

SI1717

# Service Vetting

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This Service Instruction outlines the various forms of vetting which apply to Police Officers, Student Officers, Police Staff and Non Police Personnel and is aligned to the College of Policing Vetting Code of Practice and the Vetting Authorised Professional Practice May 2025.

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## 1. Aim

As detailed in the College of Policing Vetting Code of Practice, everyone in Policing must maintain the highest ethical and professional standards, and must act with the utmost integrity. This is crucial in ensuring that Public trust and confidence in the Service is maintained.

It is essential that the Public is confident that Police vetting processes are effective in identifying those who pose a potential risk to others, or who are otherwise unsuitable for working within the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

It is also imperative that those working in Policing are also able to maintain the trust and confidence of the Chief Constable to perform their role in delivering Policing services.

Vetting is an integral part of the PSNI's framework of ethics and professional standards. Vetting forms part of a wider security regime, rather than being used in isolation. It assists with identifying individuals who are unsuitable to work in the Police Service, and have access to Police assets.

A thorough and effective vetting regime is an important component in considering an individual's suitability to work in Policing. An assessment of an individual's integrity, professionalism and demonstration of their expected character indicates whether they will achieve and maintain the required level of vetting clearance. This helps to ensure Public trust and confidence in those working in Policing to deliver a Public service.

Vetting exists to protect the Police Service's integrity, reputation, assets and data from persons and organisations intent on or capable of disrupting the integrity, security or values of the PSNI. It is the aim of the Police Service, via the Service Vetting Unit (SVU), to provide an appropriate level of assurance as to the trustworthiness, integrity and reliability of all Police Officers, Student Officers, Police Staff and Non-Police Personnel (NPP) working for or on behalf of the Service.

## 2. Service Vetting Procedures

There are two distinct vetting regimes in Policing:

- 1) Police Vetting; and

2) National Security Vetting (NSV) – which has 3 levels:

- Counter Terrorist Check, (CTC);
- Security Check, (SC); and
- Developed Vetting, (DV).

There is some commonality between the threats posed to Police assets and to Government assets, but there are differences.

The two regimes, therefore, have different decision-making criteria. Vetting enquiries involved under each regime draw on distinct information sources.

### 3. Police Vetting

There are three levels of Police Vetting applicable to the PSNI:

- Non-Police Personnel Vetting;
- Recruitment Vetting (RV); and
- In-Service Vetting (ISV) / Management Vetting (MV).

Police vetting levels are applied to all individuals who require unsupervised access to Police assets (including

information, systems or premises). Some individuals also require access to Government Security Classification (GSC) information. Where this is the case, the appropriate level of National Security Vetting (NSV) is applied.

Individuals who are not required to have unsupervised access to Police information, systems or premises do not require Police vetting clearance.

Police Vetting considers wider and more comprehensive threats than NSV, therefore the decision in respect of a Police Vetting clearance should be completed before commencing National Security Vetting.

### 4. Police Vetting Levels

#### Recruit Vetting

The minimum level of vetting for all Police Officers, Student Officers and Police Staff (RV), along with CTC. This allows unsupervised access to Police assets, estates and information and remains in place for 10 years after which it needs renewed.

If a post is determined to require NSV clearance at SC or DV level, the post will

also be subjected to ISV / MV clearance prior to commencing NSV.

Further information on Recruit Vetting is available on the [Join PSNI | Recruitment | Police Service of Northern Ireland](#).

Where 12 months or more have passed, anyone changing employment group, such as Police Officers retiring and re-joining as Police Staff, or members of Police Staff joining as Police Officers, Police Staff applying for externally advertised posts will also be subject to a vetting health check. This can only be done if their original clearance is in date. Where clearance has expired, a new application should be submitted.

The above also applies if the level of vetting clearance for the new role is comparable to that already held. Where a higher level of vetting clearance is required, the individual should be re-vetted at the appropriate level.

**Recruit Vetting** clearance, preceded by authentication, allows regular access to Police assets up to **OFFICIAL – SENSITIVE** and occasional access to **SECRET**.

## **In-Service Vetting / Management Vetting**

This is sometimes known as Police Vetting. The purpose of this level of vetting is to provide additional assurance in relation to the integrity, reliability and trustworthiness of individuals serving in sensitive posts who have decision making responsibilities and / or have access to Police premises, information, intelligence, financial or operational assets, where the compromise of those assets would cause serious damage to the Police Service.

Serious damage is defined as frustrating the prevention and detection of serious, organised or major crime, frustrating the apprehension or prosecution of such offenders, causing significant financial loss to the PSNI, unlawful or inappropriate awarding of contracts, otherwise adversely affecting the operational capability, reputation or security of the PSNI.

Clearance is a requirement for service in all posts requiring that level of clearance, irrespective of whether post holders have access to Police or Government classified assets.

## **Non Police Personal (NPP)**

All individuals who are not directly employed by, or appointed to, the PSNI

and who require unsupervised access to Police premises, systems, information or other assets must be vetted to the appropriate level.

Under no circumstances can the requirement for Police Vetting be negated by a clearance conducted under any other vetting regime.

In respect of NPP, information on the vetting appeals process can be provided on request from your Sponsor.

## 5. National Security Vetting

National Security Vetting (NSV) is specifically required for access to Government assets. NSV has been designed to counter threats to Government assets and therefore offers very limited assurance in respect of Police assets. This is due to the limited information sources that are interrogated during the NSV process compared to Police vetting, as well as the limited reference to Police databases and distinct decision-making process. Police vetting has been designed to counter a wider threat profile, with a

number of identified threats that are unique to law enforcement.

NSV in isolation does not enable any access to Police assets.

NSV should only be sought where the criteria set out below is met.

The requirements of NSV levels are contained in the [Cabinet Office Security Policy Framework](#) (SPF).

Where a person requires SC or DV clearance, they must also be vetted to the appropriate Police vetting level. The relevant level of Police vetting must be cleared before starting NSV clearance.

## 6. Transferees

PSNI do not currently have a transferee policy and any new Police Personnel at all ranks and grades are subject to RV and the appropriate NSV prior to appointment.

## 7. Re-joiners

Where Police Officers, Student Officers and Police Staff have left the PSNI less than 12 months and they apply to re-join

their previous clearance can be reinstated after a vetting health check has been completed and clearance has been granted.

## 8. Vetting / Misconduct

Where there are misconduct proceedings initiated against any Police Officer, Student Officer or member of Police Staff, their vetting status will be assessed at that time and may result in their clearance being suspended until the outcome of the misconduct proceedings.

The review of Police Officer vetting will be carried out in conjunction with any Duty Status Report (DSR) prepared by Discipline Branch.

The review of Police Staff vetting will be carried out in conjunction with HR Service lead G7 for misconduct.

Misconduct proceedings and a subsequent review of vetting clearance are different processes that, although closely related, are distinct.

Misconduct Regulations take primacy and a vetting review is not in lieu of misconduct proceedings or a route to subvert the protections afforded through misconduct proceedings.

When a misconduct investigation or proceedings has been initiated, or are ongoing, any risk posed by a Police Officer, Student Officer or Police Staff member needs to be effectively managed through restrictions or suspension. There is therefore no requirement to review vetting during this period with the exception of Police Officer and Police Staff who hold SC or DV National Security clearance. In these cases the Service Vetting Unit will assess any risk and this will form part of the DSR or as part of the consultation and assessment with HR in respect of Police Staff.

A further vetting review will follow the conclusion of disciplinary proceedings which result in any sanction other than dismissal. A misconduct allegation may have no case to answer following a misconduct investigation or proceeding.

However regardless of the outcome a focused vetting review may be carried out.

The vetting review considers the conduct that resulted in the initiation of misconduct proceedings. This is in the wider context of the individual's suitability to hold a vetting clearance. This is a holistic assessment of all information known, including that considered in prior vetting assessments.

A vetting review following misconduct can result in the following:

- Vetting clearance outcomes clearance granted;
- Clearance granted with conditions;
- Clearance downgraded with or without conditions; or
- Clearance declined or withdrawn. If vetting is withdrawn there is an appeal process.

## 9. Return after Suspension / Secondment

Where Police Officers, Student Officers or Police Staff have been suspended / seconded for less than 12 months; clearance can be reinstated after a vetting health check has been completed and clearance has been granted.

A full vetting check must be conducted on all Police Officers, Student Officers and Police Staff who have been suspended or seconded for more than 12 months. This can also include individuals who have had an extended period of absence.

If vetting checks reveal adverse information, Professional Standards and / or HR will be notified of any potential breach of the regulations or conditions of service for appropriate action to be taken.

The re-vetting process can also result in the Police Officers, Student Officers or a member of Police Staff not attaining the appropriate level of clearance to return to duty.

The PSNI can reserve the right to require a full re-vetting on any individuals returning to service as required.

## 10. Career Break

Police Officers, Student Officers and Police Staff who avail of a career break of more than 12 months will be required to be re-vetted to the appropriate level for the post they will be returning too.

Police Officers, Student Officers and Police Staff are required to advise their Line Management and HR, at least three months prior to their return in order that the appropriate level of vetting can be completed.

## 11. Outcome of Vetting

As a result of vetting there may be occasions when a Police Officer or member of Police Staff fails RV which is the minimum level of vetting for all Police Personnel. If this is the case they will be deemed as having no level of clearance and therefore subject to the appropriate performance regulations.

## 12. Appeals

Whenever vetting clearance is declined, granted with conditions or withdrawn, the individual will have the right to appeal through a process that is independent of the original decision.

The appeal process is able to consider all options. It may conclude any option that it considers reasonable and proportionate, including refusal and removal of any clearance.

The individual will have a right to be provided with a rationale for any vetting appeal decision which should satisfactorily explain the reasons unless exemptions apply.

Where NSV clearance is withdrawn or not approved by the PSNI, individuals can appeal to the [Security Vetting Appeals Panel](#) (SVAP).

The internal appeal process must be exhausted before appeal to SVAP is available.

Details of the NSV appeal process will be made available to individuals as part of the NSV appeal process.

## 13. Review of Vetting Clearances

As a result of promotion, transfer or move to a new role that does not require a higher level of National Security Vetting. SVU will review the vetting status and downgrade the NSV clearance to the appropriate level for the role.

This may also occur if an existing role is reviewed and it is decided that the clearance requirement has changed from:

- Developed Vetting to Security Check / Counter Terrorist Check; or
- Security Check to Counter Terrorist Checked.

If an individual moves within a 12 month window to a post that requires a higher level of vetting, clearance can be reviewed and upgraded after the appropriate checks have been carried out.

## **14. Risk Management**

### **Agreements**

As part of the vetting process there may be occasions when Police Officers or Police Staff and Non-Police Personnel are asked to enter into a Risk Management Agreement (RMA).

## **Appendix A – Contact Us**

### **Service Instruction Author**

Professional Standards

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