

National Security Vetting (NSV)

Advice if you have been asked to provide a Character Reference

Introduction

United Kingdom Security Vetting (UKSV) is the single vetting service processing National Security Vetting (NSV) for the whole of government.

NSV is a requirement set by the Cabinet Office to protect against threats from hostile intelligence services, terrorist groups, organised criminals and other pressure groups. We use NSV to decide whether we can trust people with sensitive government information or property.

This leaflet explains what being a Referee involves and gives answers to common questions asked about acting as a referee for vetting.

Please read the leaflet carefully, as it will help you to understand how you can help us do our job. If you have any other questions, please visit our web pages at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/united-kingdom-security-vetting>.

Or you can email us at: [uksv-helpdesk@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:uksv-helpdesk@cabinetoffice.gov.uk)

All current contact details for UKSV can be found on our [Contact Us](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/united-kingdom-security-vetting-contact-us) page.

Our vetting charter

The UKSV [vetting charter](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vetting-explained-and-our-vetting-charter/the-vetting-charter) is intended to make the process of providing security clearances as transparent as possible and ensure applicants have confidence they will be treated fairly and equally by UKSV.

The role of Referees

Who are Referees?

We ask the person being vetted to choose some character referees who have known them well for a significant, **recent** period in their life, and will be able to provide us with information about the person being vetted. Hopefully they will have asked you for permission first, and made sure that you are willing to be interviewed.

What choices do I have?

It is entirely your choice whether you want to be a Referee. You may change your mind at any time during the process.

The Human Rights Act 1998 made the European Convention on Human Rights part of UK domestic law. This included Article 8, which covers the right to respect for private and family life, the home and correspondence. We must follow Article 8, unless we can show a clear need to override it in order to protect national security.

The interview

How will the interview be conducted?

Most interviews are conducted virtually through a video call.

How long will the interview last?

Usually about one hour but occasionally this can be longer.

What will I be asked at the interview?

The interview will cover most areas of the person's life. We are trying to build up as complete a picture of them as an individual as is possible. We will consider their loyalty, honesty and reliability, and whether they could be at risk of bribery or blackmail. We will ask you about their wider family background (relationships and influences), past experiences, health, sexual relationships and behavior, drinking habits, experience of drug taking, financial affairs, general political views, hobbies, foreign travel etc.

The interview will be very searching, but it is not an interrogation and should not feel like one. Some of the questions will be very personal, but we have to ask them to find out if the person we are vetting may be vulnerable to pressure. If you have any doubts about whether some questions are relevant, you should raise these with the Vetting Officer.

You should be completely honest. The Vetting Officers are very experienced and not easily shocked or surprised. Please do not lie or hide information from us because you think this will help the person who is being vetted. If you lie or hide information, it can raise concerns about the person being vetted.