



Keeping Safe

Adult Safeguarding in Sport

AccessNI Guidance



Introduction

Sporting organisations working with adults need to apply good safeguarding practice and one important element of this is having robust recruitment and selection procedures. Before recruiting for a post, the job/role description must be drawn up outlining the purpose, scope, responsibilities and tasks required, and it is at this point that the organisation must consider if the post is eligible for an AccessNI check. If there is eligibility the organisation should make this known in their recruitment material as this may prevent unsuitable people from applying.

The AccessNI check should be the final stage of the recruitment process, the preferred applicant should be offered the post subject to the result of the check. This guidance will familiarise sporting organisations with the AccessNI registration process, the types of checks available, the information they disclose, and the definitions of regulated activity (current and former).

AccessNI

AccessNI is the system for the disclosure of an individual's criminal history to help organisations make safer recruitment decisions. It was established by the Northern Ireland Office as a result of the introduction in Northern Ireland of Part V of the Police Act 1997. Since then AccessNI has moved under the Department of Justice.

Registration with AccessNI

Sporting organisations can become a 'Registered Body' with AccessNI and process applications. Registered Bodies must submit over 20 applications a year to maintain their status. To become a Registered Body, an appropriate person must complete an online registration form to create a nidirect account. When they activate the account, they can apply to register the organisation. If approved, this person will then become known as the Lead Signatory and will be the first point of contact for AccessNI. They must be over 18, must never have been removed from the AccessNI register and will be checked for any criminal record. The registration process will cost £195.

Once registered, the Lead Signatory may appoint Counter Signatories (who must also create a nidirect account and register with AccessNI) to assist in applying for checks and receiving disclosure certificates. A charge of £13 will be made for each Counter Signatory application. Counter Signatories must also be aged 18 or over and be checked for any criminal record before they can manage applications. To register visit: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/apply-online-become-registered-body>.

Organisations who are not Registered Bodies can use the services of an organisation which has already registered with AccessNI and can deliver all of the necessary services on their behalf - an Umbrella Body. An Umbrella Body can be open, providing disclosure services to different types of organisations in different regions, or closed, providing disclosure services to one sector or in one geographical area. Most Umbrella Bodies charge a fee for provision of the service. Many of the National Governing Bodies act as Umbrella Bodies.

For more information visit: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/accessni-umbrella-bodies>.

Volunteer Now acts as an Umbrella Body for volunteer involving non statutory and nonprofit making organisations in Northern Ireland.

For more information visit:

<https://www.volunteernow.co.uk/training/safeguarding/umbrella-access-ni-service/>

Age of applicants

AccessNI will not accept applications for checks where the individual is not aged 16 or over on the day the application was submitted.

Types of AccessNI checks and the information disclosed

There are different types of checks available through AccessNI, each returning different levels of information on the disclosure certificate. Individuals can apply directly to AccessNI using the appropriate application form to obtain a Basic check. Standard and Enhanced checks can only be accessed through Registered/Umbrella Bodies. Checks with most relevance to sporting organisations will be basic and enhanced.

Enhanced check

An enhanced check discloses spent and unspent convictions, informed warnings, cautions, diversionary youth conferences (all subject to filtering – see page 4) and information held by the police that is relevant to the role applied for. For positions which are deemed 'regulated activity' (see page 7) the check also discloses information held by the Disclosure and Barring Service.

In order to process any type of check the individual must create an nidirect account. For an Enhanced Check the individual needs to apply via an AccessNI-registered organisation. The organisation that has asked the individual to get the check must give them a personal identification number (PIN) before they can apply.

Basic check

Where there is no eligibility for an Enhanced Check a Basic Check can be undertaken. Basic Check discloses any unspent convictions you have, or confirms that no unspent convictions were found. Sporting organisations may ask applicants to obtain a Basic Check as part of the recruitment process, and reimburse the cost. Alternatively, the organisation can become a Registered Body with Access NI to process Basic Check applications on behalf of applicants.

For more information visit:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/apply-online-basic-check>

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/apply-online-enhanced-check-through-registered-body>

Level of check	Unspent Convictions	Spent Convictions	Barred Lists	Relevant police information	Caution
Basic	Yes	No	No	No	No
Enhanced	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

disclosed:

For more information on the types of criminal record information visit:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/information-disclosed-in-a-criminal-record-check>

Filtering

Sometimes details of an individual's criminal record will not appear on their disclosure certificate. They are 'filtered' from Enhanced checks because they are old and/or minor. The individual does not have to tell a prospective employer/organisation about these convictions and/or cautions because they are 'protected'.

Some types of offences will always be disclosed including those which are serious, relate to sexual or violent offending or are relevant in the context of safeguarding. These are known as 'specified offences'. It would never be appropriate to filter such offences regardless of when they took place. The following convictions and/or cautions are not filtered:

- a conviction or caution, diversionary youth conference or informed warning for a specified offence
- a conviction resulting in a custodial sentence (including a suspended sentence)
- a conviction for trying to commit a specified offence
- a conviction for encouraging or helping someone else commit a specified offence

A full list of specified offences can be found here:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/accessni-list-specified-offences>

For further information on filtering visit the AccessNI website:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/accessni-criminal-record-checks/apply-accessni-check>

For Enhanced Disclosures only, the Police may decide to include information about cautions and/or convictions that have been filtered by AccessNI on the basis that they 'reasonably believe to be relevant and ought to be disclosed'. If this is applied, the information will appear in the Police information section of the certificate rather than in the convictions section.

As there have been changes made to the Rehabilitation of Offenders legislation to introduce the filtering scheme, organisations can no longer legally ask applicants to declare all convictions, even in cases where an Enhanced Disclosure will be carried out. Organisations may now only ask applicants to declare any convictions that are not subject to filtering.

AccessNI have provided the following example of an appropriate pre-employment question which employers may wish to use: 'Do you have any convictions that are not 'protected' (as defined by the Rehabilitation of Offenders (Exceptions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1979, as amended in 2014)?'

Making a dispute with Access NI

An individual can ask the Independent Monitor (IM) to review police information on their Enhanced certificate where they believe it is inaccurate or it is not relevant for the purpose for which the certificate was sought (that is the type of work set out on the application) or it ought not to have been included in the certificate. Applicants are required to complete the new Certificate Dispute Form (CDF).

This form can be found at: www.nidirect.gov.uk/accessni-advice-complaints-and-disputes.

AccessNI will continue to inform Registered Bodies if an individual has sought such an appeal, but only where the applicant has given permission on their Certificate Dispute Form for AccessNI to do so.

Costs of Access NI Checks

AccessNI charges a fee for each criminal record check:

- Basic Check £16
- Enhanced Check £32

Volunteers

For AccessNI purposes, the definition of a volunteer is set out in legislation as follows:

"a person engaged, or to be engaged, in an activity for a non-profit organisation or person which involves spending time unpaid (except for travel and other approved out-of-pocket expenses) doing something which amounts to a benefit to some third party other than, or in addition to, a close relative."

Regulated Activity

The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007, as amended by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 defines 'regulated activity' with adults. Regulated activity is work which a barred person must not undertake. It is a criminal offence for a barred person to seek or undertake regulated activity, and it is an offence for organisations to 'knowingly employ' a staff member or involve a volunteer in regulated activity if they are barred.

If a post meets the definition of regulated activity, there is eligibility for an Enhanced Disclosure with Barred List Check on the preferred candidate prior to confirming an offer of work/volunteering. If not barred, the organisation must use its discretion regarding any criminal history information which may be contained on the Disclosure certificate. Regulated activity continues to exclude any activity carried out in the course of family relationships, and personal, non-commercial relationships.



Definition of regulated activity relating to Adults

There are six categories of workers who fall into the definition of regulated activity relating to adults. Those who provide:

1. Health care

Regulated health care professionals or those acting under the direction or supervision of a health care professional, for example, doctors, nurses, health care assistants, physiotherapists.

2. Personal care

Assistance with washing, dressing, eating, drinking and toileting, or teaching someone to do one of these tasks.

3. Social work

Provision of social work by a social care worker which is required in connection with any health services or social services.

4. Assistance with general household matters

Includes helping a person with their cash, paying bills or carrying out shopping on their behalf because of their age, illness or disability.

5. Assistance in the conduct of a person's own affairs

Including enduring power of attorney, or deputies appointed under the Mental Health Order (NI) or Social Security Administration (NI) Act 1992.

6. Conveying

Conveying adults because of age, illness or disability to, from or between places where they received healthcare, personal care or social work.

There is no requirement for a person to do any of the identified activities a certain number of times before they are engaging in regulated activity.

Note: the day to day line manager/supervisor of an individual in regulated activity is also in regulated activity.

It is unlikely that sporting organisations will have staff and volunteers working in regulated activity with adults.

Former definition of regulated activity relating to 'Vulnerable Adults' (pre 2012)

Posts which are outside the scope of the current definition of regulated activity, but which involve a significant degree of contact may meet the former definition of regulated activity. These roles are eligible for an Enhanced Disclosure without Barred List Check.

Former regulated activity for 'vulnerable adults' includes:

- Undertaking activity, which is of a specified nature, which includes **teaching, training, instructing, caring for, supervising**, providing advice or guidance, providing treatment or therapy, transport, moderating a chat room;
- Regulated activity is activity which takes place in a specified place, and there is the opportunity for contact with a vulnerable person;
- Certain defined positions of responsibility for example a school governor, director of social services, trustees of certain charities;
- Manager/supervisor of worker in regulated activity.

The activity must take place on a frequent (once per week or more) or intensive (four or more days in any 30 day period or overnight) basis.

A vulnerable adult is defined in Article 3 of the SVG Order as someone who has attained the age of 18 and:

- is in residential accommodation;
- receives domiciliary care;
- receives any form of health care (treatment, therapy, palliative care);
- is detained in lawful custody;
- is under the supervision of a probation officer;
- receives a prescribed welfare service (supporting people);
- **receives service/takes part in activity provided to specified persons** (with any form of disability, age-specific needs, prescribed physical or mental health problem)
- is a Direct Payments recipient;
- requires assistance in the conduct of his own affairs.

Some roles within sporting organisations may fall under the former definition of regulated activity, for example, a coach supervising adults with disabilities on a weekly basis.

Referees

With regards to referee roles with 'vulnerable adults', there is eligibility for an Enhanced Disclosure without Barred List Check where the following conditions are met:

- the referee is required to provide teaching/coaching to the vulnerable adult groups (it is not purely referee duties)
- the members of the team all meet the definition of a 'vulnerable adult'
- the frequency is met - once a week or more, or 4 or more days in a 30 day period.

Trustees

Trustees of sporting organisations which work solely with 'vulnerable adults' are also eligible for an Enhanced Disclosure without Barred List Check.



The Disclosure and Barring Service

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) is responsible for maintaining the list of individuals barred from engaging in regulated activity with children and/or adults across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Organisations who have permanently removed an individual from regulated activity (or would have done had the employee/volunteer not left) because of harm or risk of harm to vulnerable groups must refer this individual to the DBS who will consider whether the person should be placed on a Barred list. More information on the DBS referral criteria and process is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dbs-referrals-guidance--2#barring-and-referral-guidance>

Further Information

Access NI

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/accessni-criminal-record-checks/apply-accessni-check>

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>

Adult Safeguarding in Sport Guidance

<https://www.volunteernow.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Adult-safeguarding-standards-2026.pdf>

Adult Safeguarding in Sports Resource Pack

Adult Safeguarding In Sports Service: Volunteer Now, 02890232020

<https://www.volunteernow.co.uk/training/safeguarding/adult-safeguarding-in-sport-service/>

