



Newsletter

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Welcome to the first edition of the AccessNI newsletter. The newsletter will be distributed to all AccessNI customers at regular intervals and put on our web-site where further copies can be downloaded. The purpose is to keep you up to date with developments in AccessNI and answer some of your questions. We hope you find it informative and useful and would welcome any feedback, not just on this Newsletter, but also any views you might have about our service generally. Please e-mail us at: accessni@ani.x.gsi.gov.uk should you have any comments that you would like to share with us.

Tom Clarke,
General Manager

Completing Application Forms

Did you know that since AccessNI began work on 1 April 2008 we have received over 122,000 applications for disclosure certificates, but have only accepted around 108,000? That means we have returned over 14,000 incorrectly completed forms – that's 1 in every 9 forms that arrives here with us. Most common mistakes are:-

- Failure to tick yes or no at boxes b6 or b7;
- Type of application not clearly marked at a1;
- Boxes e4 and e5 don't relate to the type of disclosure requested;
- Failure to provide a full 5 year address history.

Poor handwriting is a problem as it makes it difficult to read forms. If you can't read the form then neither can we!

Incorrectly or poorly completed forms slow down our processes and result in delay of the return of disclosures to Registered Bodies.

If you need help to complete your application form, please don't hesitate to call the helpline, (028) 9025 9100 and ask for assistance. Alternatively, check out the Guidance for Forms in the Resource Library section of our website.

Return to Service Standards

"Great work on the speed criminal disclosures are coming back at"

"well done on the performance front".

Just two of the comments recently received from AccessNI customers. What a change from the summer and autumn of 2008 when disclosures were taking on average, 12 weeks to be returned. Now that we've achieved a better service, we aim to keep it up. If you want to know the current position about your disclosure, please check out the "latest news" section of our web-site, www.accessni.gov.uk where each week we provide up to date information on how long it's taking to process and return disclosures.

Asking the right questions?

It can be hard sometimes to know whether or not you need an AccessNI enhanced disclosure. We are told that Registered Bodies sometimes get them for employees – "just to be sure". But if you do this you could be breaching someone's right to privacy.

You can only ask for an enhanced disclosure where you meet two criteria. First, that the post is "excepted" under the Rehabilitation of Offenders legislation. In other words that legislation allows you to have sight of your employee's full criminal record.

The second is that the certificate is required for a "prescribed purpose". What's a prescribed purpose? If you look at section 9 of the Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records) (Disclosure) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008, this provides a list of those positions for which AccessNI can issue a disclosure certificate. You can look this legislation up at www.opsi.gov.uk

One of the most common mistakes Registered Bodies make is to believe that if someone has contact with an older person they must have an enhanced certificate. That's not always the case – a vulnerable adult must be in receipt of specific services and have particular types of disability before an enhanced disclosure can be requested.

Over the coming months, we'll be looking more closely at "positions applied for" on application forms and if it's not clear to us the position is one which entitles the applicant to an enhanced disclosure then we'll raise a query with the Registered Body.

Compliance

Registered Bodies are reminded that Lead and Counter Signatories agree to ensure they will comply with our Code of Practice. This is important as legislation requires that information provided on AccessNI Disclosure Certificates is properly handled, safeguarded and disposed of in a safe and verifiable manner.

We have recently introduced a series of Self Assessment Audits aimed at checking that Registered Bodies understand and are complying with our Code of Practice. Over the coming months, we will extend this process more widely and will also commence a series of Compliance Visits to see, and assess, local procedures in Registered Bodies. These visits will also afford Registered Bodies the opportunity of sharing best practice.

Vetting and Barring Scheme

We're quite often asked is AccessNI ready for implementation of VBS. The short answer is yes! And you don't have to take our word for it. The national VBS Programme Board recently confirmed that AccessNI are on track to meet the October "go-live" date in terms of our IT system. Over the course of the next couple of months we will be providing you with more information, including the changes we need to make to the application form.

Calling AccessNI

AccessNI has a dedicated Call Handling Service. Since our launch we have received in excess of 20,000 calls. At present we receive almost 100 calls each day. We understand that on occasions it can be difficult to get through to an operator.

Recent analysis of calls would indicate that the busiest times are in the morning time. If you are having trouble getting through, you might find it easier if you leave your call to the late afternoon time, when the number of calls is slightly less.

Summer Schemes

Last year, when AccessNI was finding its feet, many applications were received for staff working in summer schemes. If you do plan to have a summer scheme this year, get the application forms into us as soon as you can. In the meantime, if you plan to send us more than 50 applications for such an event, please drop us an e-mail at accessni@ani.x.gsi.gov.uk.

Let us know the likely numbers and when you think you might be able to get these applications to us.

Disputes

AccessNI will, as far as possible, advise Registered Bodies about any complaints / disputes arising from a disclosure certificate.

We do receive correspondence from solicitors, MLAs and MPs raising disputes. If we simply liaise directly with the Applicant, there is a chance that you may not know about the dispute or be familiar with all the relevant information.

You are reminded that, as approved Registered Bodies, you should be the first point of contact with AccessNI in relation to any specific disclosure query. Please remind applicants about this.

Customer Survey

Many of you recently completed a customer survey questionnaire for AccessNI – thank you for taking the time. The return rate was around 50% and is very high for this type of survey.

Key findings include:-

- 60% rated our service as satisfactory or higher;
- 71% believed our staff were helpful;
- 22% complained about the service and of those, 70% were satisfied that complaints were resolved in a satisfactory way.

Further information about the survey will be posted on our web-site shortly.

We plan to run another survey in August/September 2009 to see how our service is developing.

Address Continuation Sheet

Up to now if an applicant had more than 2 addresses over a 5 year period, we asked you to note these on a separate sheet of paper. We know however there have been some difficulties with this system, so we've now introduced a continuation sheet on which these addresses can be recorded. This can be downloaded from the web-site at the Resource Library section. We would encourage you to use this sheet from this point forward.