
Expert Commentary on BS 7858:2012, *Security screening of individuals employed in a security environment—Code of practice*

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Summary

BS 7858 is now in its fourth edition as a standalone British Standard, with the first edition having been published in 1996. However, that edition was based on an appendix of the security guarding standard published in 1991. By becoming a separate code of practice, it allowed the guidance on screening to be expanded to cover prospective employees across the whole security industry.

The 2012 edition looks significantly different to the previous editions as it was decided that (rather than just amending the previous edition) the whole document was to be rearranged into a new order so that the clauses better followed the actual screening process. The opportunity was also taken to increase (where possible) the amount of guidance given within the document, with more use of examples.

The frequent changes to the document have been required to not just reflect changes in legislation, but also changes in business practices, availability of different types of information, and best practice and experience from screening professionals across the industry.

Since the introduction of a code of practice for screening, the minimum period of employment history requiring coverage and evidence has been reduced to reflect that it is frequently difficult to obtain evidence after a number of years due to companies either minimising the amount of historical personal data kept or companies simply not existing any more. However, over the same period other relevant personal data has become more accessible, allowing screening decisions to be made based on a wider variety of more current information.

Organizations should however remember that the process of screening is about making a decision based on an applicant's past behaviour which can be used as a guide to their likely future behaviour.

Significant changes introduced in BS 7858:2012

Changes in terminology used (RE-WRITTEN)

The code of practice introduces the term “preliminary checks” which refers to the parts of the screening process required to be completed in full before employment in all cases.

It then gives an organization the option of carrying out “limited security screening” before carrying out full screening. Limited screening concerns obtaining career history references (either verbally or in writing) before being able to offer an applicant “conditional employment” for the length of time specified in the code of practice and is subject to the remaining screening being completed satisfactorily in writing for the required length of time.

Alternatively, the screening can be completed in full before employment commences.