



New Zealand Security Intelligence Service

Te Pā Whakamarumarū

An introduction to

Vetting for a Security Clearance

Information for
candidates and referees



Vetting for security clearance

A New Zealand government security clearance is required when a person needs access to classified government information. Once a government agency decides an employee needs a security clearance, it requests the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS) to undertake security vetting enquiries and to make a recommendation as to an individual's suitability to hold a security clearance.

Government agencies need to ensure that employees are trustworthy and suitable to work in an environment dealing with classified information. They call upon NZSIS to help assess the reliability and trustworthiness of employees and this is done through the vetting process.

A security vetting assessment attempts to understand an individual's character and behaviours to form a view about their trustworthiness or vulnerability so government agencies can manage the risk around them accessing classified information.

A security clearance is a privilege, not a right. The Chief Executive of the government agency requesting the vetting decides whether or not to grant a security clearance. Security clearances are not granted by NZSIS (unless the individual is being employed by NZSIS).

People requiring a security clearance who are referred to NZSIS for vetting are called candidates. Those who comment on a candidate's suitability to hold a security clearance are called referees.



The vetting process

Vetting for a security clearance is required for anybody in New Zealand needing access to government information classified CONFIDENTIAL, SECRET or TOP SECRET.



Once the vetting process begins, the interaction between NZSIS and the candidate is managed by a Departmental Security Officer (DSO) who represents the government agency requesting the vetting.

Information is gathered from candidates and their selected referees through questionnaires and interviews. Enquiries include, but are not limited to, standard checks (in New Zealand

and/or overseas) such as credit and police histories, international travel and any security relevant information.

If NZSIS makes a recommendation that a New Zealand candidate should not be granted a security clearance, he or she has a statutory right to complain to the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security.

Security clearances are usually valid for five years, although this may vary. If a clearance is still required after that time, the vetting process is repeated as security clearances are subject to on-going reviews and renewals.

NZSIS has a dedicated team of Vetting Officers whose sole job is to enquire into the background of candidates. They come from varied backgrounds, have particular skills in sociology and psychology relevant to conducting assessments, and are knowledgeable about vetting processes.



Candidate vetting online

Vetting is managed through the Online Vetting Requests (OVR) system. This is a secure, automated web-based system.

Once the vetting process is initiated by a DSO, the candidate receives an email with a web address, logon and password to the OVR system. This allows the candidate to access and complete an online form requiring specific personal information.

Candidates are strongly recommended to gather their information before starting to enter it online. A document is attached to the original email with the questions that need to be answered.

For a TOP SECRET clearance, it may take a candidate some time to gather the information before they start to fill out the online form. The more prepared a candidate is, the less time required to complete the process. Completing the online candidate application may take up to two hours.

A candidate can stop and recommence the OVR process at any stage. Most OVR fields are mandatory and the system will indicate when information has not been completed.

Common problem

The most common problem encountered in the vetting process is non-disclosure of information by the candidate. This includes a failure by the candidate to disclose information such as Police Diversion, historic convictions and traffic offences. The Criminal Records (Clean Slate) Act 2004 has exceptions for security vetting and national security purposes. To comply with this requirement the candidate must disclose all historic convictions.



Referee

For vetting at a SECRET level or higher, candidates are asked to give four referees, each relevant to a specific aspect of their lives. These may include a previous employer, workmate, social contact and non-immediate family.

A referee will be sent a questionnaire or interviewed in person or by telephone. NZSIS may approach other persons not nominated by the candidate if it is believed they can provide relevant information. Referees are asked to answer questions surrounding the candidate's character and behaviour.

All information provided by a referee is held in strict privacy. Neither the employer nor the candidate will become privy to any of the information.

Responsibilities of a security clearance holder

It is the responsibility of both the security clearance holder and the employing government agency to ensure that essential security clearance practices are upheld and maintained. The holder of a security clearance accepts that this privilege carries certain responsibilities. A security clearance holder must:

- Comply with the New Zealand Government's rules for the protection of classified information.
- Comply with the employer's standards of conduct.
- Report any security breaches.
- Report changes in personal circumstances (e.g. divorce, a new partner, bankruptcy, foreign citizenship, etc.).
- Report any suspicious contacts or enquiries.
- Be 'security aware'.





For any further information, candidates should contact their Departmental Security Officer in the first instance. For any other vetting enquiries please contact ovr@nzsis.govt.nz or the Vetting Helpline on 04 471 2087.

New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS)

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