

The National Crime Agency approach to Vetting

The National Crime Agency (NCA) delivers a tailored level of security vetting to ensure that people who work at the NCA are people who are suitable to a) protect the public from serious organised crime, and b) be trusted with sensitive Government information and assets.

The NCA is part of the National Security Vetting (NSV) community, which provides two levels of security clearance, namely a Security Check (SC) and Developed Vetting (DV).

In addition to being part of the NSV community the NCA is a law enforcement agency, charged with protecting the public from serious organised crime. As a law enforcement agency the NCA exercises various statutory powers that impinge upon the rights and entitlements of members of the public. Given this significant responsibility, the NCA must ensure that all of its officers operate with the utmost integrity, maintaining the highest ethical and professional standards. As a result the NCA *enhances* each level of security clearance, to consider a wider and more comprehensive set of threats

There are some similarities between the NCA enhanced process and the approached outlined in the College of Policing Approved Professional Practice (APP) on Vetting.

In 2022, the NCA Vetting Department were subject to a HMICFRS Inspection. The Inspection noted that the NCA has a vetting process that completes a security clearance beyond the standards set out for Government Departments by the Cabinet Office. It was also noted the practices and processes in place are effective and the Inspection found that the NCA did not take unnecessary risks by compromising the standard of vetting across the Agency.

What is National Security Vetting?

National Security Vetting is distinct from other types of vetting, for example a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check to determine your suitability to work with children. It provides a level of assurance as to the trustworthiness, integrity, reliability and resilience of an individual to handle sensitive Government information or assets.

Vetting helps employers and employees identify, manage and mitigate risks for roles where national security concerns are a consideration. This includes jobs at the NCA, where you may have access to highly sensitive sites, highly classified information or systems. Vetting establishes trust between employers and employees, sometimes through confidential conversations, but also through various enquiries, to assess whether there are any relevant risk factors. In short, vetting is the start of an ongoing dialogue about managing risks of all different types, which lasts for as long as a person holds a security clearance.

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The principal aim of National Security Vetting is to ensure that the character and personal circumstances of an individual are such that they can be trusted with sensitive Government information and assets.

All roles in the National Crime Agency will require security clearance to one of the following two levels.

• **Security Check (SC)**

SC clearance is granted to those who require frequent and uncontrolled access to SECRET assets. As a minimum, all NCA employees will require SC to access NCA information and intelligence. It is Cabinet Office policy that a SC clearance must be reviewed after 10 years.

A Security Check (SC) involves the completion of a security questionnaire, along with a series of checks against criminal intelligence systems, criminal records, and enquiries concerning an applicant's credit and financial history.

• **Developed Vetting (DV)**

DV is the highest level of security clearance. You will be required to achieve DV clearance if your role dictates that you will have frequent and uncontrolled access to TOP SECRET assets. It is Cabinet Office policy that a DV will be reviewed every 7 years.

Developed Vetting (DV) builds upon all of the checks conducted for SC, but includes a detailed interview with the candidate and their referees.

The level of vetting required for a role within the NCA is dependent on the needs of that role, the responsibilities you may have in performing it and the nature of information and data being handled.

What is National Crime Agency Enhanced Vetting?

A role at the NCA does not just involve handling and protecting sensitive Government information and assets. Fundamentally, a role at the NCA is about protecting the public from serious and organised crime.

In order to protect the public and maintain public trust and confidence in law enforcement the NCA enhances national security vetting standards, to assess applicants against a wider set of criteria.

All candidates must complete that enhanced full assessment and achieve NCA enhanced national security clearance *before* you can be offered a start date with the NCA. These checks are often referred to as 'NCA Enhanced' checks.

If you hold an existing security clearance from any other organisation we will transfer that security clearance. However, you will still be required to undergo the NCA enhanced checks. You will not be able to start any role in the NCA until those enhanced checks have been completed.

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The enhanced process considers a wider variety of threats and draws information from a wider set of sources, to assess whether it is appropriate for you to have access to classified information and whether you can be trusted to protect the public.

NCA Vetting is the first line of defence in protecting the public from people who might abuse their position to achieve some kind of advantage for themselves or others, undermining public trust and confidence in the process. This is what the Agency refers to as an insider threat. The enhanced process is thorough and lengthy, but it ensures that if a risk is identified, it is assessed during the vetting process, enabling early decisions to be taken as to whether a candidate poses a risk to the public, Government information, or the law enforcement profession.

The Vetting Process

All offers of employment in the NCA are subject to a requirement to achieve a specific level of security vetting. As such all candidates within the NCA will be asked to complete a security questionnaire, which explains *why* security vetting is important and sets out the Government's statement of security vetting policy in full, before inviting each candidate to provide the personal information required for the necessary checks to be carried out.

Checks are carried out only so far as necessary to i) safeguard national security in the light of the current assessment of the threats to the UK and ii) protect the public.

We want to ensure that anyone, irrespective of their background or circumstance feels able to apply for a role within the NCA and achieve a security clearance.

Be assured that information will be gathered in a proportionate, respectful and sensitive way. If you are required to complete a security questionnaire, you will need to provide information about your background, family, employment history, finances and where you've lived. We need to ask about any criminal convictions and for higher levels of clearance we will also ask about your, life experiences, and details of your close family and friends, to help us understand you as an individual.

We acknowledge and understand that everyone has a past and each application for a security clearance is judged on its own merits. However, it is imperative that all applicants must be open and honest during the vetting process, since this is a crucial feature of building trust between potential officers and the Agency. Candid and detailed information will allow us to make the most accurate assessment possible to support you through the security vetting process.

The vetting process can feel invasive. However, vetting processes are confidential and critical to protecting the public from serious and organised crime.

What sorts of checks are conducted, if I apply for NCA Enhanced Vetting?

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The NCA conducts a range of enquiries to assess the suitability of a candidate to hold a security clearance.

The following list includes the minimum checks which form part of the Enhanced Vetting process:

- Police National Computer and Police National Database checks
- Law enforcement intelligence records and databases
- Counter Terrorism Check (CTC)
- Credit reference checks
- Voters' records
- Home address checks
- Financial checks including Credit reference checks
- Credit reference agency checks
- Open-source enquiries (e.g. social networking sites)
- Police Force enquiries including Professional Standards Department checks
- Business interest and secondary employment consideration

We only ask for information that helps us to identify areas of risk in relation to the clearance you are applying for. During the vetting process, there are no right or wrong answers; the process will not make any judgements of you as an individual nor your lifestyle.

Depending on the level of clearance your role requires, in no particular order, we may need to understand:

- Your nationality and any periods of residence or connections overseas, especially in countries that the UK has more challenging relationships with.
- Whether your spending is sustainable, mindful that most of us have debts and credit agreements to manage.
- Your physical and mental wellness.
- In the strictest confidence, any aspects of your life or identity that you keep private, but only to understand if there is a risk of somebody using this against you maliciously.
- How you manage family connections, associations and friendships, including who might have a significant influence on you, but only to understand if there is a risk of this influence being inappropriate.

Will a criminal record result in a Security Clearance being refused?

It is not appropriate to identify a prescriptive list of convictions and cautions that should lead to a vetting rejection. Each case will be judged on its own individual merits, taking into consideration a range of factors such as the seriousness of the offence(s), the length of

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time since it was committed, the age of the individual at the time and the role being applied for.

There are some criminal offences that will automatically result in the rejection of an application for a security clearance. For instance, any offences committed as an adult or juvenile that resulted in a prison sentence or any candidate who is subject to a criminal registration requirement (e.g. a registered sex offender) will automatically have their application rejected.

If you lie about or conceal information that is highly likely to be taken as evidence of dishonesty, which may result in the failure of your security clearance application.

NCA Drugs Policy

The NCA has a strict no drugs policy. We do not accept the use, possession or supply of illegal drugs, (including use of drugs that illegal in the UK but are legal in other countries) or misuse of prescribed medication. You must adhere to our policy from the moment you submit your application form. You will also be required to undergo a drugs test as part of the Enhanced process.

It is vital that you are completely open and honest about any criminal history. Any attempt to conceal information (e.g. in relation to a criminal history, historic drug usage, and so on) during any aspect of the vetting process could be taken as evidence of unreliability and dishonesty/lack of integrity and may affect the granting of security clearance.

Do you have to be a British National to be Security Cleared?

No, you do not need to be a British National. However, to achieve SC you must have resided in the UK for a minimum of 3 years out of the last 5 years and to achieve DV clearance, you must have resided in the UK for a minimum of 7 out of the last 10 years.

Can I get a security clearance with dual nationality?

Many people with dual nationalities hold UK security clearance. All applications are assessed on a case by case basis. You will be asked questions about the countries you are connected to and how often you travel to them.

I have been diagnosed with a medical condition, would this impact on my Vetting?

No, a medical diagnosis would not necessarily impact on your Vetting.

However, we would need to understand the impact of your diagnosis and sometimes any prescribed medication to assess any risks that may be associated to the level of clearance you require and the role you are applying for. We encourage you to be as open as possible during the Vetting process.

Will I be required to have a Vetting Interview?

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Interviews are routinely conducted for all applications for DV clearances and may be conducted for SC clearances.

What will I be asked during my Vetting interview?

The interview, which will be conducted by a Vetting Interviewing Officer, will be wide-ranging and cover most aspects of your life. The aim is to obtain a rounded picture of you as an individual to determine whether you are a suitable person to protect the public and have access to sensitive material at the highest levels.

In addition to assessing whether you may present a security risk the aim is to protect you from situations which could potentially present you with a conflict of interest or any other risk or difficulty.

You should expect to be asked about your family background, past experiences, health, sex life, drinking habits, experience (if any) of drug taking, financial affairs, general political views, hobbies, foreign travel and social connections. All these questions are asked for a purpose and you must be as candid as possible in your responses.

If you would feel more comfortable discussing certain matters with a different Vetting Interviewing Officer you should say so and efforts will be made to arrange a second interview. Remember to be honest: it is in your interest that full and accurate information is provided to enable the correct decision to be reached.

How do we make a decision?

We cannot go into the detail on how a vetting decision is made for national security reasons. However, each vetting case is put through a robust and rigorous process before a decision is made on whether to grant or refuse a security clearance.

Will the information obtained during the Vetting process remain confidential?

Vetting confidentiality is extremely important to us and will be maintained in all but the most exceptional cases, where a risk has been identified and a decision taken to 'manage the situation' rather than refuse security clearance. In such cases, those tasked with managing the risk will need the appropriate information in order to do this effectively.

If information provided during the vetting process identifies a threat to life, threat to harm, a criminal matter, or a threat to national security we are obliged to take appropriate action and will do so.

Advice to candidates:

It is important that you are discreet about your application. You should not post about your vetting application on social media and you should strictly limit who you tell.

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