



# 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.

# Key Learning Outcomes

## **Understanding safer recruitment**

Focus on behaviours and practices that protect children from harm through robust recruitment and safeguarding

## **Policies and procedures**

Effective induction, codes of conduct, whistleblowing and clear reporting pathways reduce risks and boundary violations

## **Creating a safer culture**

Review and improve recruitment practices, leadership and accountability to foster continuous safeguarding improvement

## **A shared responsibility**

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, supported by vigilance, challenge and ongoing professional development

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

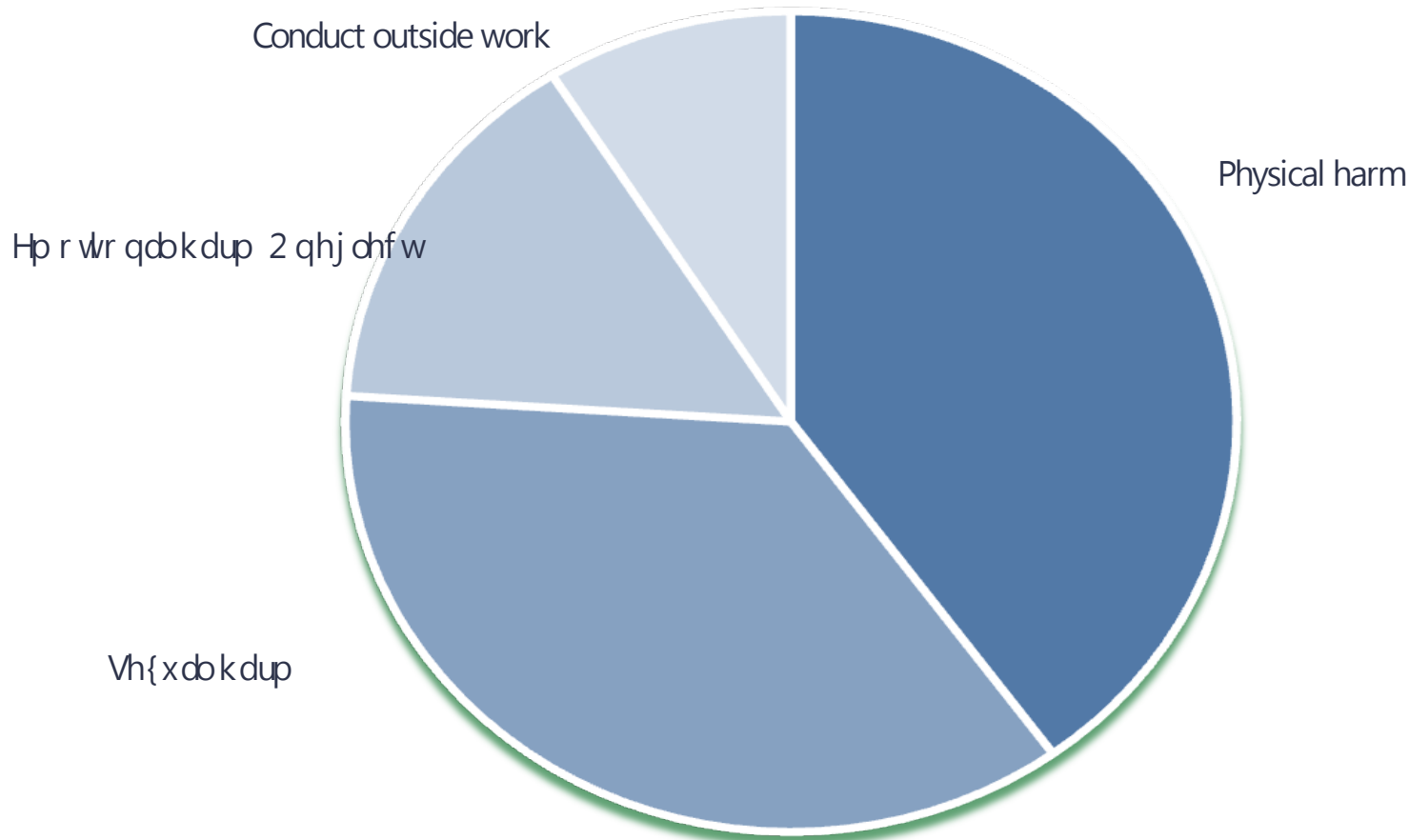
# Session 1 – setting the context for safer recruitment

- 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 Richard 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 2026)
- EYFS framework (DfE Sep 2026)
- 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

1422 initial assessments  
(365 referrals from  
members of the public)



805 investigations  
(cases investigated as  
serious misconduct)

314 hearings held  
214 prohibition orders

355 referred for hearing  
156 IPOs issued

(54 hearings found  
serious misconduct but no  
prohibition order issued)

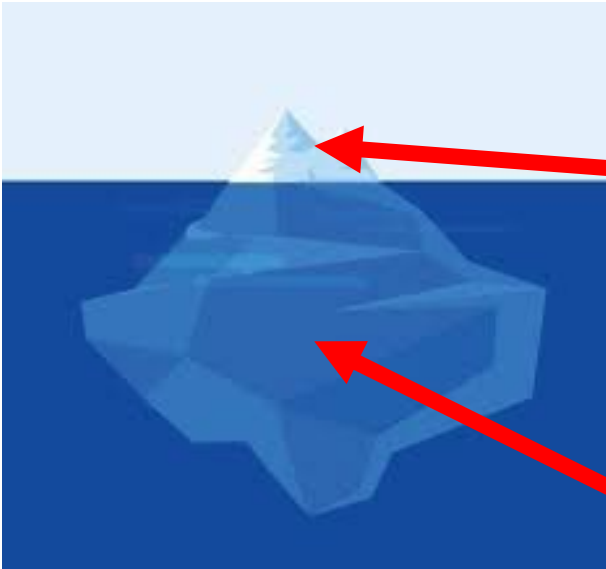
617 referrals were NFA – did not meet threshold or were outside jurisdiction

# Statistics - DBS

- DBS received over 74,000 referrals for barring in 2025/26 including 13,735 referrals for discretionary bar
- 6,431 people were barred (8.6%)
- In June 2026, there were 96,986 people on the children's barred list
- There are 111,000 people on one or both lists
- 6.7 million enhanced DBS certificates were processed during the year
- In March 2026, there were 2.8 million people on the update service

*Disclosure & Barring Service July 2026*

# The scale of CSA



- 2,200 children placed on a child protection plan due to CSA
  - 10,000 children seen by NHS sexual assault referral centres
  - 31,490 assessed as being at risk of CSA
  - 103,547 identifiable CSA offences recorded by police
- www.csacentre.org.uk*

500,000 children are estimated to be sexually abused every year

*www.csacentre.org.uk*

In 2024/5:

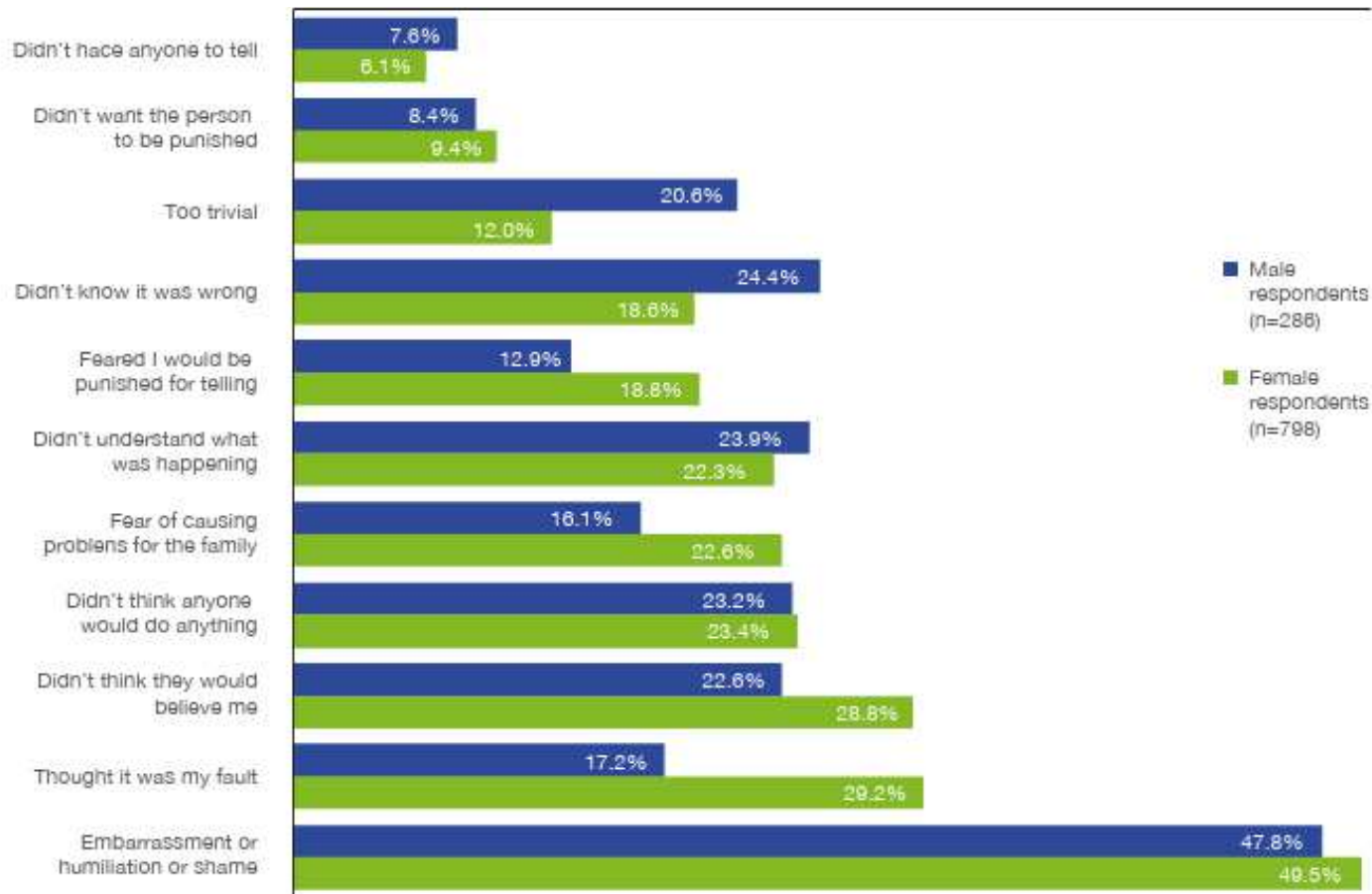
- 13,098 people were charged with sexual offences against children
  - Approx 1% accepted a caution
  - 10,700 court cases led to 8,300 convictions
- (MoJ 2026)*

## What the data tells us

- Only a small proportion of CSA cases reach statutory services
- Recorded offences represent the visible part of the problem
- Many children never disclose abuse or come to official attention
- The gap between identified cases and prevalence remains significant

# Reasons children don't report abuse

**Figure 25. Reasons why respondents to the Crime Survey for England and Wales 2024 had not told anyone about their sexual abuse at the time, by sex of the respondent**



# Who are the offenders?

- 99% of those prosecuted for a sexual offence are male
- In 2024/25, 1% of CSA proceedings were against female offenders
- However, of the 27 defendants prosecuted for 'abuse of position of trust' offences in 2025, 5 were female (19%)
- Around 3% of prosecutions were against children aged 10 – 18
- Overall, 46% of all prosecutions of adult males for child sexual abuse offences related to child sexual abuse images

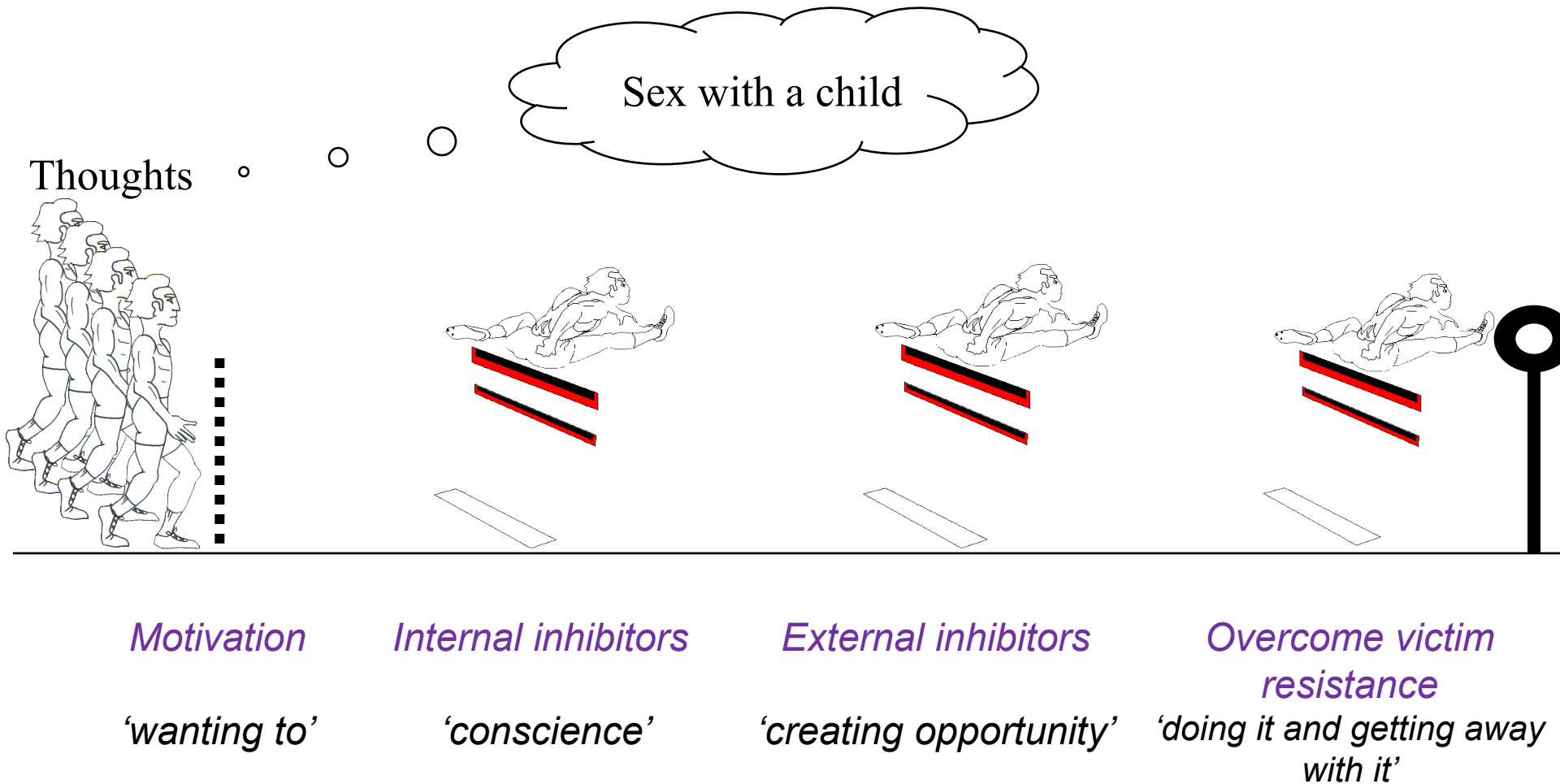
*Source: MoJ 2026*

- 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 2022*

# 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

# A Risk Pathway model

Implementing Finkelhor to prevent harm:

## Motivation stage barriers

Safer recruitment and rigorous vetting identify concerns before appointment to mitigate offender motivation

## Internal inhibitors barriers

Safeguarding cultures, ethical codes, and training reinforce acceptable behavior and accountability

## External inhibitors barriers

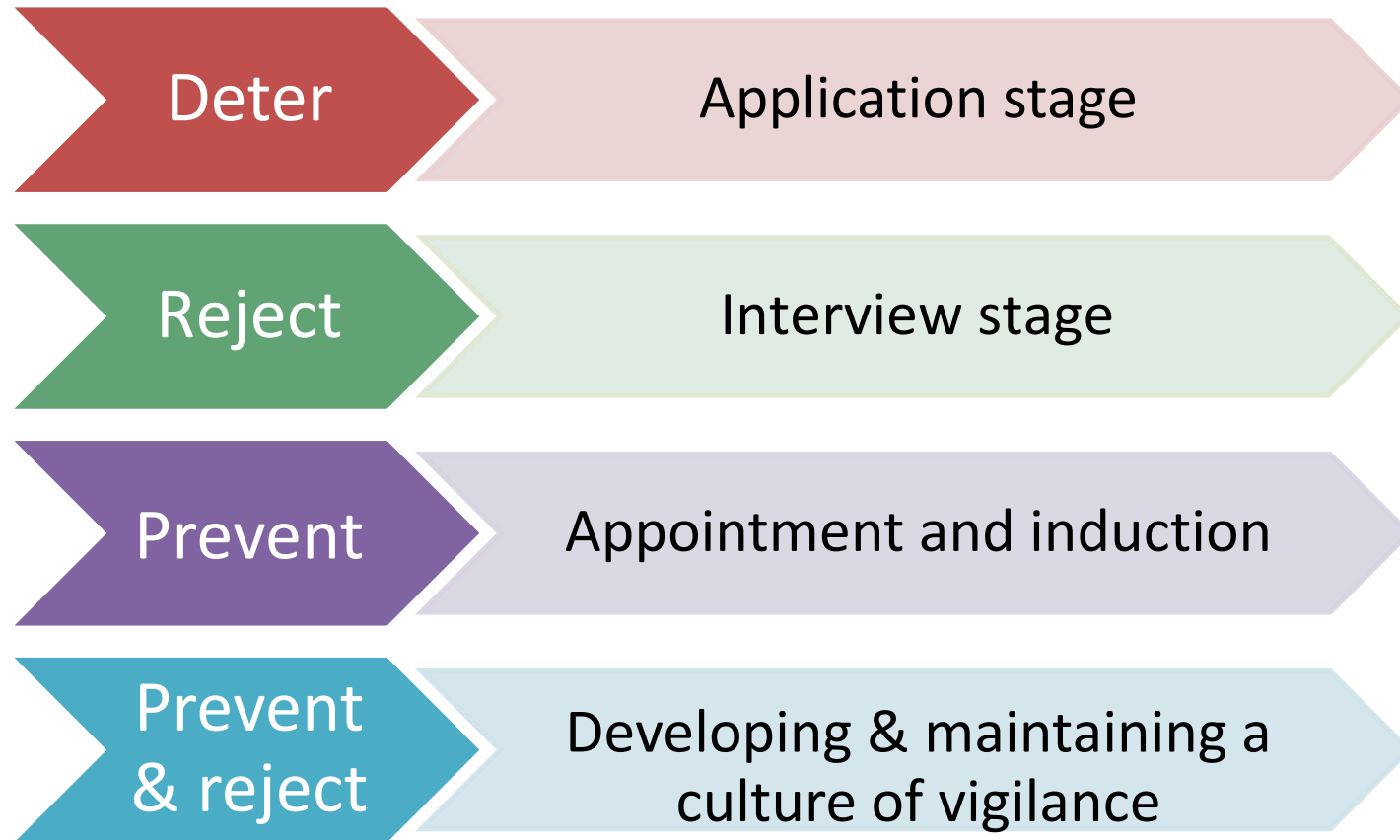
Supervision, policies, and governance create environmental controls to block offender progress

## Victim resistance barriers

Early grooming identification, vigilant staff, and protective education empower children to resist abuse



# 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...”

*Richard Inquiry Report, 2004, p 12 para 79*

**Safer recruitment cannot eliminate risk completely; it must make offending more difficult and detection more likely**

# 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

# Exercise 4 – short listing

## In your groups

- Use the example person specification, job description and completed application form
- Choose 1 of the criteria in the person spec that is relevant to safeguarding children
- Use the information on the application form to score the candidate against the chosen criterion
- Also scrutinise the application form and consider whether there are any gaps or inadequacies in the information provided or the way the form has been completed

Would you shortlist the candidate?

# 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 p23

# 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

## Best practice:

- Ensure safer recruitment applies to all adults working in schools, including employees, trainee teachers, volunteers, governors / trustees and contractors
- Use a 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

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

Interview responses should be explored through professional curiosity, follow-up questioning and safeguarding awareness.

# 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

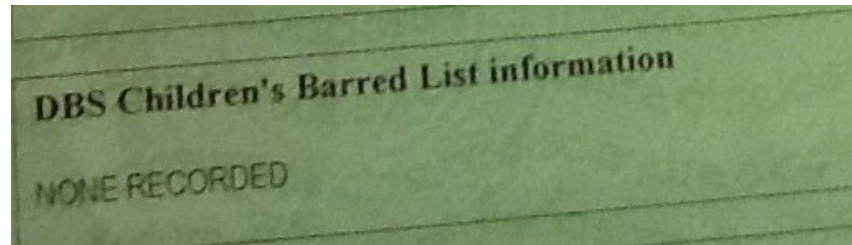
- Individuals employed to work regularly in a school are in *regulated* activity (RA) with children
- From 1<sup>st</sup> September 2026\*, volunteers in regular contact with children are also in regulated activity *even if they are supervised*
- It is a legal requirement to check people working in RA 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

An enhanced DBS certificate will *only* show whether the person is barred from RA with children if the recruiter requests a children's barred list at the same time



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

# Relevance of criminal records

When risk 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

# Safer recruitment beyond your workforce

## Third parties & contractors

- Clear safeguarding clauses in contracts
- Local risk assessments where required
- Notification of relevant / emerging safeguarding concerns

## Alternative Provision & partners

- Seek evidence of safer recruitment
- Review policies and DBS processes
- Ongoing monitoring and challenge

**KEY QUESTION: How do we know this organisation's recruitment and safeguarding arrangements are effective?**

Safeguarding accountability cannot be outsourced. Schools must satisfy themselves that all adults working with children are subject to robust safeguarding arrangements

# 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 and low level concerns
- 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 safe culture

- ✓ A whistleblowing procedure that staff understand and are confident using
- ✓ Commitment to safeguarding & an ongoing culture of vigilance
- ✓ Robust and regular training
- ✓ Clear staff behaviour / safer working practice guidelines
- ✓ Clear procedures for reporting low level concerns
- ✓ Open, no secrets
- ✓ Support in raising concerns & commitment to take action regardless of role, including volunteers, supply staff, contractors and trainee teachers
- ✓ Policies and procedures are put into practice
- ✓ Good use of induction and probationary periods

A safer culture is built through openness, accountability, professional curiosity and a shared commitment to safeguarding

# Allegations and low level concerns

## Allegation against adults working with children

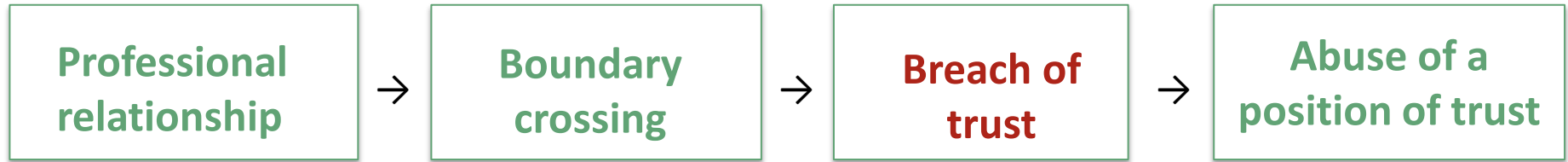
- Harmed or may have harmed a child
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- May pose a risk of harm to children
- May not be suitable to work with children

## Low-level concern

- Inconsistent with the staff Code of Conduct
- Inappropriate behaviour or poor professional boundaries
- May occur inside or outside work
- Does not meet the harm threshold

**Allegations that meet the harm threshold must be reported to the LADO within 24 hours**

# Professional boundaries: a continuum



## **Professional relationship**

- Appropriate boundaries
- Transparent communication
- Child-centred support

## **Boundary crossing**

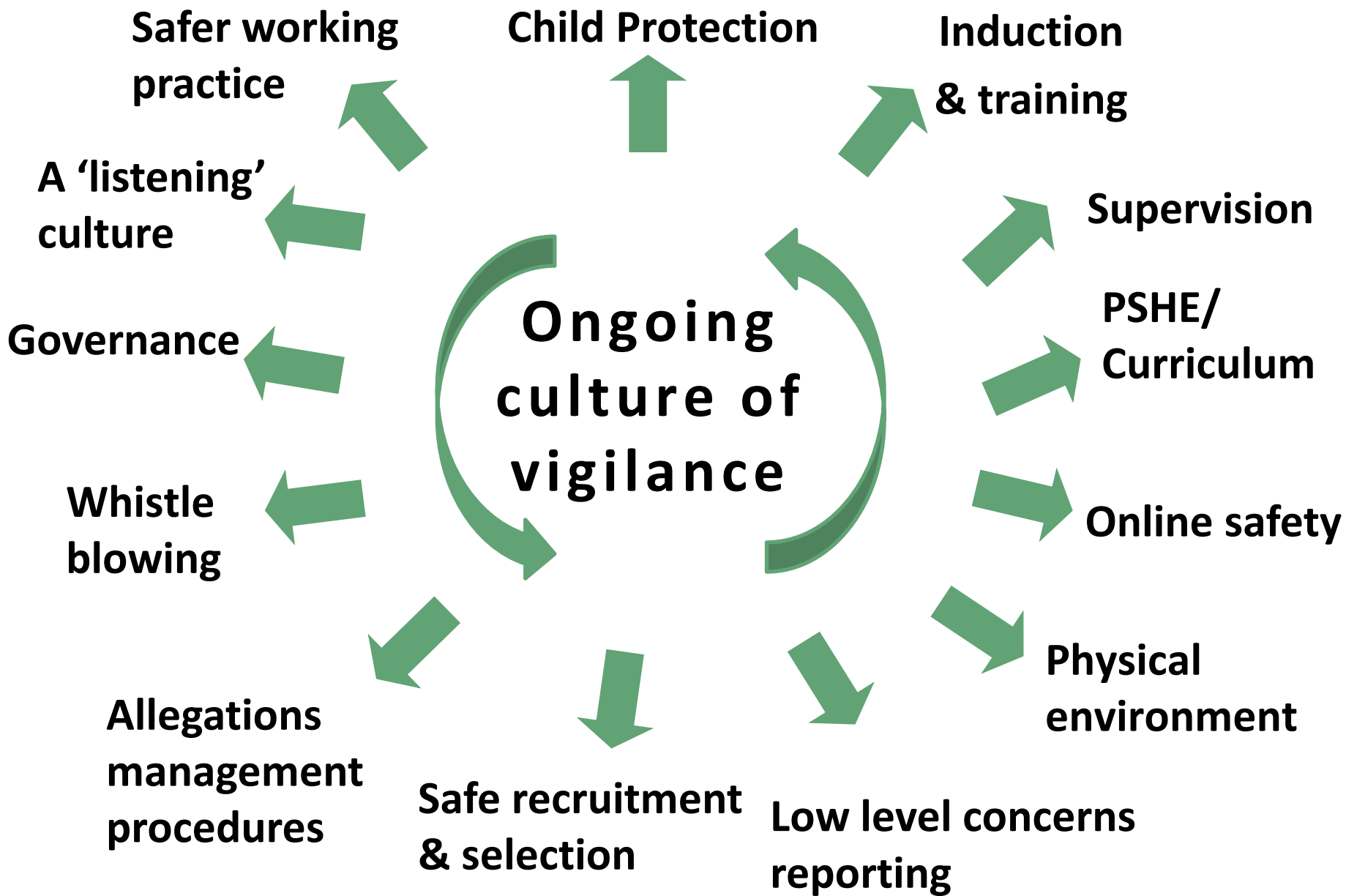
- Favouritism
- Excessive personal contact
- Private messaging

## **Breach of trust**

- Special relationship
- Secrecy from colleagues or parents
- Emotional dependency

## **Abuse of Position of Trust**

- Sexual or romantic relationship
- Exploitation of power or influence
- Potential misconduct or criminal offence



# 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

Strong safeguarding cultures are built through vigilance, challenge, accountability and continuous improvement.



**THE  
LUCY FAITHFULL  
FOUNDATION**

**Working to protect children**



National Association of Special  
Schools (NASS)  
Education



# The Safer Recruitment Consortium

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