



Cabinet Office

Vetting process for accessing International Classified Information

Version 1.0 – December 2021

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Introduction

1. This document explains the relevant process when individuals working for International Organisations as staff or as contractor personnel require Personnel Security Clearances (PSCs) in order to access international classified information at the level of CONFIDENTIAL or above.
2. This document does not apply to:
 - HMG civil servants, crown servants or service personnel;
 - Country Based Staff;
 - HMG civil servants on secondment to International Organisations; or
 - Contractor personnel engaged on HMG classified contracts.
3. This document primarily refers to new PSC applications, but applies equally to renewals of PSCs. This is because the process for a renewal in the UK is the same.
4. This document replaces 'UK Personnel Security Clearances for access to International Classified Information' (Version 3.0 – October 2016), which is no longer valid.

Section 1: PSCs for international purposes

5. For international purposes, National Security Vetting (NSV) can only be carried out by HMG in specific circumstances. HMG can consider undertaking vetting for:

- i. British nationals working directly for International Organisations who have a confirmed requirement to access international classified information at the level of CONFIDENTIAL or above;
- ii. British nationals working for a private company (hereinafter referred to as ‘contractors’) that has been awarded or already holds an existing classified contract that requires access to international classified information at the level of CONFIDENTIAL or above.
- iii. Non-British nationals¹ working for a UK based contractor that has been awarded or already holds an existing NATO classified contract that requires access to classified information at the level of NATO CONFIDENTIAL or above.

6. Any request for vetting, as set out in the previous paragraph, can only be considered by HMG when it falls under the scope of an existing security agreement, arrangement or other understanding between the UK and other international partner concerned.

7. By exception, vetting can be considered by HMG when contractor personnel require access to international classified information at the level of CONFIDENTIAL or above during the bidding phase. In this situation, the relevant International Organisation or foreign government responsible for the classified contract will need to confirm this requirement in writing to the relevant UK vetting authority.

8. PSC requests without an international classified contract, speculative vetting requests, vetting to a level higher than is necessary to fulfil the role/contract, or requests that fall outside the scope of the UK’s international obligations cannot be accepted by HMG.

UK vetting system

9. All PSC applications are managed by HMG using an online vetting platform called NSVS and all cases submitted are processed by the UK’s vetting provider UKSV. Further details on both NSVS and UKSV can be found on Gov.uk².

Applicable PSC levels

10. Only two types of NSV are valid for accessing international classified information:
- **Security Check (SC)** – Permits access to classified information up to and including the level of international SECRET; and
 - **Developed Vetting (DV)** – Permits access to classified information up to and including the level of international TOP SECRET.

¹ Non-British nationals must work for a UK contractor and have resided in the UK consecutively for the past 5 years in order for HMG to consider undertaking NSV.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/united-kingdom-security-vetting>

11. Accreditation Checks (AC) or Counter-Terrorist Checks (CTC) are valid NSV clearances within the UK, but it do not permit access to international classified information.

12. The Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) is a pre-employment check that is undertaken as part of the vetting process. A BPSS on its own (i.e. without a SC or DV) does not permit access to international classified information.

Checking existing PSCs

13. Before considering submitting a new PSC application for an individual the prospective employer should first check with the subject if they hold an existing PSC. If an existing PSC is held, and is still valid, it may be possible in some circumstances to amend the PSC to identify the new employer (what NSVS calls a ‘transfer’).

14. As explained in Sections 2, 4 and 5, NSVS sponsor account holders are able to check if the subject holds an existing PSC by logging into that system and submitting a check. They can also check by emailing the [UKSV Enquiry Centre](#) with the subject’s full name, date of birth and what clearance they believe is already held. It should be noted that the sponsor must quote their NSVS sponsor account number when contacting UKSV.

15. National Security Authorities (NSAs), Designated Security Authorities (DSAs), other Competent Security Authorities (CSAs), and the security offices of International Organisations can check if an individual holds an existing PSC by submitting a Personnel Security Clearance Information Sheet (PSCIS) form to the [UK NSA](#). If an existing PSC is held, and a transfer is possible, further advice can be provided by the UK NSA on how the PSC can be transferred.

Applicable process for new PSC

16. When it has been established that an individual requires a PSC for access to international classified information at the level of CONFIDENTIAL or above, the relevant process to follow depends on the type of employment:

Employment type	Section
International Defence Organisation staff	Section 2
Non-defence International Organisation staff	Section 3
Defence contractor	Section 4
Non-defence contractor	Section 5

Vetting process for the subject

17. Once an application has been submitted by following the relevant process, a link will be sent to the subject inviting them to complete their vetting forms online.

18. The subject has 30 days to register and submit their vetting form online otherwise their application and any data already inputted will be deleted. To avoid this, it is critical that employers urge the subject to complete and submit their application online in a timely manner. It should be noted that only once the subject has submitted their form online using

NSVS, and the sponsor has also submitted their own information using NSVS, can the vetting process begin.

19. Individuals subject to vetting should be made aware by their employer that an interview is mandatory for DV applications. In certain cases, an interview may also be necessary at the SC level.

20. Guidance for individuals subject to vetting is available on Gov.uk³. [UKSV](#) should be contacted if the subject has technical issues using or accessing their online application.

Approximate vetting timescale

21. SC vetting requests takes on average one calendar month to process. Requests at the level of DV typically take approximately between 3-6 months to process. Employers should note that these timescales are approximate minimum timescales. If the subject does not have sufficient UK residency and/or further information or checks are required then cases may take longer. Any vetting requests and renewals should therefore be submitted by the employer in good time.

PSC decisions

22. Once the vetting application is processed, a PSC decision is taken by the relevant UK vetting authority.

23. If a subject is dissatisfied with the outcome of their PSC decision they should contact the relevant UK vetting authority. It should be noted the UK NSA does not take PSC decisions and cannot overturn decisions made by UK vetting authorities.

Ongoing personnel security – Employer responsibilities

24. A PSC provides a security assessment of the subject at the time the vetting process was carried out. Active ongoing personnel security management is therefore essential to ensure that any PSC issued maintains its currency. This is especially important given the individuals under scope of this document will not be working for or behalf of HMG. Responsibility for ongoing personnel security therefore rests with the employer. For contractors who are based offsite, the security office of the site where they are based also has a role in their aftercare.

25. UK vetting authorities are reliant on the employer and the local security office of the site where the subject is based to monitor the individual, provide them with the necessary security onboarding, guidance and awareness training, and to report any adverse information or potential security concerns that may affect the subject's suitability to hold a PSC.

26. Employers should remind their staff of their own personal security responsibilities and the need to report changes in their personal circumstances to UKSV (see next paragraph).

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-security-vetting#guidance>

Ongoing personnel security – Individual responsibility

27. Individuals granted a PSC have a personal responsibility to abide by the relevant and applicable security rules where they are working and report issues of concern to local security officers.

28. Individuals granted a PSC must report any changes in their own circumstances that may have the potential to affect their clearance. If they have recently got married, entered into a civil partnership, started living with a partner and/or new co-residents, changed their name, nationality, gender, or home address then they should complete the applicable 'Change of Personal Circumstances' questionnaire⁴ and submit this to UKSV as soon as is practicable. Personnel are also required to report any significant change to their financial circumstances, if they have recently received a criminal conviction, or have been arrested or cautioned by the police. [UKSV](#) can be consulted to give advice as to what circumstances need reporting.

Personal data handling

29. The UK NSA (Cabinet Office) and UKSV will use the data provided in accordance with data protection legislation in order to process applications for National Security Vetting. The relevant Privacy Notices can be found on Gov.uk⁵.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-security-vetting#forms>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-national-security-authority-privacy-notice> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-security-vetting-privacy-notice>

Section 2: PSC requests for officials employed by International Defence Organisations

Applicability

30. This section applies to International Defence Organisations (e.g. NATO) which employ a British national directly as staff and require that individual to hold a PSC in order to undertake his/her duties.

NSVS sponsor accounts

31. In order for an International Defence Organisation to request a PSC they will need to hold a NSVS sponsor account. Once an account is held that organisation can log into the NSVS platform and submit a PSC request, a request for a PSC certificate (if applicable), and request transfer/shares of existing clearances.

32. Normally the NSVS sponsor should be a representative of the security office of the International Defence Organisation. Exceptionally the sponsor could be an official from another unit (e.g. Procurement, Human Resources, a Programme office, etc.) provided there is a clear business case as to why it cannot be a representative of the security office.

33. International Defence Organisations that require a new NSVS sponsor account should email the [UK NSA](#) the following documents:

- i. A short official cover letter⁶ that formally confirms the requirement for their staff to hold a PSC; and
- ii. A completed 'International NSVS sponsor account application'⁷ form completed by the nominated sponsor.

34. Only when both documents have been received can the UK NSA consider the request. If the request is accepted the UK NSA will forward the sponsor application to UKSV for further processing.

35. UKSV will email the nominated sponsor with instructions on how to register their NSVS sponsor account. Once the sponsor has successfully registered and logged into the NSVS platform can they submit PSC requests for their staff.

36. Sponsors must not divulge or provide their account login details to anyone outside of UKSV. If others in the sponsor's team require access to NSVS (e.g. a Deputy Security Officer or assistant) then an additional account should be sought by following the same process described in paragraph 33.

37. PSC applications on NSVS should only be submitted by the sponsor when there is a confirmed requirement for the subject to be cleared. They must also cancel requests submitted on the NSVS platform when a PSC is no longer required (e.g. the subject leaves employment).

⁶ An example can be found in [Annex A](#)

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-classified-information-security-clearance>

Section 3: PSC requests for officials employed by non-defence International Organisations

Applicability

38. This section applies to non-defence International Organisations (e.g. European Space Agency) which employ a British national directly as staff and require that individual to hold a PSC in order to undertake his/her duties.

Requesting new PSCs

39. If a new PSC or renewal is required for a British national the following documents are to be emailed to the [UK NSA](#):

- i. Short official cover letter⁸ that formally confirms the requirement for the subject(s) to hold a PSC; and
- ii. An 'International E-Form Request'⁹ form.

40. Only when both documents have been received can the UK NSA consider the request. If the request is valid the UK NSA will forward the documents to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) for further processing.

41. When processed, FCDO will send the subject a link asking them to complete their vetting application. As noted in paragraph 18 of this document, it is important that the subject completes their online application in a timely manner.

Checking existing PSCs

42. International Organisations can check and verify that an individual holds a valid PSC by submitting a PSCIS form to the [UK NSA](#).

Departure of an employee holding a PSC

43. In order to maintain accurate vetting records, it is crucial that UK vetting authorities are informed if an employee holding a PSC leaves employment. If an employee with a PSC leaves the organisation their employer must inform the [UK NSA](#), providing the subject's full name, date of birth, place of birth and the date the subject left employment.

⁸ An example can be found in [Annex A](#)

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-classified-information-security-clearance>

Section 4: PSC requests for contractor personnel participating in defence international classified contracts

Applicability

44. This section applies to contractors that have been awarded a defence international classified contract that requires a British national to hold a PSC.

Requesting new PSCs

45. How PSC requests are submitted depends on the category of contractor:

Category	Process
A - UK contractor with a FSC	<p>If a UK contractor holds a Facility Security Clearance (FSC) then they will already hold a NSVS sponsor account. They can submit PSC requests using that account.</p> <p>If a UK contractor has not been granted a FSC, but has a business case to hold a FSC, they should contact the Security Advice Centre in MoD for advice.</p>
B - UK contractor with an IPISA accreditation	<p>If a UK contractor has an Industry Personnel Security Assurance (IPISA) accreditation then they will already hold a NSVS sponsor account. They can submit PSC requests using that account.</p> <p>If a UK contractor has not been IPISA accredited, but it has a business case to be accredited, they should contact the Security Advice Centre in MoD for advice.</p>
C – UK contractor without a FSC or IPISA	Contact the UK NSA for further advice.
D – Non-UK based company that requires a British national to be cleared.	Contact the UK NSA for further advice.

Checking existing PSCs

46. UK contractors with a FSC or IPISA can check existing clearances by logging onto their NSVS sponsor accounts.

47. UK contractors without a FSC or IPISA will need to approach their Contracting Authority to make the necessary queries. For non-UK based contractors, their NSA/DSA/CSA will need to submit a PSCIS form to the [Security Advice Centre](#) or the [UK NSA](#).

Departure of an employee holding a PSC

48. In order to maintain accurate vetting records, it is crucial that UK vetting authorities are informed if an employee holding a PSC leaves employment. Contractors with a NSVS account can do this themselves.

49. Contractors without a NSVS account must inform the [Security Advice Centre](#) or [UK NSA](#) if an employee with a PSC leaves employment. They should provide the subject's full name, date of birth, place of birth and the date the subject left employment.

Section 5: PSC requests for contractor personnel participating in non-defence international classified contracts

Applicability

50. This section applies to contractors that have been awarded a non-defence international classified contract that requires a British national to hold a PSC.

Requesting new PSCs

51. If a UK company does not have FSC or is not IPSA accredited, but it requires personnel to be vetted, then they should contact the [UK NSA](#) for advice.

52. If a non-UK company requires personnel to be vetted for a classified contract then they should approach their Contracting Authority or relevant NSA/DSA/CSA. The Contracting Authority or relevant NSA/DSA/CSA should submit the following to the [UK NSA](#):

- i. Short official cover letter¹⁰ that formally confirms the requirement for the subject(s) to hold a PSC;
- ii. An 'International Classified Contract'¹¹ form; and
- iii. A PSCIS form.

It should be noted that self-completed forms, or forms completed by contractors, cannot be accepted.

53. When the forms are received the UK NSA will provide further instructions.

Checking existing PSCs

54. UK contractors with a FSC or IPSA can check existing clearances by logging into NSVS and submitting a query.

55. UK contractors without a FSC or IPSA which require an existing PSC to be verified will need to approach their Contracting Authority to make the necessary queries. For non-UK based contractors, their NSA/DSA/CSA will submit a PSCIS form to the [UK NSA](#).

Departure of an employee holding a PSC

56. In order to maintain accurate vetting records, it is critical that UK vetting authorities be informed if an employee holding a PSC leaves employment.

57. UK contractors with a FSC or IPSA can notify UKSV of a departure using NSVS. UK contractors without a FSC or IPSA, or non-UK contractors, will need to inform the relevant UK vetting authority. If the relevant UK vetting authority is not known then the employer should notify the [UK NSA](#).

¹⁰ An example can be found in [Annex A](#)

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-classified-information-security-clearance>

Annex A: Cover letter template

What follows is a template that can be used by Contracting Authorities, International Organisations, NSAs, DSAs or CSAs as the basis of their own letter. This template is not for contractors.

If this template is used it needs to be suitably amended and modified depending on the circumstances and nature of the PSC request. It must also be appropriately headed, signed and include contact details (i.e. email and telephone number) so that the letter can be verified by the UK authorities.

Preferably the letter should be sent to the [UK NSA](#) by email rather than in hardcopy.

UK National Security Authority
Cabinet Office
Room 335
70 Whitehall London
SW1A 2AS
United Kingdom

Dear Sir/Madam,

Subject: PERSONNEL SECURITY CLEARANCES FOR ACCESS TO [Select NATO / EU / ESA / Other] CLASSIFIED INFORMATION

[Insert Company name (full company address)] is conducting work for **[Insert International Organisation / Government]** on **[Insert name of contract, subject, brief details of the tender/contract, any contract reference number(s)]**.

This **[Delete as applicable: tender/contract]** requires this contractor's personnel to have access to classified information at the level of **[Insert classification level]** and access to **[Insert details of establishments where access is needed to fulfil the classified contract – if applicable]**.

It is requested that the personnel listed be vetted in order to obtain a Personnel Security Clearance (PSC).

[Signed and dated by representative of International Organisation / Government]

Annex B: Version History

Document Version	Date Published	Summary Of Changes
1.0	December 2021	First version published on Gov.uk. Replaced 'UK Personnel Security Clearances for access to International Classified Information' (Version 3.0 - October 2016)

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