
Project WordPlay CIC

DBS Checks & Safer Recruitment Policy

Document title	DBS Checks & Safer Recruitment Policy
Version	1.0
Approved by	Co-Directors
Date approved	April 2026
Review date	April 2027
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1. Purpose and scope

Project WordPlay CIC works directly with children and young people, including those with SEND, SEMH needs, and from vulnerable backgrounds such as asylum-seeking families. Keeping these young people safe is our highest priority.

This policy sets out how we recruit, vet, and onboard everyone who works or volunteers with us, and how we use Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks as part of that process. It applies to:

- Co-Directors
- Employed or contracted staff
- Freelance practitioners and teaching artists
- Volunteers
- Anyone else who has unsupervised contact with children through our work

This policy should be read alongside our Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy.

2. Our commitment

Project WordPlay CIC is committed to safer recruitment — meaning we take a careful, consistent approach to assessing whether someone is suitable to work with children, not just whether they have a clean DBS record. A DBS check is one important tool, but it is never the only one.

We will always:

- Verify identity and qualifications
- Take up and follow up references
- Conduct an interview or conversation before engagement
- Obtain an appropriate DBS check before the person begins work
- Maintain an up-to-date record of all DBS checks

3. Types of DBS check

The type of check required depends on the nature of the role:

Role type	DBS level required
Co-Directors	Enhanced DBS with Children's Barred List check
Freelance practitioners / teaching artists delivering sessions	Enhanced DBS with Children's Barred List check
Volunteers working directly with children	Enhanced DBS with Children's Barred List check
Administrative roles with no participant contact	Basic DBS check (at minimum)
Volunteers in supervised, ad-hoc roles	Risk assessment to determine requirement

We will not allow anyone to work unsupervised with children until their DBS check has been returned, unless an appropriate risk assessment is in place and a senior person is present at all times during the interim period (see Section 7).

4. Recruiting staff and volunteers

4.1 Job and role descriptions

Every role — paid or voluntary — will have a clear written description that includes:

- The purpose of the role
- Whether it involves working with children
- That the role is subject to an enhanced DBS check
- Any relevant qualifications or experience required

4.2 Application and shortlisting

We will ask all applicants to complete an application form or provide a CV and covering information. We will shortlist candidates based on the requirements of the role and will not make assumptions about suitability based on protected characteristics.

4.3 Interview and assessment

All candidates for roles involving children will be interviewed or have a substantive conversation with at least one Co-Director before engagement. Interview questions will include safeguarding-related questions.

4.4 References

We will take up at least one reference before confirming any engagement. References should ideally be from a previous employer or supervisor in a role involving children. We will:

- Always request references before confirming an appointment
- Follow up any concerning or ambiguous references
- Never accept a reference from a friend or family member

- Keep reference information confidential

4.5 Identity verification

Before requesting a DBS check, we will verify the individual's identity using original documents in line with DBS identity checking guidelines. Acceptable documents include a passport, driving licence, birth certificate, and recent proof of address.

5. DBS checks — process

5.1 Applying for a DBS check

We use an umbrella body or registered organisation to process DBS applications. The individual will be asked to complete the relevant application form and provide identity documents. We will cover the cost of DBS checks for all roles.

5.2 Portability — existing DBS certificates

We may accept a DBS certificate obtained for a previous role if:

- It is an enhanced certificate (with Children's Barred List where required)
- It was issued within the last three years
- The individual is subscribed to the DBS Update Service
- We carry out a status check via the Update Service
- There are no gaps in supervised working since the check was issued

Even where we accept a portable check, we will still verify identity, take references, and conduct our safer recruitment process in full.

5.3 Overseas applicants

For individuals who have lived or worked abroad, a DBS check alone may not be sufficient. We will also request a Certificate of Good Conduct or equivalent from the relevant country, and may take additional references.

6. Recording and storing DBS information

We will maintain a secure DBS register recording:

- The person's name and role
- The date the DBS check was applied for
- The date the certificate was received
- The certificate number
- Whether any information was disclosed
- Whether the individual is subscribed to the Update Service

We will not retain copies of DBS certificates for more than six months after the date of issue. After six months we will retain only the date, certificate number, and the outcome.

All DBS records are held securely and accessed only by the Co-Directors.

7. Starting work before a DBS check is returned

In exceptional circumstances, we may allow someone to begin work before their DBS certificate has been received. This will only happen if:

- The DBS application has been submitted and is in progress
- Identity verification has been completed
- References have been checked and are satisfactory
- A written risk assessment has been completed
- The individual is not left unsupervised with children at any time
- A Co-Director is present or immediately available at all sessions
- Parents and/or partner organisations are informed of the DBS status and are in agreement.

This interim arrangement will be reviewed regularly and ended as soon as the DBS certificate is received.

8. Disclosure of criminal convictions

Roles working with children are exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. This means applicants must disclose all convictions, cautions, reprimands, and final warnings — including spent ones — when asked.

A criminal record does not automatically disqualify someone from working with us. We will consider:

- The nature and seriousness of the offence
- How long ago it occurred
- Whether it is relevant to the role
- Any evidence of change or rehabilitation

The only absolute bar is if a person is listed on the Children's Barred List — we will never engage anyone who is barred from working with children.

All information disclosed will be treated in strict confidence and discussed only between the Co-Directors (and, where appropriate, legal advisors).

9. Self-declaration form

All new starters — before their DBS certificate is received — will be asked to complete a self-declaration form confirming:

- Whether they have any convictions, cautions, or reprimands
- Whether they are subject to any investigation by statutory agencies
- Whether they have ever been dismissed from a role involving children
- Whether they are on the Children's Barred List

Providing false information on a self-declaration form is grounds for immediate termination.

10. Renewal of DBS checks

DBS checks do not have an automatic expiry date, but we will renew checks in the following circumstances:

- Every three years as a matter of good practice, unless the individual is subscribed to the Update Service

- If there has been a significant break in engagement (more than 12 months)
- If there is a specific reason to believe a new check is needed

We strongly encourage all regular practitioners and staff to join the DBS Update Service, which allows us to carry out instant status checks at no additional cost.

11. Concerns about an existing member of staff or volunteer

If a concern arises about an existing member of staff or volunteer's suitability to work with children — whether or not it involves a criminal matter — we will:

- Take the concern seriously and act promptly
- Refer to our Safeguarding Policy for guidance on immediate action
- Suspend the individual from any direct work with children while we investigate, if appropriate
- Consult the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) if the concern relates to a regulated activity
- Make a referral to the DBS if a person in regulated activity is removed due to harm concerns

Making a referral to the DBS where required is a legal duty, not a choice.

12. Responsibilities

The Co-Directors (Sophie Beckinsale and Nicki Watts) are jointly responsible for implementing this policy. Specifically:

- Ensuring all roles are correctly assessed for the level of DBS check required
- Overseeing the application and recording process
- Maintaining the DBS register
- Making decisions about disclosure of information
- Ensuring this policy is reviewed annually

13. Related policies

- Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy
- Data Protection & Privacy Policy
- Code of Conduct

14. Policy review

This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if there are changes to DBS legislation, statutory guidance, or our activities. The current version will be available at www.projectwordplay.co.uk.