

Overview of the Second Tranche of Safeguarding Reviews undertaken by NBSCCCI

On the 5th September a further seven Safeguarding Review Reports are being published. They comprise four dioceses and three religious congregations. The dioceses included are Kildare and Leighlin, Limerick, Cork and Ross, and Clonfert. The religious congregations are the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritans), the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC), and the male Dominicans. The inclusion for the first time of three religious bodies represented an important development for us which threw up a number of issues.

Overall, the findings are mixed with some examples of good practice and sound development across the different Church authorities. This is to be very much welcomed and built upon in the coming months. However, there were also situations discovered that were very poor and these have to be learnt from. All allegations that were examined within the Review process have been reported to the appropriate statutory authorities. Sadly, some of these had been very much delayed. (All seven reports are posted on our website.)

Experience drawn from the first tranche of Reviews highlighted the benefits of openness to scrutiny. The willingness of each of the dioceses to share the findings of their individual reports and to be available to be questioned on them was welcomed by many. This transparency was matched by a commitment to implement fully any recommendations that had been made through the review process. It is gratifying to report that these have been acted upon and each of those dioceses are now in a stronger position with regard to their safeguarding capacity and practice than was the case when the reviews were undertaken initially.

It is important to note that each of the seven subjects of the reviews included in the second tranche have displayed an equal commitment to transparency and to change where this is needed. In some, poor practice was found where previous concerns had not been properly addressed or dealt with. Whereas previously, there may have been a tendency to hide this or even to deny it, it is very much to the credit of each of those examined in the second tranche that nobody displayed any desire to do anything other than to publish their reports.

In February of 2009, the three sponsoring bodies for the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland, namely the Irish Bishops' Conference, the Conference of Religious of Ireland, and the Irish Missionary Union, formerly adopted the safeguarding standards and guidance which had been proposed by the National Board. From that point on, each of the constituent elements of the Church who minister in Ireland, were expected to commit themselves to full compliance with this guidance. The methodology employed by the NBSCCCI in undertaking the reviews uses this guidance as the baseline against which practice is assessed. (The methodology is described in detail on our website, www.safeguarding.ie.)

Given that this is the case, it is disappointing to find that full compliance is still some way off for some of the subjects. Set against this, there are also many examples of excellent practice and of a strengthening of the safeguarding framework that exists at the level of the parish.

It is striking when examining the number of allegations that were recorded as to how few resulted in convictions. The gap between these two figures is marked. We offer no explanation as to why this is the case but suggest that this is not an issue that only exists within the Church but reflects a situation which is present throughout society as a whole.

Past practice sometimes involved a lack of proper management of individuals who were known to be a risk to children. As a consequence there were examples that were discovered where an offender was able to continue their abuse for longer periods than they should have. It is important to note that clear policies exist within the Church today that place emphasis on taking preventive actions early to ensure that repeated abuse does not occur.

A key point of learning for all those involved in the safeguarding of children in the Church from these reviews is the importance of objective, independent, standards based monitoring of practice. It is not enough simply to have policies in place. You must also have the means by which you can confirm full compliance with those policies on an ongoing basis. This is the benefit that the review process brings to practice in the Church. It is a unique contribution that the NBSCCCI makes and it is essential that it should continue to be supported by all those in authority across the Church.

Signed: 

Ian Elliott
Chief Executive Officer
National Board for Safeguarding Children,
Catholic Church in Ireland