

FOI DOF/2025-0687

Request

Can you please provide me with details of the appeals process including timeframes for Security Clearance (SC) checks for

- I) external applicants and
- II) applicants who are existing staff.

DoF response

I can confirm the Department holds some of the information requested.

There is no set timeframe for Security Check (SC) clearances as each case is different and relies on 3rd party information. More information on security clearance can be publicly found at [SC - Guidance Pack for Applicants - GOV.UK](#)

External applicants

HRConnect provide the operational side of recruitment HR for the NICS. Candidates who fail security clearance, have the right of appeal and this is done through HRConnect via email. NICS HR are the decision makers so the appeal will be heard by a NICS HR panel.

External candidates have the right to appeal a security vetting decision, offering any mitigation or further information.

A security clearance through HRConnect is for an appointment/promotion so candidates will appeal immediately. There is no actual timeline for an appeal, but it would be expected to be within 10 days.

All candidates are treated the same with regards to security clearance.

I can confirm there is a *Security Vetting Policy and Related Appeals Procedures Policy* for all existing employees.

Internal NICS Appeals Process (where clearance is refused/withdrawn on National Security grounds)

Internal Appeals Process

- Appeal can be submitted if security clearance refused/withdrawn by the Departmental Security Officer based on adverse information in respect of National Security.
- Appeals should be submitted within 10 working days of decision letter; late appeals only considered in exceptional cases.
- Grounds for appeal must be clearly stated.
- Appeal is reviewed by officer at least one grade higher than the person who took the original decision and who was not involved in the original decision.
- Appeal meeting held normally within 10 working days of receipt; may extend in exceptional cases.
- Individual may bring Trade Union representative or colleague; special requirements must be notified.
- Rescheduling should not delay process beyond 5 additional working days.
- If no appeal is made, Department may proceed with advised actions.

Security Vetting Appeals Panel

- Available after internal appeal if decision upheld; appeal within 10 days of notice.
- The Panel is only available to existing members of staff, employed NI department staff or Executive Agency employees vetted at CTC, SC, or DV levels.
- Panel advises head of organisation; can recommend stands or security clearance should be approved or restored.
- Panel may comment on vetting procedures and internal appeals adequacy.
- Final decision rests with head of organisation.
- Guidance provided by DSO if clearance refusal/withdrawal upheld.

Access to Panel

- Appeal process is managed by Cabinet Office Government Security Secretariat.
- Departments are responsible for drawing the attention of individuals to the existence of the Panel when informing them of the arrangements for the internal appeals process. It is the responsibility of the Secretariat to explain the Panel's procedures to these individuals.
- Individuals must register their intention to appeal in writing within 28 days of internal appeal result.

- Contact: Government Security Secretariat, National Security Secretariat, Cabinet Office, Room 335, 70 Whitehall, London SW1A 2AS.

Annex B - Internal Reviews

An Internal Review request examines the response based on applied exemptions, search adequacy, or response timeliness.

It is not the following, which will be treated as specified:

- Questions asking for clarification on information provided: Will be treated as part of the original FOI request.
- Additional questions about the information in the response: Will be treated as a new FOI request.
- Questions about the subject not related to the original request: Will be treated as new FOI request.
- Questions regarding how a service operates or why a decision was made: Will be treated as normal business and responded to accordingly.
- Complaints or concerns raised in response to information provided: Will be treated in line with relevant complaints procedure.

To make an Internal Review request:

- **Clearly state:** That you want an internal review of a previous FOI response and provide the necessary details.
- **Follow the timeline:** Be sure to submit your request within 40 working days of receiving the original response. If the Department has not responded at all, you have 40 working days after the original 20-day response period has passed.
- **Wait for a response:** The review is typically completed within 20 working days but can take up to 40 working days in exceptional circumstances. The Department should inform you of any delays.

What the review includes

- A fresh decision based on a reconsideration of all relevant factors.
- An assessment of whether the request was handled correctly and if exemptions were applied appropriately.
- The review will be conducted by someone who was not involved in the original decision.

If you wish to request an internal review, please email foi@finance-ni.gov.uk or write to FOI/EIR Team, Department of Finance, 2nd Floor, Craigantlet Buildings, Stoney Road, Belfast, BT4 3SX.