

NEW FOR JANUARY 2026

DBS Checks for the Self-Employed.

What changed in January 2026 — and what your clients need to do now. The 12-page reference for accountants, advisors, and sole traders working in regulated sectors.

FORMAT

Reference

PAGES

8

EDITION

April 2026

APPLY DIRECT

self-employed-dbs.co.uk

1 WHAT CHANGED

Self-employed workers can now apply for their own Standard and Enhanced DBS checks.

Until January 2026, higher-level checks required an employer or client organisation to sponsor the application. That door has now opened. Here's the one-line summary, before and after.

<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #e0e0e0; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">BEFORE</p>	
<h2 style="margin: 0;">Pre '26</h2> <h3 style="margin: 0;">Sponsored by an employer.</h3> <p style="margin: 0;">Self-employed individuals could not apply for their own Standard or Enhanced DBS checks. Access to higher-level checks required sponsorship by a client organisation or employer — a barrier for sole traders, freelancers, and one-person companies.</p>	<div style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; margin: 0 10px;">→</div> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #6a3d9a; color: white; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">NOW</p>
	<h2 style="margin: 0;">Jan 2026</h2> <h3 style="margin: 0;">Apply directly. No sponsor needed.</h3> <p style="margin: 0;">Self-employed individuals can apply for their own Standard and Enhanced DBS checks directly through a DBS-registered Umbrella Body — without needing an employer to sponsor them.</p>

i

Who this affects

Sole traders, freelancers, contractors, and single-person limited companies working in regulated sectors — where unsupervised contact with children or vulnerable adults triggers an eligibility for Standard or Enhanced checks.

TYPICAL PROFILES

- 👤 Sole traders

📄 Freelancers

🏢 Contractors

🏠 Single-person Ltd

2 WHICH CHECK?

Three levels. One depends on the role – not the individual.

Not all DBS checks are the same. The level required depends on the nature of the self-employed work, the degree of contact, and whether the role is listed as a regulated activity.

<p>Basic LEVEL 1</p> <p>£21.50</p> <p>DBS fee, no admin</p> <hr/> <p>SHOWS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Unspent convictions only <hr/> <p>WHO CAN APPLY</p> <p>Anyone — apply direct via GOV.UK. No sponsor, no eligibility check required.</p>	<p>Standard LEVEL 2</p> <p>£21.50</p> <p>+ admin fee</p> <hr/> <p>SHOWS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Spent & unspent convictions ✓ Cautions, reprimands, warnings <hr/> <p>WHO CAN APPLY</p> <p>Via Umbrella Body only. Role must be eligible for Standard-level disclosure.</p>	<p>Enhanced LEVEL 3</p> <p>£49.50</p> <p>+ admin fee</p> <hr/> <p>SHOWS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ All convictions, cautions, warnings ✓ Relevant police intelligence ✓ Barred List check (optional) <hr/> <p>WHO CAN APPLY</p> <p>Via Umbrella Body only. Regulated roles only — unsupervised contact with children or vulnerable adults.</p>
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i An admin fee applies to Standard and Enhanced checks — this covers ID verification, eligibility review, and submission to DBS. The fee varies by Umbrella Body; confirm before application.

3 THE MATRIX

Common self-employed roles — and the check required.

A starting point for conversations with clients. Always verify the specific role against the DBS eligibility tool (gov.uk/find-out-dbs-check) before applying.

ROLE	TYPICAL CHECK	NOTES
Childminder / Nanny · Own or client's home	Enhanced + Barred (C)	Regulated activity — Barred List check mandatory.
Private Tutor · Home visits	Enhanced + Barred (C)	Home-based role — additional police review applies.
Music / Sports Coach · Children, unsupervised	Enhanced + Barred (C)	Unsupervised contact triggers regulated activity.
Personal Care Assistant · Adults	Enhanced + Barred (A)	Personal care = regulated activity for adults.
Live-in Carer · Adults	Enhanced + Barred (A)	Personal care plus co-habitation — highest level.
Locum / Agency Healthcare · Variable patient contact	Enhanced ± Barred	Depends on patient contact and setting.
School Site Contractor · e.g. caretaker, maintenance	Standard or Enhanced	Depends on supervision and pupil access.
Counsellor / Therapist · Vulnerable adults	Enhanced	Vulnerable adult contact — check eligibility carefully.
Exam Invigilator · School / college	Standard or Enhanced	Dependent on provider requirements.
Personal Trainer · Gym or private	Basic or Standard	Enhanced only if working with under-18s unsupervised.

! **Always verify.**
 The level of check is determined by the role, not job title. Use the official DBS eligibility tool at gov.uk/find-out-dbs-check for every application. Applying for the wrong level delays issue and is non-refundable.

4 FIVE STEPS

From register to certificate – in five steps.

Once the role is confirmed eligible, the process is straightforward via **self-employed-dbs.co.uk**. No paper forms, no posted documents.

01

Register online.

Create an account at self-employed-dbs.co.uk. No employer or sponsor needed — the client registers under their own name, their own email, their own card.

No sponsor

Email verification

02

Complete the application.

Fill in personal details and 5-year address history from the secure login. Form auto-saves. Typically ten minutes.

Autosaves

~10 minutes

03

Verify identity.

Digital ID verification via smartphone (biometric passport) — or present original ID to an authorised checker. Fully remote for most clients.

Biometric passport

Or in-person

04

Submit electronically.

Application goes to the Disclosure and Barring Service through the e-Bulk system. No paper forms at any point. Submission confirmation is immediate.

e-Bulk

Paperless

05

Receive the certificate.

Hard-copy certificate arrives by post. An electronic snapshot is available in the portal within one working day of issue — useful for sending to new clients while the post arrives.

Postal certificate

Electronic snapshot

5 WHAT TO EXPECT

How long it takes – and how to keep it **current**.

Set expectations with clients up-front. Turnaround varies by check type and by the complexity of the applicant's record. There is no official fast-track.

Turnaround times

What to tell your clients.

Basic DBS

Unspent convictions only



Often hours

Standard DBS

Spent + unspent convictions



24–48 hours

Enhanced DBS

+ police intelligence + Barred List



~10 working days

⊗ **No official fast-track exists.** All applications go through the same DBS system — claims of priority service are marketing, not process.

The DBS Update Service

Keep a Standard or Enhanced certificate current across multiple clients.

£16 / year · online subscription

- ✓ Subscribe **30** of the certificate being within **days** issued (or at application).
- ✓ Organisations run a free, instant status check online — with consent.
- ✓ Ideal for self-employed workers serving multiple clients in the same sector.
- ✓ Reuse the certificate — no new DBS fee until status changes.

✓ Up to date — no new information

↻ Certificate needs renewal

6 WORTH KNOWING

Six things every self-employed client should know.

The detail that prevents surprises — and the kind of detail that makes a good advisor indispensable. Share these bullet points directly with clients.

● 01 · Validity**A DBS check has no official expiry.**

The certificate is a snapshot at the date of issue. Individual clients or organisations set their own renewal requirements — typically 1 to 3 years, sometimes annually for higher-risk roles.

● 02 · UK-only**DBS only covers UK criminal records.**

Clients who have lived or worked abroad may need an overseas police clearance certificate (Certificate of Good Conduct) in addition. The employer or regulator usually specifies.

● 03 · Filtering**Minor or old offences may not appear.**

Filtering rules remove some older or minor offences from Standard and Enhanced certificates. However, certain serious offences must always be disclosed.

● 04 · Barred Lists**Being barred is a legal restriction.**

A person can be placed on a Barred List without any criminal convictions — via safeguarding referrals. Barring is a separate legal status from a conviction.

● 05 · Criminal offence**Knowingly employing a barred person is illegal.**

It is a criminal offence for a barred individual to work in regulated activity — and for an organisation to knowingly engage them. For self-employed work this is the client's legal responsibility.

● 06 · Self-declare**There's no blanket rule on disclosure.**

What must be self-declared depends on the role and the question asked. When in doubt, the individual discloses — honest disclosure is almost always better received than a discovery later.

GET STARTED

Register and begin the application today.

Your clients can apply directly — no employer sponsor required.
Standard and Enhanced DBS applications handled end-to-end,
with digital ID verification and electronic submission to DBS.

APPLY DIRECT · NO SPONSOR REQUIRED

self-employed-dbs.co.uk

SUITABLE FOR

Sole traders, freelancers,
contractors, single-
person companies

ACCEPTS

Standard & Enhanced DBS
applications from self-
employed individuals

OPERATED BY

MJD Ventures Limited — a
DBS-registered Umbrella
Body