

Nacro >

**Criminal Record
Support Service**



What criminal record information can I obtain?

**Recruiting for jobs, roles or courses
that are subject to higher-level DBS checks**

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Introduction

This guide is for organisations that recruit for jobs, roles or courses that require placements, which are exempt, or ‘excepted’, from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. These are the jobs, roles or courses in England or Wales which are eligible for a standard or enhanced or enhanced and barred Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) criminal record check also known as higher-level DBS checks.

Please note that different rules apply if you are recruiting for jobs, roles or courses in Scotland or Northern Ireland.

Schemes of disclosure

In England and Wales, there are two schemes of disclosure:

Self-disclosure

This is information that an employer or education provider can ask an applicant to provide in the form of a criminal record declaration. The information that you are entitled to ask and that an applicant is obliged to disclose depends on the type of role or course that they have applied for.

Vetting checks

This is the formal process by which you can verify the information that an applicant has self-disclosed. Most vetting checks in England and Wales are processed by the Disclosure and Barring Service (also known as ‘DBS checks’), but other types of vetting checks include security vetting such as Security Clearance, Developed Vetting, Counter Terrorism Checks among others. The type or level of check you can request depends on the specific job, role or course that you are recruiting for.

This practical guidance aims to provide a step-by-step approach to understanding exactly what information you are entitled to request and what information will be disclosed on higher-level DBS certificates. It should be read in conjunction with the DBS filtering guidance and the [Ministry of Justice \(MOJ\) guidance on the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974](#) (see, in particular, ‘Exceptions Order’).

For further comprehensive advice, support or training on DBS (or other vetting) eligibility, or [recruiting safely and fairly](#), please contact Nacro’s Employer Advice Service on 0845 600 3194 or via email at employeradvice@nacro.org.uk.

Self-Disclosure

It is your responsibility to update your recruitment forms and online portals to ensure that:

- You ask the correct criminal record declaration question in line with legal requirements
- The question is not framed in a way which encourages the applicant to disclose more information than you are legally entitled to take into account when assessing their suitability for the role

Do I need to ask questions about criminal records?

No. There is no legal requirement to ask applicants about their criminal record. Certain sectors may have regulatory standards (e.g. to determine whether somebody is a 'fit and proper person' to hold a specific post) that requires a declaration of certain criminal record information, but for the most part it is up to you to decide whether and why you need to know about past misdemeanours.

When is a good time to ask about criminal records?

If you are going to ask applicants to declare their criminal record, you should do so in a way that encourages honesty. It is good practice to inform prospective applicants from the outset exactly what information will be requested from them and why, and at which stage of the recruitment process this information will be requested. The emphasis should be that the information will be used only to inform the overall assessment as to their suitability for the role, where it is relevant. Providing this information will help prospective applicants decide whether they would like to apply or not.

To determine when you should ask applicants to make a criminal record declaration, you need to think carefully about why you are asking for this information in the first place. You also need to consider exactly what information you will need in order to help you assess whether the criminal record is relevant to the role applied for and whether the applicant is suitable for the role. This will help you decide which stage of your recruitment process would be the most appropriate to get the information that you need.

Ideally, you should avoid requesting criminal record information during the initial application stage of recruitment (i.e. the application form or online portal). This will ensure that you first assess an applicant's suitability based on their skills, merits and experience. A simple yes/no declaration on an application form serves no helpful purpose as it will not give any information as to the context or circumstances of the offences which is necessary to inform your risk assessment.

The UK General Data Protection Regulation (UKGDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) gives extra protection to criminal offence data which includes cautions, convictions, and allegations relating to criminal conduct/behaviour. This type of data is likely to be high risk to individuals, and so your organisation may need to have in place an appropriate policy document, identify a lawful basis, and complete a data protection impact assessment (DPIA) when processing this information. It would be difficult to justify the collection of criminal record data from all applicants when some may not even meet the requirements to be shortlisted for the role.

How should I word the criminal record declaration form?

This is very important because, if you fail to ensure that your recruitment forms and online portals are in line with legal requirements, you could face an applicant pursuing a civil claim, or prosecution by the Information Commissioner's Office.

For jobs, roles or courses which are exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, you should legally ask both of the following questions:

1. Do you have any unspent cautions or convictions under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974?
2. Do you have any adult cautions or 'spent' convictions that are not 'protected' as defined by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (as amended in 2020)?

The law that governs what information is disclosed on higher-level DBS certificates has changed (as outlined in the 'What is filtering?' section below). This means that if you want to obtain all the criminal record information that you are entitled to take into account for exempt jobs, roles and courses, you need to ask both of the above questions as DBS certificates do not generally disclose overseas convictions.

Disclosure laws are complex and widely-misunderstood. It can also be very difficult to get accurate advice about what must be disclosed for different purposes. It is important that you give applicants the opportunity to discuss any discrepancies and concerns you might have before making any final decisions about their suitability for the role.

In order to reduce the potential for under-disclosure or over-disclosure, we recommend that you direct applicants to our [guide for applicants](#) and to our Criminal Record Support Service (call 0300 123 1999 or email: helpline@nacro.org.uk) for advice about what they need to disclose. We have provided a sample policy statement in the box below, but please also refer to our template self-declaration form for jobs, roles or courses which are exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act in Appendix 1.

Example policy statement

The post you are applying for is 'exempt' from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, so you are required to declare:

- All 'unspent' cautions (including conditional cautions, diversionary cautions, youth conditional cautions) and convictions under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
- All adult cautions (simple or conditional) or 'spent' convictions that are not 'protected' as defined by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (as amended in 2020)

The amendments to the Exceptions Order provide that certain 'spent' convictions and cautions are 'protected' and are not subject to disclosure to employers and cannot be taken into account.

Guidance and criteria on the filtering of these cautions and convictions can be found [here](#).

Vetting Checks: Higher-level DBS Certificates

Which jobs, roles and courses are eligible?

Jobs, roles or courses which are exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act are eligible for higher-level DBS certificates. There is no single, comprehensive list of these roles, but they are set out in different laws including:

- The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (Exceptions) Order 1975
- The Police Act 1997
- The Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records Regulations as amended in 2023)

Note that these laws provide eligibility for higher-level DBS certificates; they do not make them a legal requirement.

The following gives you an idea of the sort of jobs, roles or course placements that are eligible for higher-level DBS certificates. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list:

- Working in certain roles with children or vulnerable adults, or in certain environments where there is the opportunity for contact with them
- Working in certain regulated professions, such as healthcare, law, some senior finance roles
- Work that requires certain licences, including taxi drivers, Security Industry Authority, gambling

It can be difficult to know for sure whether the job, role or course you are offering is exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. It is your responsibility to make sure that you only request higher-level DBS certificates if you are legally entitled to do so. If you would like advice about this, please contact our Employer Advice Line on 0845 600 3194 or email employeradvice@nacro.org.uk. You might also find it useful to have a look at the [DBS guidance leaflets](#), [DBS' online eligibility tool](#) or, if you are recruiting for roles in healthcare, the [NHS Employers eligibility tool](#).

What information is disclosed on higher-level DBS certificates?

The Police Act 1997 as amended in 2023 sets out what information must be disclosed on higher-level certificates. Each level of certificate will disclose the following:

- all 'unspent' cautions (including conditional cautions, diversionary cautions, youth conditional cautions) and convictions.
- Adult cautions which are not eligible to be filtered
- 'Spent' Juvenile and adult convictions which are not eligible to be filtered

An enhanced DBS certificate may also include any other information that the police hold about the applicant, where they feel disclosure is justified in order to safeguard the children or vulnerable adults that they have applied to work with.

Most enhanced DBS certificates do not disclose any police intelligence, but if the police are thinking about disclosing information that they hold about the applicant, they will normally write to you before the certificate is processed to let you know and to invite you to make representations against the inclusion of the information they have proposed to disclose.

The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (as amended) sets out the legal definition of regulated activity with [children](#) and [adults](#). If you are recruiting for a role that is defined as regulated activity with children or adults, you are required by law to check if the applicant has been barred from working with the relevant group. These roles are, therefore, eligible for an enhanced certificate with a check against the relevant barred list.

The following table provides an overview of the information that may be disclosed on higher-level DBS certificates:

Information that may be disclosed	Level of DBS certificate		
	Standard	Enhanced	Enhanced + barred
‘Unspent conditional cautions, diversionary cautions, or youth conditional cautions)	YES	YES	YES
‘Unspent’ convictions	YES	YES	YES
Adult convictions which cannot be filtered	YES	YES	YES
Juvenile convictions which cannot be filtered	YES	YES	YES
Adult convictions which cannot be filtered	YES	YES	YES
Police intelligence	No	YES	YES
Inclusion on the children’s barred list	NO	NO	YES
Inclusion on the adult’s barred list	NO	NO	YES

What is filtering?

Historically, if a role was 'exempt' from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (ROA), the recruiting organisation was entitled to know about the applicant's (or existing employee's) full criminal record history. This meant that all convictions, cautions, reprimands, final warnings, and youth cautions held on the Police National Computer (PNC) were disclosed on higher-level DBS checks until a person reached 100 years of age.

Following a legal challenge in *T and another vs. Secretary of State for the Home Department and others*, on 29 May 2013, a filtering system was introduced which allowed for certain minor offences to be removed or 'filtered' from higher-level DBS certificates. In practice, lots of people with criminal records did not benefit from the filtering system because the rules about what could be filtered were very limited.

Subsequently, this legislation was challenged through the courts and in January 2019, the Supreme Court ruled that certain aspects of the filtering system were disproportionate. Further revisions to the filtering rules were implemented on 28 November 2020, and important amendments were implemented on 28 October 2023. The next section explains what information is now filtered from higher-level DBS certificates.

What are the filtering rules?

For adults (aged 18+)

An adult conviction will be filtered from a higher-level DBS certificate only if:

- The conviction is 'spent' under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
- 11 years has elapsed since the date of conviction
- The conviction did not result in a custodial or suspended prison sentence
- The conviction does not appear on the list of [specified offences](#)

An adult caution will be filtered after 6 years have elapsed since the date of the caution, as long as the offence is not on the list of [specified offences](#).

There is no limit to the number of cautions or convictions that can be filtered, as long as they meet the above criteria.

For juveniles (under 18)

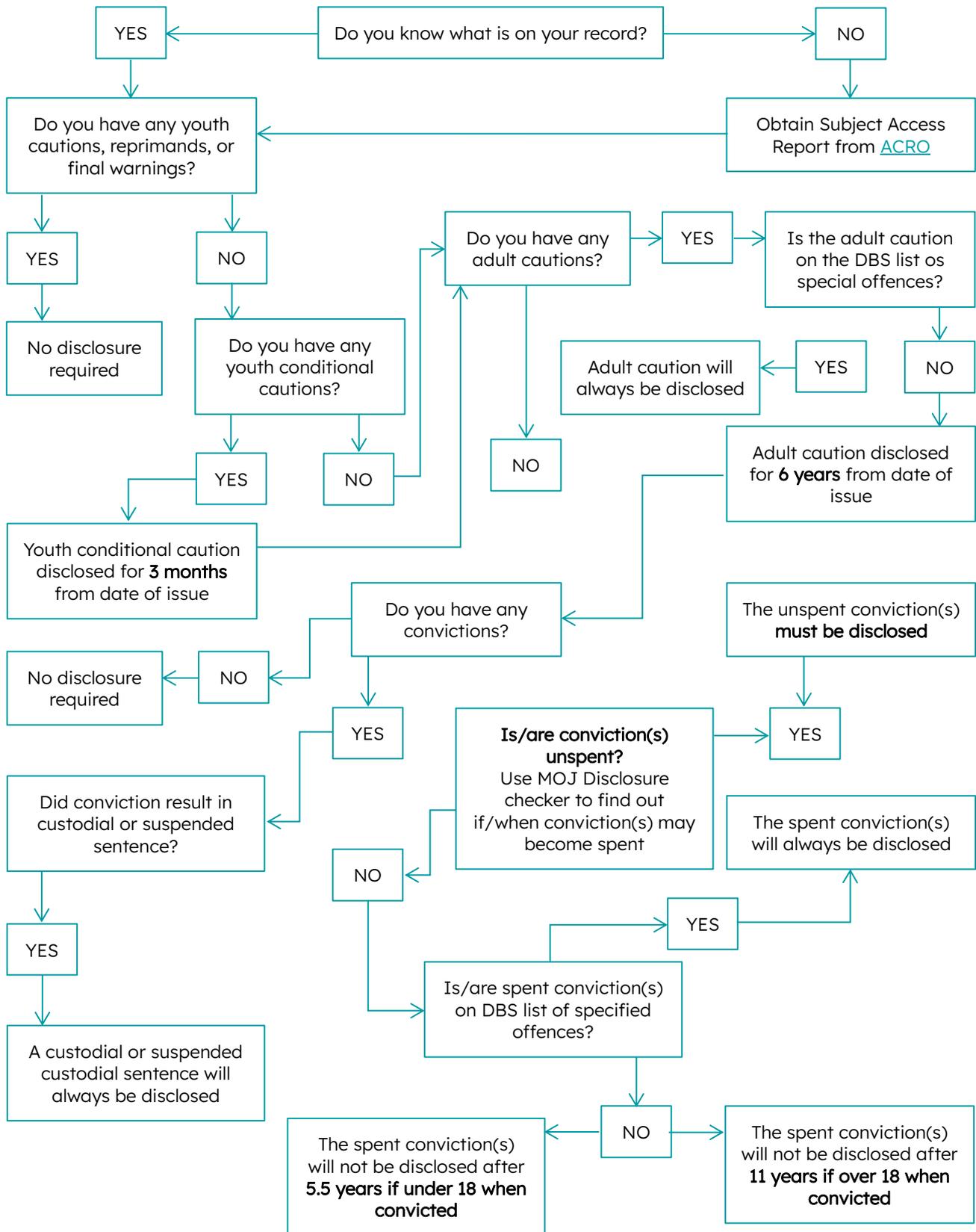
A juvenile conviction will be filtered from a higher-level DBS certificate only if:

- The conviction is 'spent' under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
- 5½ years have elapsed since the date of conviction
- The conviction did not result in a custodial or suspended custodial sentence
- The conviction does not appear on the list of specified offences

There is no limit to the number of convictions that can be filtered, as long as they meet the above criteria.

Youth cautions, reprimands and final warnings are not automatically disclosed on higher-level DBS certificates, even if they are for offences on the list of specified offences. Youth conditional cautions are automatically disclosed until they are 'spent' under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. Once 'spent' they are no longer automatically disclosed, even if they are for offences on the list of specified offences.

Self-disclosure rules – ROA Exceptions Order



Frequently Asked Questions

Does an applicant need to disclose filtered cautions or convictions for jobs that are subject to higher-level DBS certificates?

In most instances, no. If their conviction(s) and/or caution(s), reprimand(s) and final warning(s) are eligible to be filtered, they do not need to disclose them for jobs which are subject to higher-level DBS checks.

There is one exception to this:

1. If they are applying for a job that is subject to other types of vetting checks that are not processed by the DBS, e.g., applying to be a police officer, or for jobs in national security.

Will I receive information relating to a fixed penalty notice or a penalty notice for disorder?

No. The filtering provisions relate to information that will be included on higher-level DBS certificates that are of 'relevant matters' as defined by the Police Act 1997. 'Relevant matters' are convictions, cautions.

As fixed penalty notices and penalty notices for disorder do not fall under the definition of a 'relevant matter', they would not be automatically disclosed on a DBS certificate and, as such, are not subject to the filtering provisions.

Can a caution or conviction that has been filtered become unfiltered in the future?

No.

Can a caution or conviction that is eligible to be filtered be disclosed as police intelligence on a higher-level DBS certificate?

Yes. A chief officer may include details relating to an otherwise filtered conviction, caution, youth cautions and youth conditional cautions, reprimand or final warning on an enhanced DBS certificate if s/he considers, having regard to all the circumstances, that it is relevant and ought to be disclosed.

Note that this only applies to applications for an enhanced DBS certificate; there is no such provision to include a filtered caution or conviction on to a standard DBS certificate.

Is filtering applied automatically when I use the online DBS Update Service?

No. The DBS Update Service is an online service that must be used in conjunction with an existing higher-level DBS certificate.

The Update Service notifies organisations of cautions and convictions that a person has received since the date the existing certificate was produced. It does not notify organisations as to whether a caution or conviction that is currently disclosed on an existing certificate is eligible to be filtered, nor does it advise an organisation to get a new certificate in the event that the existing certificate discloses information which is now protected.

Organisations therefore run the risk of falling foul of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and data protection laws if they are using a DBS certificate that was issued for the purposes of the applicant's recruitment to a role other than the one they are recruiting for, to make suitability decisions. In particular where:

1. The certificate was obtained by an applicant's former employer; and
2. The certificate was obtained some time ago

If the recruitment involves an internal candidate and your organisation is relying on a DBS certificate that you have previously obtained to assess suitability, you need to make sure that you are not inadvertently processing information that you are no longer entitled to, as you will be in contravention of the law.

If my organisation uses the Update Service, should we request that an applicant provides an up-to-date higher-level DBS certificate?

Technically there are no restrictions on how long a period an applicant that is signed up to the update service can rely on their existing certificate, provided they are working within the same workforce i.e. adult workforce or child workforce and no indication has been received from the DBS via the Update Service that a new certificate should be obtained due to the potential disclosure of 'relevant police information'.

However, where an applicant is asked to produce their existing DBS certificate and this discloses protected information that should otherwise be filtered, organisations are encouraged to apply for a new DBS certificate. This helps to ensure legal and regulatory compliance (where applicable) when it comes to the retention and use of criminal record information.

Criminal record declaration form for jobs exempt from the ROA

You have been asked to complete this form because the role you have applied for is exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. The information disclosed on this form will not be kept with your application form during the application process.

Policy statement on recruiting applicants with criminal records

This post is exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and therefore applicants are required to declare:

- All unspent cautions and convictions
- All adult cautions and spent convictions that are not protected (i.e. that are not filtered out) as defined by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (as amended in 2020).

For further information on filtering please refer to [Nacro guidance](#), the [Disclosure and Barring Service \(DBS\) guidance](#) or [Ministry of Justice \(MOJ\) guidance](#) (see, in particular, the section titled 'Exceptions Order').

We recognise the contribution that people with criminal records can make as employees and volunteers and welcome applications from them. A person's criminal record will not, in itself, debar that person from being appointed to this post. Any information given will be treated in the strictest confidence. Suitable applicants will not be refused posts because of offences which are not relevant to, and do not place them at or make them a risk in, the role for which they are applying.

All cases will be examined on an individual basis and will take the following into consideration:

- Whether the caution or conviction is relevant to the position applied for.
- The seriousness of any offence revealed.
- The age of applicant at the time of the offence(s).
- The length of time since the offence(s) occurred.
- Whether the applicant has a pattern of offending behaviour.
- The circumstances surrounding the offence(s), and the explanation(s) provided.
- Whether the applicant's circumstances have changed since the offending behaviour.

It is important that applicants understand that failure to disclose all unspent cautions and convictions; and also, any adult cautions and spent convictions that are not protected - regardless of whether they're convicted in the UK or abroad; and/or relevant service discipline convictions received within the Service Justice System (e.g., through Summary Hearing or Court Martial) - could result in disciplinary proceedings or dismissal.

You can use the [self-disclosure rules flowchart](#) to work out which offences you may need to disclose.

Further advice and guidance on disclosing criminal records can be obtained from [Nacro's Criminal Record Support Service](#)

Surname:	First name:
<p>Do you have any unspent cautions or convictions?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Do you have any adult cautions or spent convictions that are not 'protected' as defined by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (as amended)?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If you are not sure whether your caution(s) or conviction(s), should be disclosed please use the self-disclosure rules flowchart and/or contact Nacro for further advice.</p> <p>If you have answered yes to either question, you now have two options for disclosing your criminal record.</p> <p>Option 1: You can disclose your criminal record on a separate sheet provided that you mark a cross on the line below and attach the details in an envelope stapled to this form. The envelope should be marked CONFIDENTIAL and state your name and details of the post.</p> <p>I have attached details of my conviction separately_____ (please mark with an X if appropriate.)</p> <p>Option 2: Please provide details in the space below.</p>	
<p>DECLARATION</p> <p>I declare that the information provided on this form is correct. I understand that the declaration of a criminal record will not necessarily prevent me from being offered this role at [insert name of organisation].</p> <p>Signed: _____ Date: _____</p>	

Please return this form to:

Need more help?

Contact our Employer Advice Service

Telephone: 0845 600 3194

(Monday–Thursday, 9am–5pm and Friday, 1pm–5pm)

Email: employeradvice@nacro.org.uk

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