



AccessNI Newsletter

Issue 43: Summer 2024



Welcome to the Summer 2024 edition of the AccessNI Newsletter.

Introduction

Welcome to this summer 2024 edition of the AccessNI Newsletter. As always, in this edition we have tried to provide you with some information which we hope will help you better understand AccessNI and get the best out of our service. Of particular note in this edition is the IT System Plans article which highlights our ambitions to enhance our IT solution later this year, subject to available budget allocations. Some of these changes will impact on the way RBs interact with applicants and AccessNI, particularly as we move to higher level NIDirect Accounts (sometimes called LOA2), which will include digital identity verification, and also as we continue our journey towards a paperless service with the extension of our Digital Certificates. Please be assured that we will continue to engage with you during this year to set out the nature of the

changes (and timescales) so that you can consider what adjustments you might need to make to your processes.

I would also draw your attention to the Niacro article which highlights training that is available for employers to assist with understanding and working with criminal history information.

As we move into the summer months, I trust you will all take opportunities to enjoy some time away from your daily routines and, hopefully, some warm sunshine.

Best Regards,
Brian Thomson
General Manager

AccessNI Umbrella Body Responsibilities



An AccessNI Umbrella Body is an organisation registered with AccessNI who agrees to process AccessNI disclosure applications on behalf of other organisations eg background screening companies.

Where a Registered or Responsible Body is registered with AccessNI as an Umbrella Body there are additional responsibilities to be met which are detailed in AccessNI circular 1/2020 as attached [here](#).

The additional requirements to be considered by an Umbrella Body and put in place with the client organisation include:

- A Service Level Agreement or alternatively the Service Provision Letter and Applicant Information Leaflet see template documents [here](#).
- A copy or link to the AccessNI Code of Practice (Registered Bodies only) as attached [here](#) in client organisation recruitment material/application forms.
- The AccessNI Guidance on ID checking and list of acceptable ID documents as [attached](#).
- Clarification with applicants to ascertain “is there any reason why they cannot work in Regulated Activity” (only applicable to Registered Bodies).
- A statement in client recruitment material/application forms that an AccessNI disclosure is required for role.
- A policy on the recruitment of ex-offenders which client organisations should refer to in their recruitment material/application forms.
- The need for a discussion between client organisation and applicant when information has been disclosed on a disclosure before withdrawing a job offer.

During AccessNI compliance audits, evidence will be required from Umbrella Bodies to indicate the above requirements are considered and implemented and this can be achieved by providing the signed off check list included on the Umbrella Body Service Level Agreement.

Business Continuity

If there is an interruption to our systems such that we cannot use our AccessNI email, our contingency will be to communicate with RBs using accessni.bcp@gmail.com. If an email issues from this address RBs should be confident in opening it in the knowledge it is from AccessNI.

3rd Party Accounts



What is a 3rd party account?

A 3rd party account is a NIDirect account created by an organisation or AccessNI Signatory to complete an AccessNI disclosure application for an applicant. This 3rd party account is created using an email address which the applicant (who requires the AccessNI disclosure) does not have access to.

Example: an organisation requires their employee to have a basic disclosure in place for their role. The employee does not complete this application (they may have no email address/ they may have no laptop/ they may not be comfortable using computers) so the organisation or AccessNI Signatory uses the organisation email address eg info@ourbusiness.com to create the NIDirect account and complete the disclosure application.

Due to future developments planned for the AccessNI System, by September 2024 the use of a 3rd party account by an organisation or AccessNI Signatory to complete the disclosure application for the applicant will no longer be suitable. The applicant will need to:-

- have their own email address to create their own NIDirect account in order to complete the disclosure application.
- have their own email address and the organisation or AccessNI Signatory will assist the employee to create their NIDirect account and disclosure application.
- request a family relative to assist with the creation of a NIDirect account and the completion of the disclosure application.

The use of a 3rd party account will not be suitable as AccessNI plan to pilot the extension of digital certificates to include all 'no trace' certificates and, at a further point, to include criminal history information. Digital certificates must be issued to the applicant's NIDirect account, to allow them to review the content of the disclosure certificate and if necessary to raise a dispute or appeal details on the certificate. Once the applicant reviews the information on the disclosure certificate they can share it with their employer who requested the certificate.

Instructions to create a NIDirect account are available for employees on the AccessNI PIN notification/ ID validation form which can be found at the link below:-

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/pin-notification-and-id-validation-form-registered-bodies>
<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/pin-notification-and-id-validation-form-responsible-bodies>

Failure to comply with this AccessNI instruction could result in a data protection breach (on your behalf) being reported to the Information Commissioner to consider appropriate regulatory action. If you require any further assistance please feel free to contact AccessNI.

IT System Plans

AccessNI is continually looking for ways to enhance our IT system to improve the experience for their applicants and also their Registered/Responsible/ Umbrella Bodies and, where possible, deliver further efficiencies within the service (to help us keep costs down). System changes are also required to mitigate security risks and ensure the smooth running of operational processes.



The Business Support and Transformation Team (BST) is currently working on a number of projects.

These include:

- Automation of Retention & Disposal – ensuring that applicant and disclosure data is only kept for as long as necessary. These retention timescales have been agreed with the DoJ's Records Management function and we are currently in the discovery phase (researching what data is stored and where this is, set down goals to be achieved and resources required to meet these goals).
- Upload of ID Documents for Direct Basic Citizens – this will require applicants who apply directly for basic certificates to upload their ID documents as part of the application process. The intention is that this will link to the ID checking guidance provided by AccessNI and will ensure that only the appropriate documents will be allowed. This will enable quicker turnaround times, added security of personal information and result in less refunds due to non-completed applications.
- Digital Certificates containing criminal history information – Currently we only issue digital certificates where there is no information to be disclosed. Our aim going forward is to allow certificates with criminality information to be issued digitally. The Digital Certificates change allows for additional security for personal information, increased protections by making it more difficult to create fraudulent certificates and will also result in less financial and environmental costs. Watch out for further communications regarding Digital Certificates with criminal history information, as this will obviously be an important change and RBs will need to be aware. The message has always been that all certificates with information will be on paper but this will change. Our aim here is that AccessNI will move to a paperless service in the future - this will be another step in that direction.
- Migration to LEADS – As the Police National Computer (PNC) is being decommissioned, AccessNI is currently working towards the migration to the PNC replacement, which is LEADS (Law Enforcement Data Service). PNC is the UK-wide database where AccessNI checks for criminal history backgrounds.

IT System Plans (continued)

- Migration to Level of Assurance 2 (LOA2) NIDirect accounts - AccessNI currently uses Level of Assurance 1 (LOA1) NIDirect accounts for applicants to log into the AccessNI disclosure system. AccessNI is planning to move to LOA2 (currently planned for December 24). This approach incorporates digital ID checks that provide greater assurance that the applicant is who they say they are – for example, checking the applicant is listed at the given address.



Future plans also include:

- Upload of ID documents for RBs – once we have assessed the ID document upload functionality for Direct Basic checks, we plan to extend this to applications processed through RBs. This will require applicants to upload their ID documents, making it easier for RBs to link the documents to accounts and check the accuracy of the disclosure application. AccessNI staff will also be able to access these ID documents, the deletion of which will be automatic after the prescribed timescale in keeping with retention schedules.
- Review of Signatory Accounts – AccessNI will review how lead signatory and counter signatory accounts work on our IT solution. It is hoped that this will lead to ease of use for signatories and better auditing of which signatories progress which applications.

In all the above system enhancements we will consult with our Stakeholder Forum in order to share our plans and seek feedback on how these changes will impact on RB processes. This will help us develop our communications strategy, as we seek to roll out these important changes.

Portability of AccessNI Checks



The need for 'repeat' AccessNI checks is a concern that we are very much alive to. AccessNI recognises that some individuals are being required to obtain fresh checks, sometimes within a matter of days / weeks of having had a check completed; this is most common in employment areas with higher turnover of staff. AccessNI is also aware that a number of organisations have developed safeguarding policies that mandate employees / volunteers to undertake a cyclical refresh of AccessNI checks (for example every 3 years).

At present, the position remains that AccessNI checks are not regarded as portable. Disclosure certificates are accurate on the day they are issued and will include details of an individual's criminal history and barring position, subject to rehabilitation of offenders and filtering rules. Employers and voluntary groups who accept 'aged' certificates do so at their own risk and in the knowledge that information may have changed in the period since the certificate was issued; the 'older' the certificate, the greater this risk.

It remains a key objective of AccessNI to deliver a portable disclosure solution. Technical aspects of this solution are complex and work to date indicates that a NI standalone solution would be prohibitively expensive, not least because the costs would have to be passed on to applicants in increased fees.

The long-standing aim has been for AccessNI to join the Update Service provided by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) in England and Wales. This is a web enabled subscription service that employers (etc) can access to enquire if an individual's existing disclosure certificate is up to date, or if information has changed (in which case a new certificate would have to be sought).

The DBS is currently reviewing this product, with the aim of delivering a more modernised solution that better meets customer and business needs. AccessNI understands that this DBS review feeds into a wider digitisation programme within DBS. We continue to engage with DBS with a view to joining the new modernised solution at the earliest possible opportunity. Unfortunately, given the current programme of work within DBS, it is not possible at present to say when this will be.

In the meantime, and to avoid unnecessary delays in recruitment timescales across NI, AccessNI will seek to maintain (where possible) a speedy turnaround in disclosure applications; currently approximately 80% of Enhanced disclosure certificates are issued within 2 days of receipt of the application in AccessNI. We will also endeavour to keep all RBs apprised of developments regarding the introduction of portable checks.

AccessNI Re-checks

We understand that a number of Registered Bodies have now introduced a cyclical re-checking approach within their safeguarding policies, mostly on a rolling 3 or 5 year basis. Obviously this will have an impact on the demand for checks; as such we would be very grateful, if you are considering introducing such an approach, that you please let us know (particularly if you think that the volume of additional re-checks you may require in any given year is likely to exceed 100). This will not only help us understand the extent of customer re-checking approaches, but will also allow us to factor these changes into our wider operational resource needs.



Disclosure Advice Service

Accredited Training

To support employers, Niacro's Disclosure service offers CPD accredited training on the topic of disclosure focusing on several areas including;

- Best practice when employing people with convictions
- Understanding which level of Access NI is appropriate for each role and making sense of the feedback
- Understanding the Rehabilitation of Offenders legislation and its potential impact on recruitment into certain roles.

The training is appropriate for anyone including, HR professionals involved in the recruitment of staff or volunteers, as well as statutory and voluntary agencies that provide services to people with convictions. The training aims to promote best practice in recruitment of people with convictions, and to equip participants with the knowledge and understanding needed to manage recruitment processes fairly and appropriately. By debunking myths and helping participants to better understand the wide and varied circumstances of having a conviction, we aim to help address skills shortages by creating more opportunities for the employment of people with convictions who are skilled, experienced, available and motivated to work.

Training can be tailored to meet participants needs and has been developed by experts in the field. It can be completed in person or online. The training also provides examples based on anonymised real-life experiences and case studies of instances that participants might come across in their roles. To book training, please visit our website or contact us at disclosure@niacro.co.uk.

Bespoke support for employers , education providers and others

Additionally, Niacro's Disclosure service can assist employers/further education bodies and others by reviewing their policies and procedures on the recruitment of people with convictions, and give advice and guidance on how to create a robust policy that protects both the employer and the employee. This is also relevant for agencies that provide services to individuals with convictions, especially those who assist with employability work as they will be better able to advise service users about what to expect when applying for jobs or progressing to further education.

Service user feedback

"I am so pleased to inform you that my enhanced disclosure has been cleared for the EA. It is such relief, and I must commend you for the effort you put into helping me outlay my letter in such perfect format. The work that you guys do at Niacro is just amazing and people like me wouldn't have anywhere to turn in these situations. I will keep a copy of my letter for similar scenarios in the future. I am forever grateful. "

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