



Safer Recruitment Training

The Bichard Inquiry

Recommendations for schools

Recommendation 16:

- Head teachers and school governors should receive training on how to ensure that interviews to appoint staff reflect the importance of safeguarding children.

Recommendation 17:

- From a date to be agreed, no interview panel to appoint staff working in schools and colleges should be convened without at least one member being properly trained.

Objectives of the training

Based on an understanding of offender behaviour to:

- Identify the key features of staff recruitment that help deter or prevent the appointment of unsuitable people
- Consider policies and practice that minimise opportunities for abuse or ensure its prompt reporting
- Help participants begin to review their policies and practice in recruitment with a view to creating a safer culture

NB this is not intended to be a comprehensive workshop on staff recruitment and selection

Training outline

- Scale of the problem – child sexual abuse
- A model to explain the stages those who abuse children may go through
- Application into the education context
- Prevention of abuse through recruitment/selection
- Ongoing culture of vigilance

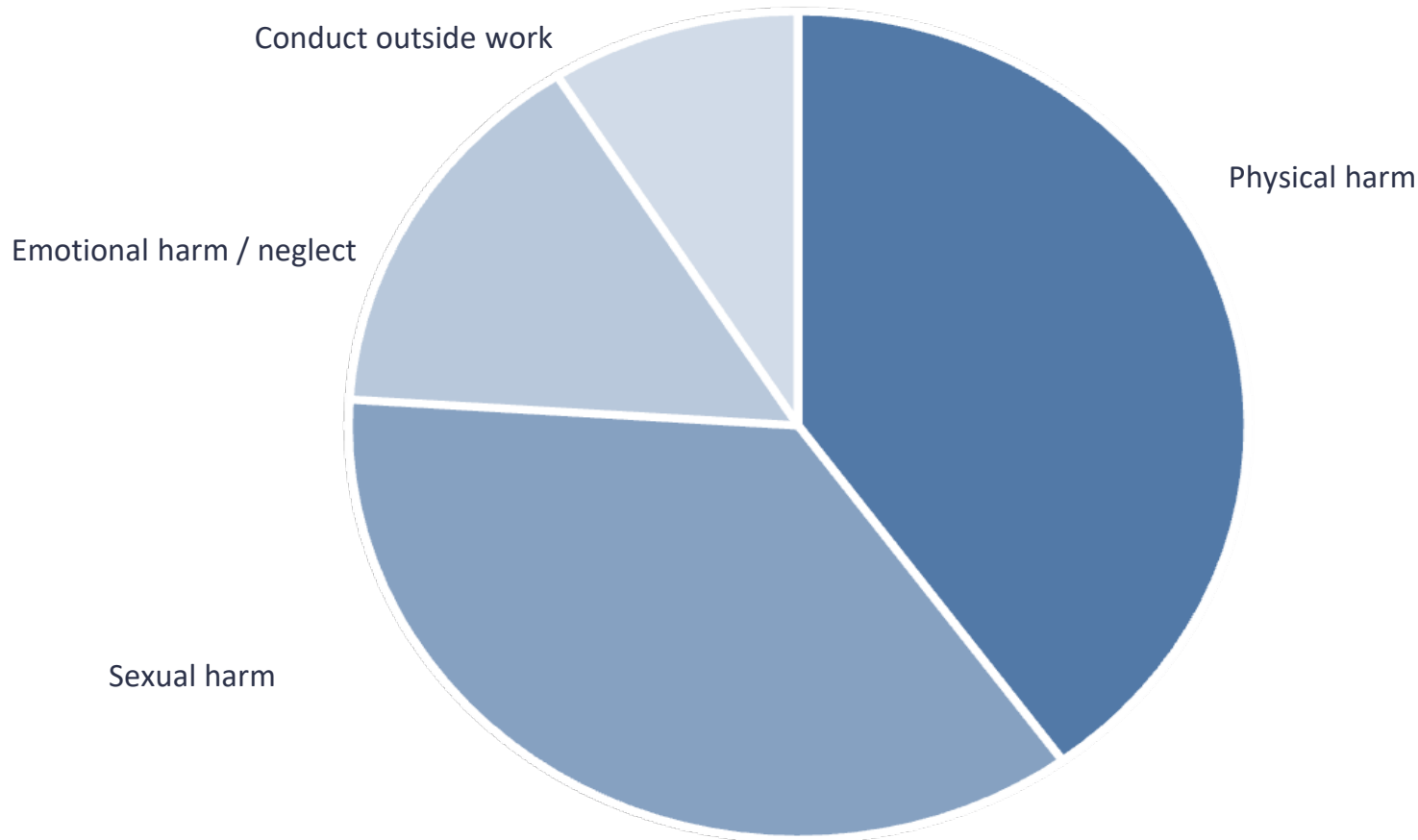
Session 1 – setting the context for safer recruitment

- Background and context
- The scale of abuse
- A model of offending behaviour
- Some characteristics of abusers
- Implications for recruitment and selection and creating a safer environment for children

The wider context

- The Bichard Inquiry Report
- Legal duties on schools, FE colleges and a wide range of partner organisations to safeguard and promote the welfare of children
- Statutory guidance ‘Keeping children safe in education’ (DfE 2025)
- EYFS framework (DfE Sep 2025)
- For boarding & residential schools, the National Minimum Standards (NMS) (DfE 2022)
- Adopting “safer recruitment” practice is an essential feature of the arrangements organisations need to have in place

Statistics – LADO referrals



One in four schools have reason to contact the LADO each year. Schools constitute one-third of all referrals.
Regional variations exist: not all LSCBs had recorded data for conduct outside work.

Review of LSCB annual reports 2015-16 / 2016-17 (Eyre 2017)

Statistics – teacher misconduct

1854 Referrals

Total misconduct cases reported to TRA in 2024-25

191 Prohibition orders

Teachers barred following professional conduct panels (297 hearings)



826 Investigations

Cases investigated as serious misconduct

454 referred for hearings

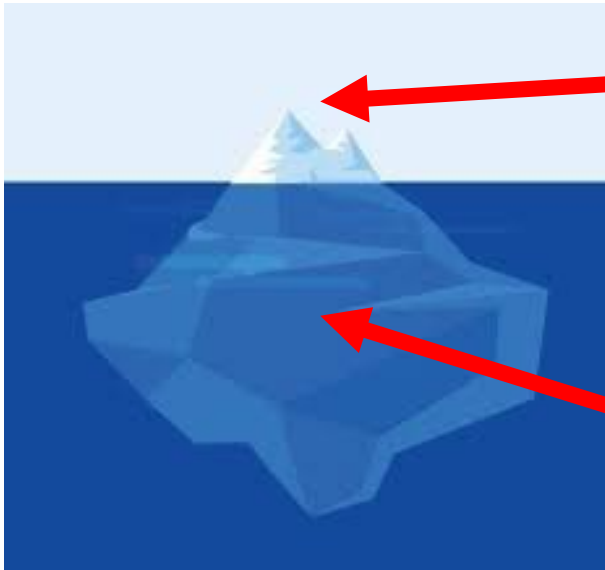
Cases referred for TMP hearing

1028 referrals were NFA – did not meet threshold or were outside jurisdiction

Statistics - DBS

- DBS received over 59,000 referrals for barring in 2023/24 including approx 13,000 referrals for discretionary bar
- 5,792 people were barred (<10%)
- There were 91,015 people on the children's barred list in March 2025 (increase of 10% on previous year)
- There are 104,125 people on one or both lists
- 4.4 million enhanced DBS certificates were processed during the year
- In March 2025, there were 2.9 million people on the update service
- About 5% of standard / enhanced certificates include PNC data after filtering has been applied

The scale of CSA



- 2,200 children placed on a child protection plan due to CSA
- 10,500 children seen by sexual assault referral centres
- 45,000 assessed as being at risk of CSA
- 101,000 CSA offences recorded by police
- 500,000 children are estimated to be sexually abused every year

www.csacentre.org.uk

In 2023/4:

- 13,098 people were charged with sexual offences against children
- Approx 10,000 accepted a caution
- 7,371 people were convicted

(MoJ 2024)

Reasons children don't report abuse

6 %
The perpetrator threatened me

15%
I was scared of the perpetrator

2%
I was worried about what would happen to the perpetrator?

2%
It was private

12%
no words to explain

3%
I was scared of what the institution would do

9%
I feel guilty

5%
I wanted to forget

14%
I didn't think I would be believed

17%
I didn't know it was not okay

12%
I didn't want to hurt my family

4%
I thought they loved me

12%
I felt ashamed & embarrassed

5%
I thought I was special

7%
I didn't want anyone else to know

8%
I thought I would get into trouble

Who are the offenders?

- 99% of those prosecuted for a sexual offence are male
- In 2023/4, 1% of CSA proceedings were against female offenders
- However, of the 25 defendants prosecuted for 'abuse of position of trust' offences in 2024, 6 were female (24%)
- Around 3% of prosecutions were against children aged 10 – 18
- Overall, 40% of all prosecutions of males for child sexual abuse offences related to child sexual abuse images

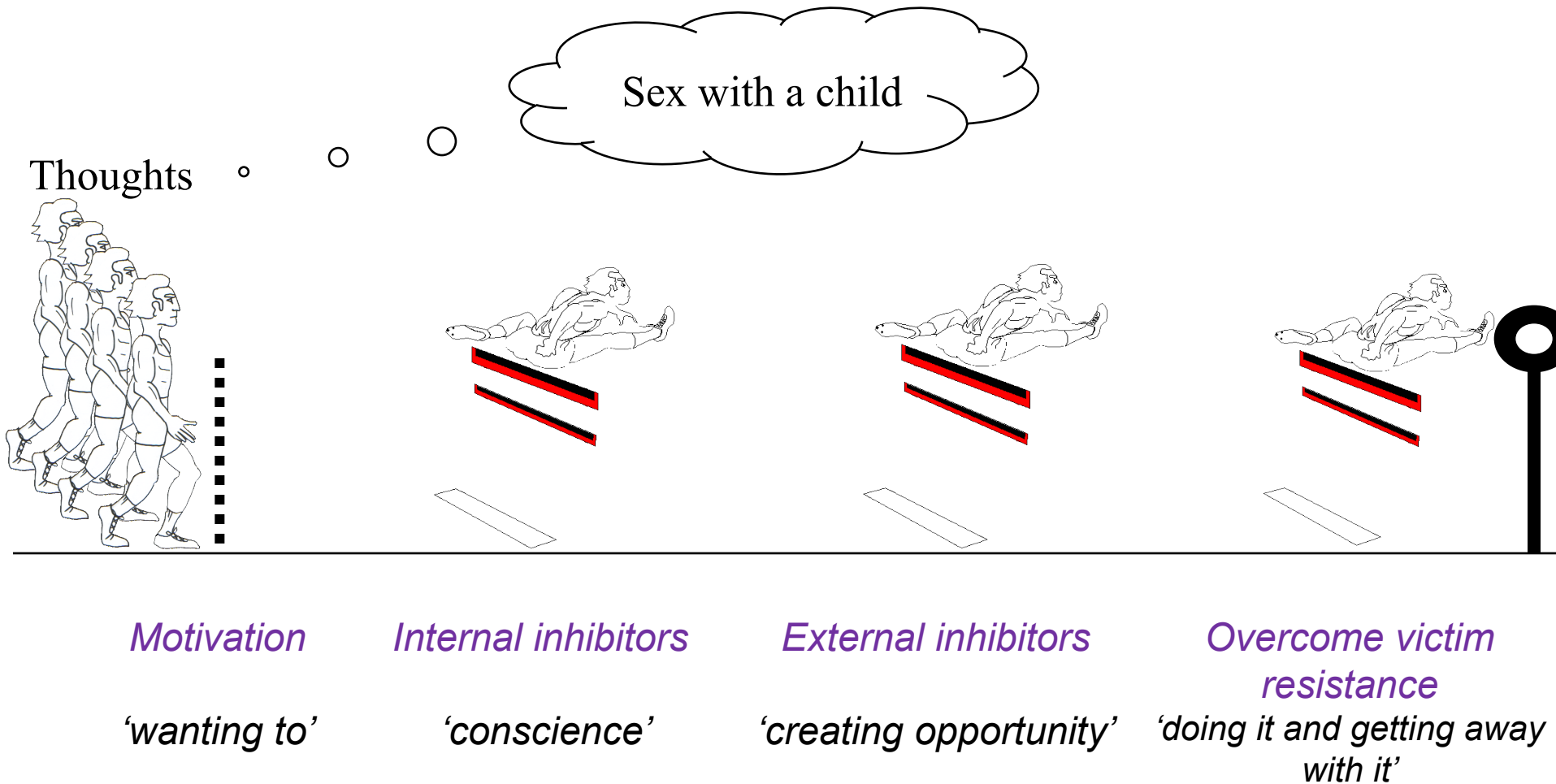
Source: MoJ 2025

- Most female professional perpetrators are aged 26 – 35
- Tend to act alone / one identified victim
- Victim studies suggest that 1 in 9 sexual offences are committed by a woman

Source: Darling 2020

Finkelhor – four preconditions

Adapted from D Finkelhor *Child Sexual Abuse: New Theory & Research 1986*



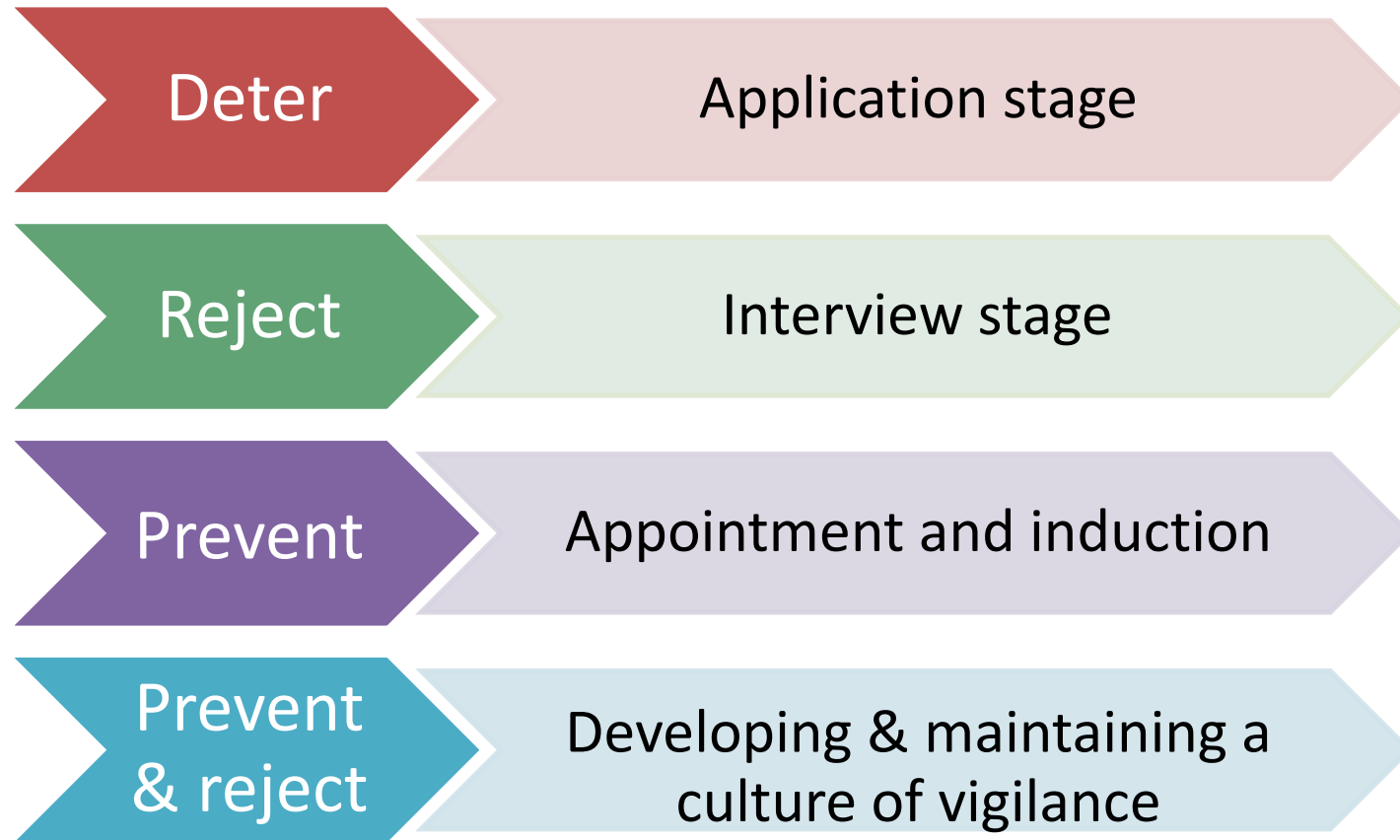
A culture of vigilance - learning lessons

- Safer recruitment procedures not in place
- Lack of safe working practice guidance - staff unclear on boundaries
- Failure to recognise, record and respond to low level concerns
- Standard operating procedures not being followed
- Poor management oversight / issues identified in inspection not actioned
- Voice of parents / pupils not heard
- Voice of staff / whistleblowing – raising concerns / exit interviews
- Human / professional / personal relationships
- Lack of effective supervision
- Ineffective governance and challenge

Other behaviours often displayed include:

- Poor boundary keeping
- Breaching policy or procedures 'in the best interests of the child'
- Lack of awareness of their behaviour on others
- Charismatic
- Dutiful, over-helpful and committed

Applying the Finkelhor model to recruitment



“For those agencies whose job it is to protect children and vulnerable people, the harsh reality is that if a sufficiently devious person is determined to seek out opportunities to work their evil, no one can guarantee that they will be stopped. Our task is to make it as difficult as possible for them to succeed...”

Bichard Inquiry Report, 2004, p 12 para 79

Session 2: a safer recruitment process

- Features of a safer recruitment process for : -
employees, contractors, agencies & volunteers
- Sending the right message
- The application form
- The selection criteria
- References
- Review and next steps

Defining the role

- Produce a job description and person specification or volunteer role profile
- Include skills, abilities, experience, behaviours and attitude/motivation and values towards children and young people
- Boundaries of role and expectations
- Responsibility for children in the role and opportunity for contact with children – is it Regulated Activity?

Advertising: Sending the right message

Four deterrents to unsuitable people

- State the organisation's commitment to safeguarding and provide information about the setting's safeguarding policy and practices to candidates
- Include statements about the safeguarding responsibilities of the post as per the job description and person specification
- State* whether the post is exempt from the ROA 1974 and eligible for enhanced DBS certificate / barred list check
- Provide clear information about protected offences and the need to disclose relevant criminal history if shortlisted

*this is required by DBS code of practice

Key information on application forms

- Personal details – current / former names, current address, NI number
- Present employment and reason for leaving
- Full history since leaving school (education and employment or voluntary work) with explanation of any gaps
- Qualifications
- Referees
- Personal statement to meet person specification
- Information for applicants about the legal basis and process for disclosing relevant criminal record
- Clear statement that it is an offence to apply for a role in regulated activity if the applicant is barred from engaging in regulated activity
- Signed declaration by candidate that all information is true

Agreeing selection criteria and process

- Base criteria for shortlisting and assessment process on person specification and job description
- Consistent for all candidates
- Specific to work with children
- Review criteria regularly

Scrutinising applications and short listing

- Take time to properly scrutinise
- At least two people shortlisting – the same people should shortlist and interview
- Identify any inconsistencies
- Application form fully completed
- Evidence provided relating to person specification and job description
- Scrutinise for gaps
- Apply shortlisting criteria equally

After shortlisting

Once shortlisted candidates have been identified:

- Seek reference(s)
- Ask candidates to complete, sign and return a criminal history / suitability self-disclosure prior to interview
- Advise candidates that online searches may be undertaken
- Undertake an online search for each candidate (if relevant)
- Panel should be advised of any relevant information, issues or concerns provided by the candidate, referees or found online so that the information can be discussed with the candidate at interview

There is more information about undertaking online searches in the delegate workbook p22

Criminal background: Self-disclosures

Purpose

- To give candidates an opportunity to share relevant information about criminal history and suitability at an early stage
- To allow information to be discussed and considered before the DBS check comes back
- To secure information about overseas criminal history and other suitability data that may not be disclosed on the DBS certificate
- To deter unsuitable people

Process

- It is discriminatory to use disclosed information for shortlisting
- **Only request self-disclosure from shortlisted candidates**
- Should not rule someone out – apply fair assessment criteria
- Continue with DBS check and compare information

References

Important part of process of gathering information before interview:

- Must have a reference from current or most recent employer
- If not working with children but has done so in the past, a reference should be sought from most recent employer where the role involved working with children
- Referee should be a senior person with relevant authority – in a school, the HT / principal should confirm the reference is accurate
- Ask whether aware of any behaviour that might give rise to concern, including any disciplinary action
- Ask specifically about allegations about their behaviour towards children
- Specific confirmation of the details and responsibilities of previous post given by applicant

Open references and testimonials

Candidates may sometimes bring 'open' references or letters of recommendation to interview. These:

- May be the product of a settlement agreement to avoid disciplinary action
- Should never be accepted at face value

Always take up your own references and/or contact the author of the open reference to verify the content

Scrutinising references

- Importance of reading references – active consideration
- Equally, importance of comparing information provided by referee with information provided by applicant
- If information is inconsistent, vague or insufficient, follow up and clarify with referee
- Ensure that all electronic references are from a legitimate source
- Information should **always** be verified with the person who provided the reference

Session 3: making the right decisions

- Importance of making the right decision
- The interview and the selection process
- Pre-appointment checks
- Using criminal disclosure information
- Review and next steps

Safer selection

Good practice

- Range of selection tools – not just an interview
- Explore motives/attitudes as well as skills and experience
- Assessors should be well briefed or trained
- Assess interaction with others – role plays, group exercises
- Appropriate involvement of children

Selecting the right people

- At least two interviewers; should also be involved in shortlisting
- Structured questions and criteria previously agreed
- Probe gaps, frequent changes in employment or location, vagueness or areas of concern
- Ask candidate about any information from self-disclosure, references or online search that may be relevant to suitability
- Ask what attracted them to the post and their motives for working with children
- Avoid hypothetical questions; seek positive examples or evidence
- Give and receive information
- Clearly document your decisions
- Beware of prejudices and discrimination

Making decisions using selection criteria and indicators

- Based on the Person Specification
- Indicators – what would you expect a good candidate to say?
- Guide not a tick box
- Bespoke to the position
- Use to make decisions and clarify why someone is suitable or unsuitable for appointment
- Review regularly

Areas of potential concern

- Implication that children and adults are equal
- Lack of recognition / understanding of the vulnerability of children
- Idealisation of children
- Inappropriate language when talking about children
- Expression of views that are extreme or do not support safeguarding
- Unclear about appropriate boundaries
- Vagueness about experiences and gaps or unable to provide any examples to support what they tell you
- Maverick – non rule-following, unwilling to work with others

Interview question template

Positive Indicators

- Consistent under pressure
- Has control over emotions
- Knows when to seek help

Emotional Resilience & Maturity

- Tell me about a time in the classroom when your authority was challenged.
- What happened?
- How did you react?
- What did you do to bring things back on course?

Negative Indicators

- Inappropriate responses under pressure or when in charge of others.
- Handles conflict badly.
- Doesn't seek help when needed.

Pre-appointment checks

A *conditional* offer of employment can be made pending the following:

- Verification of identity – including original birth certificate (where possible) to identify whether the person has changed their name
- Eligibility to work in the UK
- DBS Barred List (if regulated activity)
- Enhanced DBS check
- That those in 'teaching work' are not subject to a prohibition order, interim prohibition order or GTCE restriction
- S128 Prohibition from management (independent / free schools / academies and governors of maintained schools)
- Qualifications
- Status: QTS, HCPC, disqualified from EY / later years childcare, etc
- Overseas checks (may include overseas criminal certificates / overseas references / info from overseas teaching regulators)

Regulated activity & DBS checks

- Individuals employed to work regularly in a school are in *regulated* activity (RA) with children
- It is a legal requirement to check people working in RA are not barred from that work *before* they commence in post
- People not in RA can still be asked to undertake a DBS disclosure (without Barred list check)
- It is unlawful to check the Barred list if the person is not in RA
- Employer must see the original certificate and record on the SCR the date it was seen
- Under the DBS code of practice, if employers retain a copy of the certificate, this must be held securely & for no more than 6 months

DBS Barred list - children

At present people are barred by law from working in RA with children if they are:

- on the DBS children's barred list
- banned by a court on conviction of a specified offence

A DBS certificate obtained in regard to work with children will *usually** show whether the person is barred from RA with children.

* But not in the case of supervised volunteers

People barred from working in RA with adults are not automatically barred from working with children or vice versa

Relevance of criminal records

When assessing an applicant's criminal history, consider the offence in terms of

- Nature, seriousness and relevance
- Whether the offence would be protected / filtered
- How long ago it occurred
- Whether it was a one-off or part of a history
- Circumstances of it being committed
- Changes in applicant's personal circumstances
- Country of conviction
- Decriminalisation

It is unlawful to take offences that are 'protected' into account

Protected offences

- The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 was amended in 2020
- Employers have no right to ask candidates to disclose all spent convictions, even if the post is exempt from the ROA
- Legislation now refers to 'filtered' or 'protected' offences which applicants do not need to disclose
- It is the employer's responsibility to draw applicants' attention to the guidance on filtering
- See p21 of the delegate workbook for the wording recommended by the MoJ – this should be used on application forms, applicant information packs, etc
- If an applicant discloses an offence which they did not need to, it is the recruiter's responsibility to know not to discuss / take it into consideration

Session 4: an ongoing culture of vigilance

- Features of a safer culture
- Audio presentation
- Creating an open culture
- Individual responsibilities for expressing concern
- Dealing with allegations of professional abuse
- Next steps and other resources

Southbank International School

“A feature of the evidence is that ... staff ... consistently assumed that the fact Vahey (and other teachers) had been subject to a vetting process on recruitment in some way certified him as a person that did not – could not – represent a threat to children.”

Hugh Davies QC, 2014

The crime triangle



Features of a safer culture

- Open, no secrets
- Belief that 'it could happen here'
- Robust and regular training (child protection, safer working practice, online safety)
- Clear staff behaviour / safe working practice guidelines
- Clear procedures for reporting low level concerns
- A whistleblowing procedure that staff understand and are confident using
- Support in raising concerns & commitment to take action
- Commitment to safeguarding & an ongoing culture of vigilance
- Policies and procedures put into practice
- Good use of induction and probationary periods

Disclosing potential issues

KCSIE 2025 says that school leaders should

“Create the right culture and environment so that staff feel comfortable to discuss matters within and, where it is appropriate, outside the workplace (including online) which may have implications for the safeguarding of children.”

These discussions can help schools

- safeguard their employees' welfare and contribute to their duty of care towards their staff
- identify whether arrangements are needed to support these staff
- manage children's safety, providing them with information that will help them consider whether there are measures that need to be put in place to safeguard children

Allegations against staff

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child;
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children.
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

*** Harm threshold met - refer to LADO**

Low level concerns

concerns that are inconsistent with the staff code of conduct, including

- inappropriate conduct outside of work; and / or
- does not meet the allegations threshold or is otherwise not considered serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO.

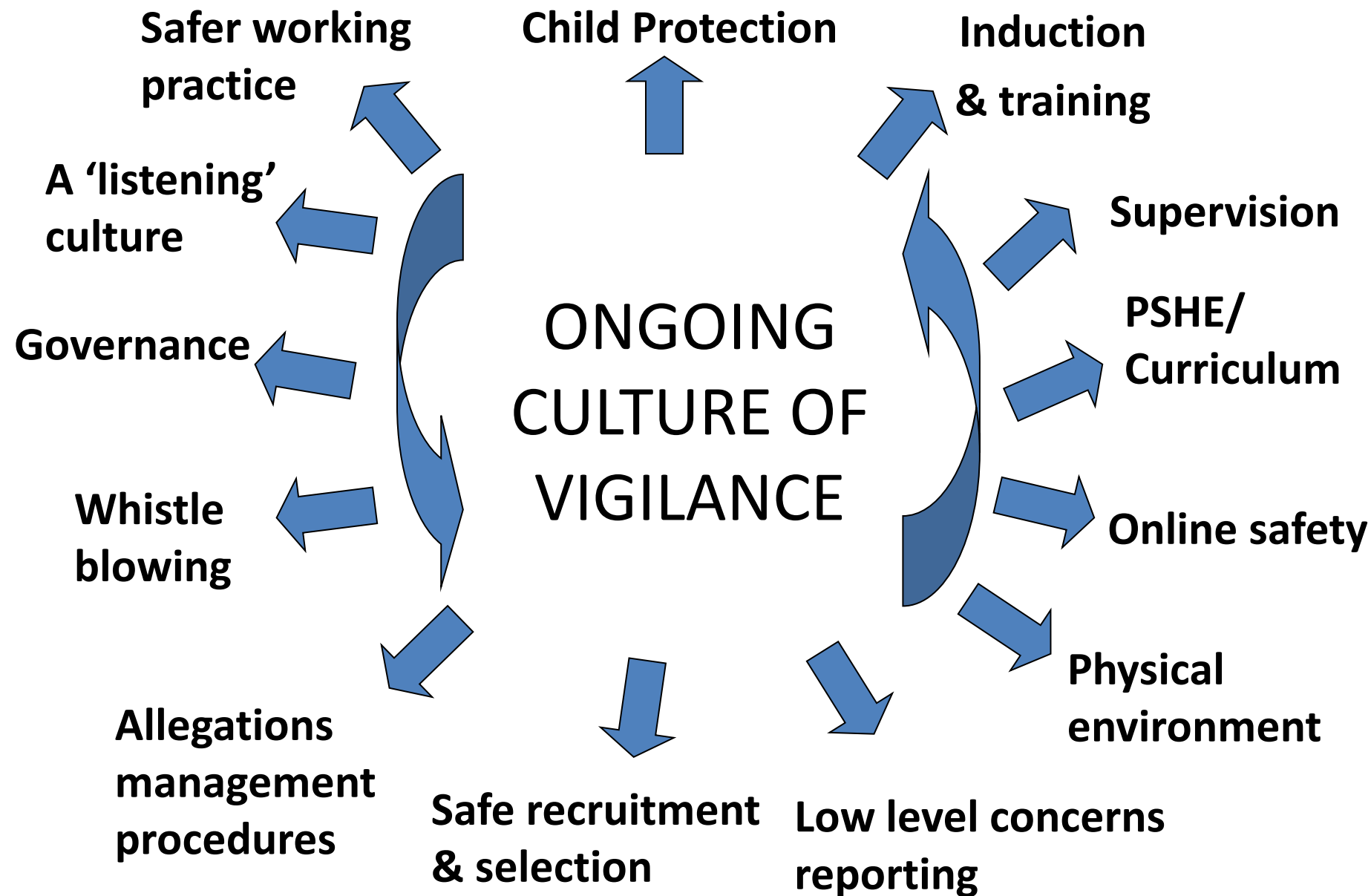
*** Harm threshold not met - follow in-house low level concerns procedure**

Breach of Trust

A breach of trust occurs when the boundaries of the relationship between a professional and a child or young person is broken due to inappropriate behaviour by the professional, which involves an abuse of power.

The behaviour itself does not necessarily have to be illegal to breach this trust – even if the child is over the age of consent e.g:

- A youth leader (19 years old) at a youth club starts a relationship with a 16 year old youth club member
- A teacher becomes sexually involved with a 6th form pupil over the age of 18



Remaining vigilant

Never think you have done enough in terms of creating a safer culture

Always believe it could happen here

Keep safeguarding high on everyone's agenda

Never rely on any one process to keep children safe

Next steps

Action planning for your organisation:

Please take time to complete the questionnaire on pages 58 - 59 of your workbook and begin to develop an action plan



**THE
LUCY FAITHFULL
FOUNDATION**

Working to protect children



National Association of Special
Schools (NASS)
Education



The Safer Recruitment Consortium

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