporate Performance Reporting**

This provides information upon past performance, our business plan and the resources / processes that will be deployed to achieve success. All employees receive a copy of the report.

- **Sharepoint & Viva Engage**

Audit Scotland's intranet provides a means of communicating with all employees. It is used by both PCS and Audit Scotland management. It includes key information within the Human Resources site relating to policies, procedures and terms & conditions of employment. PCS also has a Sharepoint site containing information for members and for non-members who wish to join the union and discussion boards for members. A more informal staff professional networking platform is Viva Engage – Viva Engage can be used by any colleague to share information of interest.

- **Business Plans**

Each function and business group produces clear business plans which are available for all employees to read. These set out the main goals of Audit Scotland and the key resource and organisational requirements necessary to achieve success.

- **Staff Survey**

Audit Scotland, working with PCS, will continue to seek employee opinion across a wide range of issues through regular attitude surveys undertaken in accordance with good practice<sup>1</sup>. The results will be shared with employees.

- **Notice Boards & flat screen display TV screens**

Notice boards and / or TV displays are available in all Audit Scotland offices.

- **PCS AGMs and special meetings**

<sup>1</sup> Past surveys include the Best Company surveys. Results will be benchmarked against external employer performance in order to assess Audit Scotland's relative performance and the survey will be managed by an independent survey provider to ensure good practice standards are maintained.

PCS consults staff at its annual general meetings and special meetings as required

- **PCS Newsletter**

PCS produces a regular newsletter for members.

- **Surveys**

PCS surveys its members on areas of interest, for example attitudes to the 3D performance appraisal & development process.

- **New employees**

Audit Scotland and PCS will work together so that they jointly explain the role of the Partnership Forum and PCS membership to new employees at induction / onboarding events.

#### **4. Principles underpinning the Partnership Forum**

Audit Scotland is committed to proper and effective communication and engagement by providing timely information, consultation and negotiation. The following provides an indication of Audit Scotland's commitment. Please note it is not intended to be exhaustive:

- Information on Audit Scotland's business planning, external environmental scanning, corporate objectives, financial position and operational updates
- Information and consultation on the situation, structure and development of employment within Audit Scotland and on any anticipated measures, in particular where there may be any likely threat or substantive changes to employment
- Information and consultation on decisions likely to lead to substantial changes in work organisation or in contractual relations.

##### **Principles relating to providing information under this agreement**

Audit Scotland and PCS agree that open communication and building strong working relationships are necessary for the Forum to function effectively, to support effective consultation and negotiation.

Audit Scotland will provide relevant information to colleagues or employee representatives in a timely manner so that effective communication, consultation and negotiation can take place. PCS representatives may also request additional information.

Occasionally, information may be commercially sensitive and/or confidential. Audit Scotland may impose a confidentiality restriction on any information or document provided to employees or employee representatives. This will only be the case when Audit Scotland believes this to be justified in the legitimate interests of the organisation. Any such restrictions will be informed by the relevant legislation and guidance (including Freedom of Information, Protected Disclosures and Data Protection).



## 5. Scope of effective consultation and negotiation

Audit Scotland will seek to take account of employee's views before making a decision covered by this agreement. Consultation is defined as 'an exchange of views and establishment of dialogue' between Audit Scotland and employees or employee representatives. Audit Scotland will seek to ensure that consultation is fair:

- Consultation will take place when the proposals are still at a formative stage
- Adequate information is provided upon which colleagues or their representatives can respond
- Adequate time is provided for a response and,
- Proper consideration will be given to the response following the consultation process

### Principles relating to effective negotiation

Audit Scotland has agreed with PCS key areas in which it will also negotiate, in addition to engaging in consultation. These areas include terms and conditions of employment relating to all employees within pay bands 1 - 3.

When the parties agree, the Audit Scotland / PCS Partnership Forum may provide a negotiating mechanism for these aspects of Audit Scotland's pay and terms and conditions of employment.

In addition, both parties will engage in collaborative negotiation in order to obtain agreement, wherever possible, upon an outcome which meets the long-term needs of Audit Scotland and its employees.

To facilitate effective negotiation it is agreed that:

- Joining the union and serving on the BEC will not affect staff career prospects.
- BEC members will be given reasonable time to carry out their TU duties and consult with members

### Resolution of Disputes

The majority of issues can be resolved through the effective use of the methods contained within this Agreement and informal ways of working together. In the event that the PCS branch is unable to obtain a satisfactory resolution and wishes to formally register a disagreement / dispute then this should be done by writing to the Chief Operating Officer. The Chief Operating Officer will consider the matter and respond accordingly within ten working days. Since it is not possible to effectively predict what areas of disagreement or dispute may arise, the response of the Chief Operating Officer will be appropriate and proportionate to the issue under consideration at that time.

## 7. Arrangements for reviewing the PF agreement

This agreement will be briefly reviewed as a standing agenda item at the beginning of all Partnership Forum meetings. A formal review is led by the Secretary every two years.

The agreement may be terminated by either Audit Scotland or PCS by providing written notification and three months' notice of the intention to withdraw from this agreement.

Signed on behalf of Audit Scotland Executive Team:



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Date: 22 July 2024

(Vicki Bibby, Chief Operating Officer)

Signed on behalf of PCS:



Date: 30 September 2024

(Ross Hubert, Branch Chair of PCS, Audit Scotland)



## Secretary - Partnership Forum

### Role Description

The Secretary manages the business of the Partnership Forum. The core transactional work includes scheduling meetings, drafting agenda, drafting minutes of meetings and liaising with PCS BEC and Audit Scotland management representatives to ensure that the meetings are productive and address the important issues identified by both parties. It is this last responsibility that requires the timely engagement of the Secretary.

The Secretary needs to deploy relationship management skills, understand and anticipate important emerging issues and help explain these to both parties so that discussion at the Partnership Forum is productive, candid and focuses upon solutions. Therefore, the role is more than simply the administrative tasks of booking meetings, issuing the agenda and drafting minutes. These represent the basic duties of the Secretary. Delivering success is primarily attributable to the offline, informal dialogue, trust and professionalism of the Secretary exercised through the relationship maintained with each Partnership Forum member.

- Set up PF meetings in advance; typically meetings occur every three months with an additional session in Q3 of the financial year to review past performance and discuss future priorities. An annual schedule should be booked prior to the start of the financial year (April).
- Provide the Chair with a draft agenda and engage in a briefing meeting approximately seven days prior to each Partnership Forum session. The draft agenda should represent the outcome of discussions which have already occurred with the PCS Chair and the Head of HR.
- Arrange all meeting logistics for the meetings.
- Accurately record minutes of Forum meetings, obtain approval for the minutes and circulate to Forum members. The Chair will approve the draft minutes within seven days of the meetings. The minutes should then be circulated to Partnership Forum members. The Secretary should seek approval from the PCS Chair within a further seven days. The final, approved minutes should be added to Sharepoint thereafter for colleagues across Audit Scotland to read.
- The Secretary should work with the Internal Communications Officer to ensure that the key business of the Partnership Forum is shared with colleagues across Audit Scotland. The objective is to demonstrate that effective employee / employer relations is in evidence, encourage engagement and assure colleagues that partnership working between Audit Scotland and PCS is happening.
- Follow-up on outstanding issues with staff responsible for Partnership issues in between Forum meetings so that a proper account of matters can be provided at any point in time.

- Prepare and keep up to date a table of key Partnership Forum projects / initiatives either underway or awaiting launch and review this with the Forum at each meeting.
- Ensure that no Partnership Forum issue disappears from the minutes / Forum's attention