

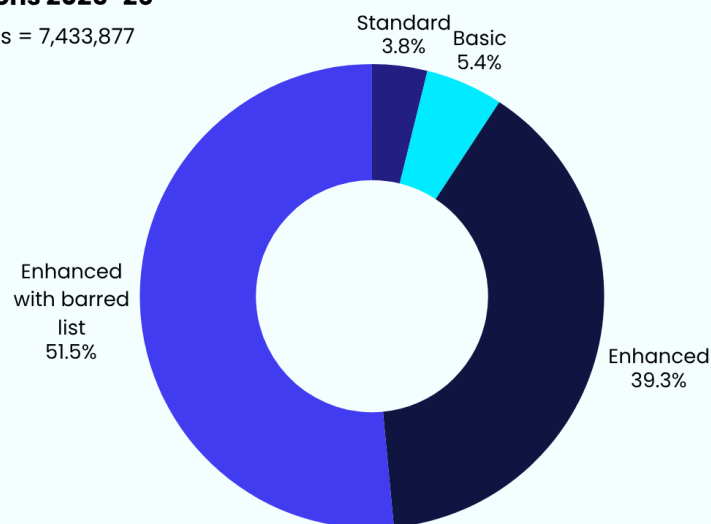
FairChecks proposals for childhood criminal records reform

The current disclosure system

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) is responsible for issuing official criminal record checks in England and Wales. There are three types of check: basic, standard, and enhanced. Any employer can request a basic check, however only specific roles can request standard or enhanced checks. The list of these roles is expanding and includes jobs in education, financial services, social care, and services such as taxi driving. Checks may also cover volunteer roles, such as visiting the elderly or helping at your child's school. **Over 7.4 million checks were undertaken in 2025/26**, up around 50,000 from the year before, with the demand for checks steadily increasing each year. **94% of them were standard or enhanced.**

DBS applications 2025–26

Total applications = 7,433,877



All cautions and convictions come with a “spending period” which indicates the length of time they must appear on a basic criminal record check. The length of time until a conviction is “spent” depends on the sentence received and is set out in [The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act \(ROA\) 1974](#). Once a spending period has concluded, the conviction is considered spent and will no longer appear on a basic check. But standard and enhanced checks are subject to different rules.

Some convictions and cautions are removed from all checks after several years, so they no longer appear. But some convictions always appear on standard and enhanced checks.

Convictions or cautions received as a child do not have to be declared for as long as convictions or cautions received as an adult, and childhood cautions are not disclosed at all after 3 months. But there is no other provision to recognise the difference between childhood and adult offending.

Specified offences

A specified offence is one which is on the [**list of offences that will always be disclosed**](#) on standard and enhanced DBS checks. The list includes a range of offences which relate to sexual or violent offending or are relevant in the context of safeguarding. Whilst many of these offences are serious, others such as affray can be the result of a minor incident. Whether committed as an adult or child, specified offences which result in convictions will appear on standard and enhanced DBS checks for life.

FairChecks proposals

FairChecks welcome the government's intention to reform disclosure for offences committed as a child.

Our proposals for shortening **rehabilitation periods** (relevant to basic checks) for childhood offences are detailed on the next page. The table shows our proposals compared to the current time that a criminal record is disclosed from the date of sentencing for each sentence.

BASIC DBS CHECKS

Sentence/disposal		Proposed time taken to become 'spent', from date of conviction.	Current time taken to become 'spent', from date of conviction
Imprisonment	Sentence length	Full sentence length + 2.5 years	Full sentence length + 3.5 years
	More than 4 years		
	More than 24 months, and less than or equal to 4 years	Full sentence length + 1 year	Full sentence length + 2 years
Detention and Training Order (DTO) (or any other custodial sentence up to 24 months)		Full sentence length	Full sentence + 2 years (if sentence between 12-24 months) Full sentence + 6 months (if sentence less than or equal to 12 months)
Youth rehabilitation order		At the end of the order, or when conditions have been completed	At the end of the order
Fine		Immediate	6 months
Conditional caution		Immediate	3 months
Endorsement imposed by court		1 year	2.5 years
Compensation order		Immediate	Once paid in full

The number of childhood offences disclosed through **standard and enhanced DBS checks** is increasing with 24,823 disclosed in 2025/26 up from 15,865 in 2021/22 (an increase of over 63%). This has been trending upwards over the last five years as shown in the table below.

Childhood convictions disclosed on standard and enhanced DBS checks

Total = 104,057



Source = FOI, 2026

Our proposals, whilst maintaining public safety and safeguarding, would significantly decrease the number of people having to disclose old childhood offences. For example, under our proposals around 1,300 disclosures for childhood offences would have been made in 2025/26 compared to the 24,823 which were made.

This would help tens of thousands of children and adults move on from childhood mistakes each year, by not making them disclose old offences for life. Of the 24,823 childhood offences that were disclosed last year 19,180 (77%) of them currently must be disclosed for life.

The table on the following page shows our proposals against the current rules for how long from the date of sentencing that a criminal record should automatically be displayed on enhanced and standard checks.

STANDARD & ENHANCED DBS CHECKS

Sentence/disposal	Proposed length of time criminal record to automatically appear on checks.		Current length of time criminal record automatically appears on checks.	
	Specified offence	Non-specified offence	Specified offence	Non-specified offence
DTO or other custodial sentence under 2 years	12 years	6 years	For ever	For ever
Non-custodial sentence	8 years	Community sentence: 4 years Non-community sentence: 2 years	For ever	5.5 years

In addition to this we are pleased that the government is reviewing the list of **specified offences**. We believe that some offences on this list when committed by a child do not necessarily need to be declared for life.

Most childhood convictions that are disclosed are for specified offences. There were 74,268 disclosures of childhood specified offences in England and Wales in the last five years compared to 29,799 for non-specified offences.

Currently there is [one list of specified offences](#), with no differentiation between offences committed as a child or as an adult. With 770 offences on this list; we feel a separate list should be created for offences committed by children.

We advocate reviewing specified offences such as affray, violent disorder, assault occasioning ABH, robbery, and assault with intent to rob. These offences are some of the most common convictions for children. They cause harm to victims and should be disclosed for a period of time, but they are not of the gravity to merit life-long disclosure.