



**Uniting Church
in Australia**

Child Safe Screening: pre-appointment screening for staff and volunteers

National Policy Framework 2020



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1. Purpose

The primary purpose of this National Policy Framework is to support Synods, Presbyteries, Congregations, entities and agencies of the Uniting Church in Australia (the Church) in their continued work to ensure that the Church is a safe place, at all times, for all people.

This policy framework provides policy direction to Synods about the pre-appointment screening processes that must be undertaken to ensure that staff and volunteers are suitable for work with children and are committed to values of child safety and wellbeing.

Principles of a Child Safe Uniting Church in Australia

This policy framework is underpinned by the Principles of a Child Safe Uniting Church in Australia:

1. Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture
2. Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously
3. Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing
4. Diversity is respected and equity is promoted
5. Our people are suitable for work with children and committed to values of child safety and wellbeing
6. Child focused complaints processes
7. Our people are provided with ongoing education and training on child safety
8. Physical and online environments promote safety
9. Policies and procedures document child safety
10. Review and continuous improvement of policy, procedure and practice

What we believe

Extract from the UCA Assembly 2017 National Child Safe Policy Framework

The Uniting Church in Australia believes that all people, including children, are made in the image of God. As a Christian community we believe that God reaches out to us in love and acceptance, and that our relationships with each other should express love, care and respect (Safe Place Position Statement developed by the UCA Commission on Women and Men in 1997).

Central to living out the gospel is to love God and to love others. As a community of faith, we are committed to providing safe environments for all people including children, so that they may live life in all its fullness.

2. Scope

This policy framework applies to all Uniting Church in Australia Faith Communities, Congregations, Presbyteries and Synods.

Synods are charged with responsibility for developing appropriate resources to support local implementation of this policy framework.

This policy framework does not replace Commonwealth, State or Territory legislation.

This policy framework does not replace Synod employment or volunteer policies.

This framework stands alongside the Church's National Child Safe Policy Framework and other statements, policies, procedures and accompanying resources (<http://safechurch.uca.org.au/strategy/>).

3. Background

The Church has a responsibility to provide worshipping communities that are free from abuse and harm, where any person can express their faith and explore their relationship with God. Everyone who attends and participates in the events, activities and programs of the Church has the right to do so in an environment where they are safe and feel safe.

People are appointed to positions of leadership and responsibility across the life of the Church, in paid and volunteer roles. Many of these positions work directly with children and young people, have contact with children and young people and/or are involved in decision making and actions that impact on children and young people.

Across Australia all states and territories have introduced legislation with regard to checking if adults who are seeking to work or volunteer in child-related work are suitable to work with children.

This legislation applies to a variety of organisations including religious organisations, schools, childcare centres, sports and recreational clubs. It is therefore mandatory by law for many individuals across the life of the Church to have secured a satisfactory (also known as a positive notice or certification) working with children check before commencing their appointed, paid or volunteer role and to continue to hold certification for the duration of their engagement in that role.

Although legislation and screening processes are different in each state or territory, pre-appointment screenings are usually undertaken by approved agencies (usually the government departments in charge of child safety and law enforcement agencies) to check an individual's criminal history and any reports about their professional conduct. It is usually necessary for an individual to be required to give their consent for these checks to be undertaken.

An individual check is a process led by the person seeking to work or volunteer in a child related role, to secure certification to confirm they do not have an adverse criminal or professional report to prevent them from doing so.

An employer led check is driven by the employing organisation which must secure certification for employees and volunteers in child-related work.

Certification is valid for a specific period of time. It also provides for on-going monitoring of an individual's suitability to engage in child-related work. If a certified person commits a relevant criminal offence or is subject to work-related disciplinary procedures the administering authority has the ability to alter or withdraw certification and notify the employer.

Individuals and/or organisations must inform the certifying authority if they change role or organisation during the period of certification.

Working with Children Checks are not transferable across states or territories. It is therefore necessary for an individual to hold valid certification for the state/territory they work in and to seek new certification if they work in other states or territories. National Police checks may transfer in some instances, but the relevant state/territory legislation should be consulted on each occasion.

Individuals and/or organisations must ensure that certification is renewed within the specified timeframe. Timing is important as in some jurisdictions it is mandatory for individuals to be stood down from their role, including volunteer roles, if they do not hold valid certification - regardless of whether or not a renewal application has been lodged.

In addition to working with children checks and criminal history checks it is usual for organisations to undertake reference checking with previous employers, managers and others who can provide information about an individual's performance and conduct.

Working with Children Checks do not, in and of themselves, keep children safe. Everyone across the life of the Church is encouraged to familiarise themselves with the Principles of a Child Safe Uniting Church in Australia; to undertake the necessary education and awareness to increase their understanding of child safety within the context of the Church; to be proactive in applying that knowledge and ready to act appropriately if they become aware of instances of practices which do not uphold the safety of children and young people.

4. Policy Statement – Working with Children Check

Recruitment and screening of all people who work and volunteer with children is a vital part of keeping children safe. The Church will continue to be intentional in its actions to appropriately screen individuals to ensure they are suitable for work with children and committed to the values of child safety and wellbeing before appointing them to paid or volunteer positions.

This screening includes exploring the values and motivations of individuals who are seeking to work or volunteer in roles across the life of the Church which will see them engage with children and young people.

The Church is committed to providing access to training and supervision to help to maintain awareness and vigilance of child safety amongst our communities.

Synods undertake a lead role in developing the processes for engaging individuals in paid and volunteer roles across the life of the Church.

Synods are responsible for developing and implementing Synod-wide policies aligned with relevant state/territory legislation to ensure that mandatory working with children checks and associated screening is undertaken.

Synod policies and processes for these activities should address the following:

- (i) A position description for every paid and volunteer role. For each role due consideration is given to direct and indirect engagement and interaction that the role holder will have with children and young people across the life of the Church.
- (ii) Each position description to identify the direct and indirect engagement and interaction the role holder is expected to have with children and young people.
- (iii) To include wording expressing the Church's commitment to child safety when advertising child related roles, including securing certification to work with children and commitment to child safety as selection criteria.
- (iv) Pre-appointment screening which includes a working with children check, national and/or international police check to be a mandatory step for all child related paid and volunteer roles.
- (v) To ensure that pre-appointment screening is undertaken, and a positive outcome is secured before an individual commences their role.
- (vi) Some states/territories have a legislated "no card, no start" provision. Synods are encouraged to adopt this best practice provision in their own policy and not appoint individuals until a positive outcome is confirmed by the issuing authority.
- (vii) Synods are responsible for undertaking appropriate reference checking with previous employers and/or character references. These checks should be undertaken before appointing an individual to a paid or volunteer role.

- (viii) Synods are responsible for verifying that the information provided by an individual seeking to secure a paid or volunteer child-related role is correct and complete.
- (ix) Synods are responsible for keeping appropriate and secure records about pre-appointment screening and reference checking.
- (x) Synods should include provisions in employment and volunteer contracts that allow for individuals to be stepped down from their role if at any time their working with children certification is invalidated by the issuing authority.

5. Child Safe Recruitment Checklist

This list provides a series of practical steps to help ensure that processes to recruit, employ or appoint staff and volunteers in child-related roles include appropriate consideration of child safety issues.

1. *Developing the role description*

- Outline how much contact with children and young people, direct and/or indirect, the role holder will have
- Identify what responsibilities for children and young people the role holder will have
- Identify what responsibilities the role holder will have for other people working with children and young people, including if these people are expected to be volunteers
- Identify if the role holder will interact with children and young people who have particular needs, including access, cultural or language needs

2. *Advertising the role*

- Include the Church's commitment to child safety
- Clearly state that the recruitment process will include the screening process in line with the relevant legislation and a police check
- Highlight that securing the role is subject to a positive outcome from these checks
- Include a request for applicants to provide professional referees, including the current person they formally report to
- For volunteer positions request character references
- Include an understanding of relevant child safety legislation and practice as a selection criterion when relevant to the advertised role
- Include a commitment to the Principles of a Child Safe Uniting Church in Australia as a selection criterion for all advertised roles

3. *Selecting candidates for interview*

- Be mindful that applicants who have worked or volunteered in different states and/or countries will require police checks from each different jurisdiction
- For paid roles, consider if career progress is considered to be a usual pattern, lack of career progression can indicate workplace issues
- If an individual is choosing, or appears to be taking, a step-down in their paid career in order to work with children and young people consider why this might be the case
- Be mindful that a prior history of violence poses a potential risk, even if not child related, and may have implications on an organisation's insurance

4. *Preparing for interviews*

- Individuals should not be appointed to paid or volunteer roles without an interview
- Where possible interviews should be conducted in person with an interviewing panel

- The interviewing panel should be a diverse mix of gender, ages and skills set
- Ensure interviews are accessible to candidates who have specific needs

5. Interviews

- Include interview questions about child safety, including about relevant legislation and organisational policy
- Use de-identified case studies or scenarios that would require the role holder to address child safety issues
- If the role is offered ensure the offer is conditional to the applicant/organisation securing a satisfactory outcome of a working with children check, a policy check and referee checks

Dependent on the role, the following questions may be appropriate:

- Ask candidates what child/young person behaviours may suggest child safety concerns
- Ask questions about adult behaviours of concern and how the candidate would address them
- Ask candidates about their motivation to work/volunteer with children and young people
- Ask about any gaps in employment
- If a candidate has not provided their current employer/manager as a referee, ask why not

6. Screening – working with children check and police check

Dependent on the role, screening could include:

- A Working with Child Check in line with relevant state/territory legislation
- If the role is a national role the Working with Children Check will ordinarily be done in the state/territory that is considered to be the primary workplace
- National police check
- International police check if the candidate has lived and/or worked or volunteered overseas for a significant period of time
- For paid positions, reference checks with at least two previous employers; ask specific questions about the candidate's work with children and young people and how they responded to the individual
- For volunteer roles, referee checks with organisations the candidate has volunteered with; ask specific questions about the candidate's volunteering with child and young people and their responses to the individual
- The internet can be another source of information, such as LinkedIn or social media

7. Appointment

- An appointment is made once the candidate has satisfied all screening criteria
- The letter of offer/volunteer agreement used by the Synod should include provisions that require the appointee to:
 - provide immediate notification of any child related charges or offences
 - maintain a valid working with children check

- understand that the employer retains the right to step-down or dismiss the individual from the appointed role if they breach any of the organisation's child safety policies or codes of conduct

8. Induction and ongoing employment/engagement

- The induction process should emphasise the Church's child safe culture and set out the behavioural expectations for staff and volunteers who work with children
- Information should be provided about access to child safe education and training
- Child safety should be a regular item for discussion between staff/volunteers and their managers/mentors, including in formal performance appraisal and supervision

6. Definitions

Applicant: a person who has applied for a paid or volunteer role.

Candidate: a person who has been selected to interview for a paid or volunteer role.

Certification: is the outcome of a working with children check.

Child/young person: any person who is under the age of 18 years.

Issuing authority is the organisation that has been appointed by a state or territory government to undertake a working with children check.

Leadership position/role: includes any position, or performing of any function, with the actual or perceived authority of the Church community.

Position description: states what the activities and responsibilities are for a paid or volunteer role within the Church.

Positive notice: means that a person has completed a working with children check and is confirmed by the issuing authority as being suitable to work with children.

Pre-appointment means before a person is appointed to a paid or volunteer role.

Presbytery: means the Presbytery that has oversight of the congregation/faith community in which an individual is recruited or appointed.

Synod: means a Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Working with Children Check: means the process that is undertaken by an issuing authority to assess whether or not an individual is suitable for child-related work.

7. Version control

Version No.	Written by	Approved by	Date Approved	Review Date
1	National Safe Church Unit	NSCU Governance Committee	October 2020	October 2022