



Safer Recruitment in Education Settings Pre-Reading

In September 2025, the DfE published an updated version of the statutory guidance for schools and FE colleges. Parts 1 and 2 outline the roles and responsibilities of staff and school leaders and the arrangements that governing bodies must have in place and in part 5, the procedures that senior leaders should have in place to deal with sexual violence and sexual harassment between pupils. Part 3 describes the current legislation and guidance relating to safer recruitment practices for paid and unpaid staff while Part 4 deals with allegations of abuse made against teachers and other staff. Part 3 says:

“The school staffing regulations require governing bodies of schools to ensure that at least one person on any appointment panel has undertaken safer recruitment training.”

Safer Recruitment training has been available for some years, both as an e-learning package and for face-to-face delivery. Between 2007 and 2014, it was mandatory for every head teacher/principal and at least one member of every recruitment panel to have undertaken Secretary of State-approved training in safe recruitment techniques. This ‘approved’ training was originally badged by the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) and then the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) – however, legislation and guidance have changed significantly in recent years and the training materials had not kept pace. In December 2013, following a series of meetings between the DfE and interested parties, the Safer Recruitment Consortium was created to update the face-to-face and online training materials and create a vehicle to ensure that good quality safer recruitment training continues to be available to schools, colleges and other education services.

This new Safer Recruitment training was launched on 1st September 2014 and has been updated regularly since.

Context

Experience over many years shows that it is important for organisations that provide services to children to incorporate into their recruitment and selection procedures, measures that help deter, reject or identify people who might abuse children, or who are otherwise unsuited to work with them. Making safeguarding and promotion of the welfare of children an integral part of HR management in organisations that work with children is an essential part of creating safe environments for children.

The need for this was illustrated by the Soham case and the findings and recommendations contained in Sir Michael Bichard’s report into that case (2004) that highlighted flaws and shortcomings in the recruitment process that allowed Ian Huntley to be employed as a caretaker at Soham Community School. However, the principles were not new. Much the same issues were addressed in Sir Norman Warner’s 1992 report *Choosing with Care*, which examined recruitment and selection in residential children’s homes and in a Department of Health programme launched in 1999 called **Towards Safer Care** which covered similar issues in the context of social care. The Safer Recruitment workshop builds on those reports and recommendations. It aims to:

- give participants an awareness and understanding of offender behaviour
 - identify the key features of staff recruitment that help deter or prevent the appointment of unsuitable people
 - consider policies and practices that minimise opportunities for abuse or ensure its prompt reporting
 - help participants begin to review their own and their organisation's policies and practice with a view to making them 'safer'
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Overview of the workshop:

- **Session 1** looks at how safer recruitment fits with the wider context of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, the scale of abuse, a model of offender behaviour, some of the recurring themes in high profile professional abuse cases and how child sex abusers typically operate within organisations, and relate that to recruitment.
 - **Session 2** illustrates the importance of planning a recruitment exercise, sending the right messages to potential applicants, following a consistent and thorough process to obtain relevant information about each applicant, and short-listing candidates for interview.
 - **Session 3** considers the importance of making the right decisions and using structured interviews to help do that, as well as pre-employment checks on the candidate selected for appointment.
 - **Session 4** examines the need for ongoing awareness and vigilance and considers how organisations can develop and maintain an environment that deters and prevents abuse and challenges inappropriate behaviour.
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Background and wider context

The principles and measures this workshop recommends are not new, although the impetus for a national safer recruitment initiative came from Sir Michael Bichard's report (2004) into the Soham case which highlighted flaws and shortcomings in the recruitment process that allowed Ian Huntley to be employed as a caretaker at Soham College.

Safer recruitment is one strand of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and keeping them safe in education settings.

Statutory guidance [Working together to safeguard children](#) (DfE, 2023) states that schools and further education institutions, including academies and independent schools, should have in place a number of arrangements as part of their duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children including:

- A culture of listening to children and taking account of their wishes and feelings
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- Safe recruitment practices for individuals whom the organisation will permit to work regularly with children
- Appropriate supervision and support for staff, including undertaking safeguarding training (including a mandatory induction)
- Clear policies in line with those from the LSCB/MAP for dealing with allegations against people who work with children and young people

Maintained (state) schools and further education (FE) institutions, including sixth form colleges, have a duty under section 175 of the Education Act 2002 to exercise their functions with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of their pupils (students under 18 years of age in the case of FE institutions). Local Authorities delivering education through pupil referral units (PRUs) also have this duty under section 175.

The same duty is put on independent schools, including academies and free schools, by the Education (Independent School Standards) Regs 2014. Guidance to local authorities, schools and FE institutions about these duties can be found in [Keeping children safe in education](#) (DfE, 2025).

In addition, under section 87 of the Children Act 1989, independent schools that provide accommodation for children also have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of those pupils. Boarding schools, residential special schools and FE institutions that provide accommodation for children under 18 must have regard to the respective national minimum standards (NMS) for their establishments. Managers of children's homes should refer to the Children's Home Regulations 2015 and associated Quality Standards.

Definitions of abuse

[Working together to safeguard children](#) (DfE, 2023) defines four categories of child abuse: physical, emotional, sexual and neglect.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child, such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another, serious bullying (including cyberbullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or their exploitation or corruption. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, although it may occur alone.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and

touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children. The sexual abuse of children by other children is a specific safeguarding issue in education.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food and clothing, shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment), failing to protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger, failing to ensure adequate supervision, including the use of inadequate care-takers, or failing to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.