

STUDENT CRIMINAL CONVICTION DECLARATION & RISK ASSESSMENT POLICY 2026/27

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Policy

1. Introduction

City of Portsmouth College (COPC) is committed to offering a fair and transparent admissions process where students are recruited based on their ambitions and aspirations, past achievements, learning potential, and their preparedness to become productive citizens of the COPC learning community. COPC fully recognises and takes very seriously its role in assisting individuals with criminal convictions in the process of rehabilitation.

The policy aims to treat all prospective and existing students equally and fairly in line with the Equalities Act 2010 and, concomitantly, meet its legal obligations under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (as amended in 2013), the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018, the Children's Act 1989, the 2004 amendments to the aforementioned Act and the Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) statutory guidance (latest version).

COPC takes very seriously its commitment to safeguard potential and existing students, staff, contractors and visitors and the need to consider closely an individual's criminal convictions when deciding whether that individual may begin or continue with their studies with the COPC. Moreover, COPC recognises that certain criminal convictions may preclude an individual from accessing careers or professions which may be inextricably linked to that person's chosen programme of study, childcare for example.

2. Definitions & Justifications

Key definitions of the terms used throughout this document and clear justifications for their disclosure are given in this section.

2.1. Criminal Record

The legal definition of 'criminal record' is 'a list of crimes of which someone has been convicted in a magistrate's court or the Crown Court.' Potential students are expected to disclose past and current criminal convictions at the application stage of their enrolment. This allows COPC colleges to identify individuals who may be a risk to themselves, other students, staff, contractors, visitors, or the college environment so that proper safeguarding decisions can be made.

2.2. Cautions, conditional cautions, and youth cautions

Cautions, conditional cautions, and youth cautions (formerly reprimands or final warnings issued to individuals aged under 18) are issued by the police when an individual accepts responsibility for an offence. Again, correct disclosure of these by the potential student will help to ensure the college is able to make the most appropriate safeguarding decisions.

2.3. Relevant criminal convictions

In line with the reasons given previously, COPC expects students to disclose relevant, unspent criminal convictions which relate to any kind of violence including (but not limited to) threatening behaviour, offences concerning the intention to harm or offences which resulted in actual bodily harm; offences

listed in the Sex Offences Act 2003; the unlawful supply of controlled drugs or substances where the conviction concerns commercial drug dealing or trafficking; offences involving weapons and firearms; offences involving arson; and offences listed in the Terrorism Act 2006.

2.4. Spent criminal convictions

Criminal convictions that are 'spent,' as defined by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 or will be spent at the time of starting the programme of study do not need to be declared by the student unless the programme of study requires a check to be conducted by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).

The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (as amended in 2013) explains that any conviction for a criminal offence can be regarded as spent provided that; the conviction did not carry a sentence excluded from the Act, such as a custodial sentence of over two and a half years and no further convictions occurred within the rehabilitation period.

2.5. Filtering of Conviction and Cautions

The College recognises that not all criminal convictions are relevant to current safeguarding risk. In line with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) filtering rules, certain cautions and convictions are classified as protected and therefore do not need to be disclosed by applicants.

Protected information typically includes older and minor cautions or convictions where there has been no pattern of offending. Applicants are not required to disclose such information and will not be treated less favourably for not doing so.

For example: A minor, non-violent offence committed years ago, particularly on childhood or adolescence, with no further history of offending, would not normally require disclosure and would not be considered indicative of current risk

In contrast, applicants are expected to disclose relevant unspent convictions and any offences that may pose a risk to others or impact their ability to safely engage in their chosen course. These include, but are not limited to:

- offences involving violence or harm to others,
- sexual offences,
- offences involving weapons,
- supply of controlled drugs,
- and offences linked to safeguarding or exploitation

Such disclosures enable the College to carry out an appropriate risk assessment.

The College emphasises that safeguarding decisions are not based solely on the existence of a criminal record. Instead, a comprehensive and proportionate risk assessment is undertaken, which considers:

- the nature and seriousness of any disclosed offence,
- patterns of behaviour and evidence of rehabilitation,

- the time elapsed since the offence,
- current conduct and engagement,
- and professional information from external agencies which appropriate.

For example: A recent conviction involving violence or safeguarding concerns would trigger a detailed risk assessment and may result in additional controls or, in some cases, a decision not to enrol.

The absence of disclosure of protected (filtered) information does not limit the College's ability to maintain a safe environment. The College relies on a range of safeguarding measures, including robust risk assessment processes, multi-agency working, and ongoing monitoring and support throughout a student's time at college. This ensures decisions are based on relevant and current risk factors rather than historical information alone.

2.6. Pending Prosecutions

A pending prosecution is a criminal charge that has been made but not yet resolved in court. Applicants must declare any pending prosecutions at application or enrolment. This allows the College to assess any potential safeguarding risks or course restrictions.

Pending cases are reviewed in line with the risk assessment process. Failure to disclose a pending prosecution may lead to disciplinary action or withdrawal from the course.

2.7. Relevant course

The term 'relevant course' refers to courses which require DBS checks to be conducted, for example, those which will involve the student coming into contact with children and vulnerable adults. For the purposes of safeguarding, all criminal convictions including those which are 'spent,' cautions, reprimands and binding-overs must be disclosed. (See Appendix 6 for guidance on spent convictions).

3. Declaration of criminal convictions

In line with the COPC Admissions Policy, all applicants are required to complete enrolment forms honestly and accurately, including the section that asks:

"Do you have any unspent criminal convictions or pending prosecutions?"

Failure to disclose this information may result in disciplinary action, which could include:

- A formal written warning
- Suspension from the course
- Permanent exclusion from the College
- Withdrawal from all COPC campuses and services

Disciplinary action refers to any sanction taken under the College's Learner Behaviour Policy and Procedure, which outlines the processes for managing breaches of gross misconduct, including non-disclosure of relevant criminal

information. A copy of the College's Disciplinary Policy is available upon request or can be found on the student portal and College website.

4. Risk Assessment

Addressing issues related to criminal convictions needs an objective, common-sense approach. It is incumbent on COPC and its constituent colleges to work with other agencies involved with the student to ensure a fair risk assessment and good support for the student is in place before they undertake a course.

5. Data Protection

The College undertakes to discuss any matters revealed in any form of disclosure with the applicant, who will be kept informed of the process and consulted before any decision on their suitability to join or remain on a course, is made. All records are kept securely and destroyed in line with data protection policies.

- The College will destroy all information about ex-offenders who do not obtain a place at the College to ensure compliance with the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018.
- Records for applicants admitted onto courses will be retained and disposed of in line with the College data protection procedures.

Retention of criminal conviction data will follow the College Data Retention Schedule. Typically, information relating to applicants who do not enrol will be retained for a maximum of (12 months), and for enrolled students, for the duration of study in line with safeguarding and legal obligations

Prospective students who reapply will be asked to declare any conviction since joining the College. Information regarding offences will be kept confidential. Students need to feel confident that information about their convictions will not be disclosed to anyone unless there is a specific reason for doing so. Information will be kept securely, and access restricted to individuals on a "need to know" basis.

Failure to disclose a relevant unspent conviction could result in exclusion from the College. The College reserves the right to verify any information that is provided by the applicant.

The College processes criminal convictions data in accordance with UK GDPR, under its public task and safeguarding responsibilities, and in line with Article 6 and Article 10 requirements.

6. DBS Checks for Specific Courses

Irrespective of the criminal convictions disclosure policy, some courses require an enhanced criminal DBS check.

On certain courses criminal records can be a bar to successful completion of the course or to gain employment in the vocational area. These are usually courses which involve working in positions of trust with children, young people, or vulnerable adults.

All convictions spent or unspent for any offence may be taken into consideration for these courses. Prospective students are urged to discuss this at the application stage should they feel it applies in their case.

For courses which require DBS checks, applicants will be informed of the importance of this and the consequences of not disclosing any criminal record, caution, reprimand or final warning, no matter how minor.

Where a criminal record is revealed which does not impact on the applicant's ability to complete a course, but which might affect their chances of gaining employment in the vocational area, this should be discussed with them, and a record of the discussion kept on their file.

A place can still be offered on the course provided the applicant understands the implications and still has valid reasons for doing the course (e.g., it represents a good general grounding for a number of career options or for admissions to a range of university courses).

Where enhanced disclosure is an essential entry requirement, applicants will be informed through publicity material and at enrolment.

7. Post Enrolment Disclosures

Where it is revealed during a course that a student has not disclosed a criminal record, the Curriculum Manager/Assistant Principal, in consultation with SMT Designated Safeguarding Lead, will consider appropriate disciplinary action, depending on the severity and impact of the disclosure.

- Minor issues which do not pose any risk to the College community or impact on the student's ability to complete the course might attract a warning.
- Significant issues that may pose a risk to the College community or affect the student's ability to complete the course will result in a disciplinary hearing with a Curriculum Manager or Assistant Principal. This might lead to the student being withdrawn from the course if the risk is judged to be significant or if they are unable to complete some mandatory element of their course.

Where a criminal prosecution or conviction occurs during the course, the Criminal Conviction Panel will make a judgement on appropriate action. Lecturers, Personal Tutors, and support services will be alerted to any support needs of students.

8. Final Decisions & Appeals

The final decision on whether to offer/maintain a place of study within the college lies with the Senior Leadership Team. Where a student fails to reveal a criminal record, which is subsequently revealed, this could lead to exclusion.

An applicant who is dissatisfied with the outcome of a Criminal Conviction Panel may appeal against the decision to the senior member of the college's SMT. The appeal must be in writing and must be made within 14 days (about 2 weeks) of the decision being made. The senior manager shall respond in writing within a further two weeks of receipt of the appeal.

9. Final Decisions & Appeals

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). The DSL is responsible for initiating the review process, ensuring the policy

reflects current legislation and best practice, and overseeing its effective implementation across the College.

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Student Criminal Conviction Declaration

1. Managing disclosures of criminal conviction

The procedure for managing criminal conviction disclosures shall be as follows:

Applicants are required to indicate on the enrolment form if they have an unspent or relevant conviction (or pending proceedings). Applicants are expected to disclose this information at enrolment. All applicants are asked to disclose unspent criminal convictions and pending prosecutions at enrolment, and appropriate risk assessment is undertaken.

Students do not begin courses where a previous criminal record is likely to disbar them from some mandatory aspect of the course (e.g., mandatory work experience in childcare courses; police visits in public service courses). Students are advised before undertaking a course if a criminal record is likely to significantly impact their chances of gaining employment in their chosen field.

1.1. Disclosure upon application

Where applicants make a disclosure upon application the student will be added to the College holds list. Before the application can proceed the applicant will be contacted by a member of the PA to the Vice Principal, Student Experience and will be invited to attend a panel review. A signed letter (Appendix 2) will be sent to the applicant along with the time and date. Additionally, the Criminal Conviction Declaration Form will be sent for completion.

1.2. Disclosures at Enrolment

Where applicants make a disclosure at enrolment, the COPC policy regarding disclosure of relevant convictions will be explained to the applicant. Those answering "Yes" to a criminal convictions question will be referred to the Safeguarding Officer where they will be asked to complete a supplementary form (Appendix 1 Criminal) conviction Declaration for A) giving details of criminal convictions.

If an applicant discloses an unspent or relevant conviction (or pending prosecution), they will be required to meet with a designated Safeguarding Officer. If the offence is considered minor and the applicant is assessed as posing little or no risk, they may be cleared to enrol. However, if the conviction raises safeguarding concerns or requires further assessment, the applicant will be referred to the Criminal Conviction Panel. Appendix 5 outlines the factors used to assess the level of risk and severity of the offence.

If the applicant is referred to the panel, a signed letter (Appendix 2) will be sent/given to the applicant along with a time and date. Additionally, the Criminal Conviction Declaration Form will be resent for completion (Appendix 1) if this has not already been done so and returned to the Safeguarding Officer. The applicant must not be enrolled until the College has gathered all necessary information and the applicant has been assessed by the Criminal Conviction Panel. Applicants who fail to attend

the Criminal Conviction Panel meeting without notice shall have their applications to study at the College withdrawn.

If an applicant has disclosed a spent conviction (which is not relevant conviction and possess little or no risk), a designated staff member (Safeguarding Officer) will discuss and assess. No records of the spent convictions shall be held by the College. There may be some courses and regulated activities that are 'exempt' from the rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and will require a Criminal Record Check through the Disclosure and Barring Service. Further details on DBS checks can be found in section 7.

Where members of the College community identify known offenders, who have not disclosed criminal convictions, such information should be passed to the SMT Designated Safeguarding Lead for further investigation and considered under disciplinary policy.

2. Risk Assessments

COPC will use objective assessment to consider the risk of enrolling students with criminal convictions. This assessment will:

- Focus on students' abilities, skills, qualifications, and experience.
- Consider the nature of the conviction and its relevance to the course in question.
- Identify the risk to staff, students, and others.
- Recognise that having a criminal conviction does not preclude the ability to learn and succeed.

Assessment of risk is undertaken in a sensitive, discrete, and confidential manner, taking into account the needs of all concerned.

- I. The College will seek further information before deciding about the perceived level of risk that a prospective student's offence poses, and whether the nature of the offence/s is such that the applicant/student should be offered or retain their place on the course. The College will follow information-sharing principles in line with KCSIE and relevant safeguarding guidance, ensuring that information is shared lawfully, proportionately, and only where necessary to protect students and others.
- II. This information will be sought firstly from the applicant themselves through the criminal conviction declaration form and/or initial interview and subsequently further information will be sought from appropriate professional agencies (Probation Services, YOTs, Social Services, Support Workers, etc.).
- III. The risk assessment will be undertaken as soon as possible after the disclosure. A risk assessment may require a meeting with the applicant. In this case, a Criminal Conviction Panel meeting will be arranged within 7 days of the application and a letter sent to the prospective student to advise them of the date and time of the meeting.

- IV. The risk assessment will be conducted by the Criminal Conviction Panel, which will consist of at least two of the following; Designated Safeguarding Lead, Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead, and/or a Safeguarding Officer. At all times at least two of the panel members must be present to conduct a criminal disclosure risk assessment.

The risk assessment is based on the following factors:

- the nature of the offence
 - the nature of the course
 - any contact the student will have with the public
 - the extent of contact with children or other vulnerable groups whilst on the course
 - the level of supervision available to students on the course they are planning to join
 - any opportunities within the course for the applicant to re-offend.
 - any concerns relating to radicalisation or vulnerability to extremism in line with the Prevent Duty
 - the seriousness of the offence/s and its potential relevance to members of the College community and property
 - the length of time that has elapsed since the offence occurred.
 - any information offered by the applicant about circumstances which led to the offence being committed e.g., mitigating circumstances which no longer apply
 - whether the offence was a one-off or part of a history of offending
 - whether the applicant's circumstances have changed since the offence was committed, making re-offending unlikely.
 - whether the offence has been de-criminalised by Act of Parliament
 - the degree of remorse expressed by the applicant and their motivation to change, supported by the evidence of a report from a professional agency (e.g., social worker)
- V. Prospective students may choose to be accompanied by an advocate of their choice to the panel meeting. In cases where the student is under 18, the parent, guardian or carer will also be invited to the meeting.
- VI. Prospective students with relevant unspent convictions may be subject to additional controls or support to study at the College. Where appropriate, an individualised support plan will be created with the student, providing access to services such as academic mentoring, counselling, and pastoral care to promote engagement, progression, and wellbeing.
- VII. Applicants are informed of the decision of the Criminal Conviction Panel by telephone/ letter as soon as possible after the panel meeting. This would not guarantee a place but that the application can be processed in the normal way.
- VIII. If the applicant is cleared to enrol this information will be held securely by the Safeguarding team and provided to those with a genuine need to know to ensure the safeguarding of the student and others, where applicable.

- IX. The prospective student is required to notify the College should they be convicted of any additional offences between the date of risk assessment and the end date of their course.

3. Internal Support for Students with Criminal Convictions

As part of the College's commitment to rehabilitation and inclusion, COPC offers a range of internal support services that can be integrated into a student's action plan following risk assessment. These include:

- Pastoral and wellbeing support (Including the Safeguarding Team)
- Counselling (via Student Services)
- Academic and Progression Support (Careers Team)

Appendix 1: Criminal Conviction Declaration (CCD) Form

Why do we ask?

The details are an essential part of the application process. They allow us to ensure we provide an opportunity for you to access appropriate courses, and that we uphold our legal duty of care and safeguarding of all students, staff, and visitors. All information given will be treated in the strictest confidence.

You are asked to declare unspent, relevant convictions or pending proceedings.

- Criminal conviction means: You have been found guilty in court of an offence.
- Unspent conviction: Convictions and cautions sometimes become spent after a certain period. These do not need to be declared unless relevant to the course you are applying for, including those that require an enhanced disclosure from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). Please note that some custodial sentences can never be considered spent.

Relevant convictions: You are asked to declare the following:

- Offences against the person whether of a violent or sexual nature.
- Offences involving the unlawful supply of controlled drugs and substances where conviction convictions concern commercial drug dealing or trafficking.
- Offences related to terrorism or involving the possession of a weapon or bladed article.

Full Name:	Age:
Course applied for:	Campus:
Type of offence (s):	
Date of offence (s):	
Type of sentence (s):	Lengths of sentence (s):
Do you have a Youth Offending / Probation Officer or Drug Intervention Program Key worker?	
Yes / No	
If Yes, Name:	
Address or contact telephone number:	

Appendix 2: Referral to Panel Applicants Letter

August / September 2026

Dear applicant,

Further to your declaration of relevant criminal conviction, the College now needs to gather more information from the probation/youth offending services to conduct a risk assessment.

The College will contact you shortly to invite you to a meeting to discuss the conviction(s) and the circumstances surrounding the offence.

You are welcome to come to the meeting with a family member, social worker, probation or youth offending officer.

Applicants are not refused access to college courses which they are academically suited for on the grounds of a previous criminal record unless their presence at the College has been demonstrated to pose a risk to others or property, or their criminal record significantly limits their chance of success on their chosen course.

The risk assessment and the meeting are undertaken in a sensitive, discrete, and confidential manner, taking account of the needs of all concerned.

Finally, if you are unclear about the detail of any part of this letter, or have questions, please contact the College by emailing us (college safeguarding email address)

Yours faithfully,

Vice Principal (Student Experience and Designated Safeguarding Lead)

Appendix 3: Criminal Conviction Panel Risk Assessment Form

Name of applicant:		Date of Birth:		
Course applied for:		Campus:		
What was the offence(s)?				
	Notes	High	Medium	Low
1. What was the sentence?		Custodial	Suspended, community, conditional discharge	Warning, caution, reprimand, fine, absolute discharge
2. When was the offence committed?		In the past 3 years	Between 3 and 10 years	More than 10 years before
3. Is there a pattern of specific offences? If yes, state nature of pattern:		Yes	Some pattern	No pattern
4. Is the applicant involved in Treatment or Therapy? If yes, who? (Drug intervention program)				
5. Is Youth Offending / Probation service involved? If yes, how do they assess risk of re-offending		High risk of re-offending	Medium	Low or no risk
6. Applicant's attitude towards offence/s?		Does not take Responsibility Is not remorseful	Some acceptance and remorse	Remorseful / accepts responsibility
7. What has changed since conviction? (Treatment, change of friends, etc.)				
8. Is the applicant in a stable environment? (Supportive family, friends, job)				

9. Other factors (Does the course include placement, or DBS checks? Mental health issues?)	
10. Are there any licence conditions set out for the applicant (restrictions to enter certain postcodes, strict curfews) which the applicant could breach by enrolling at college?	

Declaration and Decision

The Panel understands the College's policy on the recruitment of applicants with criminal convictions and has recognised this in its deliberations.

On consideration of the risk assessment form, interview with the applicant (and other parties) and a relevant report, the Panel believes that the applicant:

- should not be enrolled
- should be enrolled without any conditions
- Should be enrolled with conditions

State the conditions (Attendance target, regular report from Probation/Young Offender Services, etc.).

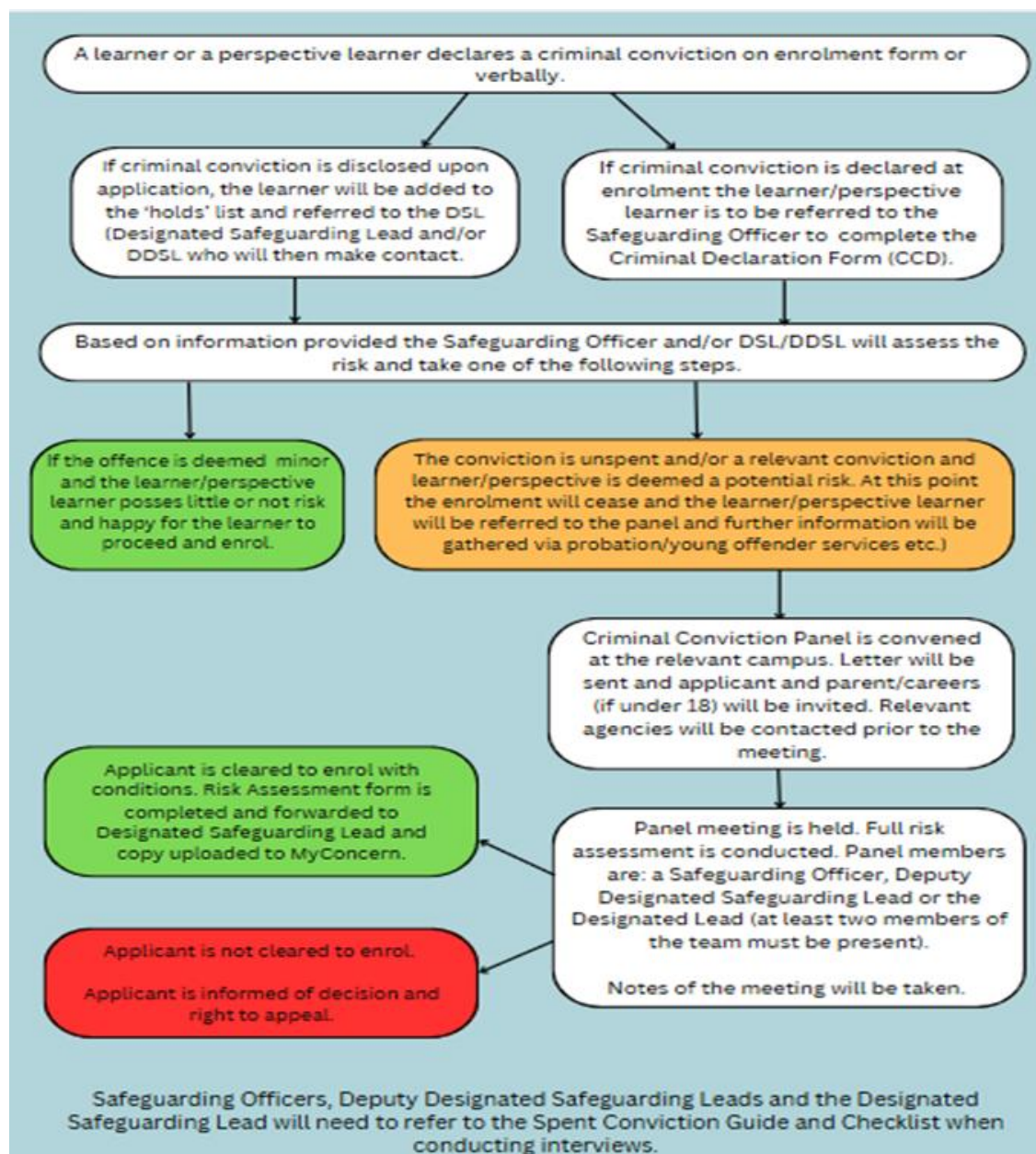
Signed by chair of Panel:

Name Date:

This form and other related documents should be forwarded to SMT Designated Safeguarding Lead

Appendix 4: Criminal Conviction Disclosure Procedure Flowchart

Criminal Conviction Disclosure and Risk Assessment Flowchart



Appendix 5: Guide & Checklist for Conducting Interviews with Applicants

Unspent and relevant convictions: Applicants with the following relevant and unspent convictions are likely to require referral to the Criminal Conviction Panel unless the risk levels are very low. Risk should be assessed using the checklist provided below.

Murder Manslaughter Attempted Murder GBH ABH Common Assault	Offences against children Sexual Assault Grooming Offensive weapons (guns, bladed articles, etc) Violent Extremism Supply of controlled drugs or substances	Rape Assault by penetration Armed robbery Terrorism offences
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Applicants with convictions other than those listed above do not normally require referral to a Criminal Conviction Panel unless the risk levels are considered to be too high. They should be interviewed, and risk assessed using the following factors:

Checklist

1. How long ago the conviction/s occurred.	10. Conduct in previous education settings or work
2. Pattern offences	11. Course appropriateness e.g. cohort, timetables, duration, health and safety factors, work placement etc.
3. Pending convictions	12. Mental Health, cognitive and behavioural disorders
4. If alcohol or drugs were a factor	13. Engagement with external support
5. Circumstances surrounding convictions	14. On tag/curfew or Bail conditions
6. Number of separate convictions	15. Attitude to conviction
7. Sentence type	
8. Rehabilitation	
9. Life/work/family experiences since conviction	

Having interviewed the applicant using the factors listed above, if the judgement is that there is little or no risk, the applicant should be cleared to enrol. Otherwise, a referral to the Criminal Conviction Panel should be made.

Further advice is available from the Safeguarding team – safeguarding@copc.ac.uk

Appendix 6: Guidance on Spent Convictions

A conviction becomes "spent" after a rehabilitation period as defined by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. In most circumstances, applicants are not legally required to disclose spent convictions unless the course or activity is exempt from the Act, such as those requiring a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS Checks).

Applicants are not normally required to disclose spent convictions. However, disclosure may be required where:

- the course requires a DBS check;
- the role, placement or activity is exempt under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974;
- safeguarding or regulatory requirements necessitate disclosure.

The College recognises that many individuals with previous convictions have successfully rehabilitated and should not be disadvantaged in accessing education. The College is committed to providing a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

Where an applicant chooses to disclose a spent conviction, the information will be treated confidentially and considered on an individual basis. Disclosure may enable the College to:

- identify any safeguarding considerations;
- assess whether additional support may be beneficial;
- put appropriate pastoral, wellbeing or academic support arrangements in place;
- work with relevant external agencies where appropriate and with the student's knowledge wherever possible.

Applicants who are unsure whether a conviction is spent, or whether they should disclose information, are encouraged to seek advice from the Safeguarding Team before enrolment. Seeking advice or making a disclosure will not automatically affect an application and each case will be considered fairly, proportionately and on its own merits.