

Volunteers and DBS checks

All organisations must ensure that staff, volunteers and trustees are suitable and legally allowed to carry out their roles, which can include (if legally required) criminal records. DBS (The Disclosure and Barring Service) processes all criminal record checks in England and Wales. *To note the minimum age to get a DBS check is 16 years.*

This sheet is purely good practice guidance - an overview of DBS checks and sharing of information to consider in your decision making. We don't give decisions or legal advice if a DBS is required and if so what level, and/or about your DBS policies and procedures.

Does the role need a DBS check?

To decide, look at what the role involves. DBS checks are based on the *activities* someone does – not just the role title.

You can only request an Enhanced or Standard DBS check if the law allows it for that role. The level of check depends on whether the person will be doing regulated activities and are volunteering directly with children and/or adults at risk and how often.

To establish if a volunteer role needs a DBS check, and if so what level - you will need to look at the activities and potential risks. This can include considering the following questions as well carrying out a risk assessment:

- What will the volunteer role will be doing?
- What's the level of contact they have with children and/or adults at risk?
- What level of supervision the volunteer role will have?*
- How often they will be volunteering in their role?
- Where they will be volunteering?

** To note that as of 1 September 2026 the supervision exemption for regulated activity with children was removed. [GOV.UK has information about what this change of definition means](#)

Also consider:

- Can anything be put in place to mitigate any potential risks assessed and/or no longer requires a DBS check - for example the role can be done with others/supervised or do alternative activities.
- Do you have DBS checks included within your policies and procedures for example safeguarding, volunteer recruitment, ex-offenders' recruitment, dealing appropriately to disclosures. These enable you to make informed decisions against the [Governments DBS eligibility guidance](#) and your organisations procedures and policies.

There is no eligibility requirement for a Basic DBS check, however it doesn't mean that all roles not requiring an Enhanced or Standard DBS automatically have a Basic check. A risk assessment and other factors already mentioned in this guidance still need consideration.

Further information:

- You may wish to take a look at the [DBS Wizard Tool](#) Please note we have heard feedback that this is more general and doesn't go in-depth into details/activities.

- NCVO also has some useful help and guidance on their website:
 - [Types of DBS check](#)
 - [Overview of DBS checks for staff and volunteers](#)
- [Unlock](#) supports and advocates for people with criminal records England and Wales and has lots of information and advice

Registering to process DBS checks

If your organisation does:

- More than 100 checks a year - can register with DBS and do them directly. This is a charged-for service.
- Fewer than 100 checks a year - can use an umbrella body with associated costs. The Disclosure and Barring Service has a [list of umbrella bodies](#) or below are organisations suggested previously via our members e-list or other Volunteer Centres:
 - Ucheck www.ucheck.co.uk
 - Atlantic www.atlanticdata.co.uk
 - Due Diligence Checking www.ddc.uk.net
 - Swiftcheck Swift Check - www.swiftdb.co.uk
 - Thirtyone: Eight www.thirtyoneeight.org

Person has lived outside the UK

If someone has lived overseas within the last five years, you can still carry out the appropriate UK DBS check, but a DBS certificate will only show information held on UK police records and may not cover the period they spent overseas. An organisation should request details of the countries and dates, then consider whether an overseas criminal record check is needed alongside the UK DBS check.

For volunteer roles, good practice is to:

- Obtain the relevant DBS check for the role (if the role is eligible).
- Ask the volunteer to obtain a criminal record check, police certificate, or certificate of good conduct from the country (or countries) where they lived. The process varies by country, and GOV.UK provides guidance on how to obtain these certificates.
- To risk assess any gaps in information where an overseas check is not available or cannot reasonably be obtained, particularly for roles involving children or vulnerable adults.

Further information:

- [The Home Office has guidance on these types of checks](#)
- The DBS has a [short video](#) including the information that it's up to the organisation to decide whether to process this type of check.

Asylum Seekers and Refugees

DBS checks can be requested for anyone who has a UK address. The process and establishing whether they have the right documents can be more complicated as they will be following DBS route one and will need to have one of the following documents and two further documents from group 1, 2a or 2b to avoid the fingerprint route:

- A Biometric residence permit – anyone granted Leave to remain from 2012 will have one
- A valid passport – Naturalised Citizens may have one. Travel Documents are not accepted
- A UK Driving licence with photo card and counterpart (full or provisional)

If they do not have these documents the fingerprint route needs to be followed. This involves having fingerprints taken at a local police station and can take longer. People may find this an intrusive and intimidating process that they want to avoid.

For the five years address history they may along with British homeless people, travellers etc. have gaps in this and the DBS requires completion of addresses without gaps. If there are periods of time when a person had no 'fixed address/abode' this needs to be written in the address history. The DBS only checks the UK criminal record database so for Asylum Seekers and Refugees the overseas addresses can be shown as 'Overseas from Date from – Date to'.

[Sheffield Volunteer Centre has further information about DBS checks for Asylum Seeker and how to complete the DBS application form](#)

DBS Update Service

The [DBS update Service](#) is an online subscription that lets a person keep their DBS certificates update to date and allows organisations (with the persons consent) to check a certificate online (The check required must be the same type and level)

This service is free for volunteers and can apply while they are waiting for the DBS to be processed. There is a limited time frame to apply, starting from when the process begins and extending a set number of days after they receive their certificate.

