

PSR

Protective Security
Requirements

Getting a national security clearance

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About this guide

This guide is for everyone who is a candidate for a national security clearance application. Being a candidate means you will go through a vetting process.

This guide tells you about the vetting process, so you are prepared. It tells you:

- about the stages in the vetting process
- what your responsibilities and rights are
- what you need to do.

Overview of the vetting process

This section helps you understand what the vetting process is about, so you know why it's important and what to expect.

Why you need a national security clearance

You need a national security clearance if you require access to information, assets, or work locations classified at CONFIDENTIAL, SECRET, OR TOP SECRET for your role.

Your organisation decides what clearance level your role needs based on the highest classification of the information and location you need access to — your 'need to know'. A clearance level is not based on your rank, seniority, or status.

The four security clearance levels are:

1. CONFIDENTIAL
2. SECRET
3. TOP SECRET
4. TOP SECRET SPECIAL.

'Your organisation' means the New Zealand Government organisation that needs you to be vetted for a clearance. They could be:

- your employer — you work for the organisation or they've offered you a job
- a 'sponsoring organisation' — a government organisation that your employer works for.

Vetting protects New Zealand's security

Your organisation must keep New Zealand Government information, assets, and work locations safe. They need to know they can trust you with access that could affect New Zealand's security.

The vetting process helps your organisation decide whether to grant you a clearance.

The New Zealand Security Intelligence Service vets you

You'll be vetted by the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS). They vet all candidates for clearance levels.

Your organisation plays a role in the vetting process

Your organisation decides if you are eligible for vetting and likely to gain a clearance. If you are, they apply to the NZSIS for your vetting. You can't apply for a clearance yourself.

Your organisation:

- might do some of their own security checks if they need to
- helps you with the vetting process
- makes the final decision on what clearance level to grant you
- manages your clearance while you work for them.

Your organisation will give you a vetting contact — a person in your organisation who can help you with the vetting process.

The vetting process has six stages

The six stages of the vetting process are as follows.

1. **Eligible:** Your organisation checks if you are eligible for the vetting process.
2. **Registration:** You register online and consent to the NZSIS doing background checks.
3. **Questionnaire:** You complete an online vetting questionnaire.
4. **Assessment:** The NZSIS assesses your information and checks your background.
5. **Recommendation:** The NZSIS makes a recommendation to your organisation. (The NZSIS will discuss any concerns with you first.)
6. **Decision:** Your organisation decides whether to grant you a clearance and notifies you.



For more on what happens at each stage, read sections 1 to 6 in this guide.

The NZSIS checks your background when they vet you

When the NZSIS vets you, they check and assess your background. The NZSIS will only do this if they have your consent. The higher the clearance level, the more in depth their checks are.

Are you trustworthy and responsible?

The NZSIS looks for evidence that you:

- are loyal, honest, and trustworthy
- will respect your responsibility to keep classified information, assets and work places safe
- will use good judgement in your decisions about classified information, assets and work places, free from any inappropriate influence.

Do you pose any risks?

The NZSIS assesses whether there is a risk you may decide (or be convinced) to use your access inappropriately. They look at the following areas of your life.

- Organisations or people:
 - you are loyal to
 - who may have influence over you

- you are associated with.
- Personal relationships and conduct
- Financial situation
- Alcohol and drug use
- Criminal history and conduct
- Security attitudes and violations
- Mental health situation.

For more details, see: [Security assessment criteria and the adjudicative guidelines](#)

The vetting process can take time

The time it takes from your application to the final decision on your clearance depends on:

- how quickly you and your character referees provide information
- how much checking the NZSIS needs to do on your background
- how many other applications are being processed.

Your responsibilities and rights as a vetting candidate

This section tells you about your responsibilities as a vetting candidate, and your rights in the vetting process.

Your responsibilities

As a candidate, you have the following responsibilities.

Give full and honest details

You must cooperate in the vetting process by giving information fully and honestly when you:

- complete the forms you're asked to fill out
- answer questions in an interview (if you're asked to have one)
- provide personal documents and other evidence to help verify your details
- respond to any questions that come up during the process.

If you're not completely honest, your trustworthiness might be put in doubt. This could affect the decision on whether to grant you a clearance or not.

If you forget to include any information, get in touch with your vetting contact straight away.

Disclose all criminal convictions and diversions

If you have any criminal convictions and diversions, you must declare all of them to the NZSIS, including historic convictions and traffic offences normally exempted by the Clean Slate Act 2004.

Because your clearance is important to national security, the NZSIS has the legal right to ask for your full criminal record under the following Acts:

- [Section 25 of the Human Rights Act 1993](#)
- [Section 19\(3\)\(d\)\(i\) of the Criminal Records \(Clean Slate\) Act 2004.](#)

Your rights

As a candidate, you have the following rights.

Rights under the Human Rights Act

When a job involves New Zealand's national security, Section 25 of the Human Rights Act lets the NZSIS consider some factors that could otherwise be considered discriminatory. The NZSIS will only consider these factors if they are connected to a security concern.

Factors the NZSIS can consider	Factors the NZSIS cannot consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious or ethical beliefs • Political opinion • Mental health • Particular partners or relatives • National origin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender • Sexual orientation • Ethnicity • Physical disability • Marital status • Age (unless you are under 20)

Right to procedural fairness

Procedural fairness means the NZSIS must use a fair and proper process to decide whether to recommend you for a clearance or not.

The NZSIS must consider your whole life and range of experiences — so they assess you accurately as a unique individual.

Security vetting involves checking more of your background than you might have experienced before. The higher the clearance level you are vetted for, the more checking the NZSIS must do. However, the vetting process:

- is designed to respect your privacy and dignity
- does not allow you to be discriminated against
- protects your rights as a candidate as much as possible.

The NZSIS will give you the opportunity to discuss any concerns they have before they make their recommendation to your organisation.

If you believe you haven't been treated fairly, talk to your vetting contact.

More information from protectivesecurity.govt.nz

→ [Procedural fairness — your right to a fair process](#)

Right to make a complaint

After the vetting process ends, you have the right to make a complaint if you're unhappy with:

- how the NZSIS carried out the vetting process
- the recommendation the NZSIS made.

If you decide to make a complaint, it should be made in writing and sent to the Inspector-General by post or email.

Post

Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security
P O Box 5609,
Wellington 6140

Email

enquiries@igis.govt.nz

More information

→ [Complaints](#) — Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security

1. Your organisation checks your eligibility for vetting

This section is about how your organisation checks if you're an eligible candidate for vetting. Checking your eligibility is the first stage in the vetting process.

Your organisation asks you questions

Your organisation will ask you some questions to find out if you're suitable for holding a clearance. You need to answer their questions fully and honestly.

Your organisation might check for risks

Your organisation might do some checks to identify risks that are specific to your organisation. The results of these checks stay with your organisation.

Your organisation checks you meet the eligibility criteria

To be eligible for vetting, you must meet the following three criteria.

1. You are a New Zealand citizen or hold a suitable visa

Normally you must be a New Zealand citizen or hold a suitable visa, such as a Resident class visa. Your citizenship is an indicator of your loyalty to New Zealand.

Your organisation may also have other, tighter rules about the nationalities they can grant clearances to.

New Zealand citizenship has three categories.

Citizen by birth

You are a citizen by birth if:

- you were born in New Zealand, the Cook Islands, Niue, or Tokelau *before* 1 January 2006
- OR
- you were born in New Zealand, the Cook Islands, Niue, or Tokelau *after* 1 January 2006 and at least one parent is either:
 - a New Zealand citizen
 - entitled to be in New Zealand indefinitely, under the Immigration Act 2009
 - entitled to live indefinitely in the Cook Islands, Niue, or Tokelau.

Citizen by descent

You are a citizen by descent if you were born overseas to a parent who is a New Zealand citizen.

Citizen by naturalisation

You are a citizen by naturalisation if you have been granted New Zealand citizenship (and neither of the categories above apply to you).

→ [Check your eligibility for a national security clearance](#)

2. NZSIS can check your background details

The NZSIS must be able to check the details you give about your background. In most cases, backgrounds must be checkable for the required period.

Clearance level	Background checking
CONFIDENTIAL	5 years
SECRET	10 years
TOP SECRET	10 years
TOP SECRET SPECIAL	15 years

If you've spent time living overseas: The NZSIS can check your background when you have spent time living in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, or the USA. If you have spent much of your adult life outside of those countries, talk to your organisation's vetting contact to make sure you meet the checkable background criteria.

You can use our eligibility self-check tool to find out if your background is likely to be checkable.

→ [Check your eligibility for a national security clearance](#)

3. You are likely to pass NZSIS and organisation checks

Your organisation must be confident you will pass the NZSIS vetting checks, and any checks of their own that they decide to do.

If you meet the eligibility criteria

Once your organisation agrees you're eligible and suitable, they apply to the NZSIS for your vetting.

Start preparing for the next stages

The NZSIS will send you an email with links to the online registration form and questionnaire that you need to complete.

The vetting process will be smoother and quicker if you complete the form and questionnaire quickly. You should aim to have these completed within two weeks. Read the next two sections in this guide to understand what information you need for the form and questionnaire, and start gathering it.

Remember you can ask your vetting contact for help if you need it. Your vetting contact is the person in your organisation who can help you with the vetting process.

2. You register online and give consent

This section helps you with the second stage of the vetting process — registering online.

Get your information ready first

If you have all the information you need to register ready, you can complete the form in one go.

You will need your:

- name, date of birth, and home address
- citizenship details — if you weren't born in New Zealand that includes your residency status, and the date you arrived in New Zealand
- employment details — current and past employers.

How long it takes to register: Set aside about 1 hour to complete the registration form.

Follow the instructions in your email from the NZSIS

The NZSIS will send you an email with instructions and your login details for the registration form.

1. Use the details in the email to log in.
2. Follow the instructions on-screen to register.
3. Submit the form when you're finished.

Note: You must fill out the form yourself. You can't ask someone else to do it for you. But if you need help to understand what to do, ask your vetting contact.

When you register, you consent to the vetting process

The NZSIS needs you to consent to the vetting process— you do this when you register. Before you submit the form, read the information on-screen so you know what you're agreeing to.

If you need help to understand any of it, check with your vetting contact before you submit the form.

3. You complete the vetting questionnaire

This section tells you about the third stage in the vetting process — filling out the questionnaire.

The questionnaire gives the NZSIS most of the details they need for vetting you. The higher the clearance level, the more details you need to give.

The sooner you give your information, the sooner the NZSIS can start the vetting process. You should aim to have these completed within two weeks.

Get your information ready first

Collect all the information you need before you go online. You can save information you enter and come back to complete the questionnaire later, but if you have everything ready, you can do it quicker.

You won't need to repeat anything you've already entered into the registration form.

Details you need for the questionnaire

For all clearance levels, you need to provide:

- citizenship and passport details
- current and previous residential addresses
- education records
- employment details — current and previous
- associations — for example, groups, clubs, memberships
- all criminal convictions
- travel history
- referees (if required).

For TOP SECRET SPECIAL, you also need to provide information about your finances, and collect some details from:

- your spouse or partner
- other family members
- people you live with (depending on the clearance level).

Read one of the following guides to help you collect the right information for the questionnaire.

[Getting a Confidential Security Clearance](#)

[Getting a Secret Security Clearance](#)

[Getting a Top Secret Security Clearance](#)

[Getting a Top Secret Special Security Clearance](#)

Who can be a referee?

You need to have referees for a clearance at SECRET level or higher, so you must give contact details for four people who fit the criteria in the following table. You will also need their current contact details,

especially their email address. Your referees can be based overseas if they have access to email and meet the criteria.

Referee number	Type of contact	How long they must have known you
1	Immediate supervisor or manager	At least 2 years
2	Colleague (workmate)	At least 2 years
3	Two friends or colleagues who know you socially	At least 5 years
4		

Tell your referees what to expect

Let your referees know what to expect.

- The NZSIS will contact them by email with details of an online form they need to complete.
- They'll need to fill out the online form — it takes 10 to 20 minutes.
- They may be asked for an interview (by phone or in person).

Who can't be a referee?

You can't use any of these people as referees:

- a current or past partner or spouse
- an immediate relative — a parent, sibling, child, uncle, aunt, first cousin, nephew or niece (including in-laws, step-relatives, and adoptive relatives)
- someone who is related to another of your referees
- a person you share accommodation with
- anyone who works directly under you — a subordinate.

Follow the instructions in your email from the NZSIS

Your email from the NZSIS will have a link to the questionnaire and your login details.

1. Use the details in the email to log in.
2. Follow the instructions on-screen to enter the right information.
3. Submit the questionnaire when you're finished.

4. NZSIS assesses your information and checks your background

The fourth stage in the vetting process is when the NZSIS assesses whether you are suitable for holding a clearance.

NZSIS checks the details you gave in the questionnaire

Once you've submitted the vetting form, the NZSIS:

- studies your information closely
- decides if they need to know anything else
- contacts people and organisations to confirm the details you've given
- calls you if they have questions.

NZSIS may interview you and any referees

Whether you are interviewed or not depends on the clearance level you're a candidate for. Interviews are recorded.

CONFIDENTIAL or SECRET clearance: The NZSIS may contact you to arrange an interview, if they decide they need to. They will brief you on what to expect in the interview.

TOP SECRET or TOP SECRET SPECIAL clearance: The NZSIS will arrange to interview you and brief you on what to expect.

Interviews with your referees

The NZSIS may ask any of your referees for an interview, even if they don't interview you. These interviews are completely confidential between the NZSIS and your referees.

When the NZSIS is assessing information from an interview, they may contact you if they need to get more details.

5. NZSIS gives their recommendation

In stage five of the vetting process, the NZSIS decides whether you are suitable to hold a clearance and makes a recommendation to your organisation.

NZSIS considers your application carefully

When the NZSIS have all the information they need, they:

- think carefully about your application and what they learnt in stage 4
- assess your application against rules and guidelines
- decide what recommendation to make
- write up their recommendation.

NZSIS lets you know if they have concerns

The NZSIS will let you know if they identify any concerns about you, so you can discuss them before they finalise the recommendation to your organisation.

NZSIS sends their recommendation to your organisation

The NZSIS sends their recommendation directly to your organisation.

The NZSIS might recommend that:

- you're suitable for the clearance level your organisation applied for
- you're suitable for the clearance but with some constraints
- your organisation should only grant a clearance at a lower level
- you shouldn't be granted a clearance.

6. Your organisation decides on your clearance

The final stage of vetting is when your organisation decides whether to grant you a clearance, and at what level.

Your organisation considers the NZSIS recommendation

Your organisation looks at the NZSIS recommendation, and the results of any checks they have done to help them decide whether to grant you a clearance.

Then your organisation makes their decision to grant you a clearance or not. The chief executive or head of your organisation must approve that decision to make it final.

You are notified of the clearance decision

When your organisation's chief executive or head has approved the decision, you will be notified.

You have the right to make a complaint if you are not happy with the decision. See the section on page 6 called 'Right to make a complaint' for details.

Your organisation might establish a security risk management plan

If the vetting recommendation from the NZSIS contained recommendations to manage specific concerns, your organisation will work with you to establish a security risk management plan. Following the plan is an important part of staying eligible to hold a clearance.

As part of this process the recommendations may be discussed with your manager and other people in your organisation if required.