

# Better safe than sorry

**Making thorough background checks on new teachers is a critical part of risk mitigation. Diane Jacoutot explains safekeeping and the realities of criminal-checking international staff and provides some key recommendations**

When English-national-curriculum international schools hired only British teachers directly from the UK, criminal record-checking was a relatively straightforward matter. Today, most schools hire a variety of nationalities from an even wider variety of locations.

Not all police checks are equal. *Best practice:* always require a national rather than regional check, and one specifically for those working with children and vulnerable adults when the option is available.

This new international reality, along with the constantly changing home country processes, requires extra vigilance and robust recruitment policies.

Let's start with the checks themselves. Most western countries offer at least two kinds of checks: one for those working with children and vulnerable adults, and

**"Hiring schools should require a criminal-check from the country of teacher training as well as where they are teaching."**

another for the rest of the population. Furthermore, some countries such as the US, Canada and Australia offer both regional checks, which only report back offences in a particular region, as well as national checks, which span the country.

What's the difference? In most countries, standard checks will not show spent convictions or may not list arrests that did not lead to conviction, and regional checks will not show convictions or arrests in a neighbouring state or province. The countries in the table, however, offer a more thorough police check that shows spent convictions, though countries such as Canada may only show spent convictions in categories that are significant to safeguarding children or vulnerable adults. Schools should accept only the best practice criminal-check to protect themselves.

Country	Best practice criminal-check	Other checks available
England and Wales	DBS check with list check, or ICPC check*	Standard police check, police certificate
Scotland	Enhanced disclosure (PVG scheme)	Standard disclosure
Northern Ireland	Enhanced disclosure (Access NI)	Standard disclosure
Republic of Ireland	Garda check	Local police check
New Zealand	Police check (online version, exception request)	MOJ check on letterhead, standard online check
Australia	Federal police check	State police check
US	FBI check	Local or state police check
Canada	Federal RCMP check	Local police check, regional RCMP check

\*The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) is a new UK agency whose checks replace the combined CRB Enhanced Disclosure and ISA checks in England and Wales. The UK International Child Protection Certificate (ICPC) is similar to a DBS check, but is carried out more quickly and is easier to get if you are based overseas. It runs the same checks as a DBS with list check. Regardless of the type of check requested, police checks rarely include information on crimes committed outside the country that issues them.

## Check points

Internationally-based teachers bring extra challenges to the international school aiming to safeguard itself. How many checks do you ask for, and at what point?

Some schools require teachers to have a full and unbroken criminal-record history, providing police checks for every country in which they have lived and taught. However, practically, it can be difficult for internationally experienced teachers to get checks from some countries

after they depart. Therefore, at a bare minimum, hiring schools should require a criminal-check from the country of teacher training, as well as the country in which they are teaching immediately before joining their new school. This policy is easily enforceable because most countries require a check before embarking on teacher training, and most teachers can get a police check in their current country while they are still resident. Letting teachers know this requirement on issuing a job offer will allow them the lead time to obtain the check before they depart. Make sure you have a system in place to enforce it.

### When valid?

A criminal record-check is only valid on the day it is issued. A teacher can have a clear criminal history on the day before they commit a crime. While it would be ideal to have a criminal record-check dated on the day a teacher departs for your school, it's not practical given the unpredictable and sometimes long timeframes needed to get checks done, which can range from one week to 12 weeks or more. Make sure that the latest criminal-check for a teacher you hire is not more than nine months old on the day they depart. Ideally, three months is best and is what some countries now require.

Finally, police-checking is only one tool in a head's arsenal and police checks alone will not fully protect your school. Internationally, teachers who commit or are suspected of crimes are frequently deported or flee before crimes are recorded. And in many cultures, families and even schools, may choose to protect their reputation rather than press charges.

By having a robust combination of international criminal-checking, CV analysis, thorough referencing, and

At least two checks for internationally - based teachers.

*Best practice:* you should at least require a police check from a teacher's most recent country of residence as well as the country of their teacher training. Let teachers know this early in the hiring process.

behavioural red-flagging policies, schools can feel more secure that they are protecting their students and also their hard-won reputations.

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