



THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR  
**SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN**  
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IRELAND

**Annual Report 2023/24**



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## STATEMENT FROM THE CHAIRPERSON



It is clear from the report of our CEO, Teresa Devlin, that the past year has been a busy and productive one. Of particular note is all the work that went into producing a revised child safeguarding policy for the Catholic Church in Ireland. It was a major achievement to bring this work to a successful conclusion.

On behalf of the National Board, I would like to thank Teresa for her outstanding leadership and to wish her well in her continuing work with the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. This appointment is a fitting acknowledgement of the great work Teresa has done in the National Office over the past fifteen years, first as Director of Safeguarding and then as CEO. Thanks are also due to Imelda Ashe and Ann Cunningham for the great support they gave Teresa.

I would also like to thank Mr Justice Iarfhlaith O'Neill, chair of the National Case Management Committee, and his fellow Committee members, for their vital contribution.

This is a time of change in the National Office, which sees Teresa retire following fifteen years of dedicated service. The year also saw the retirement of Peter Kieran, who contributed much to research and oversaw many reviews, and the resignation

of Dr Niall Moore to take up an appointment as Safeguarding Officer for the Church of Ireland. Again, on behalf of the Board, I would like to thank each of them for the significant contribution they both made to child safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

My final thanks go to my fellow Board Directors for their regular attendance, their thoughtful contributions and their unfailing kindness and good humour. Chairing board meetings was always stress-free and enjoyable.

Finally, the Board would like to welcome our new CEO, Aidan Gordon, and our new Director of Training and Support, Carolyn McDermott, who replaces Dr Niall Moore. We wish them every success and happiness in their respective roles.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Garrett Sheehan", located below the main text.

Garrett Sheehan  
Chairperson  
May 2024

## REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



This is my final report as CEO of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (the National Board). It is with mixed emotions that I leave my post after ten years as CEO and five years as Director of Safeguarding. I know that the time is right for me to hand over to a CEO who can move the Church forward with new energy and commitment.

The last ten years have provided me with great opportunities to influence child safeguarding practice. I hope that I have achieved some improvements, together with the small but dedicated staff in the National Office. There have been many high points and I am very proud of the work of the National Office and the staff, who have been loyal to me and, more importantly, loyal to the mission of safeguarding children. The finest moments for me were engaging with children and their parents/carers, and with complainants of abuse, in order to rewrite policy for the Church in 2023. I am constantly humbled by the generosity of those who have been harmed. In spending time with me, they have shared their experiences and made suggestions for a more compassionate way of responding to allegations. These meetings have often been filled with sadness and I am not embarrassed to admit that I shed many tears when reflecting on the trauma caused by the abuse of children in the Catholic Church.

I have also been heartened when engaging with priests, religious and lay personnel as they pick up the broken pieces after allegations are made. Our collective work has been, and continues to be, to promote a better culture of safeguarding and ensure

that those abused are listened to and responded to with care and compassion.

I want to pay particular tribute to my two colleagues who have journeyed with me throughout my tenure as CEO: Dr Niall Moore and Peter Kieran. Sadly, for the National Board, both these staff are also leaving in 2024.

We congratulate Dr Moore, who has already moved to a new role as Safeguarding Officer with the Church of Ireland. I know that the Church of Ireland will benefit enormously from his hard work and huge experience as a trainer and influencer of policy. I owe great gratitude to Niall, who has stood beside me through many challenges, and has brought logical thinking and positive solutions to the everyday issues that have been presented.

We also offer sincere thanks to Peter Kieran, who, like me, is moving towards retirement. Peter has always been the thinker and researcher in the office. He has brought quiet wisdom to everything we are involved in, and steadied the ship through many storms.

The National Board has been fortunate to have had the presence of Sr Colette Stevenson since its commencement in 2006; prior to that, Sr Colette set up the first Child Safeguarding Office for the Catholic Church in Ireland. Colette has been a key staff member and, in the past ten years, a valuable volunteer. We have relied heavily on her institutional knowledge and connections; more importantly, we have relied on her wisdom, good nature and gift for storytelling. Sr Colette will soon step down from her volunteering role and

## REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

we offer our sincere gratitude for her significant contribution to child safeguarding.

The backbone of the team – Imelda Ashe and Ann Cunningham – have picked me up, brought me tea and comforted me when under pressure. More importantly, they have provided quality administrative support and are welcoming to everyone who calls to the office, in person or on the phone – a great team!

In terms of achievements, I would like to thank everyone who assisted with redrafting the current child safeguarding policy, *A Safe and Welcoming Church: Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024*. Extensive consultation took place with children/carers; victims/survivors of abuse; statutory colleagues; and Church personnel. The work was overseen by a Steering Committee. I am very pleased to confirm that the Irish Episcopal Conference (IEC) and Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI) have agreed to adopt the new policy in June 2024. The new child safeguarding policy achieves a number of objectives, by:

- (a) Bringing it into line with current civil, criminal and canon law;
- (b) Positioning it in, and infusing it with, Gospel values and children's rights; and
- (c) Reformatting the mission of safeguarding children into three standards:
  - i. Leadership, governance and accountability,
  - ii. Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding, and
  - iii. Responding Pastorally and Reporting According to Civil and Canon Law.

I now look forward to assisting with the implementation of the 2024 policy through induction and information sessions.

As always, this annual report will detail allegations notified to the National Board between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024. During this period, the National

Board was notified of 252 allegations against clerics and religious. There were 251 such allegations in 2022/23. The National Board is unable to access identifying information in relation to notifications of abuse, therefore we can never be confident that all the allegations are new, or whether they have been previously notified to us.

We have been advised by the Data Protection Commissioner's office that the Law Reform Commission is considering drafting recommendations for legislative changes to enable the exchange of information in limited situations, in the interests of safeguarding. We welcome this initiative, as it will assist the National Board, on behalf of the Church, to develop better mechanisms for monitoring trends and patterns of abuse, which in turn will influence policy and practice.

All of the National Board's work is driven by a desire to improve practice. We have several approaches to learning how effective child safeguarding practice is within the Church, including annual self-audits and external reviews of Church bodies. This report will reference developments in both of these areas. In addition, staff in the National Office engage on a regular basis with Church personnel, complainants of abuse and Church authorities, all of whom share their experiences of effective safeguarding practice.

We are grateful to those who contributed to the National Board's thinking and research on an important Guidance, Advice and Practice (GAP) paper about transitional justice, accessible at [https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/GAP\\_Papers/GAP%20PAPER%2012%20Transitional%20Justice.pdf](https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/GAP_Papers/GAP%20PAPER%2012%20Transitional%20Justice.pdf). It outlines ways that the Church can respond to complainants, which allow for truth, reparation, justice, and a commitment to non-recurrence to be established. This paper has attracted significant international attention, through the work of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, as it, too, engages in developing a selection of compassionate responses to those harmed by child abuse. It is my desire that the Catholic Church in Ireland will consider this paper further, and begin

## REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

to open up possibilities of developing a transitional justice approach in its ministries with victims and survivors. It was written at a time when two further State inquiries were being considered, as well as a clerical abuse inquiry in Northern Ireland and a public inquiry into abuse of children in religious-run schools in the Republic. The National Board has not been involved in planning either of these developments, but will support any inquiry that the relevant governments announce.

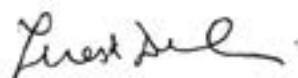
The message that I receive is that many are still suffering because of child abuse in the Church. We cannot afford to think that we have finished our work in this area in Ireland. We clearly have more to do. I believe that there are still gaps in our practices with complainants and their families. We must accept the need to 'transition' to a more compassionate response.

I do, of course, acknowledge with gratitude the caring approach of most Church personnel in response to complainants. I will not embarrass anyone in particular, but there are wonderful people within the Church who work tirelessly to ensure that complainants are heard and responded to with compassion. They are the people who, on every occasion they receive a new notification, remember the child who, instead of being cherished, was abused. I applaud their compassion when dealing with the hurt and wounded adult that child became.

Before concluding, I want to mention the Head to Heart formation programme. This initiative started over three years ago, with seminarians in formation in the Pontifical Irish College, Rome; St Patrick's College, Maynooth; and Redemptoris Mater Seminary in Dundalk. The programme seeks

to ground child safeguarding in the theology of the Church and to empower seminarians to address all aspects of child safeguarding in a safe space during their studies for the priesthood. The programme has now been expanded to the Permanent Diaconate, with a view to extending it further. The importance of this programme cannot be underestimated for its approach, depth and impact. The outgoing Director of Training, Dr Niall Moore, and I would like to thank the seminaries involved for their leap of faith in engaging with the National Board in the development and delivery of the programme. I am confident that, in terms of international development, this programme leads the way in embedding the importance of child safeguarding in priestly formation.

To conclude, I wish to offer my thanks to the Directors of the National Board who continue to give time and wisdom to the work of safeguarding in the Church. As another indicator of change, some of the Directors will also retire this year. The incoming Board of Directors will continue to support the work of, and provide leadership to, the new CEO and team in the National Office. I congratulate Mr Aidan Gordon on his appointment as CEO of the National Board, and wish him and his team well in their roles.



Teresa Devlin  
Chief Executive Officer  
May 2024





The Board of Directors met on eleven occasions between April 2023 and March 2024. Ten of these meetings were regular business meetings, with an extraordinary general meeting held to confirm the appointment of the new CEO. All of the meetings, with the exception of the AGM in June 2023, were held online.

Directors of the National Board oversee the Strategic Plan, ensure that resources are managed efficiently, ensure adherence to the Companies Registration Office and the Charities Regulator, and quality-assure the work of the National Office. In light of staff changes in 2024, the Directors agreed to extend the current Strategic Plan for one year, to allow the new team – once settled into their posts – to consider priorities and objectives.

Directors also receive reports on all operational matters and offer advice and guidance to the CEO on pertinent issues. Together with the CEO, they take responsibility for financial transactions and ensure that expenditure is in line with income and with the needs of the service. An external financial review by the National Board's auditors – Walsh O'Brien Harnett – took place in January 2024 and their report will be lodged with the Charities Regulator and Companies Registration Office. The audit confirmed that expenditure is in line with income, and that there are no financial anomalies. In order to support their financial oversight, the Directors receive a monthly Income and Expenditure Report. The National Board wishes to thank our colleagues in the IEC Finance Department for their support and assistance in ensuring good financial governance.

The following items were considered at the National Board meetings:

- » Strategic Plan
- » Training Strategy, 2023–2025
- » Communications Strategy
- » Risk Register, reviewed every six months
- » Compliance with data protection legislation
- » Charities Regulator Compliance and Governance Code – the compliance notification was submitted to the Charities Regulator in October 2023, along with the audited accounts for 2022
- » Evaluation of the Head to Heart programme
- » Reviews of Church bodies' safeguarding practices
- » Transitional justice
- » Revision of the 2016 safeguarding children policy for the Catholic Church in Ireland

## CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

The following specific objectives were set for 2023/24.

OBJECTIVE	PROGRESS
Conclude the revision of <i>Safeguarding Children: Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All work completed.</li> <li>Draft policy submitted to IEC and AMRI in November 2023 and approved by both Sponsoring Bodies.</li> <li>Date will be set for implementation following induction and training in 2024.</li> </ul>
Undertake reviews of child safeguarding practice in all remaining dioceses, and respond to requests from religious congregations for reviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All twenty-six diocesan reviews have now been completed.</li> <li>The National Board has reviewed thirteen religious orders.</li> </ul>
In consultation with the relevant people, develop a framework for responding appropriately to victims of abuse and their families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work completed.</li> <li>GAP Paper 12, <i>Transitional Justice - Responding to Child Abuse Within the Catholic Church in Ireland</i>, completed and disseminated across the Church.</li> <li>Training to follow in 2024.</li> </ul>
Complete the work on a new database for the National Board.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work completed.</li> <li>High-security database established.</li> <li>Staff trained in use of database.</li> <li>Data in process of being migrated to new database.</li> </ul>

### Risk Register

The Risk Register was considered at National Board meetings on two occasions and amended as appropriate. The Directors recognise the risks associated with changeover in executive staff, and have put mitigating measures in place such as handover notes and joint events with outgoing and incoming staff. The Directors agreed to provide close monitoring and support to ensure that institutional knowledge is shared with the new team.



The National Board takes its responsibilities around data protection very seriously. The CEO and Data Protection Officer (DPO) engaged with the Data Protection Commission and the National Board's legal advisors to ensure compliance with existing legislation. As part of governance, there are regular reviews of policy and procedure to ensure that practices within the National Office are compliant with legislation. The CEO reports to the Directors on any changes required. Case law, case studies, and advice from the Data Protection Commission enabled the DPO and CEO to review and amend the National Board's existing data protection policy and procedures in November 2023.

As a non-statutory body with regulatory functions, there are significant barriers relating to the sharing of sensitive personal data with the National Board. During 2022/23, the National Board sought its own senior counsel's opinion, having already received advice from the Data Protection Commissioner's office. The legal opinion provided to the National Board is summarised as follows:

The National Board may be viewed as a data controller in respect of the processing of personal data when providing advisory services and, accordingly, must have a valid legal basis to process the data and the relevant Church body must have a valid legal basis to transfer the personal data to the National Board and/or the National Case Management Committee (NCMC).

The National Board may be viewed as a data processor in relation to child safeguarding reviews whereby the Church body determines the purpose of the processing and the National Board carries

out its review work in that context as data processor under a Data Processing Deed already in place with the relevant Church body.

### **Development of a New, More Secure Database**

As a data controller and processor, the National Board is required to observe good data storage practices. In 2022, the National Board was successful in obtaining funding from the philanthropic organisation Porticus to develop a more efficient and secure database. The DPO led the development of this database, work on which is being carried out by an Irish charity, Enclude. The development work began in January 2023 and has involved the amalgamation of the three existing databases, which are:

- » Contacts and Trainers – used to hold personal information relating to all Church personnel engaged in child safeguarding, and the training records of registered trainers.
- » Head to Heart database – used to hold personal information relating to all seminarians and deacons undertaking the Head to Heart formation programme.
- » Allegations and Advice – used to hold anonymised allegations reported to the National Board (and is destroyed following the publication of the Annual Report each year), and advice offered to Church authorities as evidence of work product.

The development of the new database is complete, and the aim is that the final transfer of existing advice data will conclude in July 2024. Throughout

## DATA PROTECTION

the process, and in line with best practice guidance, relevant personnel and Church authorities have been kept informed regarding the data security procedures and measures put in place to safeguard the data placed on this new database.

### **Data Destruction Process**

The National Board's robust annual process for the review and destruction of data, in line with its data retention and destruction procedures, continued through 2023. All data received by the National Board as a data processor, in relation to notification of allegations received up to the end of March 2023, has been destroyed or returned to the data controller Church body.

Other data shared with the National Board as part of its advice-giving functions through the work of the NCMC has been reviewed, and only relevant data has been retained. Supplementary data about cases presented during 2023/24 was returned to the data controller Church bodies.

As part of the migration of data onto the National Board's secure database, the CEO sought legal advice and initiated a review of all hard-copy data retained. Advice offered by the National Board has been scanned and stored on the database, while all other data held by the National Board is being destroyed, as the legal basis for retaining it no longer exists.

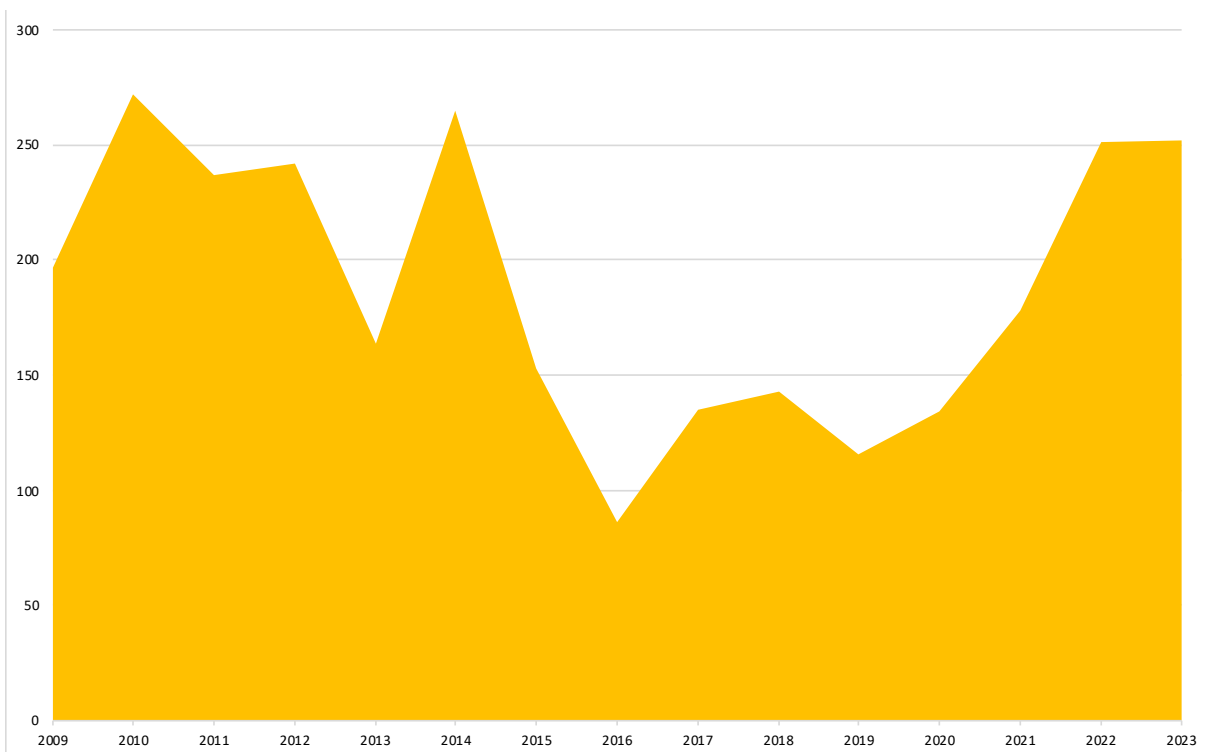
# ALLEGATIONS NOTIFIED TO THE NATIONAL OFFICE, 1 APRIL 2023-31 MARCH 2024



A total of 252 allegations were reported to the National Board between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.

Table 1 displays the comparison figures received by the National Board, setting out allegations notified since the start of Annual Reports in 2009.

**Table 1: Number of Allegations, by Year**



# ALLEGATIONS NOTIFIED TO THE NATIONAL OFFICE, 1 APRIL 2023-31 MARCH 2024

The reports received for 2023/24 note the following periods during which abuse is alleged to have taken place.

**Table 2: Decade in which the Abuse is Alleged to Have Taken Place**

Year of abuse not given or unknown	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s	Unknown	Total
<b>Diocese</b>	0	1	6	24	18	3	2	0	1	10	65
<b>Religious</b>	2	12	41	68	39	7	1	0	0	17	187
<b>Total</b>	2	13	47	92	57	10	3	0	1	27	252

While the majority of allegations relate to the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, it is noted that four allegations relate to the year 2000 or later. Two relate to sexual abuse that is alleged to have taken place in the 2000s; one is sexual abuse alleged to have taken place in 2023; and one further allegation of physical abuse is from the 2000s.

The majority of the 252 allegations relate to sexual abuse (183) as the major abuse; there were a further 26 allegations of physical abuse; 17 allegations of emotional abuse; 1 allegation of neglect; 1 allegation of boundary violations; and 24 types of abuse not provided. In some cases (particularly in relation to sexual abuse), emotional abuse is also noted on the referral form.

Table 3 sets out the notifications received monthly from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

## ALLEGATIONS NOTIFIED TO THE NATIONAL OFFICE, 1 APRIL 2023-31 MARCH 2024

**Table 3: Notifications Received Monthly, 1 April 2023-31 March 2024**

Month/Year	Diocese by number reported	Religious by number reported	Type of abuse by number reported
<b>April 2023</b>	7	32	Sexual 36 (6R* & 30D**) Physical 3 (2R & 1D)
<b>May 2023</b>	8	45	Sexual 6 (2R & 4D) Physical 12 (10R & 2D) Emotional 16 (16R) Neglect 1 (1R) Unknown 18 (16R & 2D)
<b>June 2023</b>	4	28	Sexual 29 (27R & 2D) Physical 1 (1R) Unknown 2 (1R & 1D)
<b>July 2023</b>	1	17	Sexual 15 (15R) Physical 2 (1R & 1D) Unknown 1 (1R)
<b>August 2023</b>	2	3	Sexual 4 (3R & 1D) Physical 1 (1R)
<b>September 2023</b>	2	6	Sexual 7 (5R & 2D) Unknown 1 (1R)
<b>October 2023</b>	1	28	Sexual 23 (22R & 1D) Physical 3 (3R) Boundary violation 1 (1R) Unknown 2 (2R)
<b>November 2023</b>	1	7	Sexual 7 (6R & 1D) Emotional 1 (1R)
<b>December 2023</b>	8	3	Sexual 11 (3R & 8D)
<b>January 2024</b>	5	15	Sexual 19 (15R & 4D) Physical 1 (1R)
<b>February 2024</b>	4	19	Sexual 20 (16R & 4D) Physical 3 (3R)
<b>March 2024</b>	0	6	Sexual 6
<b>Total</b>	43	209	252

\* R=Religious

\*\* D=Diocesan

## ALLEGATIONS NOTIFIED TO THE NATIONAL OFFICE, 1 APRIL 2023-31 MARCH 2024

Further information that can be deduced from the notifications indicates that the 252 allegations were made against 209 respondents.

**Table 4: Gender of Respondents, by Diocese and Religious**

Gender	Diocese	Religious	Total
Male	14	153	167
Female	0	41	41
Unknown	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	14	195	209

**Table 5: Status of Diocesan Clergy - All Forms of Abuse**

Deceased	Laicised	In ministry	Retired (including in nursing home)	In prison	Under management plan	Out of ministry	Left ministry and diocese	Unknown
7	2	3	0	1	0	1	0	0

**Table 6: Status of Religious - All Forms of Abuse**

Deceased	Laicised	In ministry	Retired (including in nursing home)	In prison	Under management plan	Out of ministry	Left ministry and diocese	Unknown
94	3	3	0	8	3	22	13	49

Data protection legislation prevents the sharing of special-category data with the National Board, which means that when notifications are received, they do not contain any identifying information. The role of the National Board is to monitor that the allegation has been reported to the relevant statutory authority agency and to monitor that risk is being assessed. As the information received is anonymised, there is no ability to cross-reference to ensure that the respondent is already known, or to check if the allegation may already have been reported to the National Board by another source. As referenced in previous reports, this means that the National Board cannot report publicly with the level of detail that it would like, to demonstrate a transparent, centralised account of allegations received in any one year.





Two major initiatives were undertaken by the National Board during 2023: (1) the revision of the 2016 Church's safeguarding children policy and, later in the year, (2) consultation in drafting GAP Paper 12 on transitional justice. The second initiative emerged out of the consultation with complainants as part of the first. Extensive engagement with complainants took place throughout 2023, so that their experiences and views could influence the revision of the Church's child safeguarding policy.

***A Safe and Welcoming Church: Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024***

The new policy is based on three new standards:

- » Leadership: Governance and Accountability
- » Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding
- » Responding Pastorally and Reporting According to Civil and Canon Law

Each of these new standards sets out the Church teaching (Gospel or scriptural) imperatives, alongside relevant specific articles in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The purpose of doing this is to remind Church personnel that child safeguarding is fundamental to the ministry of the Church. The new standards also weave in the importance of adherence to civil legislation by placing children at the core of the Church's ministry, adhering to the Church's commitment to uphold their rights as enshrined in the UNCRC.

The foundational work of consulting and drafting the revised policy has been concluded. The National Board will now proceed to write induction, support and guidance materials, and to engage with Church personnel, before a date for implementation is agreed later in 2024.

The National Board would like to thank all those who offered wisdom and guidance during the development of the revised policy:

- » Children, their parents, carers, and Church youth workers, who all shared their experiences with such vitality and positivity
- » Complainants/victims and survivors of abuse
- » Those accused of abuse
- » Church personnel
- » External experts in child safeguarding, including Tusla the Child and Family Agency and Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) colleagues
- » Steering Committee members: Abbot Brendan Coffey, Archbishop Francis Duffy, Saoirse Fox, Avril Halley, Garry Keogh, Philip O'Hara, Mary Tallon and Joan Walsh.

## INITIATIVES AND ADVICE OFFERED BY THE NATIONAL BOARD

### **Transitional Justice**

Born out of discussions with complainants/victims/survivors of abuse, the National Board drafted a GAP paper on transitional justice in 2023. The full paper can be read at [https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/GAP\\_Papers/GAP%20PAPER%2012%20Transitional%20Justice.pdf](https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/GAP_Papers/GAP%20PAPER%2012%20Transitional%20Justice.pdf).

The impetus behind the paper was to provide the Church with experience and learning from other sources (academic, research and practitioner), about enabling alternative responses to those who have been harmed in the Church as children.

The core tenets of a transitional justice approach are:

**Truth** – Who knew what and how the abuse was allowed to happen.

**Reparation** – Responding with counselling, care and financial compensation.

**Justice** – Ensuring that those who are found guilty of child abuse within the Church are held accountable through either criminal or canonical (penal) proceedings.

**A promise of non-recurrence** – Ensuring that good policies and practices are in place to prevent the abuse of children (as far as possible) today.

The National Board will continue to encourage a transitional justice approach within the Church, and will host training and information sessions to equip Church personnel with the knowledge and

skills to move forward with this approach when responding to victims/survivors of clerical and religious abuse.

### **Advice Offered By National Office Staff**

Staff remain available at all times to offer guidance and advice to Church personnel in relation to all current seven child safeguarding standards. Table 7 provides a record of advice offered over the last five years in order to demonstrate annual trends.

When a number of requests for advice indicate a pattern of need for guidance on a particular topic, specific guidance is produced and placed on the National Board's website.

Table 7 provides statistical information on advice by standard per year while Table 8 provides statistical information on advice by standard per month. The reader will note consistent requests for advice in relation to Standard 1 *Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments*, Standard 2 *Responding to Child Protection Suspicions, Concerns, Knowledge or Allegations*, and Standard 3 *Care and Support for the Complainant*. The National Board was particularly receptive to ensuring a needs-led response to victims and survivors and welcomed the opportunity to talk to Church personnel about how to achieve a more pastoral response. In fact, during 2023/24 a large number of complainants contacted the National Board directly for advice, either where they did not know whom to approach within a Church body, or when they were not satisfied with the Church response.

## INITIATIVES AND ADVICE OFFERED BY THE NATIONAL BOARD

On fifty-seven occasions, advice was sought from the National Board in relation to other aspects of safeguarding that fall outside the seven standards. These requests centred around: safeguarding issues relating to vulnerable adults, which fall outside the remit of the National Board; the Children First Act 2015; data protection and information sharing; lay associations of the faithful; general safeguarding

policy advice; and government inquiries (there is a Scoping Inquiry currently in process in the Republic of Ireland and preparation for research into clerical abuse in Northern Ireland).

During 2023/24, the National Office staff responded on 306 occasions, as follows.

**Table 7: Total Advice Offered Under All Seven Standards, by Year**

2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
260	392	258	282	306

**Table 8: Advice, by Standard and Month**

Standard	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Other	Total
April 2023	4	3	2	4	0	1	0	5	19
May 2023	11	10	5	2	1	0	0	4	33
June 2023	9	4	0	1	0	0	3	4	21
July 2023	3	3	7	2	1	0	2	1	19
August 2023	0	5	4	3	0	0	0	3	15
September 2023	2	6	12	2	1	0	1	6	30
October 2023	0	3	7	2	1	4	0	4	21
November 2023	9	4	6	2	1	0	1	6	29
December 2023	3	8	4	1	0	0	1	2	19
January 2024	3	9	6	2	0	0	0	8	28
February 2024	2	10	11	6	2	0	2	11	44
March 2024	0	11	10	3	0	0	1	3	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>306</b>

## INITIATIVES AND ADVICE OFFERED BY THE NATIONAL BOARD

The seven safeguarding standards are grouped into two related clusters. The first is those that apply to prevention (child safeguarding), which are:

**Standard 1:** Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments;

**Standard 5:** Training and Support for Keeping Children Safe; and

**Standard 6:** Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message.

The second cluster comprises those standards that apply to reporting and responding (case management):

**Standard 2:** Responding to Child Protection Suspicions, Concerns, Knowledge or Allegations;

**Standard 3:** Care and Support for the Complainant;

**Standard 4:** Care and Management of the Respondent; and

**Standard 7:** Quality-Assuring Compliance with the Standards.

The next section is structured using these cluster headings.

### *Child Safeguarding – Standards 1, 5 and 6*

#### **Standard 1: Creating and Maintaining Safe Environments**

Given the resumption of children's ministry in many Church bodies post-Covid 19 pandemic, the National Board has supported Church personnel in refreshing their practices, which are aimed at creating a warm, safe and welcoming environment for children. Specifically, advice has been provided in relation to vetting, developing codes of conduct, use of Church property, and ensuring safe practices for visiting clerics and religious. The National Board responded to forty-six requests for advice in relation to this standard.

#### **Standard 5: Training and Support for Keeping Children Safe**

The training structure within the Catholic Church has been well developed for a number of years. The National Board provides a Train the Trainers

programme and has developed a network of tutors and trainers to deliver local training to volunteers and Church personnel. Formal and informal meetings take place between tutors, trainers and the Director of Training and Support, which have resulted in positive, collaborative, networking relationships. The operation of this training network means fewer requests to the National Board for advice on Standard 5, with just seven such requests being made during 2023/24.

#### **Standard 6: Communicating the Church's Safeguarding Message**

On five occasions during the reporting year, advice was sought in relation to communication. The advice requested varied from how to communicate with children with special needs, to developing a communications strategy, communicating with children whose first language is not English, and drafting child safeguarding statements.

### *Case Management – Standards 2, 3 and 4*

#### **Standard 2: Responding to Child Protection Suspicions, Concerns, Knowledge or Allegations**

As in previous years, it is important to acknowledge that most Church personnel understand their mandated responsibility to report. Advice is only sought from the National Board when the information relating to an allegation, suspicion or concern is not clear, or where the information is received through a third party and discussion of clarity in terms of reporting is required. In addition to offering advice in relation to whether a threshold for notification is reached, advice was sought about the appropriate sharing of information. The National Board is clear about sharing information with statutory personnel and recognises the need to have a legal basis for sharing with other third parties. It is not for the National Board to offer legal advice in these situations; that is for legal and data protection advisors. However, trends and patterns often emerge that can usefully be referenced to assist a Church authority determine the legal basis for such information sharing. Overall, the National Board offered advice on Standard 2 on seventy-six occasions during 2023/24.

## INITIATIVES AND ADVICE OFFERED BY THE NATIONAL BOARD

### Standard 3: Care and Support for the Complainant

Almost all advice offered in relation to this standard comes under the heading of ‘Pastoral Support’. During 2023, the National Board engaged directly with complainants to develop a better understanding of their needs, and subsequently incorporated their views in the drafting of GAP Paper 12 on transitional justice. The National Board met with complainants at events, as well as on a one-to-one basis when individuals asked for advice. Many, but not all, complainants remain dissatisfied with the response they received from the Church. During 2024, National Office staff were aware of more Church personnel contacting complainants in order to work collaboratively to meet their needs: the National Board responded to requests for advice on this standard on seventy-four occasions.

### Standard 4: Care and Management of the Respondent

Advice was sought under this standard at various stages of the case management process – from informing the respondent that an allegation had been made, to risk assessment and Church inquiries, following the conclusion of criminal investigations. The National Board offered thirty pieces of advice under this standard.

#### National Case Management Committee

The NCMC was convened on four occasions during the reporting period. These meetings were held in July, September and November 2023 and March 2024.

Eight cases, as identified in Table 9, were presented to the NCMC, and written advice was subsequently sent to the relevant Church authorities. All cases presented and discussed were anonymised.

**Table 9: Cases Presented by Month and Church Body**

Date in 2023/24	Diocesan Cases	Religious Order Cases
25 July 2023	2	0
5 September 2023	1	2
13 November 2023	0	1
14 March 2024	0	2

The NCMC is comprised of the following individuals: Chairperson Mr Justice Iarfhlaith O’Neill (a retired judge of the High Court); Ms Anne Confrey (a retired solicitor); Fr Michael Mullaney (a canon lawyer); Sr Helen O’Riordan (a support person for complainants); Mr Phil Mortell (a former HSE social worker); Sr Colette Stevenson PVBVM (Director of the National Board of Coimirce); Fr Brendan O’Rourke CSsR (a psychotherapist); Director of Safeguarding Mr Peter Kieran (a former HSE social worker); Ms Miriam Tallon (a former probation officer); and

CEO of the National Board Ms Teresa Devlin (minute taker).

### Standard 7: Quality-Assuring Compliance with the Standards

This standard relates to governance and accountability. The National Board provided advice on eleven occasions in relation to quality assurance.

A Church authority oversees safeguarding ministry through the development of a

## INITIATIVES AND ADVICE OFFERED BY THE NATIONAL BOARD

safeguarding plan and reviews practice annually through a self-audit. This self-audit consists of a review of practice in parishes and communities. In addition, the Church authority receives an annual report from the designated liaison person (DLP) on the management of allegations, victim care, risk assessment, and criminal and canonical inquiries.

The figures in Table 10 reflect the responses regarding self-audits received from religious congregations and dioceses in 2023/24.

The reader will note a significant number of religious who are no longer required to conduct a self-audit. In order to receive an exemption certificate from the National Board, the Provincial of the order must confirm that no members are conducting ministry with children on behalf of the congregation, nor are they managing any allegations. This high number reflects the increasing age profile of those in religious life who are no longer in any form of active ministry. Currently, twenty-six dioceses and sixty religious congregations have either ministry with children or are managing cases (either new allegations or existing cases).

**Table 10: Numbers of Self-Audits by Church Body**

Complete	In Process	Self-Audit Required	Self-Audit not Required
26 dioceses 50 religious orders/ congregations	10 religious orders/ congregations	26 dioceses 60 religious orders/ congregations	93 religious orders/ congregations

### Second Tranche of National Board Reviews of Safeguarding Practice in Church Bodies

All dioceses have engaged in an external review by the National Board and all review reports have now been posted on the National Board website. An overview report of compliance with the Church's standards has also been produced and it can be read in full at [https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Dioceses\\_reports/Overview\\_of\\_Diocesan\\_Report\\_Launched\\_February\\_2024.pdf](https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Dioceses_reports/Overview_of_Diocesan_Report_Launched_February_2024.pdf).

The first tranche of reviews measured compliance with the earlier standards of 2008. Therefore, direct comparisons between the two series of reviews are not possible; each sought evidence on different

aspects of child safeguarding, and their purposes were distinct.

Included in the overview report are the following findings:

- » Eighteen of the twenty-six dioceses met all seven 2016 standards, which is both commendable and heartening.
- » The combined number of recommendations made to dioceses arising from the earlier reviews was 210, while the current round of reviews led to 10 recommendations being made. A recommendation this time around

## INITIATIVES AND ADVICE OFFERED BY THE NATIONAL BOARD

is only made in the event of a diocese not meeting a standard.

- » Of the 210 recommendations previously made to diocesan bishops, 202 were fully implemented. It is a matter for each individual bishop to decide whether to implement any recommendation made to him, as the National Board cannot insist that its advice be followed.
- » The second tranche of reviews enabled greater input from bishops at the planning stage and, as a result, the approach adopted varied in order to take account of the specific focus that each bishop wanted to take. This has led to some differences in the detail and length of review reports.
- » Pre-fieldwork meetings, most often via Zoom, helped significantly in the preparation of the review fieldwork visits.
- » While Covid-19 led to review fieldwork sometimes being split and conducted over longer periods, all diocesan reviews measured compliance against each of the seven standards.

Thirteen reviews of religious orders have now been completed. During the reporting year, the following congregations engaged in a review:

- » The Marist Fathers (Society of Mary)
- » The Order of Carmelites (male)
- » The Discalced Carmelite Order
- » The Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers)
- » The Presentation Brothers
- » The De La Salle Brothers
- » The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

The dioceses in which reviews have been completed and reports issued since April 2023 are:

- » Down and Connor
- » Dromore
- » Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora
- » Waterford and Lismore

Reports of all these reviews can be found at <https://www.safeguarding.ie/publications/national-board-publications>.

As all reviews are now concluded for 2024, the National Board would like to take the opportunity to thank all the external reviewers who engaged in this important work.



The current National Board Training and Support Strategy covers the period from 2023 to 2025, and it can be viewed at [https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Training\\_Resources/Training%20and%20Support%20Strategy%202023-2025.pdf](https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Training_Resources/Training%20and%20Support%20Strategy%202023-2025.pdf).

The Strategy has seven objectives, which are used to chart the training and support initiatives delivered during 2023/24, and which are outlined as follows.

### **Objective 1: Building Competence and Skills at Local Level**

A key element of embedding the safeguarding standards is to assist Church personnel in building their own skills locally in Church bodies across Ireland.

In the period under review, nine Safeguarding Committee training sessions (seven dioceses and two male and female religious) were facilitated by staff from the National Board. Many of those who requested Safeguarding Committee training have already been trained by the National Office staff but, following new personnel being recruited to the Committee, the respective Church authorities felt it appropriate to re-engage with these training sessions. The feedback continues to be very positive, in terms of enabling Committee members who have an important function in creating and maintaining safe environments for children to reflect on and refocus their role.

Specific training tailored to particular circumstances of each Church body was delivered twenty-six times in 2023/24.

### **Objective 2: Training and Supporting Trainers**

In order to equip Church personnel with the

knowledge and skills to create and maintain safe environments for children and the adults who work with them, a one-Church approach was developed. This continues to allow for national, basic-awareness training facilitated locally by National Board-registered trainers. Trainers are supported by the Director of Training and Support, alongside tutors in each of the four ecclesiastical provincial areas of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

The National Board has created a bespoke Train the Trainers programme, which is compliant with statutory expectations and Church procedures. As trainers leave, new ones are recruited, trained and supported by tutors and the Director of Training and Support. A new cohort of trainers availed of the Train the Trainers programme, which was delivered to thirteen people in January and February 2024. The new trainers will join an existing group of trainers who offer their services willingly to ensure that all those who minister within the Church have the necessary knowledge and skills to keep children safe and to develop a warm and nurturing environment that promotes their participation within the Church. The National Board would like to thank all 109 trainers who provide high-quality training across the Church, with the sole purpose of ensuring the safety and well-being of children.

This year 5,163 people were trained by National Board-registered trainers. While this represents a decrease on last year's training figure of 7,219, the National Board is committed to supporting the delivery of local training and will continue to focus on providing support to Church authorities. In 2023/24, 1,092 individuals attended the full-day training sessions on child safeguarding while the



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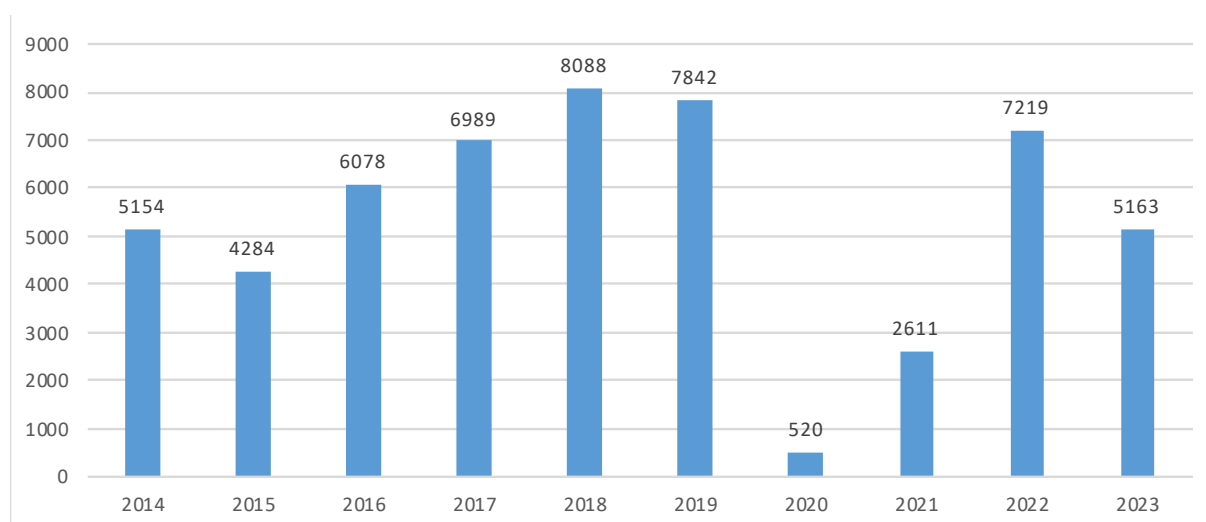
refresher session has continued to prove popular, with 1,067 individuals attending across 79 sessions delivered. The delivery of information training within local parishes and in religious communities continues to be a focus, with 2,379 individuals attending these sessions in the last twelve months.

The development of the National Board's new, secure database enables trainers to log the training delivered directly onto an electronic platform for

transfer to the National Board's database. This allows statistics to be more reliable, and reduces the bureaucracy associated with the administration of training.

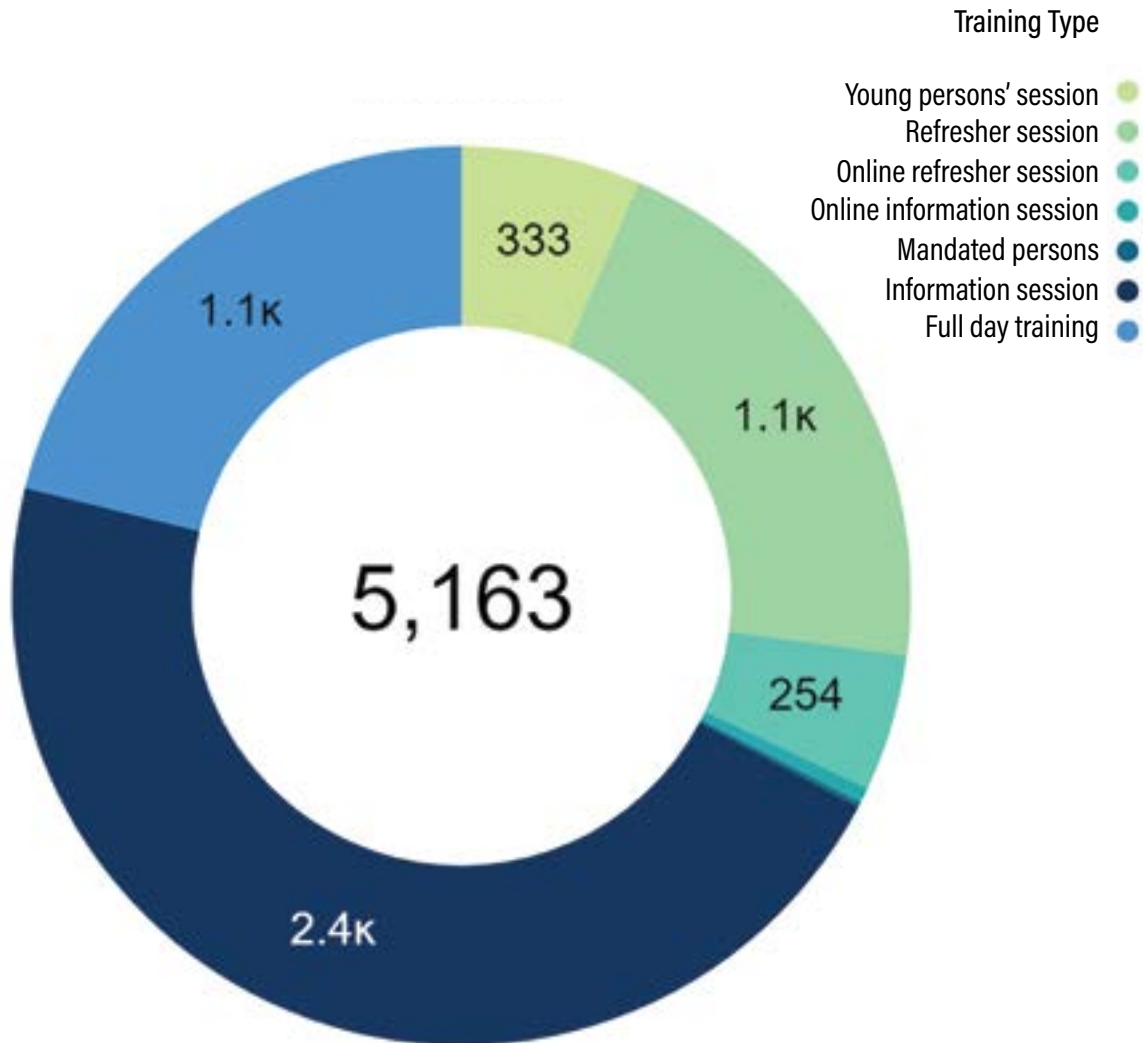
Figure 1 sets out the number of training events that were facilitated during each year from 2014 until 2023/24. Figure 2 identifies the numbers of personnel trained, by type of training.

**Figure 1: Number of Participants Trained per Year**



## TRAINING AND SUPPORT

**Figure 2: Number of People Trained and Type of Session**



### Objective 3: Facilitating National Training Events

A key role of the National Board is to highlight and encourage best practice, and to share the latest developments in child safeguarding policy, legislation and guidance. As part of the development of best practice policy and guidance, the National Board staff spent significant time during 2023/24 engaging with children, parents/carers and Church personnel to ensure that their views were taken into

consideration in the development of a new child safeguarding policy for the Catholic Church in Ireland. Six of the national training events took the form of listening meetings with Church personnel, to inform the revision of the child safeguarding policy.

During 2023/24, the following training events were delivered.

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### **16 May 2023 – Embedding a Culture of Safeguarding**

The National Board and the UK agency thirtyone:eight hosted this event, which sought to explore what safer, healthier Christian cultures could look like in the Irish Catholic Church.

### **24 May 2023 – Risk Assessment and Local Self-Audit**

This training event covered information on understanding the local risk assessment process and template, exploring best practice in terms of carrying out the safeguarding audit (Standards 1, 5 and 6), the DLP's annual file audit (Standards 2, 3 and 4), and discussing alternative methods for conducting the annual audit.

### **1 June 2023 – Safeguarding Issues for Youth Pilgrimages**

This training day was for those in a diocese or religious order involved in taking children on youth pilgrimages, in Ireland or another country. It covered the following areas:

- » Exploring and understanding the potential safeguarding risks involved in youth pilgrimages, and the procedures that are required to manage those risks.
- » Understanding the local risk assessment process and template.
- » Understanding crisis-management processes and serious incident reviews in relation to trips away from home.

### **7 June 2023 – Reporting Processes for those Involved in Spiritual Direction or Pastoral Support**

This workshop focused on understanding what to do when a child abuse allegation is disclosed during spiritual direction or pastoral support. It provided participants with practical information in relation to communicating the limits on confidentiality and reporting processes.

### **28 June 2023 – Case Management and Supporting Complainants and Respondents**

This training event was for those involved in all aspects of case management, including reporting allegations and supporting complainants and respondents. It covered the following:

- » Clarity on the role of the support person, priest advisor and DLP.
- » Reporting requirements, including those where information is incomplete or anonymous.
- » Exploring the case management process, including relevant aspects of canon law, risk assessment, and supporting and managing respondents.
- » Discussing the recording requirements, including data protection and information sharing for DLPs, support people and advisors.

### **5, 6, 18 and 25 July and 18 August 2023 – Listening Meetings on New Draft of the Safeguarding Policy**

As part of the work of revising the 2016 child safeguarding policy, the National Board held a number of listening meetings, specifically for those involved in child safeguarding. In order to ensure the participation of female religious, a dedicated session was held for members of female congregations.

### **11 October 2023 – Governance and Lay Associations of the Faithful**

This training event was for Church authorities and safeguarding personnel involved in ensuring that groups using Church property and lay associations are safe to do so.

### **The day included discussions and presentation on the following topics:**

- » Understanding lay associations of the faithful, and the new procedure for groups to become recognised as associate members of the National Board.

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- » Discussing how to assist groups that are not national organisations but that carry out important ministry with children on Church property.
- » Discussing how to ensure appropriate governance arrangements are in place to identify groups ministering on behalf of the Church, or using Church property, and to ensure good child safeguarding practice.

### **29 November 2023 – Influencing and Supporting the Child Safeguarding Practice of Female and Male Religious Orders Ministering with Children Internationally**

The purpose of this training day was to encourage good child safeguarding practice among Irish missionaries who engage with children in an international context. The aim was to ensure that anywhere Irish missionaries engage with children, the safety and well-being of children will be prioritised and promoted.

The day included information and presentations on:

- » Template policies and procedures for safeguarding children internationally
- » Information and advice on governance
- » Information and advice on embedding a culture of child safeguarding, including training

### **10 January 2024 – Spirituality and Safeguarding in the Context of Catholic Social Teaching**

Rev. Dr Barry O’Sullivan facilitated this training, which sought to explore the place of child safeguarding as a ministry in the theology and social teaching of the Church. The training covered the following topics:

- » Exploring the place of safeguarding in theology, social teaching and the Gospel.
- » Discussing the challenges that face the Church today in living out a theology of safeguarding.
- » Discussing how to overcome these challenges

in order to practise safeguarding as a ministry and to follow the example set by Jesus.

### **20, 21, 26, 27 and 28 January and 2 March 2024 (six training days in total) – Train the Trainers**

This course was designed for anyone who wishes to be registered as a National Board trainer. Applicants must undertake a six-day training and assessment process, which includes developing knowledge in relation to safeguarding children in the Catholic Church in Ireland, group work and facilitation skills. After this process is completed, a final day is delivered by the applicant in their own local Church body, where they are assessed by a National Board tutor. The process in its entirety takes seven days.

### **31 January 2024 – Training for New Church Authorities**

This training was organised specifically for Church leaders to induct them into their strategic role in relation to child safeguarding. The day covered a range of topics relating to safeguarding, including:

- » The strategic role of the Church authority in relation to child safeguarding
- » Pastoral ministry and safeguarding
- » The importance of governance

### **25 and 26 March 2024 – Induction for New Child Safeguarding Policy**

This was the first in a series of training events to support and assist with the implementation of the Church’s new safeguarding children policy, *A Safe and Welcoming Church: Child Safeguarding Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024*.

### **Objective 4: Facilitating the National Formation Programme**

#### ***Head to Heart***

Head to Heart is a formation programme that seeks to provide participants with a deeper understanding of the core elements of child safeguarding. The National Board has continued its important work with seminarians in formation at St Patrick’s College, Maynooth, and Redemptoris Mater Seminary, Dundalk.

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After evaluating the programme, it was agreed that modules would be delivered face-to-face, as this was the preferred delivery method of the students, formators and facilitators. This has meant that each module has to be delivered twice (once in each seminary). While this process is resource-intensive, feedback from the seminarians has been that it is much more effective than the previous online delivery method.

In this reporting year, two induction sessions were delivered, as well as the following modules:

- » Children's Rights (5 May 2023): This module explored how the UNCRC impacts ministry and child safeguarding.
- » Personal Challenges when Dealing with Abuse (17 November and 24 November 2023): This module explored the impact of the abuse on seminarians, and how to deal with these challenges during formation and after ordination.
- » Theology of safeguarding (15 March 2024): This module explored the relationship between child safeguarding and theology. It explored definitions of safeguarding and of theology and examined how a faith-based understanding of the human person enhances policies, practice and effective implementation of safeguarding and child protection procedures.

Alongside the seminary formation programme, Head to Heart has been extended to those in formation for the permanent diaconate. During 2023/24, another module was delivered to twenty-one student deacons and their partners. The topics covered included protecting children online and establishing good boundaries in pastoral ministry.

### *Pastoral Theology Students, St Patrick's College, Maynooth*

Staff from the National Board delivered training on child safeguarding to pastoral theology students in St Patrick's College, Maynooth. The focus was to ensure that students were informed about the

creation and maintenance of safe environments for children, as well as about how to respond to allegations and disclosures of abuse prior to undertaking their pastoral placement. The students then reflect on what they have learned and submit a commentary on their learning.

### *Loreto House Religious Formation Programme*

Building on previous years, staff from the National Board delivered training over two sessions to Religious Formation Programme students in Loreto House, Dublin. The students were ordained or vowed religious from countries across the world who attend Loreto House as part of their formation. The input by the National Board focused on the development of child safeguarding standards, particularly on how to create and maintain safe environments.

### **Objective 5: Supporting Child Safeguarding Internationally**

The National Board seeks to ensure that Irish missionary work abroad adheres to the best child safeguarding standards. National Board staff are proactive in supporting religious congregations and missionary societies ministering in countries that are just setting out on their child safeguarding journeys. The training sessions delivered this reporting year included supervision and support as part of safeguarding for licentiate students from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, sharing the lessons from Ireland to help influence international practice.

Discussions were also held with a number of religious who sought to develop international policies and supportive training.

### **Objective 6: Developing Policy, Guidance and Resources**

To support the implementation of *Safeguarding Children: Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2016*, the National Board produces optional web-based guidance, to be used as appropriate when a concerning matter arises. By its nature, it requires review and revision following changes to legislation, regulation, canon law, and developments

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in best practice and experience. During 2023/24 the guidance has been updated fourteen times.

Changes to the guidance focused on the following areas:

- » Details added for Garda National Protective Services Bureau local teams
- » New whistleblowing guidance following a change in legislation in the Republic of Ireland
- » Updated references following the update to *Vos estis lux mundi* (VELM) in 2023
- » New, simplified reporting form
- » Expanded guidance on ministering with children online
- » Expanded and clarified guidance relating to webcams

The last year was important in terms of revising the Church's 2016 safeguarding children policy. To support the implementation of the revised policy, staff in the National Office undertook an extensive review of all related guidance. This guidance has now been streamlined under three new standards: Leadership and Governance, Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding, and Responding Pastorally and Reporting According to Civil and Canon Law. This new guidance will be available in June 2024 in *A Safe and Welcoming Church: Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024*.

### Objective 7: Responding to Emerging Issues to Support Best Practice

#### *Guidance and Practice Papers*

As part of a series of guidance papers (a project that was first initiated in 2018), the National Board continued to conduct research to inform best practice, share new initiatives and provide practice guidance to Church personnel on important child safeguarding initiatives and issues. Two new GAP papers were produced in 2023/24:

- » *Framing a New Policy for Safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Ireland*

In this GAP Paper 11, the National Board attempted to explore some lessons from research, such as examining international policies and practices and changes in civil and canon law to inform the revision of Church policy here in Ireland.

- » *Transitional Justice – Responding to Child Abuse Within the Catholic Church in Ireland*

This GAP Paper 12 reviewed research and literature and national projects that seek to 'restore' the heart of those adults who were abused as children within the Church. In GAP Paper 3, *Caring Pastorally and Managing Respondents*, there are short descriptions of potential responses. These include a pastoral healing response, counselling, redress, a victim and survivors' forum, a spiritual healing response, and a truth and justice commission. The focus of this paper is on the needs of victims of abuse, and how a transitional justice approach could assist with bringing healing to those harmed by Church personnel, prior to laying the foundation for a transformative justice model. Consideration is also given to aspects of justice, human rights and Church teachings associated with these concepts. Twelve GAP papers have been produced to date.

#### **Ecclesiastical Provincial Area Meetings**

The National Board facilitates ecclesiastical provincial area meetings at least once per year. Four meetings were held in 2023/24: one in Dublin, one in Tuam, one in Armagh, and one in Cashel.

The aim of these meetings was for staff from the National Office to meet with bishops, provincials, superiors and safeguarding personnel from Church bodies to discuss developments in child safeguarding. Topics this year included:

- » An update on the revision of the policy and standards
- » Lay associations of the faithful and process to become associated members of the National Board
- » Update on training and support
- » Transitional justice

## OPERATIONAL PLAN AND OBJECTIVES



The current Operational Plan has been extended for one year and can be viewed at <https://www.safeguarding.ie/about-us/our-purpose-vision-and-mission>. The incoming CEO and his team will consider their strategic objectives together with the National Board Directors for 2024/25.

In consultation with the incoming CEO and Board of Directors, the following specific objectives have been set for 2024/25.

1. Following the induction of the new policy, *A Safe and Welcoming Church: Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024*, the National Board will assist each Church body and authority to embed the Policy into the day-to-day work of the Church through the provision of a comprehensive and appropriate training programme supported with advice.
2. Draft a Strategic Plan for 2024–27 that identifies how the National Board will support good child safeguarding practice within the Catholic Church in Ireland.
3. Plan for a National Safeguarding Conference in 2025 on transitional-justice approaches to engaging with victims and survivors of abuse in the Catholic Church in Ireland.
4. Develop guidance and training for those in leadership roles on the use of appropriate support and supervision mechanisms to enable them to meet the leadership and accountability requirements of the new policy, *A Safe and Welcoming Church: Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024*.



### National Board Members

#### **Garrett Sheehan, Chairperson**

Is a former judge of the Irish Court of Appeal, in which role he served from 2014 until 2017. Prior to his appointment to the Court of Appeal, he was a judge of the Irish High Court from 2007. He was educated at Gonzaga College, University College Dublin and the Law Society of Ireland. He was enrolled as a solicitor in 1969. He is a bencher of the King's Inns and retired from the bench in 2017. On 9 December 2020, he was appointed by President Michael D. Higgins to the position of chairperson of the Standards in Public Office Commission. He became chair of the National Board in January 2022.

#### **Dr Keith Holmes**

Is a consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist. Former lead clinician and chairperson of the Medical Board in Lucena Clinic, Dublin, and former chair of the Faculty of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry within the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland, he joined the National Board in 2009.

#### **Marie Kennedy**

Has a background in social work and extensive experience in child protection and welfare with a post-graduate diploma in child protection and an MSc in health services management. Through a range of important assignments, Marie provides significant and extensive experience in all aspects of child and family services management. She joined the National Board in 2008.

#### **Jim O'Higgins**

Is a retired solicitor and accredited mediator. He was founder member and co-designer of the State Family Mediation Service. He served as honorary secretary and board member of Cheeverstown, a service for the intellectually challenged. He also chaired the advisory panel on child abuse for the Ferns Diocese for eight years and is a former chairperson of the Peter McVerry Trust and of the board of two national schools in a disadvantaged area in Dublin's North City. He joined the National Board in 2013.

#### **Sr Colette Stevenson PBVM**

Is a Presentation Sister. She has been involved in child protection work within the Church since 1995, when she became Director of the Conference of Religious of Ireland (CORI) Child Protection Office. Previously she worked as a teacher and facilitated retreats. She is a qualified marriage and family therapist. She recently retired from the National Office as Director of Professional Standards. She joined the National Board in 2013.

#### **Sr Nuala O'Gorman**

Is a Sister of Mercy of the Southern Province of the Congregation, and is a retired secondary school teacher. She was principal of the school and chairperson of its board of management, and was a member of the provincial team in the Southern Province. She was a member of the steering group in the Diocese of Cloyne when child safeguarding policies were being established, and she served on the Safeguarding Committee in that diocese for a number of years. She is currently one of the victim support persons for the diocese. She joined the National Board in October 2017.



## BOARD AND OTHER CORPORATE INFORMATION

### **Fr Martin Whelan**

Is a priest of the Galway Diocese and a canon lawyer. He was ordained in 2009, and he has served as the Galway Diocesan Secretary since 2010. In addition to his administrative duties within the diocese, Fr Martin is curate at Galway Cathedral and chaplain to St Mary's College. Fr Martin has also served as a canon lawyer with the Galway Regional Marriage Tribunal. He joined the National Board in February 2021.

### **Phil O'Laoide**

Is a retired solicitor, having practised for almost forty years, first in her own general practice and then for twenty-seven years as managing solicitor and regional manager with the Legal Aid Board. Her expertise was mainly in family law, child care law, and in dealing with the consequences of human trafficking. Since retirement, she has been the director for recruitment and branch prison liaison officer for her local branch of Samaritans in Athlone. She currently leads the prison team, and trains and support prisoners to be Samaritan listeners. Phil joined the National Board in May 2021.

### **Gillian McGrath**

Has a background in education and is the former CEO of the Catholic Education Partnership, and a member of the board of the Education Authority, Northern Ireland. She was formerly the Director of Education in the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools. Prior to that, she was a primary school principal, and was also employed by the Education and Training Inspectorate as an inspector of schools in all sectors and phases. Gillian currently works as an independent education adviser. She joined the National Board in February 2022.

### **Members of National Case Management Committee**

**Iarfhlaith O'Neill:** Chair of NCMC, retired High Court judge.

**Teresa Devlin:** Secretary to NCMC, National Board CEO.

**Sr Helen O'Riordan:** Loreto Sister, Ferns Diocese, with experience in the area of pastoral support for victims.

**Fr Michael Mullaney:** Archdiocese of Cashel and Emly, canon lawyer.

**Peter Kieran:** Former HSE senior child and family services manager, with experience in risk assessment.

**Phil Mortell:** Former HSE senior childcare manager, and currently the DPL for the Redemptorist congregation.

**Sr Colette Stevenson:** Presentation Sister with experience of working with respondents.

**Anne Confrey:** Civil lawyer, formerly worked with Mason Hayes & Curran.

**Fr Brendan O'Rourke:** Therapist with respondents.

**Miriam Tallon:** Former probation officer.

## BOARD AND OTHER CORPORATE INFORMATION

### Management of National Office

**Teresa Devlin:** CEO, was in this role since January 2014 until her retirement in April 2024. Prior to that, she was the Director of Safeguarding with the National Board. Teresa is a qualified social worker and has an advanced diploma in child protection; she has extensive experience in child protection management and family support, both at the levels of senior management and in the specific areas of risk assessment and care planning. Teresa was appointed as a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors by Pope Francis in September 2022.

**Aidan Gordon:** Incoming CEO from April 2024. Aidan is a qualified social worker with over thirty years' experience in safeguarding practice and management. He is a former Assistant Director of the Western Health and Social Care Trust and from 2015 until 2024 was Director of Safeguarding in the Archdiocese of Armagh.

**Dr Niall Moore:** (Outgoing) Director of Training and Support (resigned February 2024), with a degree in law, a master's degree in criminology and a doctorate in childhood studies, which examined the role of the Holy See as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. He joined the National Office in 2013.

**Carolyn McDermott:** (Incoming) Director of Training and Support (since March 2024). Lyn has worked in the social care field since qualifying as a social care practitioner in 1992. She has also worked within the disability and mental health sectors in frontline, supervisory and management roles. Having worked for many years ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements within the health and social care sector, in 2018 she moved part-time into a trainer role teaching Safety Interventions, a trauma-informed crisis prevention training to support staff who need to prevent or intervene in crisis situations. Due to a keen interest in development initiatives to enhance skills and knowledge, Lyn progressed to running a training department supporting a workforce of 2,500 staff in 2021. She has experience in identifying training needs, designing training

programmes, utilising programme management tools and learning-management systems.

**Peter Kieran:** Part-time Director of Safeguarding until his retirement in April 2024, providing policy and case management advice. Peter is a qualified social worker and has a master's degree in counselling. He worked in child protection with the South Eastern Health Board/HSE South from 1974, and became the Regional Specialist in Children and Family Services in 2004. He worked in that role until his retirement in December 2010. He has conducted a number of reviews for the National Board since 2011 and is now working on research and policy development. He also taught on the MA (Leadership in Therapeutic Child & Social Care) course at Carlow College.

**Imelda Ashe:** Company Secretary and Administrator.

**Ann Cunningham:** Administrator.

**Training tutors:** Fr Paddy Boyle, Caroline Brogan, Kevin Duffy, Avril Halley, Garry Kehoe, Eleanor Kelly, Julie McCullough, Aoife Walsh and Maureen Walsh – supporting the Director of Training and Support in the delivery of the Training and Support Strategy.

### Other Corporate Information

The members of Coimirce, a company limited by guarantee without a share capital (Co. Number 465899), are comprised of nominees from the IEC (Irish Episcopal Conference) and AMRI (Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland). The IEC and AMRI are described as the 'Sponsoring Bodies' of the National Board in this report.

The registered office and address of Coimirce is New House, Maynooth, Co. Kildare.

**Company Secretary:** Imelda Ashe

**Website:** [www.safeguarding.ie](http://www.safeguarding.ie)





THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR  
**SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN**  
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IRELAND

