

VETTING UNDER-18S: AN EDUCATION IN MISTRUST



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- There has been a large increase in Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks on under-18s – rising from 61,730 checks in 2002-3, to 126,951 in 2008-9 (a 100% increase).¹ Some young people are vetted when they are under-16: one children's sports body said that they believed children could be vetted from the age of 10.
- These young people are being CRB checked for a range of roles, including:

Volunteering to help younger children in schools – for example, with reading practice or after-school homework sessions;

Sports coaching – under-18s are CRB checked to coach younger children in sports, or to work as swimming pool lifeguards;

Work experience – sixth formers or BTEC students are CRB checked to carry out work experience with children or other vulnerable groups, for example in health and social care;

Jobs and volunteering with 'vulnerable adults' – under-18s must be CRB checked for work/volunteering in an old people's home, or for volunteering with some refugee organisations;

Children of childminders – when a young person's mother is a childminder, they must be checked when they turn 16 in order to be in the house with the children.

- The CRB checking of under-18s is currently recommended by regulatory bodies including: local education authorities, the Child Protection in Sport Unit, Care Commission (Scotland) and Ofsted. After the final coming into force of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act in November 2010, it will be a legal obligation for these under-18s to go on the vetting database. Indeed, one Home Office guidance document recommends that young people register with the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) when they are 15, so they will be covered on the stroke of their sixteenth birthday.²

- For these young people, the CRB check is their first act of adulthood – before they can drink, drive, vote, or get married without their parents' consent. This document argues that these young people are being educated in mistrust. At the cusp of adulthood they are declared a potential risk to others, and in need of monitoring by the state.

¹ Data obtained from Home Office, emails on 11/11/2009 and 13/11/2009

² Guidance for the Vetting and Barring Scheme, Draft, 12/5/2009, p.92

- Many young people find CRB checks perplexing and insulting. One young man who was vetted just before he turned 16, because his mother was a childminder, said: 'It was baffling. Why when we were 15 was it ok to be in the house, but as soon as you turned 16, it was not. There was a shift from trust to no trust.'³
- CRB checking puts pressure on cash-strapped children's organisations, and means that some schools are considering reducing volunteering programmes for sixth formers. It is also a burdensome process, since many young people do not have passports, utilities bills, driving licenses, or other adult forms of documentation.
- It is a sick society that CRB checks a young person at 16 - yet this only reveals the mistrustful assumption of the vetting laws, which equate 'adult' with 'potential abuser'.
- The Manifesto Club calls for:
 - the halt to the vetting of under-18s;
 - a review of vetting and barring policy as a whole;
 - the abolition of the ISA scheme.

VETTING UNDER-18S

The CRB checking of under-18 year olds has doubled since 2002 – from 61,730 checks in 2002-3, to 126,951 in 2008-9.⁴

Year	Number of CRB checks on under-18s
Oct 2002—Sept 03	61,730
Oct 2003—Sept 04	78,892
Oct 2004—Sept 05	92,974
Oct 2005—Sept 06	106,795
Oct 2006—Sept 07	118,675
Oct 2007—Sept 08	128,811
Oct 2008—Sept 09	126,951

The total number of applications made for Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks on under-18s since the bureau's inception in 2002 is 730,164.⁵

These young people are being CRB checked for a range of roles, including:

- Volunteering to help younger children in schools – for example, with reading practice or after-school homework sessions;
- Sports coaching – under-18s are CRB checked to coach younger children in sports, or to work as swimming lifeguards;
- Work experience – sixth formers or BTEC students are CRB checked to carry out work experience with children or other vulnerable groups, for example in health and social care;
- Jobs and volunteering with 'vulnerable adults' – under-18s must be CRB checked for work/volunteering in an old people's home, or for volunteering with refugee organisations;
- Children of childminders – when a young person's mother is a childminder, they must be checked when they turn 16 in order to be in the house with the children.

The CRB checking of under-18s is currently recommended by regulatory bodies including: local education authorities, the Child Protection in Sport Unit, the Care Commission (Scotland), and Ofsted.

4 Data obtained from Home Office, emails on 11/11/2009 and 13/11/2009

5 Meg Hillier MP, answer to parliamentary question by Tim Loughton MP, 13/11/2009. There is a small discrepancy between these two sets of Home Office statistics, which the Home Office has been unable to resolve.

6 Guidance for the Vetting and Barring Scheme, Draft, 12/5/2009, p.92

7 Guidance for the Vetting and Barring Scheme, Draft, 12/5/2009, p.92

8 Guidance for the Vetting and Barring Scheme, Draft, 12/5/2009, p.100

After the final coming into force of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act in November 2010, it will be a legal obligation for these and other under-18s to be registered on the vetting database. Indeed, one Home Office guidance document recommends that 15-year olds register with the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA), so that they would be covered on the stroke of their sixteenth birthday.⁶

'Under 16s wanting to start [work/volunteering with a vulnerable group] after go-live may register in time for their 16th birthday to avoid committing an offence.'⁷

'[Organisations] should check ages of young people they engage to work with the vulnerable groups as necessary to avoid both them and the young people inadvertently committing offences.'⁸

TEENAGE VOLUNTEERS

Under-18s are CRB checked if they volunteer to help out with younger children. One former sixth form student from Yorkshire says:

'I was CRB checked when I was a sixth form college student ... to go into schools to help out with after-school homework help sessions or to help out in some lessons. If we did assist with lessons it was usually PSHE/citizenship where they got "older young people" in to talk to the pupils in small groups about life issues etc.'⁹

A sixth form college in Darlington says that it has a number of volunteering programmes which require CRB checks, including: a programme where sixth formers go into a local primary school to help children with difficulties reading and writing; a peer mentoring programme, where students mentor and offer support to younger pupils; and volunteer work in care homes.¹⁰

In total, this college runs 50-70 CRB checks each year. The school's manager says that without CRB checks schools generally refuse to take volunteers: 'Unless they turn up with photo ID and CRB number, they are turned away.'

Official youth volunteering programmes - such as Millennium Volunteers programme, and its offshoots such as v-inspired - require CRB checks for under-18s working with younger children. A representative from a north London branch of v-inspired said:

'When the young people are working with other young people, or elderly people, they are CRB checked, because they are working with vulnerable groups. We work with organisations, and they do the CRB checks.'¹¹

The Volunteer Centre Westminster said that it vetted under-18s who worked with other young people: 'We say it's essential to protect their safety and the safety of the people they are working with.'

Other organisations that define their client group as 'vulnerable' also require CRB checks for teenage volunteers. One adult volunteer with the British Red Cross said that she knows several 16- and 17-year old volunteers who had been CRB checked. 'The policy is that all staff and volunteers in the international tracing and message services and refugee services must have an enhanced CRB check'¹² (the organisation defines refugees as a 'vulnerable group').

9 Response to Manifesto Club survey, 'CRB checking under-18s'

10 Telephone interview, 1 December 2009

11 Telephone interview

12 Response to Manifesto Club survey, 'CRB checking under-18s'

SPORTS COACHES

Under-18s are checked when they coach younger children in sport. This is following the advice of organisations including the Child Protection in Sport Unit and the CRB itself. A representative from the CRB said:

'I WAS CRB CHECKED WHEN I WAS A SIXTH FORM COLLEGE STUDENT ... TO GO INTO SCHOOLS TO HELP OUT WITH AFTER-SCHOOL HOMEWORK'

'In a sporting environment, 16–18 year olds are classed as adults – so they would need to be CRBed.'¹³

A child protection officer for Badminton England said that the organisation vetted coaches, however young:

'We CRB check all coaches who are on the coaching register, including those who are 16–17. We have CRB checked people in other positions, where they will have significant contact with children, some have been under 16.'¹⁴

Indeed, the officer said that she believed that 'you can CRB someone from the age of 10. We have had questions about whether it is necessary for those under 18 and ... we have confirmed that it is.'

The child protection officer for the Amateur Swimming Association said that in the year 2007–8, it checked 408 under-18-year olds:

'We CRB check young people aged 16/17 who can qualify as a coach/teacher when we feel they hold a position of trust and responsibility. We have checked 15-year olds if their role is one where we consider such a check necessary ...'¹⁵

Other young people have been vetted for community sports programmes run by country councils. A representative from the Active Communities Programme at Ceredigion County Council, Wales, says that several under-18s have been checked to run sports sessions working with children.¹⁶

Under-18s are also checked for sports jobs such as lifeguards, which involve contact with children or elderly people. One former lifeguard, who worked at a pool in south Cheshire, said:

'I remember feeling shocked when I was CRB checked for working as a lifeguard as I had only just turned 16. I got the job straight after my birthday. There were around twenty 16- and 17-year olds at the same pool who were also CRB checked.'¹⁷

CHILDREN OF CHILDMINDERS

When a young person's mother is a childminder, they must be checked when they turn 16 in order to be in the house with the children. In Scotland, this is overseen by the Care Commission, which carries out the CRB checks.

A representative for the Care Commission said: 'Anyone who is living in the premises where childminding is taking place, they must have a disclosure [CRB] check when they turn 16. We arrange those for the childminder.'¹⁸

13 Telephone interview with CRB information line

14 Email, 12 November 2009

15 Emails, 17 and 18 November 2009

16 Response to Manifesto Club survey, 'CRB checking under-18s'

17 Email, 27 November 2009

18 Telephone interview

In England, CRB checking of 16-year-old children is recommended by Ofsted, and the childminder must carry out the checks herself. A representative for Ofsted said: 'The childminder has responsibility for her staff and any other people in the home. If her children turned 16, she would have to ensure they are CRB checked.'

It is accepted common practice to CRB check teenage children in a child-caring home. A representative from the National Childminding Association said: 'They just accept that's part and parcel of being a registered childminder.'¹⁹

One young man from Dundee was CRB checked before he turned 16, because his mother was a childminder; his siblings were vetted at the same age.²⁰ He was also vetted for the Scouts: 'I had been vetted twice by the time I was 18'.²¹

WORK EXPERIENCE

Under-18s are CRB checked to carry out work experience that involves contact with children or other 'vulnerable' groups. Courses with vocational elements are particularly affected by this rule, which include:

- BTEC vocational courses in health and social care or education, where work experience is obligatory;
- General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ);
- Vocational GCSEs;
- New 'diplomas', rolled out in September 2008, with a vocational element.

One tutor in health and social care in Islington, north London, says that 'all my students must be CRBed before embarking on work placements'.²² Indeed, he says that 'several placements will not accept a CRB previously obtained whilst on placement for another provider', which means that students can be CRB checked several times.

THE COST OF VETTING UNDER-18S

In some cases, as with students on BTEC courses, the students must pay for the CRB check themselves. The health and social care tutor says:

'our teenage students, who are supposedly joining a free full-time college course, have to pay for a CRB before they can enrol.'²³

As an indication of the ensuing costs, a 2007 report found 5848 students studying for BTECs in health or education-related subjects.²⁴ The total cost of registering these students on the vetting database would be £374,272.²⁵

19 Telephone interview with press office

20 Face-to-face interview, 1 October 2009

21 Face-to-face interview, 1 October 2009

22 Email, 14 November 2009

23 Email, 14 November 2009

24 Report for Higher Education Funding Council, p.12: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/hefce/2007/btec.htm>

25 This includes 1971 medicine students and 3877 students. The cost of ISA registration is £64.

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In other cases, schools themselves pay for teenagers' CRB checks. A manager for a Darlington sixth-form college said:

'It is costing a lot of money. Before, the local volunteering service would pay, but their budget is being cut. Now the school has to pay. There is a debate about whether we could ask some of the pupils to pay, but they don't necessarily have the money.'

This college currently pays £46 in admin fees for each of its 50-70 annual CRB checks, which adds up to around £3,220 a year – a cost that will rise when they have to register students with the ISA. The manager said that the college was determined to keep volunteering programmes open, but that 'the cost is going to become rather prohibitive.'

Sports centres or sports governing bodies often cover the cost of young coaches' CRBs. The Amateur Swimming Association, for example, covers the CRB checks for its teenage coaches. These costs will increase with the introduction of the ISA, when registration rises to £64. As an illustration, the cost to register the 408 under-18 swimming coaches in 2007 would be £26,112.

The manager from a sixth-form college in Darlington also points out other practical problems with checking under-18s, who lack the adult forms of documentation required:

'Some young people don't have the right documentation to get [a CRB check] done - they don't have bank statements, driving licence, passports, or utility bills.'²⁶

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE THINK

Some young people see CRBs as just something they have to do, a meaningless ordeal. A north London coordinator for v-inspired said that, in her experience, many 16- and 17-year old volunteers saw the CRB check as 'just a tedious process'. A representative from the Volunteer Centre Westminster said that some young people 'tend to see it as a matter of course, a thing that has to be done. Most of them tend to accept that, as when they have to apply for a driving licence.'²⁷

A tutor in health and social care said that in his field, it has become an accepted part of the course, and is rarely discussed or challenged: 'The situation is now so institutionalised in our area that no-one bats an eyelid, neither staff nor students. It is simply the norm and unchallenged.'²⁸

Yet other teenagers feel confused or insulted by the process of being vetted at such a young age. The young man from Dundee who was vetted because his mother was a childminder said:

26 Telephone interview
27 Telephone interview
28 Email, 30 November 2009

'The CRB check was baffling. Why when we were 15 was it ok to be in the house, but as soon as you turned 16, it was not? There was a shift from trust to no trust. You feel hands off with the kids – which feels bad. Everything is set up to suspect you.'²⁹

Adelah, a 16-year-old volunteer from east London, agreed about the mistrustful implications of a CRB check, saying: 'Overnight, because I turned 16, I was viewed as a potential paedophile. I think my generation is used to this suspicion being loaded on us'.³⁰

It is certainly absurd that 16- and 17-year olds are vetted to work with younger children, when they are still classed as children themselves, and adults must be vetted to work with them. The absurdity is not lost on many young people. A former sixth form volunteer, who was vetted to help out at a local primary school, said:

'the students thought it was ridiculous being checked for going back to a school especially as they'd been a school pupil themselves a couple of months earlier.'³¹

A young woman, who was vetted as a teenage lifeguard, said that CRB checks and other forms of child protection policy made her feel suspected, and affected the way she saw her job:

'It did feel strange to be suspected of being a criminal at that age. As well as being CRB checked, they also make such a big thing about not doing anything inappropriate on the lifeguard qualification course (for example not helping a child tie their shoe laces or dress themselves in any way even if they ask you for help in the changing rooms etc) that for the first few months of my job I was constantly worried.'³²

AN EDUCATION IN MISTRUST

For many of these 700,000 young people, the CRB check was their first act of adulthood – taken before they could drink, drive, vote, or get married without their parents' consent. We could well ask: what signal does it send young people when their first adult act is to be checked to see that they are not a paedophile?

At the very cusp of adulthood they are declared a potential risk to others, and in need of monitoring by the state.

The CRB checking of young people shows how the move from child to adult is viewed ambivalently, as a shift from potential victim to potential abuser. Adulthood – which should mean one's independence from parents, and taking responsibility for others – comes to mean somebody who is now a risk to others. The point of leaving the tutorship of parents, therefore, means moving under the monitoring tutorship of the state.

29 Face-to-face interview, 1 October 2009

30 Quote from 'Bitter Sweet Sixteen – UK Vetting laws', a film by WorldWrite youth education charity

31 Response to Manifesto Club survey, 'CRB checking under-18s'

32 Email, 27 November 2009

'UNDER 18S SHOULD DEFINITELY NOT HAVE TO BE CRB CHECKED AND PLACED IN CATEGORIES THAT TARGET US AS POTENTIAL CRIMINALS BEFORE WE ARE EVEN TREATED AS ADULTS AND ALLOWED TO VOTE.'

The relationship between the generations – between those with more knowledge and capabilities, and those with less – is flattened out into a potential for abuse.

For young people, the CRB check undermines what should be a positive life experience - the point at which they are starting to play a role in caring and taking responsibility for others less capable than themselves. It is through early experiences in babysitting or volunteering that teenagers begin to develop a sense of responsibility for others, and a sense of their own adulthood. The under-18s who have been vetted are precisely those who are stepping up to the next stage of life. Vetting undermines these formative experiences.

ABOLISH THE VETTING DATABASE

This briefing document calls for the ISA and government to halt the vetting of under-18s. We also call for a review of vetting and barring policy as a whole, and for the ISA and the vetting database to be abolished. It is a sick society that CRB checks a young person as their first act of adulthood - yet their case only reveals the mistrustful assumption of the vetting laws, which equate 'adult' with 'potential abuser'.

We agree with the 16-year old from east London who said: 'Under 18s should definitely not have to be CRB checked and placed in categories that target us as potential criminals before we are even treated as adults and allowed to vote.'³³

CRB checks send a damaging signal to young people, who should be encouraged to take steps in caring for others less capable than themselves. CRB checks send an equally damaging signal to the rest of the adult population, who are defined as toxic and risky, and therefore discouraged from showing the responsibility that adulthood entails.

33 Response to Manifesto Club survey, 'CRB checking under-18s'



THE AUTHOR

Josie Appleton founded and runs the Manifesto Club. She has coordinated the club's Campaign Against Vetting for the past three years; writes many of the club's reports and documents; and edits Manifesto Club publications. As a journalist and writer, she comments frequently on contemporary freedom issues.

THE MANIFESTO CLUB

The Manifesto Club campaigns against the hyper-regulation of everyday life. We support free movement across borders, free expression and free association. We challenge booze bans, photo bans, vetting and speech codes - all new ways in which the state regulates everyday life on the streets, in workplaces and in our private lives.

Our rapidly growing membership hails from all political traditions and none, and from all corners of the world. To join this group of free thinkers and campaigners, see: www.manifestoclub.com/join

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to WorldWrite youth education charity, for discussions with their young people and insights gained in being involved in their documentary on this subject, 'Bitter Sweet Sixteen – UK Vetting laws'.³⁴ Thanks also to Andrew Hadley at Momentum youth development.

Design: Tom Mower
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³⁴ http://current.com/items/91556557_bitter-sweet-sixteen-uk-vetting-laws.htm

MANIFESTO CLUB CAMPAIGNS AGAINST VETTING

The Manifesto Club has been campaigning against the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act since October 2006, when we launched a petition signed by individuals including Fay Weldon, Johnny Ball and Alan Silitoe, and hundreds of volunteers, parents and concerned adults. We relaunched this petition in October 2009.

Reports: We have also published a series of reports, documenting the expansion of vetting and its damaging effect on social life, including:

[The Case Against Vetting](#) (October 2006) provides an overview of the dramatic expansion of vetting, and shows how this feeds a child protection bureaucracy, while undermining everyday relationships between adults and children.

[How the Child Protection Industry Stole Christmas](#) (December 2006) shows how overregulation is ruining seasonal celebrations.

[Hobby Clubs](#) (April 2007) documents how some mixed-age clubs are banning children.

[Briefing Document](#) (April 2008) shows how the government's new vetting laws are late, over-budget and over-stretched.

[Briefing Document](#) (July 2009), [Regulating Trust](#) - reports on a leaked government document, and exposes officials' absurd plans for the vetting database.

See a record of our campaigning, here:
www.manifestoclub.com/hubs/vetting