

Chapter 7: AccessNI vetting procedures

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0.1 Context

Joymount Presbyterian Church as a congregation of The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) is a faith-based body that is required to ensure appropriate and adequate checks for all persons working or volunteering with children and/or adults at risk of harm.

As part of the ethos of safeguarding all who come in contact with our mission and ministries, it is crucial that all volunteers and employees of the individual congregations and Presbyteries are checked, prior to commencing roles and regularly thereafter.

This policy applies to all volunteers, leaders, officers and employees in congregations and associated ministries in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

0.2 Guiding principles

If you apply for a job or volunteer in a role having close and regular supervision of children or adults at risk of harm, as outlined in legislation, you need an **Enhanced** AccessNI check.

Given the nature of our ministry and associated roles, all individuals in a relevant role are identified by:

- Access NI Criminal Record Checks, under Part V of the Police Act 1997 and the provisions of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2005

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland identifies the following roles as Regulated Activity applicable under the legislation:

- Ministers (Student Ministers, Ministers with or without a charge, active Ministers, retired Ministers if continuing to engage in a pastoral role)
- Auxiliary Ministers
- Elders

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- Deaconesses
- Leaders, helpers, volunteers
- Youth/family workers

Currently, PCI will complete a check at the beginning of the person's role.

This is to be renewed every three years while they remain in the post.

All checks must be applied for through a registered body; Presbyterian Church in Ireland is a registered body for AccessNI.

AccessNI checks in Northern Ireland are not currently portable between roles and organisations. However, it may be possible to use a recent PCI completed AccessNI check when an individual leader moves congregations or is involved in mission in another PCI church. Provided that the work is the same type of role which they were checked for ie Sunday school teacher moving to another Sunday school or into other youth work in children's regulated activity and where:

- The Congregation has sight of the original AccessNI certificate (which is only held by the applicant in their nirect account);
- The check was done in last the 3 years;
- Joymount Kirk Session seek an assurance from the previous church that there were no issues around the leader's role or work

Where the above cannot be complied with a new AccessNI check must be carried out.

Joymount Presbyterian Church will also want to ensure they follow their recruitment processes for a transferring leader especially where this involves a change of role or different context.

Checks are not transferable between Presbyteries for any Minister role or Deaconess role.

For example, if a Minister is moving to a new charge within the same Presbytery a new criminal records check is not required. However, if a Minister moves to a new charge within a different Presbytery, the receiving Presbytery must conduct a fresh AccessNI records check.

Joymount Kirk Session is accountable for the leaders and volunteers operating within its congregational remit.

Anyone working with children or adults at risk, from the age of 16 on should get an AccessNI check.

No one may commence the role until the check process is completed, and a Presbytery cannot install a Minister until the check process is completed.

0.3 Exceptions

- Persons under the age of 16
- A short-term emergency situation
Example: a parent who has stepped in to supervise a Sunday School class to allow a teacher to take a child to hospital. These should be the exception and risk managed by those in positions of responsibility.
- Volunteer from another jurisdiction, in some circumstances only (see 0.8 below)

0.4 Process

1. An individual who is seeking a relevant role will approach a Leader in Charge of an organisation within an individual congregation to advise that they can fill a role; OR an individual is elected as a member of Joymount Kirk Session; OR a Minister/Deaconess receives a call
2. An application for an AccessNI record check will be completed for a relevant role, giving references: [AccessNI and Garda Vetting Forms – Presbyterian Church Ireland \(presbyterianireland.org\)](https://www.presbyterianireland.org/AccessNIandGardaVettingForms)
3. Joymount Kirk Session or Presbytery should ensure that the form is fully completed and that all required documentation is attached before it is sent to the Council for Social Witness (CSW) admin team for processing. The process will expire after 90 days if not followed through completely
4. Once approved by Joymount Kirk Session or Presbytery, the application will be sent by the applicant to CSW central office for processing
5. CSW admin staff will process the application and the applicant will receive a disclosure certificate (see 0.6)
6. Incomplete forms will be returned to the applicant via email by the CSW admin team; incomplete forms cannot be processed and sent to AccessNI.

AccessNI applications for criminal record checks will expire in 90 days if the process is not completed and a new form will be required after this time.

0.5 Payment

There is no charge to process a volunteer's AccessNI check.

All paid offices and employed positions (Ministers, Deaconesses, employed youth workers etc.) cost £31 (as at March 2026). Individual congregations will be invoiced by Council for Social Witness for these checks.

0.6 Management of disclosure certificates

Leaders/volunteers/helpers

A disclosure certificate will be issued to the applicant.

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PCI Safeguarding Office will be advised of either a clear disclosure or that a disclosure of a criminal record (known as a 'trace') has been identified.

The Safeguarding Office will not be advised of the nature or detail of the trace – that remains confidential to the individual.

If a trace is flagged it is important that Joymount Kirk Session satisfies itself that it is of no nature that would suggest a risk to children, young people or adults at risk.

Therefore, PCI Safeguarding Office will both advise the representative of Joymount Kirk Session who has signed the form, and advise the individual to speak with the representative or Minister about the issue. This will be done in writing.

They should have sight of the digital certificate that has been issued to the person by AccessNI, which may contain criminal record information, relevant policing information or details of Barred List inclusion.

Kirk Session representatives should discuss the disclosure with the PCI Safeguarding Lead or Safeguarding Officer and ensure that it has recorded its decision-making when considering any trace.

Joymount Kirk Session cannot overlook any trace that would contravene public protection.

It is a criminal offence for someone barred from working with children or vulnerable adults to apply for Regulated Activity and it is an offence for anyone to knowingly employ or use them in a Regulated Activity.

Elders

Elders do not complete applications for the role; rather, they are selected through a congregational voting process. This includes a period after nomination for concerns to be raised in writing by members of the congregation before they are confirmed in the role.

An AccessNI vetting check should take place during the period of nomination and the Presbytery cannot ordain an Elder until the check is completed. In NI this only applies to Elder roles that meet the test of regulated activity.

If a trace is disclosed on a nominated Elder's vetting check, or on any check taken after they are confirmed in role, the Clerk of Presbytery will inform the PCI Safeguarding Lead and the Minister/Clerk of Session of the local congregation will make a decision. All decisions should be recorded.

Ministers

If a trace is disclosed on an AccessNI check for any Minister, Clerk of Presbytery must inform the PCI Safeguarding Lead. The Clerk of Presbytery will also inform the Clerk/Deputy Clerk of General Assembly. All decisions should be recorded.

If a trace is disclosed on a Student Minister's certificate as part of their application, the Convenor and Secretary of the Council for Training in Ministry, and the Convenor of Ministerial Studies and Development Committee will make the final decision about the management of this. All decisions should be recorded.

Deaconesses

If a trace is disclosed on an AccessNI records check for any Deaconess, Clerk of Presbytery must inform the PCI Safeguarding Lead. The Clerk of Presbytery will also inform the Clerk/Deputy Clerk of General Assembly and the Secretary of the Council for Mission in Ireland. All decisions should be recorded.

If a trace is disclosed on a Student Deaconess certificate as part of their application, the Convenor and Secretary of the Council for Training in Ministry and the Convenor of the Deaconess Selection and Training Panel will make the final decision about the management of this. All decisions should be recorded.

No governing body can overlook any trace that would contravene public protection with any of these roles.

0.7 Record management

Applications and trace information from AccessNI will be held for 90 days from the date of the certificate issued.

All information is kept confidentially in a locked cabinet centrally in CSW offices if received in paper form. All online applications are held in a secure, restricted section of the PCI system.

At 90 days after the issue of the AccessNI digital certificate to the applicant, the above information will be destroyed (shredded or deleted) by the office manager.

If a trace is disclosed and there is further action required, the 90-day process does not apply; 90 days will commence at the date on which the Kirk Session and PCI Safeguarding Lead/Safeguarding Officer have agreed that volunteering is appropriate OR that volunteering is not suitable.

0.8 Management of checks from other jurisdictions

AccessNI cannot normally access criminal records held in other countries (with the exception of 12 EU countries, including Ireland), but it is possible to submit an application while the applicant is overseas. In a small number of cases overseas

criminal records are held on the Police National Computer and these would be revealed as part of an AccessNI check.

You must still verify the identity of an overseas volunteer.

As AccessNI cannot access criminal records from other countries, an AccessNI check may not provide a complete picture of an individual's criminal record. Good character must therefore be established as clearly as possible via other avenues (see below: *Other Screening Methods*).

How to check overseas applicants

If you are recruiting people from overseas and wish to check their overseas criminal record, you should contact the embassy or High Commission of the country in question. It may be possible to avail of the that country's vetting procedures. Note that these may not be the same as those in the UK.

You can also contact the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Response Centre Helpline on 020 7008 1500.

Certificates of good conduct

You can try to obtain a certificate of good conduct and any other references from potential overseas employees. The standard of foreign police checks varies. To find out the standard, you should contact either the authorities in a particular country or its embassy.

Either you or the employee should obtain a certified translation of the certificate of good conduct.

When managing applications for volunteering from overseas, a common-sense approach will be adopted (see *Other Screening Methods*).

Other screening methods

References and interview

Joymount Kirk Session and/or panel should make every effort to establish the suitability of candidates by careful use of references and interviews.

You must remain aware that what would be considered an offence in Northern Ireland may not be considered an offence in another country, and vice versa.

Any certificates of good conduct should be treated with caution, as there is little way to establish their validity.

Good Practice Guidance

- Always follow the usual recruitment processes as closely as possible
- Think about putting additional weight into interview questions

- Get checks completed where you can, as outlined above
- Seek references and, when possible, follow up verbally
- Verify identity
- Ask the volunteer to make a written statement, clearly signing, saying that there is nothing in their background that would disqualify them from volunteering with children or adults at risk or in need of protection

An 'adult at risk of harm' is as defined in *Adult Safeguarding Operational Procedures, Adults at Risk of Harm and Adults in Need of Protection, September 2016*: A person aged 18 or over, whose exposure to harm through abuse, exploitation or neglect may be increased by their personal characteristics and/or life circumstances.

Personal characteristics may include, but are not limited to, age, disability, special educational needs, illness, mental or physical frailty or impairment of, or disturbance in, the functioning of the mind or brain. Life circumstances may include, but are not limited to, isolation, socio-economic factors and environmental living conditions.

Sending volunteers to other countries

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland will conduct all its own usual checks and measures (i.e., normal recruitment procedure and conducting the relevant AccessNI records check) prior to sending any volunteer to another country.

Please refer to PCI online procedures if you require procedures for:

- 1.0 Students for ministry training and Deaconesses Training Program for the Diaconal Ministry (Union Theological College).
- 2.0 Transferring ministers/licentiates (ministers from other jurisdictions/denominations)

3.0 References and associated policies

<https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/about-accessni>

<https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/accessni-legislation-and-guidance>

Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Council for Social Witness, Procedures for Managing Traces (AccessNI and Garda checks) V003 20.05.24

[***The Code: the constitution and government of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland***](#) (2026)

CHAPTER END