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(by email)

During Lord O'Donnell's evidence session on 14 May 2012, in response to questions about whether previous holders of Mr Coulson's post had DV (Developed Vetting), he agreed to provide "information on precisely when previous occupants of the office were DVd." I am replying as I am the official responsible within the Cabinet Office for security vetting of Cabinet Office staff.

I am replying in respect of both Directors of Communication and PMs' official spokesmen (6 postholders between January 1996 and May 2010). Three previous holders of the posts (civil servants) already had DV granted by their previous department on taking up their post in No10. Of the others, two (one special adviser and one civil servant) had DV granted around 3 months after taking up post and one (special adviser) had DV granted just over 7 months after taking up post.

There are two categories of clearance for access to sensitive national security information: SC (Security Check) and DV (Developed Vetting).

SC allows long-term, frequent access to secret material, or occasional/controlled access to top secret material. Staff who have long-term, frequent/uncontrolled access to top secret material must undergo DV.

Therefore, in practice staff who are undergoing DV will, provided they hold SC, be able to have occasional/controlled access to top secret material.

More generally, special advisers (and other civil servants) around Whitehall are DVd only where it is justified for business reasons, and this level of clearance is exceptional.

