

Paper R2

Safeguarding advisory group

Past Case Review:
findings of phase one (synods);
plans for phase two

United Church 2016
Church 2016 Reformed Church 2016
Church 2016



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Past Case Review: findings of phase one (synods); plans for phase two

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Cassi Wright cassi.wright@urc.org.uk
Action required	This paper updates and extends the information given in paper R1, and should be read alongside that paper. No specific action is requested or required by the information in this paper
Draft resolution(s)	See paper R1

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Review of the findings of phase one (synods)
Main points	To summarise findings from phase one, and outline amendments to the proposed design of phase two
Previous relevant documents	Paper R2, Mission Council, November 2015; Paper R1 at this meeting
Consultation has taken place with...	Richard Church Elizabeth Gray-King

Summary of Impact

Financial	See Paper R1
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Ecumenical partners have been informed about phase two, and there has been a positive response and some offer of support to assist with the execution of phase two.

Past Case Review: findings of phase one (synods); plans for phase two

Phase one – update of paper R1

17. Brief outline of the findings of phase one

17.1 A total of 1556 ministers' files were examined between October 2015 and January 2016. Most synods allocated two full days to complete the reading although I note some synods required three days to achieve this. A total of 54 files were referred for review by the independent safeguarding consultant, who has dedicated a large amount of time to scrutinise each of these files and make recommendations and observations. Synods, on average, referred four cases for review, although one synod referred 12 cases and there was another that referred none.

A) Of the 54 referred files, the categorisation was as follows:

Category 1 – two referrals

For both of these files, the independent safeguarding consultant made recommendations that these were immediately referred to the ministerial disciplinary process and appropriate liaison with external agencies was undertaken.

Category 2 – one referral

Category 3 – 30 referrals

Category 4 – 20 referrals

B) Reasons for referral:

(Frequently, more than one reason was cited for referral.)

- Concern around boundaries, inappropriate relationships, behaviour and bullying – **61%**
- Inconsistency in files, lack of information, evidence of missing documents and concerns that paperwork had been removed – **42%**
- Apparent failure to follow procedure – **18%**
- Previous Section O investigation – **11%**
- Domestic abuse – **5%**
- Financial discrepancies – **3%**
- Avoidance of training – **2%**

C) The demographic detail of the referred cases was requested on the reader referral form. In some cases this information was not recorded or only partially complete. In 20% of cases, there was no response as to whether the minister might be vulnerable, although the general consensus of response to this question indicates that the readers were unable to determine vulnerability from reading the file alone (64% answered 'not known').

Of the files where the information was provided, the demographic was as follows:

- Stipendiary minister – 72%
- Active minister – 42%
- Male minister – 81%
- Vulnerable – 7%

18. Learning

18.1 The process of phase one has demonstrated the need for a more concise, consistent format of record keeping and filing within the URC. All synods identified inconsistent and limited files which did not have appropriate information recorded – and in some cases there were concerns that information had been removed from the files. It was clear that the lack of standardised record keeping impacted on the accuracy of referred cases; there may have been cases that would have been referred for review if the information was evident. This raised concern that the ‘loose’ culture around recording could lead to speculation that there was an avoidance of recording sensitive matters, as some synods found evidence of situations that were alluded or referred to, but were not supported with any further documentation detailing this.

18.2 This concern leads to the first of two recommendations arising from phase one, which the safeguarding advisory group will consider on 8 March, and may then bring forward through appropriate channels in the Church.

Recommendation 1: *Church House to produce standardised guidance for synods with regard to the importance and legalities of appropriate record keeping. This would enable churches to produce accurate and consistent records, which can be easily transferred to other synods and demonstrate clear, transparent recording of information and aide with understanding what information needs to be maintained in a file.*

18.3 Many of the cases referred for review concerned inappropriate boundaries, relationships or behaviour by ministers. There was no clear identifiable pattern within these cases which could identify contributory factors which may have caused this behaviour. It was agreed by Mission Council in 2013 that the Safer Sacred Space training would be mandatory for all ministers and consequently a training and delivery plan was formalised to ensure all ministers were trained by the end of 2016. This leads to a second recommendation to the group.

Recommendation 2: *The United Reformed Church as a whole to emphasise and recognise the importance of the newly established Safer Sacred Space training, ensuring all ministers fully engage in the training and support the implementation of a planned refreshment of this training every four years. In addition, for the purpose of good practice and safer churches, the safeguarding advisory group to consider the proposal of mandatory safeguarding training for all ministers which is refreshed every three years.*

18.4 At the time of writing, these recommendations have not been before the safeguarding advisory group. They are therefore reported to Mission Council as a provisional stage in a process of considered response; following the reading of files under phase one of the review.

Phase two

- 19.1 Paper R1 states that phase two will launch in April 2016 for six months, ending in October 2016. However, due to issues that have now been identified, there will be a delay to the launch of phase two. This is due to the delay of phase one and need to recruit, obtain DBS clearance and train listeners throughout the URC in order to receive any allegations. Whilst it is disappointing that we cannot facilitate the original launch date, in order to ensure that phase two is an effective, transparent and trustworthy process, it needs to be sufficiently resourced and planned. Therefore, a launch date of July 2016 is proposed.
- 19.2 There has been an amendment to the original design within the pastoral care stage. With much consideration and assessment of risk, the URC will not allocate dedicated companions to either complainants or alleged perpetrators. This is due to the potential legal implications that may arise from any criminal investigation, which may then jeopardise the role of companion. To compensate for this change, substantial information regarding support and counselling services within the UK will be distributed to synods and individuals, where they can access further independent impartial support, should they so wish.
- 19.3 In addition, consultation has taken place with The Lantern Project – which supports survivors of child abuse – with regard to the design and practical aspects of phase two.

Postscript

- 20.1 On the day after this paper was submitted, the independent consultant's report on the conduct and outcomes of phase one arrived. This report is to go before the safeguarding advisory group on 8 March, and the group will then be responsible for shaping an initial response to the points it makes. Any significant recommendations from the group will be brought to a future meeting of Mission Council. These are likely to include recommendations for tackling two issues on which we need clearer policies than we currently have.
- 20.2 It is clear that our file records on the Church's ministers are not integrated. Files are generally kept in synod offices. However, material may also be stored at Church House if, for example, a minister has been involved in the disciplinary process. The record is diffuse, and especially for older records, it is not always easy to track down and gather all the material about a person. We need to improve our awareness of what we have and where we have it. We need a tidier and more comprehensive log of the places where information is held. The safeguarding advisory group will therefore propose some steps for bringing this about, in consultation with the Records Manager at Church House and with the Synod Moderators.
- 20.3 A very few historic cases present information that we may need to share with police. We need clear and recognised criteria that will enable us to know when to do this, criteria that we can follow without fear or favour when the need arises. The safeguarding advisory group will therefore prepare criteria for this, in consultation with the legal adviser, and will report on their progress to Mission Council.

