



# ACCESSNI PERFORMANCE AND ACTIVITY REPORT

1 APRIL 2023 - 31 MARCH 2024

<b>Glossary:</b>	
<b>Basic Check:</b>	Provides unspent criminal record information. Cost was £18 for reporting period (£16 wef 1 April 2024)
<b>Standard Check:</b>	Provides both spent and unspent criminal record information. The 'position applied for' must be exempt from Rehabilitation of Offenders legislation. Cost was £18 for reporting period (£16 wef 1 April 2024) - free to volunteers.
<b>Enhanced Check:</b>	As per Standard checks, plus relevant police 'non-conviction' information and, where eligible, check of lists of those barred from working with vulnerable groups. The 'position applied for' must be prescribed in AccessNI Regulations. Cost was £33 for reporting period (£32 wef 1 April 2024) - free to volunteers.

1	<a href="#"><u>Introduction</u></a>	3
2	<a href="#"><u>Applications received and processed</u></a>	6
3	<a href="#"><u>Customer service standards</u></a>	10
4	<a href="#"><u>Information disclosed on certificates</u></a>	14
5	<a href="#"><u>EU Referrals</u></a>	18
6	<a href="#"><u>Disputes of criminal record information</u></a>	19
7	<a href="#"><u>Income and expenditure</u></a>	20
8	<a href="#"><u>Compliance work with organisations and Customer Survey</u></a>	22
9	<a href="#"><u>AccessNI Business Solution</u></a>	26

## Section 1 - Introduction

1. This document sets out details of AccessNI's activity over the 12-month period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, noting performance against targets and where appropriate, providing a comparison to previous years.
2. 2023/24 saw a sustained high level of demand for all levels of disclosure checks, leading to the busiest operational year ever for the Branch, with more than 176,000 disclosure applications processed.
3. As with many NI Civil Service staff, AccessNI staff have workstyle agreements in place, with most working a hybrid arrangement which combines working from home with attendance in the office as business needs require.
4. For 2023/24 AccessNI sought to issue 60% of certificates digitally and was able to achieve 58%. [[Section 2](#)]
5. AccessNI met all but one of the time-bounded targets set by the Minister of Justice for the issue of certificates. [[Section 3](#)]
6. AccessNI certificates provide a significant level of criminal record and other information on applicants thereby contributing to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults in Northern Ireland. Five applications from individuals not permitted to work with children and/or vulnerable adults were detected, and appropriate action taken.
7. The Independent Reviewer scheme operated throughout 2023/24. This scheme enables applicants to ask for an independent review of spent criminal record information disclosed on a certificate or, where all the criminal record information to be disclosed relates to a time when the applicant was under 18 years of age, an automatic review to be undertaken. The scheme has worked smoothly with few delays and positive outcomes for the overwhelming majority of applicants. [[Section 4](#)]

8. AccessNI continued to work with the UK Central Authority for the exchange of criminal record information (ACRO) to obtain information on nationals from EU Member States seeking to work with children in NI [[Section 5](#)].
9. AccessNI resolved 6 disputes raised by applicants where AccessNI had made an error [[Section 6](#)].
10. Operational costs increased by 6.9% in 2023/24, compared to the previous year. This is primarily due to the impact of the NICS pay award alongside increases in a range of variable costs that are directly related to the operational functions of AccessNI, including database search costs, police force enquiry costs, postage and stationery.
11. Income increased in 2023/24 compared to the previous year reflecting a slightly higher number of disclosure applications received in AccessNI. This sustained increase in demand for checks resulted in an overall surplus in the year-end cost recovery position and led to a reduction in disclosure fees from 1 April 2024. [[Section 7](#)]
12. 70 organisations registered for the first time with AccessNI during 2023/24. At 31 March 2024 there were 646 statutory, private, voluntary and community groups with approved Registered Body status, and 133 organisations with Responsible Body status. 214 audits were undertaken to ensure organisations were complying with the statutory Code of Practice – these audits were all undertaken by way of video conference. As a result of these audits, a number of organisations were asked to provide additional information to assure AccessNI of their compliance with the Code. AccessNI uploaded 11 Training videos to the DOJ YouTube channel. [[Section 8](#)]
13. AccessNI undertook it's bi-annual Customer Survey in the summer of 2023 to receive feedback on a range of aspect of the disclosure service. [[Section 8](#)]
14. During the year AccessNI successfully delivered 29 enhancements to our IT solution, impacting on both the citizen and customer portals. [[Section 9](#)]

15. Looking to 2024/25, the key challenges will be to:-

- Meet Ministerial targets for the issue of checks;
- To implement proposals within the review of the List of Specified Offences;
- Consider and implement further enhancements to the AccessNI IT solution for staff and citizens;
- Introduce wider improvements to the AccessNI service, including:-
  - Training delivery
  - Conducting Registered Body audits
  - Follow up actions to address matters of concern
- Work with Home Office to transition from Police National Computer (PNC) to Law Enforcement Data Service (LEDS);
- Continue to explore provision of portable certificates in consultation with the Disclosure and Barring Service;
- Enable upload of identity documents as part of the disclosure application process;
- Extend use of Digital Certificates;
- Introduce digital identity checking through NIDA Level of Assurance (LOA) 2;
- Develop automation of a retention and disposal solution in relation to information on applicants and others held by AccessNI and update the AccessNI privacy statement;
- Consider impact of wider policy decisions on disclosure process, including potential amendments to rehabilitation periods in NI.
- Improve AccessNI's ability to use management information;
- Monitor income and expenditure against AccessNI's cost recovery model;
- Review processes with regards to managing aged debts;
- Review the Registered / Responsible Body network; and
- Monitor compliance among registered organisations with the AccessNI Code of Practice.

## Section 2 – Applications received and processed

16. Tables 1 and 2 show the number of applications received and processed by AccessNI in 2023/24 compared to the previous two years. To assist the on-going response to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, AccessNI has been prioritising applications from hosts / sponsors under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. By 31 March 2024, 2,005 applications were processed under this scheme, with an average turnaround of 2 days. All other applications were processed in chronological order.

**Table 1 – Applications received**

Disclosure type	Apr 2021 - Mar 2022	Apr 2022- Mar 2023	Apr 2023- Mar 2024	% change 22/23 - 23/24
<b>Basic (B)</b>	42,400	42,104	41,767	-0.8%
<b>Standard (S)</b>	5,594	4,579	4,071	-11.09%
<b>Enhanced (E)</b>	116,646	128,933	130,981	+1.59%
<b>Total</b>	165,200	175,616	176,819	+0.69%

**Table 2 – Applications processed**

Disclosure type	Apr 2021 - Mar 2022	Apr 2022- Mar 2023	Apr 2023- Mar 2024	% change 22/23 - 23/24
<b>Basic (B)</b>	41,344	42,083	41,129	-2.27%
<b>Standard (S)</b>	5,581	4,577	4,065	-11.19%
<b>Enhanced (E)</b>	115,835	127,631	131,571	+3.09%
<b>Total</b>	162,760	174,289	176,765	+1.42%

17. Staff in AccessNI continued to work a hybrid approach, with rotas in place for office attendance to meet specific business needs.

### Volunteer certificates

18. Where an applicant meets the statutory definition of a volunteer, no fee is payable for their disclosure certificate (Standard and Enhanced checks only). AccessNI noted that demand for volunteer checks for 2023/24 was 23.9%. This is broadly in line with the 2022/23 position. Whilst the overall number of volunteer checks has increased from pre-pandemic levels (ie, up c1,700 since 2019/20), the proportion is down 2% due to the increase in the volume of paying applications.

### Digital certificates

19. In July 2018, AccessNI introduced digital certificates for all types of disclosures where no criminal record or other information was included in that certificate, or where the applicant lives outside the UK. Digital certificates are delivered to the nidirect account used by the applicant when making their online application. The applicant can share the certificate by email with an employer, but these certificates are “invalid” if printed. Digitally issued certificates allow applicants to receive their certificate more quickly and safely than the traditional postal method required for paper certificates. In 2023/24, paper certificates were used for certificates that disclose information.

**Table 3 – Digital certificates**

Target	Achievement	Met
60% of certificates issued digitally by 31 March 2024.	58% of certificates issued digitally over the year.	<b>X</b>

20. In 2023/24, the target of 60% was not achieved – it may be the case that the preference for this type of certificate has plateaued. AccessNI has set a target for 2024/25 of exceeding 60% of certificates delivered digitally by 31 March 2025. In order to improve uptake in this regard, AccessNI will continue to deliver regular messages to Registered / Responsible Bodies impressing on them the advantages of digital certificates.

21. During 2024/25, AccessNI will also be seeking to extend the content of digital certificates to include criminality information with the expectation that

this should increase the uptake of digital certificates, with the aim of moving to an entirely paperless service.

### Police referrals

22. Approximately 25.3% of Enhanced applications were referred to PSNI during 2023/24. Referrals are made to PSNI where the applicant:-

- has been matched to a criminal record;
- has been matched to information on a police database;
- is undertaking work at their home; or
- lives, or has lived, in the Republic of Ireland within the last 5 years.

23. On referral of an application, PSNI determines if additional / non-conviction information should be disclosed on the applicant's AccessNI certificate using a statutory test defined within legislation. Referrals are made to police forces in Great Britain also.

**Table 4 – Police Referrals for 2023/24**

	<b>PSNI</b>	<b>GB forces</b>
Number of Enhanced applications referred	33,170	6417
Number of disclosures made	274	11

### Commentary

24. 2023/24 saw the high levels of demand from the previous year being maintained. Whilst Basic and Standard checks reduced slightly, the increase in demand for Enhanced checks meant that 2023/24 was the busiest year ever for AccessNI with in excess of 176,000 disclosure certificates issued.

25. Whilst the uplift in demand in 2022/23 was initially thought to be temporary as organisations adjusted their recruitment position post pandemic, the view now is that this higher level of demand is the 'new normal' and AccessNI is now forward planning based on this increased and sustained



level of demand. AccessNI believes that two primary factors contribute to the uplift in demand, namely:-

- Organisations reviewing their safeguarding policies, with many seeking to incorporate a rolling 3-5 year re-checking procedure for their staff / volunteers.
- General awareness of the role of AccessNI is now well-established throughout Northern Ireland, leading to an increased interest in the services being provided.

26. During the year, AccessNI continued to prioritise disclosure applications for host households under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. As of 31 March 2024, AccessNI has processed 2,005 Enhanced checks under this Scheme.

27. AccessNI will continue to monitor the demand for disclosure checks and adjust the resources required to sustain high standards throughout 2024/25.

28. AccessNI’s top 30 customers in 2023/24 requested 74,310 applications (42% of all applications made). The top 5 customers are set out below (along with their comparative demand for 2022/23):-

**Table 5 – Top 5 Registered Bodies**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Applications (2023/24)</b>	<b>Applications (2022/23)</b>
Education Authority	13,087	12,091
BSO Recruitment	7,102	5,462
Ulster GAA	4,569	5,434
Irish Football Association	3,911	2,887
Security Industry Authority	2,935	3,379

## Section 3 – Customer service standards

29. AccessNI service standards, set by the Minister of Justice, are to issue:

- 99% of Basic checks made via Responsible Bodies within 7 days
- 95% of Basic checks submitted directly by a member of the public within 14 days
- 99% of Standard checks within 7 days
- 70% of Enhanced checks within 10 days
- 95% of Enhanced checks within 21 days
- 98% of Enhanced within 28 days

**Table 6 – Service Standard Results (April 2023 - March 2024)**

Type	Target	Achievement	Met
Basic check submitted via body	99% within 7 days	<b>100%</b>	✓
Basic check submitted directly by public	95% within 14 days	<b>99.7%</b>	✓
Standard check	99% within 7 days	<b>99.8%</b>	✓
Enhanced check	70% within 10 days	<b>88.2%</b>	✓
	95% within 21days	<b>97.1%</b>	✓
	98% within 28 days	<b>97.8%</b>	✗

30. Table 7 shows the average number of days to issue each type of disclosure check, along with a comparison with the two most recent previous years.

**Table 7 - Average Issue Time (calendar days)**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Apr 2021 - Mar 2022</b>	<b>Apr 2022 - Mar 2023</b>	<b>Apr 2023- Mar 2024</b>
Basic check via RB	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0.5</b>
Basic check by citizen	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.0</b>
Standard check	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0.5</b>
Enhanced check	<b>3.6</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>3.7</b>

**Commentary**

31. As can be seen from Tables 6 and 7 above, AccessNI delivered a strong performance in processing disclosure applications submitted during 2023/24. AccessNI was able to meet all but the final Ministerial target, ie 98% of Enhanced checks within 28 days, with 97.8% achieved. The reason for this relates directly to the sustained high level of demand for Enhanced checks throughout the year, and the requirement for 25.3% of these to be referred to PSNI. The increase in volume of cases referred to PSNI, which exceeded 33,000 (the estimated in-year planning assumption was 30,492) had an adverse impact on PSNI’s ability to maintain turnaround within service targets, which in-turn impacted on AccessNI delivery against this specific target. PSNI are currently seeking additional resources to meet service targets for the demand estimates for 2023/24.

32. The average time to issue a certificate remained relatively consistent over the past 3 years in respect of Basic and Standard certificates. AccessNI reduced the average turnaround for Enhanced checks in 2023/24 to less than 4 days, with c80% of these disclosure certificates issued within 2 days.

33. The following graphs below provide further information about the processing of applications throughout the year.

Figure 1 – Average certificate issue time (days) 2023/24

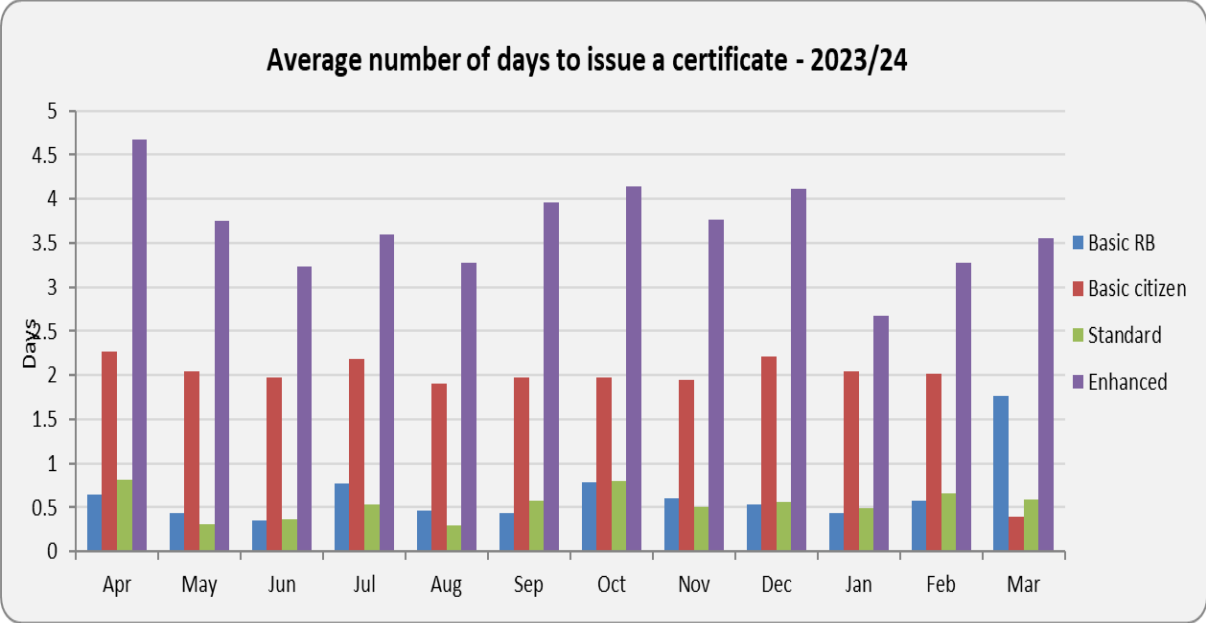


Figure 2 – Issue of Basic certificates 2023/24

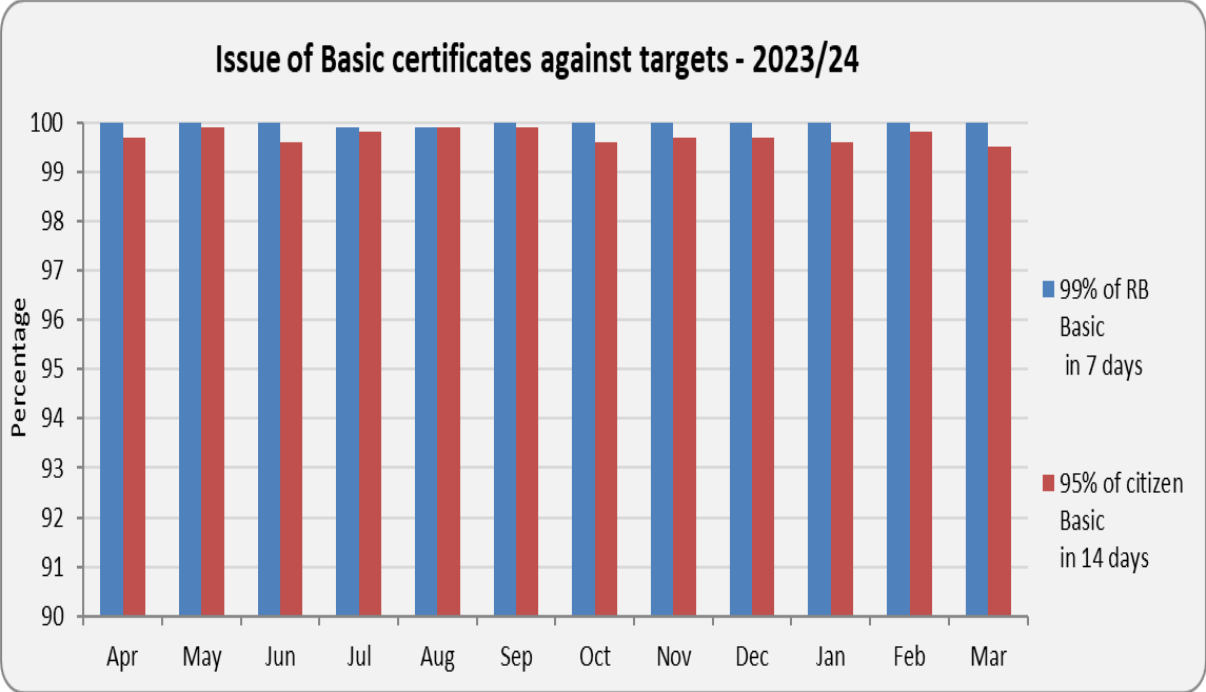
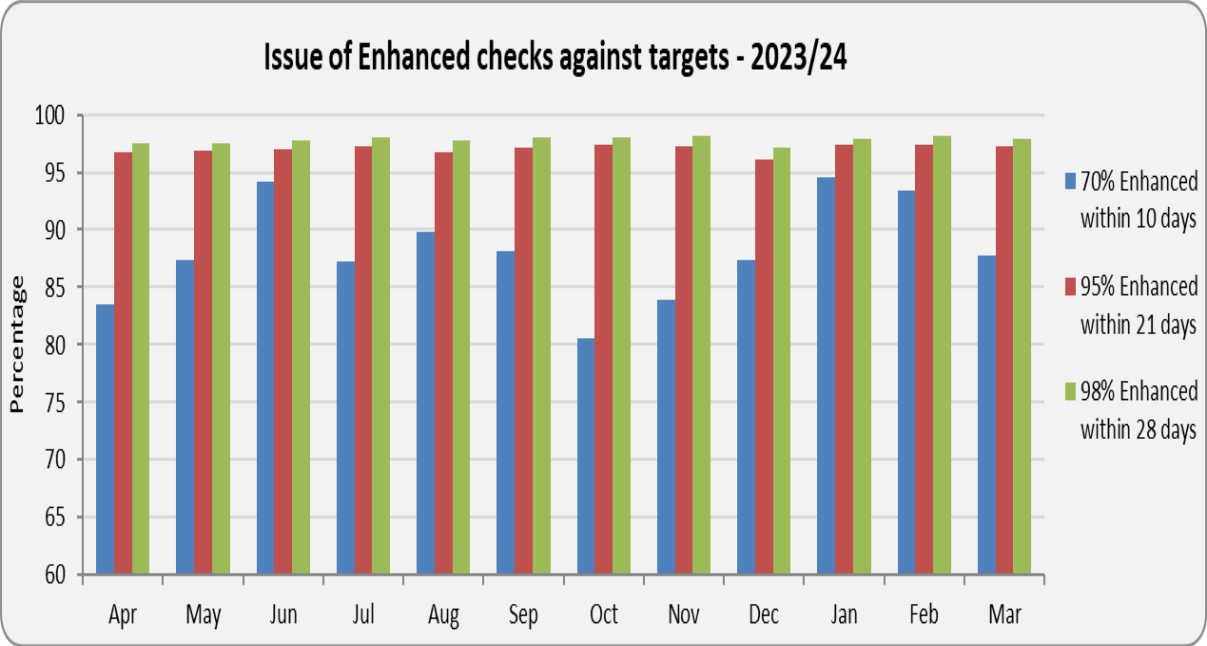


Figure 3 – Issue of Standard certificates 2023/24



Figure 4 – Issue of Enhanced certificates 2023/24



## Section 4 – Information disclosed on certificates

34. The table below sets out the total number of certificates processed in 2023/24, along with the number on which information was disclosed from various sources searched.

**Table 8 – Disclosures of information on certificates**

Type	Certificates processed	PNC	PSNI	GB forces	UK lists
Basic	41,129	1,142 2.8%	N/a	N/a	N/a
Standard	4,065	583 14.3%	N/a	N/a	N/a
Enhanced	131,571	6,050 4.6%	274 <sup>1</sup>	11 <sup>1</sup>	5

### Glossary of Terms

<b>PNC</b>	Police National Computer – UK criminal records information disclosed
<b>PSNI</b>	Non-conviction information released by PSNI and provided on enhanced checks
<b>GB forces</b>	Non-conviction information released by GB police forces and provided on enhanced checks.
<b>UK lists</b>	Matches against lists held by Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) & Scottish Government lists of those barred from working with vulnerable groups.

<sup>1</sup> Police information may have been included in certificates that also have criminal record information disclosed, that is included in the PNC column.

## Filtering

35. AccessNI filters old and minor convictions from Standard and Enhanced certificates, before they are issued, in line with legislative provisions. The following table sets out the impact the Filtering Scheme had on disclosure certificates issued in 2023/24.

**Table 9 – Impact of filtering**

Type	Certs with information filtered	Certs with convictions filtered	Certs with cautions filtered	Certs with both filtered
Standard	414	280	110	24
Enhanced	5,633	3,495	1,778	360
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,047</b>	<b>3,775</b>	<b>1,888</b>	<b>384</b>

36. In June 2021, legislation was passed in the NI Assembly to amend the Filtering Scheme, effectively dropping the automatic ‘multiple convictions’ rule. This means that all convictions will be considered for filtering after a period of 11 years has elapsed since the date of conviction, unless:-

- The offence was a serious or ‘specified’ offence; or
- The offence resulted in a period of imprisonment.

37. Pending relevant legislative changes, AccessNI continues to refer to the Independent Reviewer of Criminal Record Certificates all Standard and Enhanced cases containing non-court disposals (NCDs) awarded when the applicant was under 18 years of age. The Independent Reviewer will consider each NCD and decides whether to retain the information, or remove it, before the certificate is issued.

38. During 2023/24 information was filtered from approximately 4.5% of Standard and Enhanced applications. However, AccessNI consider this has not adversely impacted the safeguarding of vulnerable groups as serious offences, including those with a sentence of imprisonment, are always disclosed.

## Independent Reviewer of Criminal Record Certificates

39. The criminal record review scheme enables an Independent Reviewer to examine cases where:-

- Prior to issue, all the information on a certificate relates to a time when the individual was under 18 (Auto-referral); and
- After the issue of a certificate, where an individual requests a review on the basis that it was disproportionate for that information to have been released (Review request).

40. The table below sets out the extent and outcome of the Independent Reviewer's work in 2023/24.

**Table 10 – Work of Independent Reviewer – 2023/24**

Type	Referred/Received	Information removed	Information retained
Auto-referral	584	558	26
Review request	146	145	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>730</b>	<b>703</b>	<b>27</b>

### Commentary

41. Table 8 highlights that the percentage of Basic certificates containing information was low (2.8%) as only unspent convictions (and no non-court disposals) are disclosed on such certificates. There was a significant percentage of certificates where information was present (in excess of 15%), but not disclosed due to the application of provisions within the Rehabilitation of Offenders (NI) Order 1978.

42. For Standard certificates, over 1 in 4 applicants were matched to information held on PNC. However, not all of the information was disclosed (for example impending prosecutions). After the application of the filtering process and where the Independent Reviewer removed information, the



percentage of certificates where criminal record information was disclosed was 14.3%.

43. Of the applications made for Enhanced certificates, 11.1% were matched to information held on PNC or had police information disclosed. As with Standard checks, and due to filtering, not all the information was disclosed – therefore, the number of checks where information was disclosed reduced to 6,050 (4.6%). Of these checks, 290 (4.8%) contained information from police or a notification that an applicant was on the barred list.

44. Five persons who applied for an Enhanced check were found to be on one of the UK lists of those barred from working with children or vulnerable adults. In all these cases applicants were unaware of their barring status at the time of their application. A number of police investigations remain ongoing, including one in relation to the use of a fraudulent disclosure certificate.

45. Table 10 shows that the majority (96%) of information considered by the Independent Reviewer was removed from Standard / Enhanced certificates after review, and before the certificate was issued.

## Section 5 – EU referrals

46. During 2023/24, AccessNI continued its project with the UK’s central authority for the exchange of criminal records (ACRO), to obtain information from approved European Union member states where Enhanced checks were sought for EU nationals who were seeking to work with children in Northern Ireland.

47. AccessNI has arrangements in place to make referrals to 15 EU countries; details of the volume of referrals during 2023/24 are provided in the table below.

**Table 11 - EU referrals in 2023/24**

Country	Referrals	Country	Referrals	Country	Referrals
Bulgaria	43	Holland	35	Poland	538
Cz Republic	31	Hungary	71	Portugal	155
France	50	Italy	84	Romania	205
Greece	35	Latvia	88	Slovakia	59
Germany	113	Lithuania	210	Spain	121

48. A total of 1,838 referrals were made to these EU member states in 2023/24, a 3% increase on the 2022/23 volume. From these referrals a total of 18 matches were made to criminal records held in the EU member states and nine disclosures were made on Enhanced certificates.

49. In addition to above, 2,609 Enhanced checks were referred to An Garda Síochána as the applicant lives in the Republic of Ireland, or has lived there in the last 5 years. Of these, disclosure of criminal record information was made on 4 Enhanced certificates.

## Section 6 – Disputes of criminal record information

50. AccessNI deals with substantive disputes where the applicant questions the conviction or other information provided on the certificate. The figures below refer solely to occasions where AccessNI staff make an error, for example, selecting a criminal record that does not belong to the applicant. It does not include those instances where the criminal record is inaccurate.


51. The table below sets out the number of disputes upheld compared to the previous year.

**Table 12 – Disputes upheld**

	<b>Total Upheld 2022/23</b>	<b>Total Upheld 2023/24</b>
Substantive	7	6

52. Table 13 sets out achievement against the target for the number of substantive disputes upheld:-

**Table 13 – Achievement for substantive disputes**

	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>	<b>Met</b>
Substantive	No less than 1 certificate in every 11,000 certificates issued to have an error	1 certificate in every 29,460 certificates contained an error	

## Section 7 – Income and expenditure

53. AccessNI operates a full cost recovery model requiring the income derived from the fees collected for disclosure applications to offset AccessNI expenditure each year. Table 14 sets out the difference between income from fees charged and expenditure on staff and non-staff costs together with notional costs in 2023/24, and compares this with the previous two years.

**Table 14 – AccessNI cost recovery position**

	Apr 2021- Mar 2022 (£000s)	Apr 2022- Mar 2023 (£000s)	Apr 2023- Mar 2024 (£000s)	% change for 23/24 against 22/23
Expenditure <sup>2</sup>	3,130	3,018	3,226	+6.9%
Income	3,831	4,024	4,138	+2.8%
CR Out-turn	701	1,006	912	

### Commentary

54. In 2023/24, AccessNI's costs increased by 7.1% compared to the previous year. This is primarily due to the impact of the NICS pay award, effective from August 2023, alongside increases in a range of variable costs that are directly related to the level of demand and operational functions of AccessNI, including database search costs, police force enquiry costs and postage and stationery costs. AccessNI was also able to successfully deliver a number of functional enhancements to the disclosure IT solution (see Section 9).

55. In the same period, AccessNI's income increased by 2.8%, due to the increase in the volume of Enhanced applications received in the year. As a result, AccessNI's cost recovery surplus in 2023/24 was £912k.

56. During 2023/24 AccessNI undertook a review of the operating business model. This review reflected on the level of cost recovery surplus post

<sup>2</sup> Expenditure costs include costs of depreciation and notional running costs

pandemic and sought to consider any appropriate fee adjustments. Building in the new higher level of demand estimates, along with increased running costs, the model pointed to a reduction in disclosure fees as follows:-

- Basic checks to reduce by £2 to £16
- Standard checks to reduce by £2 to £16
- Enhanced checks to reduce by £1 to £32

57. These fee reductions were implemented on 1 April 2024. AccessNI routinely monitors the ongoing cost recovery position and will consider any further fee adjustments to ensure the continued veracity of the operating business model.

## Section 8 – Compliance work with organisations and Customer Survey

58. AccessNI has a network of Registered Bodies that countersign applications for Standard and Enhanced certificates in accordance with Part V of the Police Act 1997 and a number of Responsible Bodies that countersign applications for Basic certificates on the basis of a Service Level Agreement with AccessNI. At 31 March 2024, 782 organisations in Northern Ireland, and wider afield, were registered with AccessNI.

59. All organisations are bound by a statutory Code of Practice that sets out their obligations as part of registration with AccessNI. AccessNI has a number of measures in place to ensure compliance with the Code including a rolling programme of audits with organisations to test their level of compliance. The table below sets out information about AccessNI's compliance work during 2023/24.

**Table 15 – Compliance visits**

	<b>Audit 23/24</b>	<b>De- Registrations</b>	<b>Audits 22/23</b>	<b>De- Registrations</b>
Registered Body	215	0	178	1

\*44 RBs were made inactive as a result of the Annual Review.

### Commentary

60. During 2023/24, compliance audits continued to be undertaken virtually, with a noted increase in the number of audits (up 20% on the previous year). However, due to staffing pressures within the team, it was not possible to attain the target level of 25 audits per month. Efforts are ongoing to back-fill vacancies, which we expect will allow the monthly target to be achieved in 2024/25.

61. Having consulted with the AccessNI Stakeholder Forum, it is acknowledged that the virtual nature of the audits is working very well and also serves to deliver greater efficiency in this area of work. As such,

AccessNI has no plans to re-introduce physical visits, but retains this option should the need arise.

62. A key aspect of work within the Compliance Team in the past year has been in supporting customer organisations to improve the standard of applicant identity checking and the accuracy of details provide on disclosure applications. AccessNI has already had some good successes in getting these key messages across to Registered / Responsible Bodies, and securing notable improvements, and will continue with this work through 2024/25.

63. In summer 2023 AccessNI published 11 Training videos on the DoJ YouTube channel. These videos cover the main functional aspects of the AccessNI disclosure service, including:-

- legislative position;
- processing applications;
- using the AccessNI online services;
- complying with the Code of Practice; and
- understanding criminality information and interpreting disclosure certificates.

64. Customer feedback indicates that these videos have been well received by those seeking to use the AccessNI service.

### **Customer Survey 2023**

65. Using the Citizen Space platform, AccessNI conducted a survey across all customer organisations that use the AccessNI services in June 2023. This was the first survey undertaken since 2019. The survey returned a 37% response rate which is considered statistically significant, making the results a reliable indicator of broader customer opinion.

66. The survey covered a range of issues relating to 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. 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.
- 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 use 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 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.



67. In response to the survey results, AccessNI has now amended presentational aspects of the seasonal Newsletter and sought wider sectoral input to content articles.

68. AccessNI would plan to re-run this survey again in 2025, and every two years thereafter.

## Section 9 – AccessNI Business Solution

69. During 2023/24, AccessNI has made a number of important changes to its IT system, including:-

- 29 separate system enhancements to meet business and customer needs;
- Conducted IT Healthcheck and undertook all remedial work; and
- Changes to payment module to accommodate new disclosure application fees.

70. Working with our IT supplier, phase 1 of Buy Social clause of our 3<sup>rd</sup> Party IT Support Contract was successfully completed.

71. Further system enhancements currently underway include:-

- Upload and validation of ID documents for Basic Direct applications.
- Discovery process for the automation of the Retention and Disposal of applicant and RB data.
- Extension of digital certificates to include those with criminal history information.

72. AccessNI continues to work with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) to progress a longstanding objective to provide for the portability of AccessNI checks. DBS is currently reviewing their Update Service and have indicated a desire to modernise this to better meet business and customer needs. AccessNI is working closely with DBS on this modernisation programme to understand the functional aspects of the new solution and explore how to best integrate with this at the earliest possible opportunity.