ATLAS – federated searching across police systems to support Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) applications

Internal developers in North Yorkshire produced a system that supports the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) function, allowing effective federated searching across local and national policing systems to support DBS reviews and checks with a full audit trail.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Digital, data and analytics
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Region	North East
Partners	Police
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	September 2023
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Adults Children and young people General public

Aim

The initiative aims to:

- provide a repository of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) applications for ease of access and improve workflow
- create a process that is slick in the way it pulls relevant information into the system
- audit DBS applications and their outcome
- support the processes from beginning to end of DBS applications to include officer engagement, representations letters, conflicts and so on

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of ATLAS are to:

- improve compliance against targets set out by central DBS in terms of national service level agreements
- improve performance in relation to applications by reducing the time taken to manually process applications
- reduce the amount of time spent on administrative tasks and to increase time spent on national service delivery
- improve auditing results around performance and progress including:
  - volume of applications
  - progress data – how long to process stage by stage and allocation
  - outcomes including decision making and rationale
  - staff workload and progress
  - identify delays and obstructions in the process

Description

A DBS check is a background check to help employers make safer recruitment decisions, particularly for roles involving vulnerable groups, such as children or adults at risk.

DBS checks review an individual's criminal record and identify whether someone is barred from working with vulnerable groups to ensure safeguarding in roles of trust. Police are responsible for providing relevant information to assist with DBS checks.

The previous DBS system, iDisclosure, was not well supported and had not been updated in years, with regular downtime causing errors and frustrating delays in processing DBS applications.

So internal developers created a fully automated system that downloads applications relating to North Yorkshire Police from the central DBS Oracle system. The process ensures that requisite applications are sent into ATLAS for full downloads into DBS analyst workstreams.

The project team included a project manager, business analyst, a DBS team leader to advise on the requirements, and IT development staff to create the solution.

Applications are processed using ATLAS by searching datasets, which returns results directly for analyst consideration. Relevant information is recorded within an integrated auditing format which mirrors the central DBS national auditing document (AT2/3). This is a national audit trail document used by all forces, issued by central DBS.

Results occur within ATLAS for the following outcomes:

- not relevant
- no trace
- relevant information
- conflict

Completed applications are returned through a 'push' from ATLAS to Oracle for central DBS to finalise and send a certificate to the applicant.

Central DBS were supportive of this development and informed at all stages. Funding was required to pay for staff to develop the system. The project work was approved at board level by senior leaders including the assistant chief constable.

Overall impact

The implementation of ATLAS to support DBS checks has delivered a range of operational, strategic, and user-focused benefits. Including:

- accelerated processing - DBS checks are completed up to 30% faster, improving service delivery and turnaround times
- enhanced productivity - staff are achieving more with less manual effort, contributing to a more efficient workflow
- reduced administrative burden - automation has cut down on repetitive tasks and manual data entry
- improved data quality - screen scrape functionality has led to fewer data errors and improved consistency
- robust audit trail - integrated auditing aligned with national DBS standards ensures full traceability and compliance
- positive staff experience - feedback indicates improved morale because of system stability and user-friendly design
- scalability potential - the federated search capability offers opportunities for expansion into vetting, firearms licensing, and safeguarding
- strategic alignment - the project received board-level approval and was supported by central DBS throughout development
- local impact - data monitoring shows a reduction in work-in-progress cases and improved performance tracking

This system has currently only been rolled out to the force DBS staff, although there is potential with further technical development to expand this to other areas of business where federated searching is used, such as vetting, firearms licencing, and safeguarding.

Learning

- The IT team and business analyst spent a considerable amount of time with DBS practitioners and managers to understand the current processes, challenges, and requirements. The sound understanding developed is central to the delivery of an effective product.

- The design of ATLAS for applications and cases to be processed in a linear fashion clearly showing when each stage is complete and allowing allocation to the appropriate resource to complete the next stage. Data entry is kept to a minimum.
- Challenges were faced in accessing the information required, but this was overcome with the skills of the internal IT team. To be able to interact with the central DBS Oracle system, North Yorkshire Police developed a windows application which was designed in a way to allow for the screen scraping, processing and local storage of the central DBS worklist data.

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