

Annual Report to Stakeholders

February 2020



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FOREWORD

The Uniting Church has publicly pledged to continue to implement the lessons of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. This commits the Church and its entities to remain open to the insights of people with lived experience of abuse and professionals, to regularly review and renew policies and practices in all parts of the Church and work to ensure that they reflect best practice for the care, service and support of children.

Although the Church's commitment to safety is not new, its commitment to take a nationally consistent approach to safety is new and the National Safe Church Unit was created to lead this work.

2019 saw the establishment and launch of the Unit. As such, much of the Unit's work across the year focused on putting the necessary structures in place to enable the NSCU to become fully functional. This included establishing the legal structure of the Unit, agreeing parameters for the work of the Unit, recruiting staff, agreeing delegations, confirming the operating budget and addressing operational issues such as securing physical office space, and the provision of back of house support services.

A new Governance Committee was created to oversee the work of the Unit and a Consultation Advisory Group was established to help inform that work. The National Director, Rev. John Cox, also continued to manage the process of winding down elements of the National Engagement and Response Task Force to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and facilitating the continuation of some of the stakeholder groups that had been created to support the Task Force and which are now helping to inform the work of the Unit.

The National Director undertook an extensive program of meetings and visits across the Church and with external stakeholders to create awareness of the Unit, communicate its role and identify how it will collaborate and work with entities across the Church, other ecumenical partners, governments and other organisations.

The strategic frameworks, policies, tools and resources developed by the Unit are intended to be used by all entities and individuals associated with UCA who engage in child related services or activities. This includes, but is not limited to: Congregations, Presbyteries, Synods, the Assembly, agencies, ministries, childcare services, out-of-home care services, family and community services, disability services, health services, camps and schools. In 2019 the Unit began work to develop these resources and this report outlines that work.

Moving into 2020, the Unit is working across three pillars – **strategy and policy, quality assurance, education and training** - to deliver a suite of tools and resources for the Church and its entities to implement locally. Underpinning these pillars is a culture of safety, which is founded on the existing culture of the Church and its values. This report outlines the Unit's workplan for 2020.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations used in this report

ASC	Assembly Standing Committee
CAG	Consultation Advisory Group
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CPSL	Catholic Professional Standards
NFP	Not for Profit
NSCU	National Safe Church Unit
POC	Person of Concern
SCFIN	Safe Church Framework Implementation Network
SSC	Synod Standing Committee
UCA	The Uniting Church in Australia

ESTABLISHMENT

2019	Key actions and delivery
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Development of governance and legal structures
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Governance workshop
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agreement of governance and legal structures
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establishment of the National Safe Church Unit• Appointment of National Director• Office move
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identification of required back of house supports• Development of operational processes
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Operational agreements finalised• Recruitment process for National Policy Adviser
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preparation for launch
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Official launch of the NSCU and induction of the National Director• Inaugural meeting of the NSCU Governance Committee• Strategy workshop (Governance Committee)
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NSCU Risk Register created• Selection and interview process for National Policy Adviser
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inaugural meeting of the Consultation Advisory Group• Project brief created for the National Education and Training Project• Appointment of National Policy Adviser• Governance Committee meeting• Delivery of 2020-2022 NSCU Strategy• Delivery of the revised National Child Safe Policy Framework• Delivery of the Person of Concern Policy Framework
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delivery of the National Child Safe Collaboration Framework and Decision-Making Protocol• Stakeholder mapping completed• Annual Report provided to the National Office for Child Safety• Development of NSCU Communications Strategy
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2020 Work planning for NSCU undertaken• National Education and Training Project Stakeholder Group teleconference• Prototype NSCU website created• Provision of draft training units – Resourcing Ministry Project

Establishment of the National Safe Church Unit was delayed April to 2019 because of the Church's commitment to first deliver a fully functioning UCA Redress Ltd. [The National Director, Rev. John Cox, was appointed in April 2019](#) and led an intensive program of work across 2019 to make the Unit operational. The [official launch](#) of the Unit and induction of the National Director took place on 23 August 2019.



UCA President Dr Deidre Palmer, NSCU National Director Rev. John Cox and Assembly General Secretary Colleen Geyer at the Unit's launch

The Unit adopted the operational policies of the UCA Assembly for the purposes of its operations. Work in the first half of 2019 put in place agreements for the Assembly to provide back of house services which includes finance, payroll, HR, IT communications and management support.

The Unit was temporarily based at the Queensland Synod office in Brisbane at the start of 2019. Work was undertaken to find more suitable office space and the Unit co-located with UCA Redress Ltd in a serviced office in April 2019. The location was chosen following analysis of available office space in Brisbane and was found to be the most cost effective. Co-location has delivered financial savings and strengthened collaboration between the Unit and UCA Redress Ltd.

The Professional Standards - Resourcing Ministry Project moved to the Unit in April 2019.

Governance Committee

The NSCU Governance Committee was established and held its inaugural meeting in August 2019, with a subsequent meeting in October. The Committee is meeting bi-monthly for the first 12 months (to August 2020) and is responsible for the oversight of the Unit.

In 2019, the charter was adopted by the Governance Committee and membership terms were agreed.

The Unit acts as secretariat for the Governance Committee providing all briefing papers and information to support agenda items for each meeting and minutes of the meetings.

Consultation Advisory Group (CAG)

The CAG was established and held its inaugural meeting on 18 October 2019. At this meeting, membership and terms of reference were agreed.

The first CAG meeting also received an update on the work undertaken by the Unit from the National Director, this included an outline of the structure, a forward look at work to be done, consideration of the cultural change required to grow and sustain a culture of safety across the Church.

The CAG endorsed the Safe Church Framework Implementation Network (SCFIN) as an important part of the ongoing process.

The CAG assists the Governance Committee in an advisory and collaborative capacity. The CAG also provides support and information to the Unit; in particular in supporting the Unit to connect and work with individuals and entities across the life of the Church.

The CAG will meet face-to-face one to two times per year, hold bi-monthly remote (zoom) meetings, and out of session meetings when required. The next meeting is a face-to-face meeting on 17 February 2020 in Adelaide. The Unit acts as secretariat for the CAG.

Safe Church Framework Implementation Network (SCFIN)

The SCFIN was the first collaborative network established by the Church's Royal Commission Task Group to resource implementation of the National Safe Church Policy Framework. Prior to establishment of the National Safe Church Unit, the SCFIN was guided by the work of the Task Group and had sufficient flexibility to determine what issues it wanted to pursue.

The SCFIN November 2019 meeting was postponed to February 2020 to align with the next CAG meeting to minimise costs (several SCFIN members are also CAG members). This meeting will consider the on-going role of SCFIN.

The Unit acts as secretariat for the SCFIN.

National Education and Training Project Stakeholder Group

The National Education and Training Project Stakeholder Group was formed in 2019 to provide support for the development and delivery to the Unit's Education and Training Project. Membership includes representatives from each Synod and the Assembly.

The Group teleconferenced in December 2019 and began work to identify the training and education priorities in terms of strengthening and growing a culture of safety across the Church.

The Unit acts as secretariat for the Group.

Staffing

The Resourcing Ministry Project became a function of the Unit in 2019. This work is being taken forward by the Unit in partnership with staff across the life of the Church on a project basis.

The National Policy Adviser was appointed in late October 2019.

STRATEGY AND POLICY

2020-2022 NSCU Strategy

The 2020-2022 NSCU Strategy was developed in consultation with stakeholders across the second half of 2019 and provided to the Governance Committee at its October 2019 meeting.

The strategy outlines the Unit's three work pillars – strategy and policy, quality assurance, education and training. It identifies performance measures, the role of staff and of working groups and provides a timeline for the delivery of work by the Unit.

National Child Safe Policy Framework

The National Child Safe Policy Framework was updated by the Unit in 2019 to align with the [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#) which were endorsed in February 2019 by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). The framework will be presented to the Assembly Standing Committee in March 2020 for formal endorsement.

The updated framework aligns with the 10 Principles for Child Safe Organisations to further support the Church and its entities to create and sustain a culture of child safety. Actions flowing from the framework in 2019 have included:

- Safe church issues included as a standing agenda item at many Church Council meetings
- The inclusion of the Principles in Safe Church workshops and refresher training delivered by Synods for congregations, children's ministry workers and Safe Church Officers
- Progressive inclusion of reviews and updating of organisational codes of conduct for staff, school students and their parents/carers to align with the Principles
- Progressive inclusion of The Child Safe School – Statement of Claim in school websites alongside publication of the policies and procedures that document how a school is safe for students
- Updating induction procedures, staff training and resources to strengthen delivery and access to child protection and mandatory reporting training and information
- Development of a policy for psychometric assessment for staff working in residential care
- Revision of feedback and complaints processes, including new directions for responding to allegations made against staff
- Auditing of compliance with policies and procedures to ensure they align with the Principles
- Reviews and changes to archive systems and facilities
- Updating of information sharing procedures and practices

The Unit will work with CAG, SCFIN and others to support implementation of the updated National Child Safe Policy Framework across the life of the Church in 2020.

National Child Safe Collaboration Framework

The National Child Safe Collaboration Framework was provided to the Governance Committee at the October meeting. It outlines how the Unit will work to facilitate and enable a collaborative approach by the Assembly and Synods to embed a consistent and robust safe church culture and safe church practices across the Church and its agencies.

Person of Concern Policy

A Person of Concern Policy was developed in consultation with stakeholders across the life of the Church to provide guidance to congregations, presbyteries and synods about the safeguards that must be put in place around the attendance and participation at any Church events, activities or programs of a person who has engaged in criminal sexual behaviour and/or is reasonably suspected of engaging or seeking to engage in harmful sexual behaviour toward a child.

The policy was informed by the existing procedures that have been implemented in some Church entities about the participation of persons of concern in the life of the Church. It is sufficiently flexible to enable local implementation aligned to the requirements of different regulatory environments.

The Unit sought feedback on the policy from the CAG and Governance Committee before providing it to the Assembly General Secretary for endorsement.

The Unit will work through SCFIN to support implementation of the policy across the life of the Church in 2020.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Governance

Work to develop a Governance Charter for the Unit was undertaken in 2018 and was endorsed by the ASC and SSCs. The charter was adopted by the Governance Committee as the initial document by which operations and oversight of the Unit would be directed.

This led to the arrangement whereby the Unit was formally established as a part of the Church's framework hosted within in the Assembly Structure in April 2019. The Unit is not a separate legal entity and therefore and it derives its authority and decision-making powers from the Assembly and the Synods.

The Governance Charter includes that the initial work of the Unit will be limited to child safety within the life of the Church. However, it recognises that this is only a subset of having a safe church and it includes provision for further aspects of providing for a safe church to be tasked to the Unit. As such, during the establishment period the Unit set-up operations and created foundations that are scalable.

As the Unit adopted the operational policies of the UCA National Assembly for the purposes of its operations a considerable amount of administrative work was undertaken in the first half of 2019 to ensure back of house services could be provided by the Assembly. This work was led by the National Director working with relevant Assembly colleagues. These operational policies are linked to the existing governance and oversight arrangements of the Assembly.

Compliance

The Unit is responsible for writing and submitting the Church's [Annual Report to the National Office for Child Safety](#) on the Implementation of Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The Unit provided the template given to organisations by the National Office for Child Safety to Synods to facilitate information gathering about the progress of different Church entities against the recommendations of the Royal Commission. The Unit chose to include case studies in the report in order to show the progress made against each recommendation applicable to the Church and to provide a clear illustration of the size and complexity of the UCA.

The Unit provided the draft report to Synods and the Governance Committee for feedback. Once finalised, the report was endorsed by the Assembly General Secretary and submitted to the National Office for Child Safety (before the 30 November deadline).

Communications and engagement

Across 2019 the Unit was primarily promoted directly by the National Director who has built an extensive network of contacts internal and external to the UCA.

Formal meetings and engagements with UCA entities in 2019 included:

- UCA Redress Ltd (National Director as Board member)
- With South Australia school principals

- Child Safe Steering Group
- National Conversation on Discipline – VIC/TAS Synod
- Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Taskforce
- Children, Young People and Families network chaired by Uniting Care Australia
- Investigating outcomes measurement as practiced by Uniting Communities in South Australia

Formal meetings and engagements with external entities in 2019 included:

- Delivery of a workshop on hearing the voice of the child at the National Council of Churches in Australia conference
- Meetings with the Commonwealth Department of Social Services
- Membership of the Child Safe Sector Leadership Group (part of the National Office for Child Safety)
- Australian Community Workers Association
- NFP Governance Forum
- Working Together – Salvos, UCC and CPSL

The National Director's work throughout 2019 to connect and build a network of contacts across governments, other ecumenical partners, academics, the community services sectors and communities has created an important knowledge base to consult and collaborate with as the Unit progresses its work. It has also promoted awareness and acknowledgement of the action that the Church is taking to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

The Unit undertook a mapping exercise in 2019 to identify the different stakeholder groups and the purpose of connecting with them. This stakeholder mapping was used to begin the development of the Unit's communications strategy which is being developed with the support of the Assembly Communications team. The initial communications priority of the Unit is to ensure that leaders, staff and volunteers across the UCA, its schools and agencies are aware of the work of the Unit, how it relates to them and their role in growing and sustaining the Church's culture of safety, with a particular focus on vulnerable people who engage with the Church. The key message that the Unit is working to communicate is that everyone in the Church is responsible for creating and sustaining the Church's culture of safety.

The Unit is working with the Assembly Communications team to deliver a National Safe Church Unit website as a platform to share information across the life of the Church. A pilot website was created in December 2019. It is intended that the website will host the policies and frameworks developed by Unit as baseline formats that will support and inform each of the Synods to create their own materials which are both nationally consistent and responsive to specific state/territory legislation and compliance.

In 2019 the Unit developed its own branding and style guides in consultation with the Assembly Communications Team.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

In 2019 the Unit began working with the National Education and Training Project Stakeholder Group to facilitate broad consultation about the future education and training needs of ministry agents. Each Synod and the Assembly is represented in the membership of the group.

This initial work in 2019 identified that there is a lack of clarity regarding the standards that the UCA believes are its ideal practice with regards to a culture of safety, that there is a desire across the Church for nationally agreed standards for the training of ministry agents and for the creation of a national curriculum which is flexible enough to incorporate different state/territory requirements but sufficiently robust to meet the 'best practice' standard articles of the Royal Commission. This scoping and consultation work across 2019 also concluded that the Church would benefit from the development of a multi-modal delivery process to ensure accessibility of training, particularly for regional and remote locations.

The Unit worked to identify the benefits of a national curriculum and national training standards for ministry agents in consultation with a broad range of stakeholders representing Synods and the Assembly. The expected benefits are:

- Clarity of training requirements based on the agreed national standards
- Clarity of standards that are nationally consistent
- Increased mobility of lay people and ministry agents with respect to safety standards compliance and training
- Synergies of practice and content through alignment and collaboration
- Quality assurance processes consistently applied
- Quality online learning processes available and share across the whole Church

The Unit will progress the project in collaboration with stakeholders across the Church who are already working to review and refresh existing training delivered in the Synods. The project scope will be considered at the February 2020 meeting of the Education and Training National Project Stakeholder Group.

In 2019 the National Director also undertook a series of meetings with ecumenical partners and other stakeholders to investigate their approach to education and training. This included the National Council of Churches Australia (NCCA) and the National Office for Child Safety (NOCS).

CULTURE

The Unit was created to lead work to deliver on the Church's commitment to take a nationally consistent approach to safety.

Work by the Unit in 2019 identified that strengthening and growing the Church's culture of safety was foundational to every aspect of the Unit's work and confirmed that the Church's values of compassion, respect, justice, working together and leading through learning which unite people across the life of the Church are foundational pillars.

In 2019 the Unit began to explore what resources and actions are already in place and happening across the Church to create and sustain a child safe culture. The National Director also explored what other ecumenical partners and organisations are doing. The Unit will progress this work in 2020.

The working culture of the Unit is one of openness, transparency and collaboration. The Unit works with stakeholders across the Church to develop and deliver national frameworks and policies; these are intended to be baseline documents for Synods to enable them to develop local plans of action and ways of working that are consistent with national architecture whilst being responsive to local need and compliance regimes.

The National Child Safe Collaboration Framework is a key tool to support the growth of a safe church culture, it commits the Unit to work with the Assembly and Synods and provides for open and transparent decision making processes in the design and delivery of the Unit's work.

2020 DELIVERABLES

Following an intensive establishment period in 2019 the Unit has moved into the development and delivery of resources to enable a nationally consistent approach to safety. The Unit undertook work planning in December 2019 and identified the following deliverables for 2020:

Strategy and policy

- Map and secure the resources required to fully implement the National Child Safe Policy Framework
- Support implementation of the Person of Concern Policy
- Develop national policy principles for complaints handling
- Published a series of information resources to strengthen the safe Church culture:
 - Interrupting behaviours
 - Rights of children/vulnerable people
 - Record keeping and disclosure best practice
 - Guidelines for Indigenous and CALD members
 - Working with children checks
- Develop a best practice policy guide for the recruitment of volunteers
- Develop trauma informed guidelines for supporting people with lived experience of abuse, including where individuals may not have disclosed their lived experience
- Create trauma informed pathways to connect with people with lived experience of abuse to enable their insights to inform the work of the Unit, including a lived experience reference panel

Education and Training

- Facilitate the development national principles for the education and training of ministry agents
- Facilitate the development of a national curriculum for the education and training of ministry agents
- Coordinate the creation of a multi-modal training resource to deliver safe Church training

Quality Assurance

- Provide the annual (internal) stakeholder report (March 2020)
- Provide the annual report to the National Office for Child Safety (November 2020)
- Map current evaluation and reporting mechanisms used across the Church
- Develop a policy implementation review tool to enable review the implementation of policies created by the Unit across the life of the Church
- Develop measurement frameworks, including benchmarks, that include explicit measures linked to the values base of the Church to identify cultural change

Projects

- Child Safe Culture – scope and deliver a specific project to increase awareness of child safety issues across the life of the Church
- Continue to facilitate and coordinate the Resourcing Ministry – Professional Standards project