

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates 26 May-6 June 2014

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.1 Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: Security clearances for ministerial staff

Senator: Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Question reference number: 58

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Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 11 July 2014

Number of pages: 2

Question:

Senator WONG: Can I just give you the opportunity to reconsider your evidence. I have just found—or one of my very good staff has just found—the employment form for MOPS staff, in which the 'Notice to prospective staff of a minister or parliamentary secretary' says:

If you are to be employed by a Minister or Parliamentary Secretary either in a personal or electorate staff position, it is a condition of your employment that you obtain and maintain a Negative Vetting 2 security clearance.

I am reading from "Employing an ongoing employee under the Commonwealth Members of Parliament Staff Enterprise Agreement 2012–2015". Your evidence, I think, perhaps differed from that. I think this says that every staff member must have a negative vetting 2 security clearance.

Ms Cross: We will check that for you. That seems very high for some of the roles. It is not consistent with our understanding but we may be mistaken.

Senator WONG: Can you assure me that any prime ministerial staff member that attends cabinet or cabinet committee meetings has a negative vetting 2 security clearance?

Ms Cross: Again, I think we would need to take that on notice. They would have the security clearance that is appropriate for the item they are attending for. But we will take on notice whether that is always negative 2.

Senator WONG: Does the Prime Minister's chief of staff have the relevant security clearance—negative vetting 2?

Ms Cross: We will have to take that on notice to see exactly what

Senator WONG: You cannot tell me whether the Prime Minister's chief of staff—

Ms Cross: I would assume that she has a very high clearance. But I would like to check what level that is.

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Dr McCarthy: It is my understanding that the Prime Minister's chief of staff has the required level of clearance, but we will double-check.

Senator WONG: Does the Prime Minister's chief of staff have a positive vetting clearance; I think that was the next level up.

Dr McCarthy: We will check that for you.

Answer:

Terms and conditions for ministerial staff are a matter for the Department of Finance. The Department of Finance document titled *Employing an Ongoing Employee under the Commonwealth Members of Parliament Staff Enterprise Agreement 2012–2015* states:

“Notice to prospective staff of a minister or parliamentary secretary:
If you are to be employed by a Minister or Parliamentary Secretary either in a personal or electorate staff position, it is a condition of your employment that you obtain and maintain a Negative Vetting 2 security clearance.”

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has not previously commented on the level of an individual's security clearance and does not propose to do so in this case. Access to all information within the Prime Minister's Office is granted in accordance with Protective Security Policy Framework.

The Department notes that at page 58 of the Hansard for Tuesday 27 May 2014 the Minister, Senator the Hon Eric Abetz, stated “I can indicate that the Prime Minister's chief of staff has a positive vetting clearance”.