



# AccessNI Newsletter

Issue 40: Summer 2023



## Welcome to the Summer 2023 edition of the AccessNI Newsletter.

### Introduction

Welcome to the summer 2023 edition of the AccessNI Newsletter. We have changed the design of the Newsletter to enhance readability and include more white space – we hope you like it.

As ever, there are a few articles in the Newsletter providing information to help you get the most out of the AccessNI service – I would encourage you to take a few minutes to read through these. Also included in this Newsletter are some of the high level results from our recent customer survey. We are very pleased to have attained a response rate of 37% and I would like to take this opportunity to thank those Lead Signatories who took the time to complete the survey. On the whole, the survey results are very encouraging and we are grateful to you for the positive marks and comments received but we do not rest on our laurels as we continue to strive to develop affordable ways of improving various aspects of our service. Some enhancements to our systems that we are working on and hope to roll-out later this year include an upload facility for ID documentation (subject to the outcome

of a pilot exercise with Basic applications) and extending Digital Certificates to include criminal history information. We also continue to work closely with the Disclosure and Barring Service to ensure that AccessNI customers will be able to join a new and enhanced Update Service, although at this point in time I cannot provide any sense of the timeframes involved here.

We continue to be very busy in AccessNI, receiving higher volumes of applications than ever. I'm pleased to report that our performance continues to be strong, albeit with occasional delays in some areas, particularly if cases are referred to police. But please be assured that we are doing all we can to pick up the pace of processing all checks.

I do hope that you find something of interest in this Newsletter – we'd welcome any feedback on the presentation or content, or any ideas you might care to share on future articles.

Thank you, and I hope you have restful and peaceful summer.

**Brian Thomson**  
General Manager, AccessNI

# Expired Passports and Driving Licences



## ID DOCUMENTATION – EXPIRED PASSPORTS AND DRIVING LICENCES

During Covid, AccessNI issued notifications to advise that expired passports and driving licences were acceptable for a specific period of time.

Expired passports and driving licences can no longer be provided as acceptable forms of identity.

## AccessNI Signatory Accounts

AccessNI regularly issues important notifications, newsletters and circulars to Signatories using email so it is essential that all email addresses are up-to-date and correct. On occasions AccessNI would also make telephone calls to Registered organisations.

Lead Signatories should regularly log into their account to ensure:-

- their email address is correct – go to the section entitled “Edit Personal details” to check and/or update email address.

- the current list of Signatories is up to date – go to the section entitled “Manage Signatories” to remove previous Signatories from the account.

- contact number for the organisation is correct – go to the section entitled “Manage AccessNI account” to update contact number and/or address details.

Countersignatories should also log into their account regularly to ensure their email address and contact number is up-to-date. To do this they should go to the section entitled “Edit Personal details”.

By keeping your account up-to-date you will not miss out on IMPORTANT and URGENT notifications or circulars from AccessNI.

# AccessNI Customer Survey

The AccessNI Customer Survey took place over the three week period from 5th to 23rd June 2023 — this is the first such survey since summer 2019. AccessNI would like to thank all Lead signatories that took the time to respond to the survey – we are very grateful to you for this important feedback.

The survey was issued electronically to almost 644 Lead signatories and generated a 37% response rate; this is considered statistically significant, making the results a reliable indicator of broader customer opinion.

The survey covered a range of issues relating to our customers experience of using AccessNI, including questions on the online application process, disclosure certificates, identity verification, contact with AccessNI, AccessNI communication, our complaints procedure and overall satisfaction. On the whole, most respondents were satisfied with the levels of service in the areas where feedback was sought. The overall satisfaction with the service provided remains high, with 96% of our customers satisfied — this is up 5% on the 2019 survey results. Other responses in the survey include:-

- 90% of organisations said they found completion of the on-line form to be easy, or very easy (down by 1% in 2019).
- 87% of respondents indicated that they had no difficulties with the identity verification process required by AccessNI.
- 94% of respondents regard the online case tracking facility as a valuable tool which they frequently used to monitor the progress of applications.
- Despite the availability of digital certificates, 8% of organisations indicated that they continue to insist on paper certificates in all instances.
- 51% of respondents said they had received a certificate with information disclosed on it during the previous 12 months.
- Of this 51%, 26% of respondents had been refused a job application on the basis of the information provided in an AccessNI disclosure certificate while 23% had placed conditions on employment (both same as 2019).
- When contacting AccessNI directly, rather than through the nidirect call centre, 91% of respondents were satisfied with how AccessNI dealt with their telephone queries (up 3% on 2019) – this rating is reduced when contact is made through the nidirect call centre.
- 77% found the seasonal AccessNI Newsletter useful (down 7% on 2019).
- 99% of respondents indicated that they update / check their details on their nidirect account at least once each year.
- Less than 1% of organisations said they had made a complaint to AccessNI.

There are a few areas in the survey that we will wish to reflect on, with a view to what further improvements we might reasonably make to our systems and processes - as ever, we'll bring our thoughts and plans to the Stakeholder Forum so that we can gauge user opinion. As is our normal practice, AccessNI will use email shots, Newsletters and Circulars to advise signatories of any changes that we have decided to progress.

Thank you once again to those who took the time to respond to the survey.

# Viewing AccessNI Disclosure Certificates

Registered/Responsible Bodies are reminded of the need to regularly access the online Case Tracking tool in order to see if a disclosure certificate has been issued, and whether criminal history information has been disclosed, or not.

All Registered / Responsible Bodies should regularly log on to their NIDirect account to access Case Tracking. When a certificate has been completed and issued to the applicant (either digitally or by paper) the status will change to one of the following:-

- Certificate Issued (N) – this means no information was disclosed on the certificate and you can safely proceed to the next stage of your recruitment process in the knowledge that you do not need to view the certificate.
- Certificate Issued – here you will note that the suffix (N) has not been displayed. This is an indicator that criminal history information has

been included on the certificate and the Registered / Responsible Body must request sight of the disclosure certificate in order that a suitability assessment can be undertaken before proceeding any further with the recruitment process.

If you operate as an Umbrella Body, it is your responsibility to inform client organisations when a disclosure certificate has been issued and whether information has been disclosed or not – this will allow your client organisations to request the certificate from the applicant and assess the relevancy of information disclosed for the role they are seeking to fill.

There is an AccessNI template letter which Registered/Responsible Bodies can edit to request sight of the disclosure certificate or pass to client organisations to allow them to request sight of the disclosure certificate. See the link as detailed below:-

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/sample-letter-requesting-accessni-certificate>

## CONSULTATION PAPER – REVIEW OF LIST OF SPECIFIED OFFENCES

DoJ is consulting on proposals arising from the Review of the List of Specified Offences. This List sets out the serious and violent crimes that are not subject to the AccessNI Filtering Scheme and will always appear on AccessNI standard or enhanced checks. Signatories are encouraged to take a bit of time to read through the consultation documents and provide any feedback on the emerging proposals - this is your chance to influence the direction of travel on this matter and your comments would be very welcome. For more information on this Consultation Paper please see the link below:-

<https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-paper-review-list-specified-offences>

The closing date for the Consultation is 25 September 2023.

# Conflict Related Convictions



When AccessNI process applications for Basic, Standard and Enhanced checks, one of the key databases we search is the Police National Computer (PNC). This is a UK-wide database that is updated and maintained by police forces and holds, among other information, details of:-

- Convictions
- Cautions
- Warnings
- Arrests
- Reprimands.

Information held in relation to convictions arising from NI conflict-related offences are held on PNC and AccessNI discloses details of these convictions (etc), subject to application of rehabilitation and filtering rules.

The Executive Office has published guidance to employers on recruiting people with convictions which are in relation to the NI 'troubles'. This guidance recognises that up to 30,000 people have spent time in prison due to the conflict in, or about, NI. The key principle arising within the guidance is:-

"... the conflict-related convictions of 'politically motivated' ex-prisoners, or their membership of any organisation, should not generally be taken into account [in accessing employment, facilities, goods or services] provided that the act to which the conviction relates, or the membership, predates the Good Friday Agreement. Only if the conviction, or membership, is materially relevant to the employment, facility, goods or service applied for, should this general rule not apply."

You can read this TEO document, including steps you might wish to consider when reviewing a disclosure certificate with conflict-related convictions at Employers' Guidance on Recruiting People with Conflict-Related Convictions.

# Disclosure and Barring Service

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) plays an important role in Northern Ireland by helping to keep citizens safe from harm by managing and maintaining the Barred Lists.

DBS maintains 2 Barred Lists – the Adults’ Barred List, and the Children’s Barred List – for Northern Ireland (alongside England and Wales), and also makes informed decisions as to whether an individual should be included in one or both lists.

Samantha Corr, Regional Outreach Manager for South of England and Northern Ireland explains: “DBS is committed to supporting organisations in Northern Ireland and across England and Wales as part of our shared safeguarding objectives.

“As part of our commitment, we were pleased to host the ‘Enhancing Safeguarding in Northern Ireland – Developing a Collaborative Approach’ event earlier this year in Belfast. The event provided those with a commitment to safeguarding an opportunity to develop and strengthen strategic alliances across the safeguarding landscape in Northern Ireland.”

DBS Regional Outreach team

The DBS Regional Outreach team work regularly with organisations, to identify how we can collaborate and share key messages among the safeguarding community. The Regional Outreach Advisers provide dedicated support to organisations within their allocated region.

DBS is currently in the final stage of recruiting a Regional Outreach Adviser in Northern Ireland. Within Northern Ireland, the Regional Outreach Adviser will act as a single point of contact for organisations who have any barring-related queries or would like support where safeguarding, referrals, and the legal duty to refer are concerned. The adviser will work alongside a number of organisations to deliver workshops and events, with both partners and staff.

If you have any general enquiries about the work of the Outreach team, please contact [dbsregionaloutreach@dbs.gov.uk](mailto:dbsregionaloutreach@dbs.gov.uk).

The Regional Outreach Manager for South of England and Northern Ireland is Samantha Corr [samantha.corr@dbs.gov.uk](mailto:samantha.corr@dbs.gov.uk).

## INDEPENDENT REVIEWER

The Independent Reviewer (IR) of Criminal Conviction Certificates is appointed by the Minister of Justice to review Standard and Enhanced checks prior to the certificate being issued to ensure the appropriate and proportionate disclosure of cautions and convictions for offences committed by individuals when under the age of 18. The IR also considers appeals against disclosure of cautions and convictions. The IR has published her annual report for 2022/23. The report provides a breakdown of the volume and nature of cases referred along, with the types of decisions taken during the year, including details of:-

- Auto-referrals
- Youth Cautions
- Representations
- Appeals

You can review this report on the DoJ website at [Independent Reviewer Annual reports | Department of Justice \(justice-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/independent-reviewer-annual-reports)

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