AN EMPLOYER’S GUIDE TO USING THE DBS UPDATE SERVICE

The DBS update service is an online subscription that enables employers to accept a person’s pre-issued standard or enhanced DBS disclosure certificate by carrying out a free and instant online check. The online check will confirm whether or not their criminal record status has changed since the last disclosure was issued.

While subscribing to the service is voluntary, NHS organisations may consider making this a policy requirement for individuals being appointed into highly mobile positions, to ensure the smooth and efficient transfer of staff.

If your organisation already has a policy in place that requires periodic checks on staff working in positions that are eligible for a DBS check, as an alternative to using the update service, then these arrangements can continue as normal.

Where you are considering changing local policy to require subscription to the update service, we would stress the importance of working with local unions and communications teams to ensure staff understand what this means for them.

If any change in policy is to replace periodic checks, then we would suggest that any requirement for staff to subscribe to the update service is scheduled to coincide with existing renewal periods.

Purpose of this briefing

If used effectively the DBS update service can be used to strengthen pre-existing safeguarding measures and has the potential to reduce the time and cost spent on recruitment.

This briefing paper aims to provide additional clarity on:
- the mutual benefits of the service
- encouraging subscription
- who can carry out an online status check
- how to access the service
- fees for subscription
- what an online check tells you
- avoiding lapses in subscription
- DBS communication tools
- where to find further information
The mutual benefits of the service

Benefits for employers

- No application forms to complete, thereby reducing administrative burden.
- Free, instant online checking of DBS disclosure certificates speeding up the ability to appoint.
- Increased safeguards through a two-way link between the Electronic Staff Record and DBS systems, enabling automatic updates of a person’s criminal record status (every 60 days) and the ability to transfer high level information when considering making a referral to the DBS. For more information, see the ESR website.

Benefits for employees and volunteers

- In the majority of cases, they will only ever require one DBS check.
- For an annual subscription of £13 (free to volunteers) an individual can take a pre-disclosed disclosure certificate with them from role to role (if the new role does not change the type of access they have with adults and/or children or the type of clearances required).
- Individuals have more control over who has access to their criminal record information.

Encouraging subscription

An individual can join the update service before submitting a DBS disclosure application, during the application process or, after the issue of their DBS disclosure certificate.

It will be in your best interest, as the employing organisation, to ensure you provide as much information to individuals at the recruitment stage so that they understand what they need to subscribe to the service.

There are two ways in which individuals can join the update service.

- With their application form reference number before the application is submitted or during the application process. Employers can provide this, or individuals can find it in the top right-hand corner of the front page of the application form.
- With the application e-reference number if submitting applications electronically using the DBS’ e-bulk service.

If the individual is intending to join with their application form reference or e-reference number, it will be important for the employer to make it clear to them that the application must be received by the DBS within 28 days of the subscription being created. Applications received by the DBS on or after the 28th day will mean their subscription application will be rejected.

When the applicant’s DBS certificate is issued, the DBS will automatically add this information to their online account and their subscription to the update service
will then be live.

Individuals can also join after the DBS certificate being issued using the certificate reference number. You should make it clear to them that they must do so within 30 days of the ‘date of issue’ displayed on the certificate.

The DBS have provided a useful checklist which you can share with individuals to help them join the update service within the given timeframes.

**Who can carry out an online status check**

To carry out an online status check using the DBS update service you must have a legitimate interest in the individual you will be checking (for example, they are in your direct employment, are volunteering or are contracted to provide services in your organisation).

You should nominate the most appropriate person(s) within your organisation to have access to this information, one of which should be the counter-signatory. This may be done in advance and need only be entered onto the system once, regardless of how many individual checks that person will be undertaking.

You can find more detailed information about who is allowed to carry out an online check on the [DBS website](http://www.gov.uk).

**How to access the service**

**Individuals**

- Individuals can subscribe to join the [update service](http://www.gov.uk) by going to the DBS website.
- Individuals who hold a Gender Registration Certificate or do not want to disclose their previous gender/name changes to the employing organisation should contact the DBS sensitive application’s team. This can be done by emailing sensitive@dbs.gsi.gov.uk, telephoning 0151 676 1452, or by writing to, Sensitive applications team, Customer Services, PO Box 165, Liverpool, L69 3JD. This will ensure that information about their previous gender/name is not released on the online portal or in the DBS disclosure certificate.
- To track the progress of your DBS certificate application individuals can go to the [DBS online tracking service](http://www.gov.uk),
- For further information see the DBS guidance for applicants.

**Employers**

Employers can carry out a status check by going to the [update service](http://www.gov.uk) link on the DBS website.

After viewing the original DBS disclosure certificate, the authorised person will need to enter the name of their organisation, their own forename and surname
and then the following details of the DBS certificate being checked.

- DBS disclosure certificate number.
- Current surname of the DBS certificate holder, as specified on their DBS certificate.
- Date of birth of the DBS certificate holder, as recorded on the DBS certificate.

Full guidance for employers on using the service can also be found on the DBS website.

**Fees for subscription**

- Individuals can choose to join this service for an annual subscription fee of £13 which is less than having to pay for a DBS check each time they change jobs.
- Volunteers will be able to subscribe to the service for free, however if they move into paid employment they will need to pay the fee for their annual subscription the next time it is due for renewal.
- Employers do not need to subscribe to the service but must have the individual’s permission to undertake an online status check on them. Access for employers is free of charge.
- Payment for subscription to the DBS update service must be done online using a credit card. The DBS are looking at extending facilities to accept other forms of payment, as part of their product review later in 2019. We will continue to engage with the DBS to ensure any planned changes to the service continues to meet employer needs.

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**Did you know...**

Employers who agree to pay for DBS checks and/or subscription to the update service on behalf of individuals are eligible to claim income tax relief.

Further information on how to claim income tax relief can be found can be found on the [HM Revenue and Customs section](#) of the gov.uk website.

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**What an online status check tells you**

The status check will give one of four responses when you log onto the system.

1. **The certificate is clear and there is no new information** - which means you can accept their current DBS disclosure certificate and formerly confirm their appointment.

2. **The certificate contains information but there is no new information** - which means that you must make your recruitment decision based on the information provided in the individual’s original DBS disclosure certificate.
3. **New information is known** - which means that new information has been recorded since the issue of their last DBS disclosure certificate, and you will need to obtain a new DBS check.

4. **Details not found** - which could mean that the individual has provided the wrong information and you will need to go back and check this with them, or their subscription has not yet been processed or they haven’t yet subscribed.

**Avoiding subscription lapses**

The effectiveness of the update Service in enabling portability is reliant on individuals maintaining their subscription. It is essential for employers to make clear the individual’s responsibility to ensure their account is kept accurate and correct at all times to ensure subscription does not elapse (unless they specifically wish to unsubscribe). This responsibility is no different to any other requirements to maintain registration with a professional or licensing body.

The DBS system sends out two notifications to alert individuals of their expiry date (four weeks before subscription is due, with a final reminder issued two weeks before). We would, however, stress that it is in the employing organisation’s best interest to put in place their own arrangements to prompt individuals to renew their subscription.

Employers should also remind individuals of their responsibility to ensure the following details remain correct during the full term of their subscription:

- name
- address
- bank and/or debit card details.

While individuals can amend their account to reflect any changes to name and/or address at any point during their subscription, they can only change bank and debit card details at the point of renewing their subscription. Therefore, employers should use this opportunity to prompt individuals to check that their details remain correct. This will be particularly important if individuals have opted to automatically renew their subscription, as they may assume that they do not have to take any further action.

Any failure to ensure details are correct, means that employers will cease receiving automatic updates on the individual’s criminal record status and they must obtain a fresh DBS check in order for the individual to resubscribe, incurring unnecessary time and costs to the employer or, in some cases, the individual themselves.

**DBS communication tools**

Guidance for employers and applicants, including useful promotional materials that employers may wish to use in their communications with staff, can be found on the [DBS website](#).
Further information
This briefing note outlines some key considerations for NHS organisations, when encouraging individuals to subscribe to the DBS update service.

Further guidance and resources can be found on the employment check section of the NHS Employers website which are aimed at helping employers to understand their legal responsibilities when considering eligibility for a DBS check.

Queries
If you have any further queries which are not covered in this briefing paper, please do not hesitate to contact us at employmentchecks@nhsemployers.org

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