

DBS Checks:

What You Need to Know

Basic, standard and enhanced checks — when they're lawful, what they reveal, spent convictions and your right to challenge errors.

 Last reviewed: August 2026

 Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 · Police Act 1997

 Applies across England & Wales

ukworkrights.co.uk

The three levels of DBS check

LEVEL	WHAT IT SHOWS
Basic	Unspent convictions only — anyone can apply
Standard	Spent and unspent convictions, cautions, reprimands, warnings
Enhanced	Standard + any info held by police considered relevant
Enhanced + barred lists	Enhanced + whether on children's or adults' barred list

▲ EMPLOYERS CANNOT CHOOSE FREELY

Standard and enhanced checks are only lawful for **specific roles listed in law** — e.g. working with children, vulnerable adults, certain regulated professions. An employer cannot request a standard or enhanced check for a general office role.

💡 BASIC CHECKS ANY EMPLOYER CAN REQUEST A BASIC CHECK — OR YOU CAN APPLY YOURSELF AT £20 VIA [GOV.UK/REQUEST-COPY-CRIMINAL-RECORD](https://gov.uk/request-copy-criminal-record).

When convictions become spent

- Under the **Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974**, most convictions become **spent** after a rehabilitation period
- Once spent, you do **not have to declare** a conviction to a general employer
- The rehabilitation period depends on the **sentence**, not the offence
- Custodial sentences over 4 years for serious violent, sexual or terrorist offences never become spent; other sentences over 4 years can now become spent
- Simple cautions are spent immediately; conditional cautions are spent after 3 months
- For **excepted roles** (working with children, healthcare, legal, financial) — spent convictions must still be disclosed
- From **28 October 2023**, rehabilitation periods were **reduced significantly** for many sentence types

✓ **KEY CHANGE 2023 CUSTODIAL SENTENCES OVER 4 YEARS CAN NOW BECOME SPENT (EXCEPT FOR SERIOUS VIOLENT, SEXUAL OR TERRORIST OFFENCES), AND SHORTER SENTENCES BECOME SPENT SOONER.**

What to do if your check contains an error

1

Check your certificate carefully

The certificate is posted to you, and you then show it to the employer who asked for the check. Compare what's listed against your actual history — errors do occur.

2

Apply for a dispute through DBS

If information is wrong, contact the DBS disputes team: 03000 200 190. They will investigate and correct genuine errors.

3

Request a Chief Constable review

If enhanced information from a police force is disputed, you can request a review via the Independent Monitor at the Home Office.

4

If refused employment — take legal advice

Blanket policies that refuse anyone with any criminal record may be unlawfully discriminatory. Seek advice before accepting a rejection.

Frequently asked questions

Q Can my employer withdraw a job offer because of my DBS check?

They can, but must consider the nature of the conviction, how long ago it was, your age at the time, and the relevance to the role. A blanket policy of rejecting anyone with any record may be unlawful — particularly if the conviction is old, minor or unrelated to the role.

Q Does my employer have to tell me what's on my check before making a decision?

Yes — good practice (and most HR policies) require discussing the certificate with you before making a decision. This gives you the chance to explain the context. If they don't, raise this in any appeal.

Q Do volunteers need DBS checks?

Enhanced checks for volunteers working with children or vulnerable adults are free. The eligibility rules are the same as for paid roles — the role must be one listed in the relevant legislation.

Q How long is a DBS certificate valid?

There is no set expiry date — but most employers treat certificates as valid for 3 years. The DBS Update Service (£15/year) allows employers to check whether a certificate is still current without a full new check.

FREE RIGHTS GUIDANCE

Questions about *your DBS check?*

Get plain-English guidance on your rights and your employer's legal duties.

DBS DISPUTES

03000 200 190

gov.uk/dbs-check

NACRO — REHABILITATION CHARITY

Free helpline

nacro.org.uk

CITIZENS ADVICE

0800 144 8848

citizensadvice.org.uk

UK WORK RIGHTS — FREE GUIDE

**What Shows Up on a DBS Check
in England and Wales? 2026
Guide to Basic, Standard and
Enhanced Checks**

ukworkrights.co.uk/guide-criminal-record-checks-england-wales.html

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FREE GUIDE

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