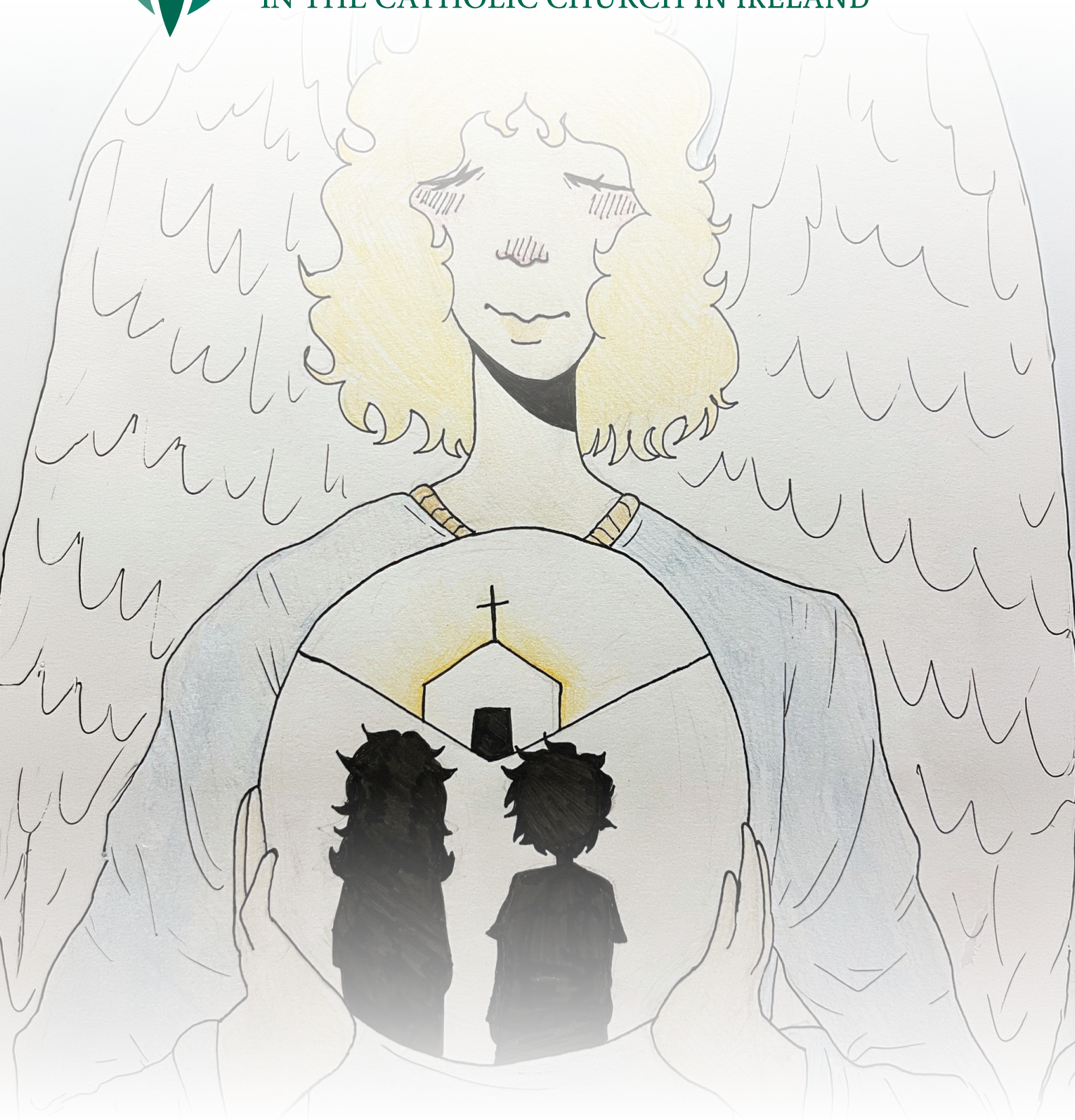




THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR
SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN
IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IRELAND



Annual Report 2025

(for the period covering 1st April to 31st December 2025)

Published 2026

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Cover (Sarah Cronin) and back page (The young people of St. Vincent's Special National School). We are grateful to every child who contributed to the *A Safe and Welcoming Church Art Competition* and whose artwork has brought this annual report to life.

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Chair's Report

The Annual Report 2025 of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland, as always, covers an extremely busy time for the Office of The National Board. While the report itself covers a nine-month period, in order to allow us to adjust our reporting timeframes towards reporting a January to December calendar year, you will see from the content that much has happened.

In particular, the National Board hosted its National Conference from the 3rd to the 5th of September 2025, and we were gratified by the level of attendance, and, in particular, the engagement of the attendees with those who were speaking and presenting. The degree of courage shown by our speakers was enormously impressive, but also the receptivity of those attending was heartening. There was much to digest, much to ponder, and it will certainly inform future practice.

The National Board has also been very involved in the discussions and planning on foot of the RSM report which gave some very clear sign posting towards the direction that Safeguarding will continue to take.

Since our last report, wherein I made reference to the level of change within the National Board Office, it is especially impressive to see how well they have settled in and have since been joined by Julie McCullough as Director of Safeguarding.

As a board, we were extremely saddened to hear of the death of Mr Jim O'Higgins, an extremely valued former colleague on the board, who had recently stepped down. Jim was a Lawyer, whose sage and pithy advice, whose experience of Church matters, and whose wonderful integrity and humour kept us very much on our toes; he will be enormously missed, and we send our prayers and best wishes to his family.

I conclude my brief remarks by referencing my fellow Directors, whose ranks have been augmented by the arrival of Ms Catherine Walsh, and collectively, their commitment and support remain steadfast, and I extend my sincere thanks to them.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Keith Holmes

Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist
MCRN: 14463



Chief Executive Officer Report

Welcome to this annual report published by the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI). Our previous Annual Report covered the period 1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025, but as part of our transition to a report that covers the Calendar year, this report spans the nine months from April 1, 2025 to December 31 2025. Moving forward, NBSCCCI annual reports will cover January 1 to December 31 of each year.

During these nine months, the NBSCCCI hosted its biannual National Conference at the Sheraton Hotel, Athlone, from 3–5 September 2025. Our Conference was titled ‘Towards a Restorative and Transitional Justice Process of Engagement with Victims and Survivors of Abuse in the Catholic Church in Ireland’ and was generously supported by Porticus. The event reached full capacity, welcoming 150 delegates for a landmark programme that, for the first time, featured a collaborative panel of survivors, academics, safeguarding personnel and Church leaders.

We extend our deepest gratitude to our speakers: a group of survivors who generously and courageously shared their experiences of harm within the Church; the academics who provided essential research frameworks for our mission; and the Church leaders and safeguarding personnel who candidly described their experiences of responding to victims and survivors harmed in their Church settings. We also thank the generosity of participation to all who attended the conference. I would particularly like to thank Mr Dudley Potter, Professor Linda Hogan and Archbishop Francis Duffy for their assistance in planning and supporting the Conference, as well as Bishop Kevin Doran for kindly accommodating us and leading our Conference Mass.

While feedback highlighted the intensity of the schedule, the overwhelming positivity emerging from the Conference reinforces our belief that open, transparent and, at times, challenging, dialogue is the only path to healing. We are committed to incorporating your suggestions for improvement as we begin preparations for the 2027 Conference, which will focus on the creation and maintenance of a Culture of Safeguarding across all Church activities.

While assessing the impact of the safeguarding policy released on the 11th of June 2024, I had the opportunity to visit two of the many Youth Summer Camps which take place around the country. On July 10, 2025, I was in Knockadoon, Co. Cork, for the annual Dominican Summer Camp and on July 21, 2025, I visited the SMA Summer Camp in Dromantine, just outside Newry in Co. Down. These visits were in response to discussion which took place at our Board meeting following which it was agreed that it would be useful for me to see ‘safeguarding in action’. This would, it was hoped, enable me to reassure myself and the Directors, that our work around good safeguarding practices in engaging with children and young people was having a practical outcome.

Across both visits I observed really strong practices around ensuring the children entrusted to our care were kept safe and informed of what to do if they were in any way uncomfortable or upset. The support the leaders received from the Safeguarding personnel and the Provincial Leadership of both Church bodies demonstrated a genuine commitment to effective safeguarding practice allied to a determination to ensure the young participants are informed of the good news of the Gospel. The leaders in each camp were such fantastic young people themselves and invariably

had been previous attendees at the camps. They came from all walks of life and volunteered their time each year to ensure others had a positive and enriching experience of engaging with the Church.

The clear message that I was able to take back was that there is a hunger among our young people for a message of hope and meaning, and the Catholic Church has an opportunity to provide that safely. I hope that these camps, and the numerous others which take place each year, will continue to be places of welcome and safety for our young people. From our perspective here at the NBSCCCI, we will continue to support their development by keeping Church Bodies updated on best safeguarding practices around their organisation.

Another impactful initiative held during 2025 included the NBSCCCI Art competition, which sought to determine what children and young people understood about 'A safe and welcoming Church'. The success of the event saw over 400 entries displayed across the hallways of New House, the NBSCCCI offices in Maynooth, for the month of October. I was proud to present the awards to many of the young winners and you will see some of the photographs from presentations later in this report. I would like to thank all those who took the time to make submissions and our panel of judges for making the difficult decision around prize-winners. We have used some of the winning entries for this report, and are delighted that other Church Bodies have also used them for their child-friendly safeguarding materials.

This annual report will provide details of much of the work the NBSCCCI has engaged in over the nine months from 1st April 2025 to 31st December 2025. We have a number of roles, which include advising individual Church bodies on best child safeguarding practice and case management; providing training to Church personnel on best practice and preparing them for their roles; reviewing the safeguarding arrangements in place in individual Church bodies and ensuring our policy and guidance adheres to legislative and statutory guidance across the island. During the nine months of this report, advice was requested on 179 occasions. Page 17 of the report will

outline the breakdown of advice offered by the relevant Standard. A significant number (55) related to case management advice which falls under the standard *Responding Pastorally and Reporting according to Civil and Canon Law*.

As part of our annual reporting, the NBSCCCI recorded 178 allegations against clerics and religious from April to December 2025. We acknowledge the immense strength required for survivors to share their stories, and we continue to advocate for a compassionate Church response to every survivor who finds the courage to speak out. However, as the NBSCCCI is unable to receive personal identifiers in these notifications due to Data Protection regulations. It is impossible to determine if all 178 allegations relate to respondents that were previously known or have been reported in prior periods. That information is held by the individual Church Body.

During 2026 we will begin our independent reviews of Safeguarding practice in individual Church bodies. The reviews will be examining practice under the three standards of our current Church policy (2024) and will be conducted through a mixture of field visits, meetings with relevant personal and examination of written material. We hope that the significant improvements in practice that were evidenced by previous reviews from 2016 to 2024 will continue as the Church strives to ensure that ministry for and with children within the Church is safe and welcoming.

Over the past twelve months, the “**Head to Heart**” safeguarding formation programs have continued to demonstrate their value through high levels of participant engagement, robust discussion, and a clear commitment to best practices in the National Seminary in St Patrick’s College Maynooth, Redemptorist Mater Seminary in Dundalk and with the Permanent Diaconate group. This success is a shared achievement, and the NBSCCCI extends its sincere gratitude to the formation teams across all programmes for their unwavering support and partnership.

A successful recruitment campaign in May 2025 saw the NBSCCCI fill the post of Director of Safeguarding. Julie McCullough has an extensive background in child protection in community, medical and Church safeguarding structures. Julie joins Imelda, Ann, Lyn and I to make up the National Office staff, and I want to take this opportunity to thank them for their hard work during the last busy year.

I would also like to thank Dr Keith Holmes, Chair, and the Directors of our Board for their continued commitment to our work of ensuring our children experience a safe and welcoming Church and for the support they offer all of us here in the office.



Aidan Gordon
Chief Executive Officer
April 2026



Corporate Governance

The Directors of the Board met with the CEO on 8 (eight) occasions between April 2025 and the December 31, 2025. The AGM was held in June 2025 and was attended by the Board Directors along with representatives of the IEC and AMRI.

The Board has several key roles. These include developing a strategy, ensuring that resources are managed efficiently, adhering to Company and Charity law and regulations, and quality assuring the work of the National Office. The Directors reviewed income and expenditure at each Board meeting and received an external audit of yearly accounts. The Directors are satisfied that there is good financial governance and oversight of the NBSCCCI's financial resources.

An annual self-audit was undertaken by the Board Directors during 2025, which reviewed areas such as the conduct of Board business, the management of meetings, and the effectiveness of the Chair and Directors.

The following items were considered at the Board meetings:

- Charities Governance Code – The NBSCCCI Charities Compliance Notification was submitted to the Charities Regulator in September 2025, along with the audited accounts. Directors considered requirements to ensure compliance. The Directors' assessment is that the NBSCCCI is a 'Non- Complex' Charity, in line with the characteristics set out in guidance from the Charities Regulator.¹
- The Risk Register was considered at three Board meetings. The Board was satisfied that control measures are currently clear and meet all identified risks.
- Operational Plan 2025-2028.

¹ Charities Regulator (2021) Charities Governance Code Complex and Non-Complex Charities, accessible at, <https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/media/2225/complex-and-non-complex-charities.pdf>

The following specific Objectives were set for 2025

Objective	Progress
<p>Hold Biannual Conference that engages those in the Church around Transitional Justice.</p>	<p>The NBSCCCI hosted its biannual National Conference at the Sheraton Hotel, Athlone, from 3–5 September 2025. Titled “<i>Towards a Restorative and Transitional Justice Process of Engagement with Victims and Survivors of Abuse in the Catholic Church in Ireland</i>”.</p>
<p>Develop a communications plan for the NBSCCCI, which includes ideas to develop better social media presence; an information leaflet on the work of the NBSCCCI and greater accessibility to guidance materials.</p>	<p>The Communication Strategy 2024-2026 was approved by the Board of Directors in December 2024. Articles have been produced along with a podcast by <i>The Way</i>. An information leaflet has been created for use in the Church on <i>A Safe and Welcoming Church; Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024</i>.</p>
<p>Establish mechanisms for conducting Reviews of Practice in Church bodies in 2026, including recruitment of Independent Reviewers.</p>	<p>The Director of Safeguarding within the NBSCCCI has established a working group to support the development of a review methodology. It is anticipated that independent reviews will commence in 2026.</p>
<p>Produce two GAP papers on relevant safeguarding issues.</p>	<p>Two Gaps papers are scheduled to be published in the first six months of 2026. They will focus on ‘Data Protection’ and ‘Supervision in Safeguarding settings’.</p>
<p>Engage with parents and young people involved in Church activities in order to obtain feedback on the effectiveness of Safeguarding measures in place.</p>	<p>CEO attended Summer Camps during the summer of 2025. An art competition organised by the NBSCCCI for all age ranges up to 18yrs occurred in September with prize giving events attended by the CEO across October, November and December 2025.</p>



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

The revised Church policy on child safeguarding; *A Safe and Welcoming Church; Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024* has now been in operation since June 11, 2024.

All documents within the NBSCCCI were updated along with all guidance in line with the new policy.

Those principles that underpin the policy are:



The policies' three standards

- Leadership, Governance and Accountability,
- Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding
- Responding Pastorally according to Civil and Canon Law.

Each of the standards comprises of several criteria, which guide the Church to best practice in the challenges of safeguarding. Attached to the criteria are several indicators which are the practical measures that provide evidence of the safeguarding practice, and which can be used to measure adherence to the requirements of the policy.





Data Protection

Data Protection remains a significant focus for the NBSCCCI. Further on this report on page twenty six (26), we outline Data Protection training created and provided by the NBSCCCI to Church Leaders and Safeguarding leads. Data Protection training is also provided as part of DLP training and New Church Leader training. In November 2025, Director of Safeguarding Julie McCullough met with the Data Protection Commission to discuss data protection in the context of the upcoming review process.

Data Sharing

As a non-statutory body with regulatory functions, there are barriers relating to the sharing of personal data with the NBSCCCI. In preparation for the next round of reviews data processing deeds and memorandum of understanding (MOU) documents were updated. These MOUs reflect the most up-to-date best practice in data protection and refer to *A Safe and Welcoming Church; Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024*. All Church bodies were provided with a copy of the deeds and MOUs and invited to sign confirming their agreement and understanding of the same.

To avoid any data protection concerns, the NBSCCCI continues to ask that personal data is not shared by a Church body when requesting advice from the NBSCCCI (i.e. any data that identifies or could identify a living individual) or when notifying the NBSCCCI of an allegation of abuse against one of its members.



Allegations notified to the National Office between April 1, 2025, and December 31, 2025.

The NBSCCCI continues to receive notifications from individual Church Bodies of allegations of child abuse by Church personnel. As previously referenced, data protection concerns arise in relation to Church bodies sharing sensitive personal data with the NBSCCCI for the purposes of notification of allegations received. To remove any concerns about potential breaches of data protection legislation in this regard, it is proposed that when notifications are received, they do not contain any identifying information that would contravene data protection legislation.

The submission of an allegation of child abuse by a Church body enables the NBSCCCI to fulfil its role in maintaining oversight that the allegation has been reported to the relevant statutory authority, and that the associated risk is being assessed and managed.

The NBSCCCI currently cannot cross-reference the notification to establish whether the respondent is already known, or to check if the allegation may already have been reported to the NBSCCCI by an alternative source, or if there has been more than one allegation against the same Respondent or by the same Complainant. That information remains with the relevant Church Body.

The NBSCCCI received 178 child protection notifications against clergy and male and female religious between 1 April 2025 and 31 December 2025.

Year reported abuse occurred	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s	Unknown	Total
Diocese	1	1	3	14	10	2	1	1	1	2	36
Religious	3	10	33	48	30	8	0	0	1	8	141
Other	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	4	12	36	62	40	10	1	1	2	10	178

Table 1: Decade to which allegations refer received from 1st April 2025 to 31st December 2025

Table 1 sets out the decade to which the allegations relate. 138 (78%) of the 178 notifications received by the NBSCCCI in the reporting timeframe, refer to allegations of abuse having occurred between 1960 and 1989. 4 (2%) relate to allegations of abuse that occurred the period post-2000. This is caveated with 10 (6%) notifications received that did not include a timeframe. This is reflective of the pattern observed in recent years that a significant number of the allegations submitted to the NBSCCCI relate to the period from 1960 to 1989.

Month	Diocese (D)	Religious Congregation (RC)	Other / Unknown	Type of abuse by number reported
April 2025	5	20		Sexual 21 (16 RC & 5 D) Physical 3 (3 RC) Unknown 1 (1 RC)
May 2025	5	13		Sexual 14 (9 RC & 5 D) Physical 2 (2 RC) Unknown 2 (2 RC)
June 2025	5	15		Sexual 17 (12 RC & 5 D) Physical 2 (2 RC) Unknown 1 (1 RC)
July 2025	2	20	1	Sexual 22 (19 RC, 2 D, 1 Unknown) Physical 1 (1 RC)
August 2025	0	12		Sexual 8 (8 RC) Physical 2 (2 RC) Boundary Violation 1 (1 RC) Unknown 1 (1 RC)
Sept 2025	1	18		Sexual 17 (16 RC & 1 D) Physical 1 (1 RC) Boundary violation 1 (1 RC)
October 2025	12	23		Sexual 33 (21 RC & 12 D) Physical 1 (1 RC) Unknown 1 (1 RC)
November 2025	4	9		Sexual 13 (9 RC & 4 D)
December 2025	2	11		Sexual 9 (9 RC) Physical 2 (2 RC) Unknown 2(2 D)
Total	36	141	1	178

Table 2: Notifications of child abuse allegations received monthly by the NBSCCCI from 1st April 2025 to 31st December 2025.

154 (87%) allegations received by the NBSCCCI in the reporting period reported sexual abuse as the major abuse experienced; 14 (8%) reported allegations of physical abuse; in 8 (4%) notifications received during the reporting period the type of abuse alleged was not provided.

Diocesan	Religious		Other (Unknown Respondents)
34 Male	141	3 Female	2 Unknown
		138 Male	1 Other

Table 3: Breakdown of notifications received between Diocese and Religious Congregations during the reporting period

Deceased	Laicised	In ministry	Retired	In Prison	Management plan	Out of ministry	Unknown
25	1	1	0	1	4	3	1

Table 4: Status of Diocesan Clergy against whom notifications of reported child abuse were received by the NBSCCCI during the reporting period (34)

Deceased	90
Laicised	3
In ministry	2
Retired	0
Living in Nursing Home	0
In Prison	8
Under management plan	7
Left Church Body	19
Unknown	7
Out of Ministry	5

Table 5: Status of members of Religious Congregations against whom notifications of reported child abuse were received by the NBSCCCI during the reporting period (141)

Tables 4 and 5 demonstrate that, excluding 8 unknown, 115 (66%) of respondents are deceased. Of the remainder, 9 (5%) are in prison, a further 11 (6%) are subject to a management plan, while 31 (18%) have either been laicised, have left the Church body, or are out of ministry.

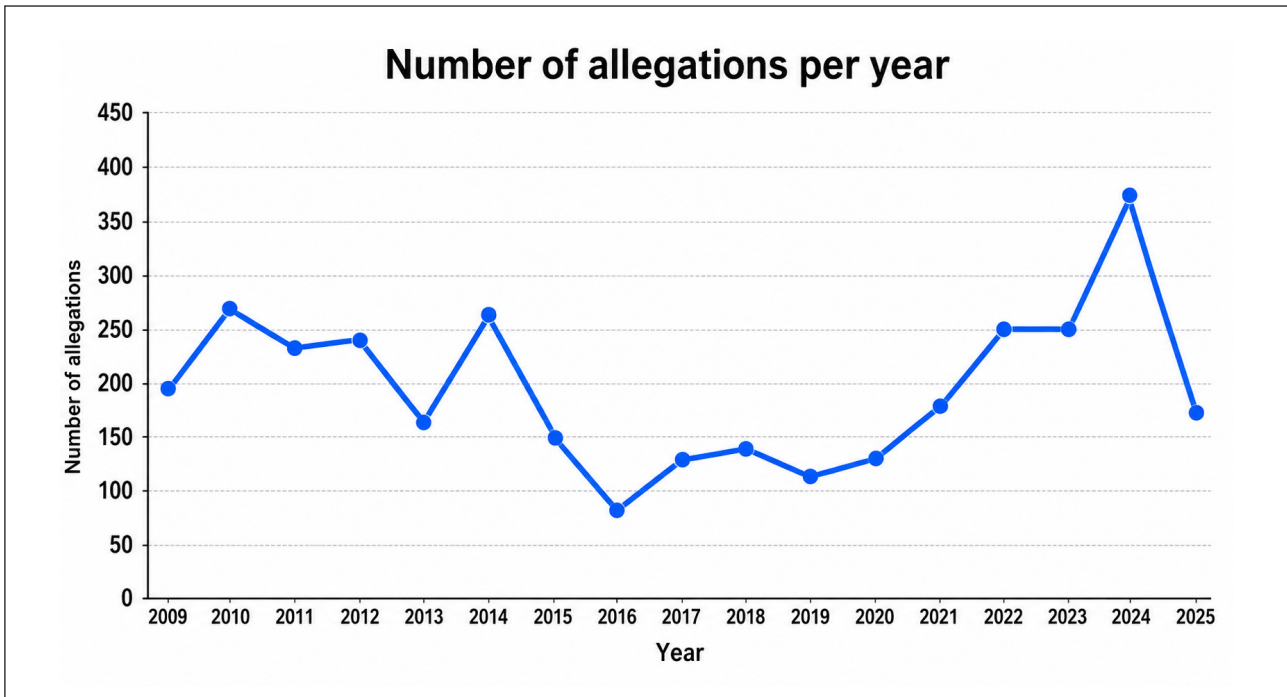


Chart 1: Child abuse allegations notified to the NBSCCCI since the NBSCCCI commenced publishing Annual Reports in 2009 [for comparison purposes]

The year 2025 in this chart represents allegations received from April to December 2025.

Strategic Review of National Safeguarding Arrangements

In 2021, the Irish Episcopal Conference (IEC) and the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI) initiated a Strategic Review of Child Safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Ireland to evaluate the effectiveness child protection structures in the Catholic Church in Ireland and support for survivors. The review was conducted by RSM Ireland, an independent, external consultancy firm, and their report was published on 4 December 2024.

In 2025, the IEC and AMRI formed an Implementation Group to review the recommendations in the RSM Ireland Review Report. The Implementation Group identified four overarching pillars from the RSM Ireland Review Report recommendations:

- Governance Structures and Collaboration
- Victims, Survivors and Redress
- Communication
- Adult Safeguarding

Four multidisciplinary subgroups were appointed from the membership of the Implementation Group, each tasked with analysing one pillar to improve safeguarding structures in the Catholic Church throughout Ireland. The NBSCCCI is participating in each subgroup and will endeavour to implement and support any work plans that emerge from each subgroup.



Biannual Conference

A key achievement for the NBSCCCI in 2025 was the success of the biannual conference, which ran from the 3rd to the 5th of September 2025, titled “Towards a Restorative and Transitional Justice Process of Engagement with Victims and Survivors of Abuse in the Catholic Church in Ireland.” The fully booked event was supported by a grant from Porticus, for which the NBSCCCI was very grateful. This conference brought together survivors, academics, Church leaders, and members of safeguarding teams within religious congregations and dioceses. Together, we explored new frameworks for genuine engagement, and we were challenged to consider the potential further harm experienced by survivors and victims of child abuse when met with inadequate responses in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

The event introduced holistic approaches rooted in restorative and transitional justice, emphasising access to archives, truth-telling, acknowledgement, apology, meaningful participation, justice and healing. These principles closely mirror the Church’s emerging framework of conversional justice, as articulated in the Pontifical Commission’s Annual Report [Annual Report - Tutela Minorum](#) (published 16th Oct 2025), which calls the whole Church to ongoing conversion through truth, accountability, reparation, and the active participation of those harmed.

By aligning with these shared principles, the conference demonstrated that the NBSCCCI’s work is firmly embedded within the wider mission of the Universal Church to pursue justice, healing, and transformation. The conference created space to listen to survivors’ firsthand experiences, study how some Church bodies have implemented restorative and transitional justice initiatives and consider insights from academic research.

Postconference feedback evidenced high satisfaction levels with the event, using terms such as impressive, unique, excellent, and challenging. Areas for learning were also noted by the NBSCCCI, including revising the structure of the days to allow more opportunities for networking and discussion.



New Initiatives

During the reporting period, the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) introduced a dedicated eTraining module on vetting. This initiative was developed in response to the changes introduced to the Garda Vetting process by the Garda National Vetting Bureau (GNVB) in July 2025.

The eTraining programme was created in a partnership between the Munster Safeguarding Liaison Persons Group, the Archdiocese of Dublin and the NBSCCCI. It provides clear, accessible, and consistent guidance on the current vetting requirements and procedures to equip religious, clergy, staff, and volunteers to meet the GNVB's requirements. It emphasises best practices, legal compliance, and the importance of implementing thorough vetting processes, while also offering practical, user-friendly instruction accessible remotely. By leveraging digital learning, the NBSCCCI has enhanced its capacity for supporting Church organisations in embedding a culture of vigilance, accountability, and compliance in safeguarding children.

A Safe and Welcoming Church Art Competition was undertaken in the early autumn of 2025. The Church policy on Child Safeguarding: *A Safe and Welcoming Church; Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024* was released by the NBSCCCI on the 11th of

June 2024. A year later, the NBSCCCI wanted to measure what the revision of the child safeguarding policy meant for children and young people, and how the new policy had impacted their feelings of safety within the Church. The art competition also provided an opportunity to remind us that effective safeguarding involves everyone.

Opened in September 2025, the submission period ran for one month and was broken into age categories up to 18 years. The event saw considerable success with over 400 entries depicting colourful and intricate representations of safeguarding in the Church through the eyes of children and young people. All contributions were displayed in the NBSCCCI office, with a page on the website used to further celebrate the entries.

A Safe and Welcoming Church Children and Young Person's Art Competition Presentations in photos



Photos of the winners of the art competition, with family and supporters receiving their much deserved prizes.



Advice offered by National Office Staff

A large area of the work of the NBSCCCI is providing advice to Church personnel on all aspects of child safeguarding. The provision of advice is supported by the development and publication of best practice guidance that supports Church bodies to implement the three core safeguarding standards embedded in *A Safe and Welcoming Church: Safeguarding Children Policy and Guidance for the Catholic Church in Ireland (2024)*:

- Leadership, Governance and Accountability
- Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding
- Responding Pastorally according to Civil and Canon Law.



Chart 2: Advice offered by National Office staff in relation to each of the core three standards in the reporting timeframe

During the reporting period National Office staff provided direct advice on safeguarding matters on 179 occasions. Church personnel generally approach the National Office on matters of complexity and queries often relate to safeguarding case management and to the promotion of good safeguarding practice across religious congregations and dioceses.

Standard: Leadership, Governance and Accountability

This standard reflects the importance of strong leadership in safeguarding. The Church authority embodies and imparts the Catholic Church’s vision, principles and values, which are reflected and apparent in the child safeguarding culture, structures and practices at all levels and in all ministries with children. Meeting

criteria for this standard involves demonstrating through sermons, pastoral letters, addresses to meetings, newsletters, face- to-face meetings and personal engagement the Church authority’s commitment to fulfil the safeguarding mission of the Church. This standard requires the Church authority to commit to decisive action in safeguarding matters and to ensure training, support and care for those in safeguarding ministry.

The highest demand for advice sought under this core standard in the reporting timeframe was for quality assurance.

Standard: Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding

This standard encompasses all daily operations within the Church to maintain a secure environment for minors. It mandates that Church authorities actively welcome children, promote their well-being, and uphold their fundamental rights. Key requirements include establishing robust structures for recruitment and vetting of personnel, managing complaints, and implementing codes of conduct for both adults and children, alongside a strong emphasis on risk management.

The highest demand for advice sought under this core standard in the reporting timeframe was for creating safe environments, vetting, safeguarding training and managing external contexts.

Standard: Responding Pastorally according to Civil and Canon Law

This standard emphasises that all allegations, suspicions, concerns and disclosures of abuse must be responded to promptly, compassionately and transparently. Church bodies are required to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of children and the pastoral care of those affected by abuse, particularly survivors and victims. Church bodies must ensure that all concerns are reported without delay to the relevant statutory authorities and managed in accordance with both civil and canon law. This standard highlights the importance of clear procedures, accurate record-keeping, cooperation with statutory agencies and fair processes for all involved while ensuring that pastoral care, accountability and legal obligations are fully integrated in every response.

The highest demand for advice sought under this core standard in the reporting timeframe was for support for complainants, interim management planning and reporting allegations of abuse.

2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/25	2025 (April to Dec)
258	281	287	179

Table 6: Total advice offered under all Standards by year

National Case Management Committee (NCMC)

Through the examination of individual safeguarding cases the NCMC provides independent, expert, multidisciplinary advice to Church authorities who are responding to complex child protection issues. The NCMC plays a critical role in providing consistent, transparent, person-centred case management advice while reinforcing accountability and adherence to the core standards of the 2024 policy, civil legislation and canon law.

Membership of the Committee

The Committee met seven (7) times during the nine-months of 2025 under review, and offered advice on ten (10) cases, five (5) relating to diocesan cases, and five (5) relating to religious congregations.

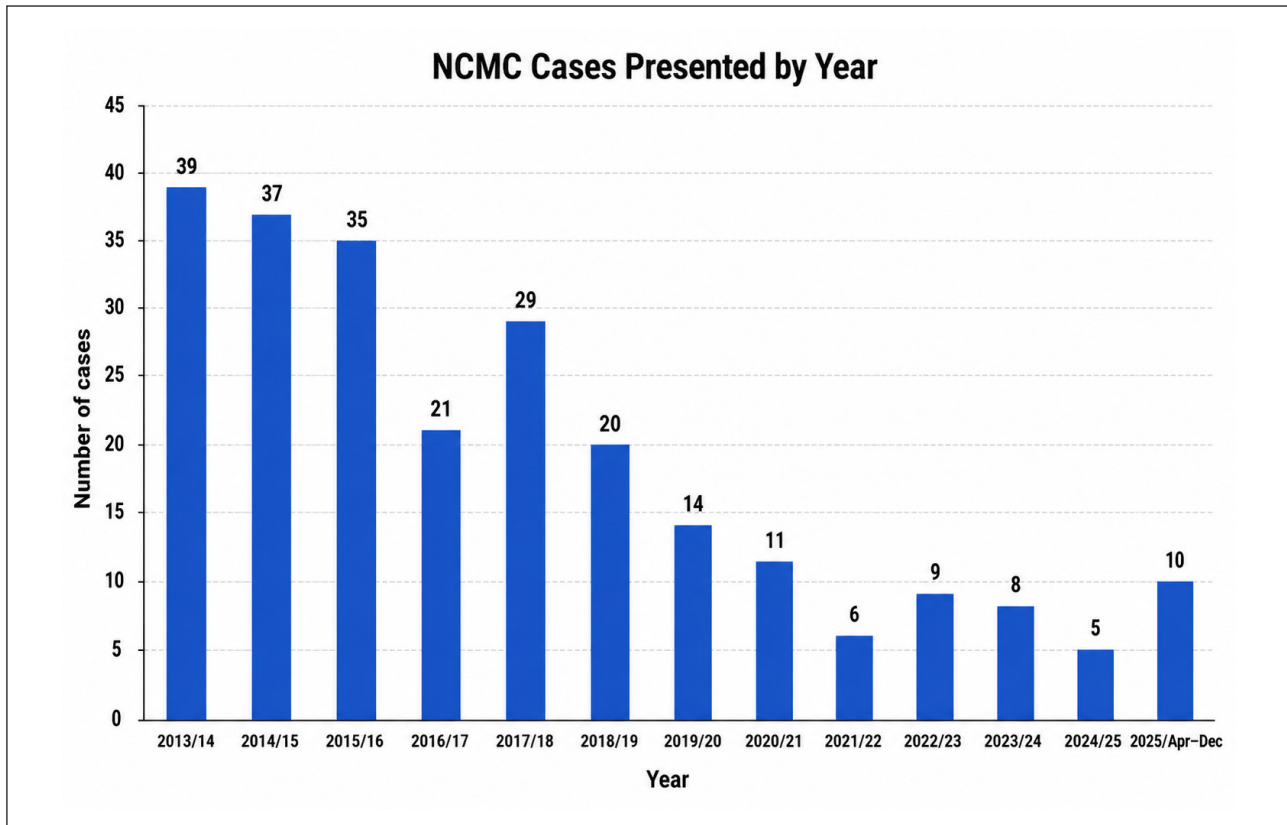


Chart 3: NCMC Cases Presented each year since 2013/14

A review of the last 13 years of operation has shown a pattern of decline in the number of cases being presented to NCMC overall, with a slight increase during 2025.

Quality-Assuring Compliance with the Standards

The mechanism for assessing the delivery of effective safeguarding at local level is an annual safeguarding self-audit conducted in line with the requirements of *A Safe and Welcoming Church: Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024*. Given the diverse nature of Church bodies in Ireland, their range of ministries and that not all have ministry with children, the applicability of the criteria relating to the child safeguarding core standards contained in *A Safe and Welcoming Church: Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024*, will vary. The Safeguarding Standards Criteria Matrix found in Appendix D of the 2024 policy document defines four categories of Church bodies, based on safeguarding activity, and it identifies the relevant criteria to be assessed during a child safeguarding self-audit. The requirement to complete an annual safeguarding self-audit can be found in the core standard: Leadership, Governance and Accountability.

The annual self-audit should be a robust examination against the criteria of the core standards, and it should involve the identification of actions to bring the Church body into compliance with the core standards.

The Safeguarding Committee of the Church body should examine the audit and the subsequent action plan implemented to address any safeguarding deficits. The Committee provides the Church authority with information on what is working well, and on what areas need improvement. This information assists the Church body in setting safeguarding objectives for the following year.

In addition to the self-audit, the Church body arranges compliance visits, and the Designated Liaison Person for Safeguarding (DLP) produces an annual report to their Church authority on cases that have been active during the year. The NBSCCCI requests that each Church authority confirm that these quality assurance measures have taken place.

Dioceses	Religious Congregations & Communities
26	124

Table 7: Number of completed annual safeguarding self-audits reported to the NBSCCCI for 2025 (records up to May 12, 2026)

The figures in Table 7 reflect the information regarding safeguarding self-audits received by the NBSCCCI from religious congregations and dioceses for 2025. These figures indicate that all dioceses have completed annual safeguarding self-audits for 2025. One hundred and twenty-four (124) religious congregations completed self-audits for 2025. This figure is more than double that of 2024. This is because religious congregations who had been exempt from annual self-audits prior to the introduction of *A Safe and Welcoming Church: Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024* are now required to complete annual safeguarding self-audits.

NBSCCCI Reviews of Safeguarding Practice in Church bodies

A core part of ensuring that safeguarding practice meets best standards is captured in the review function of the NBSCCCI’s work. The Directors are very pleased to report that with the employment of the Director of Safeguarding, work began in July 2025, on a methodology for the next tranche of reviews. A panel of experienced safeguarding personnel, along with Church leaders, and an independent reviewer was convened by the Director of Safeguarding to provide a collaborative approach to the creation of the review process.

The safeguarding reviews, which will examine safeguarding structures and compliance with the Church safeguarding policy: *A Safe and Welcoming Church; Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024*, are planned to commence in summer 2026.

The CEO of the NBSCCCI, along with the Director of Safeguarding, on behalf of the Directors, has had continued engagement with the Data Commissioner’s Office. This engagement aims to ensure that safeguarding reviews are completed in line with data protection obligations where the Church body is the data controller, and the NBSCCCI is a data processor. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) documents regarding independent NBSCCCI safeguarding reviews of Church bodies have been updated. These MOUs reflect the most up-to-date best practice in data protection and refer to *A Safe and Welcoming Church; Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024*.

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



Training and Support

The Training and Support Strategy covering the period from 2025 to 2027 was approved by the NBSCCCI Board of Directors in November 2025. This strategy can be viewed at [NBSCCCI Training and Support strategy 2026-2028.pdf](#)

The strategy focuses on the 3 standards as objectives:

- Leadership, Governance and Accountability.
- Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding.
- Responding Pastorally according to Civil and Canon Law.

These objectives are achieved through the following actions:

- Building competence and skills at local level.
- Training and supporting trainers.
- Facilitating national training events.
- Facilitating a national formation programme.
- Supporting child safeguarding internationally.
- Developing policy, guidance and resources.
- Responding to emerging issues to support best practice.

Review of Objectives:

a) Building Competence and Skills at Local Level

One of the roles of the NBSCCCI is to assist local Church personnel to implement the safeguarding standards set out in *A Safe and Welcoming Church; Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024*. To assist with this, local training is provided to Church personnel that is tailored to the individual needs of each Church body.

- Safeguarding Committee Training
Safeguarding Committees are important components of the safeguarding structure. They have an overarching governance and oversight role in ensuring that children are safeguarded and nurtured when participating in Church ministries and activities.

In this reporting period, Safeguarding Committee Training was delivered by the NBSCCCI on thirteen occasions to dioceses and religious congregations.

b) Training and Supporting Trainers

As outlined above it is important for the NBSCCCI to listen to trainers and ensure that their experiences, challenges and successes are reflected in any updates made to the training.

The NBSCCCI currently has 113 accredited trainers working across diocese and religious congregations. Trainers are supported by the Director of Training and Support, alongside 7 tutors in each of the four Ecclesiastical Provincial Areas of the Church in Ireland. The NBSCCCI keeps in contact with trainers updating them via email and arranging meet-ups to involve them in any of the changes that need to be made in the training material. In the last 12 months a number of trainers have stepped back from a training role; however, in the last 12 months a session of *Train the Trainer* has meant that 15 new trainers have been accredited by the NBSCCCI.

- Local Safeguarding Awareness Training
This year, NBSCCCI registered trainers held 356 training events and trained 7,281 people. 1,857 people were trained at 88 full safeguarding training events.

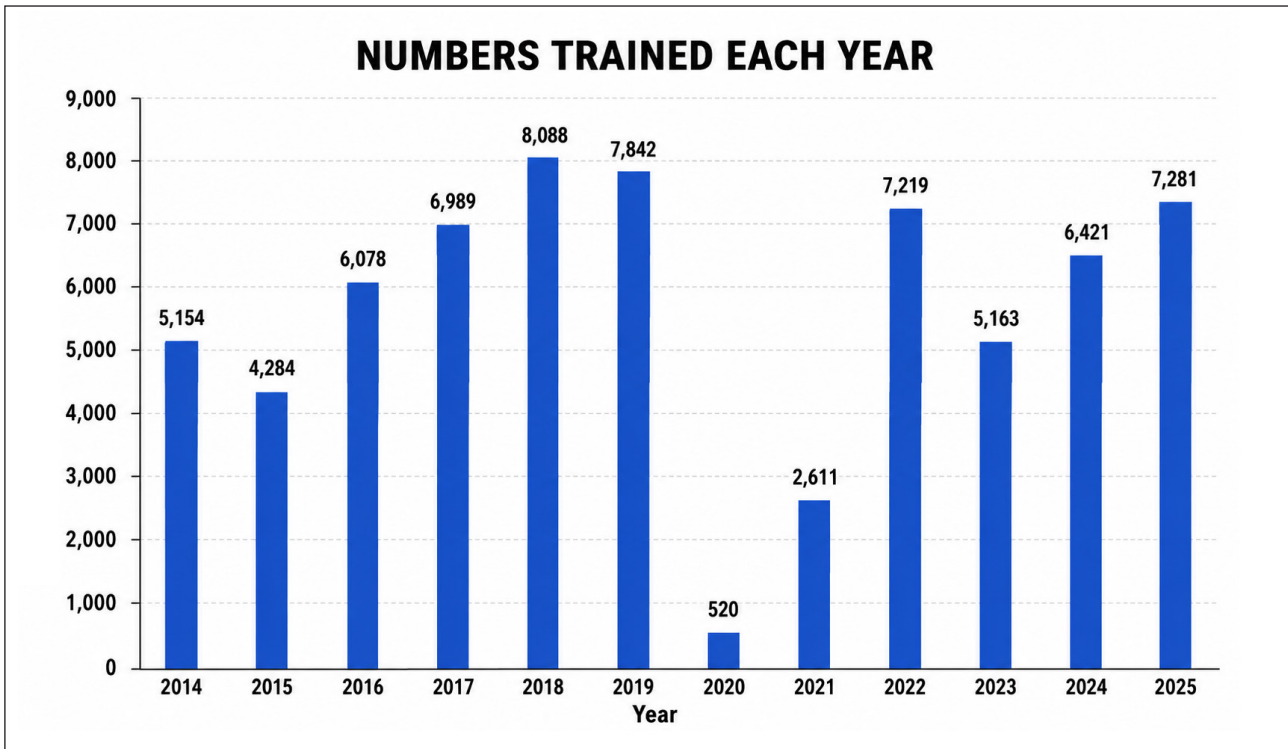


Chart 4

These training figures are based on the returns received from each of the trainers registered. 2025 reflects nine months (April to December 2025).

Chart 5 illustrates the type of training delivered. Each session of the NBSCCCI's training programme is shown as to whether it was delivered online or in person.

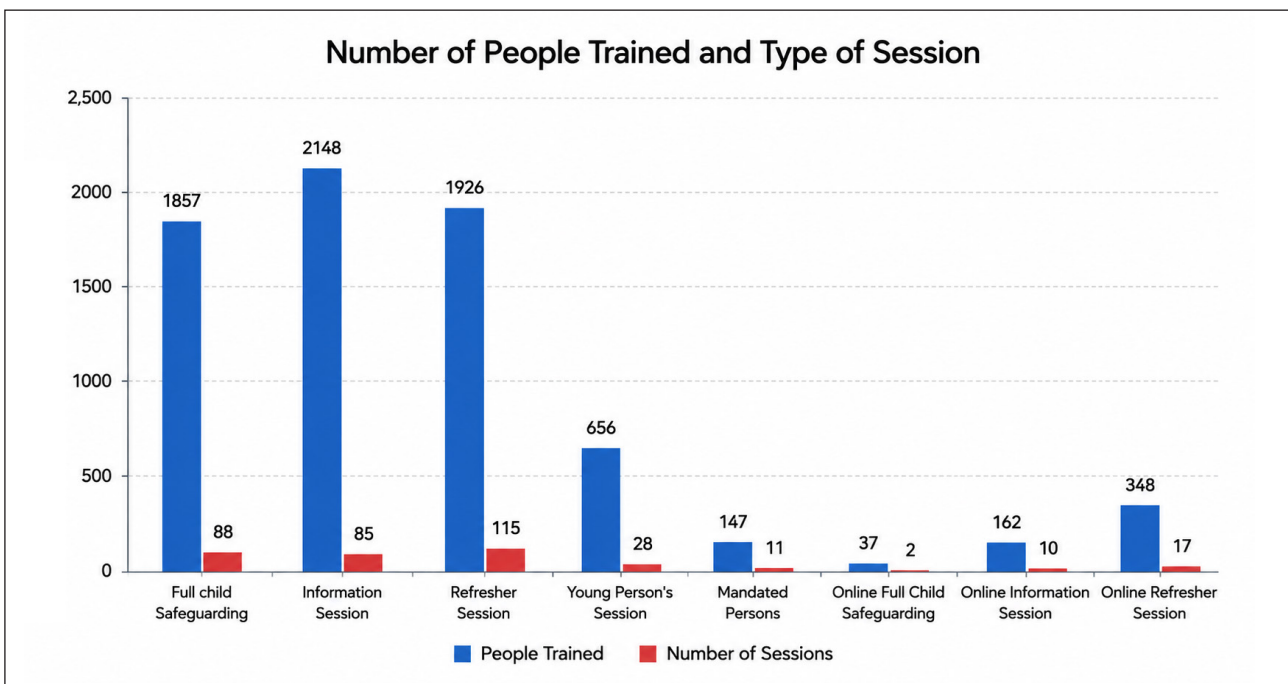


Chart 5

Attendance at full child safeguarding training is compulsory for anyone who has a safeguarding role, or who is a cleric or religious in ministry with children. It is required that at least one leader of each group ministering with children should attend this training. Information sessions, which are shorter with less group work, were delivered 85 times to 2148 individuals.

In line with best practice, and to ensure the competency of trainers, all trainers are required to undergo an initial assessment by a tutor registered with the NBSCCCI. Following this, trainers are reassessed every three years by one of the NBSCCCI registered tutors.

c) Facilitating National Training Events

A key role of the NBSCCCI is to highlight and encourage best practice, and to share the latest developments in child safeguarding policy, legislation and guidance. Seven induction Sessions were held this reporting period with various groups of Church personnel to inform and alert them to the changes in the Church child safeguarding policy 2024.

As part of this objective, the NBSCCCI strives to offer learning opportunities, based on the latest developments in child safeguarding practice, to enable Church personnel to develop the required skills to participate safely in ministry with children and young people and to respond compassionately to child protection concerns, including reports of non-recent abuse.

The NBSCCCI's Director of Training and Support is responsible for identifying learning needs in safeguarding across the Church. The NBSCCCI develops and delivers specific training to meet the unique and common needs and challenges within and across Church bodies. In this reporting period specific training was developed and delivered in:

- Resilience and Supervision
- Data protection and Retention
- The History and legislative context of abuse
- Trauma-informed practices
- DLP specific training (on two occasions given demand)
- New Church Leader training.

November 2025- Train the Trainers Course (6 days to complete the course in full)

Applicants who wish to become registered trainers with the NBSCCCI must undertake a five-day-long training and assessment process delivered in a blended approach. The training includes developing knowledge in relation to safeguarding children in the Catholic Church in Ireland, group work, and general facilitation skills. After this process is completed, the applicant, in their own local Church body, delivers a final day, where an NBSCCCI tutor assesses their training delivery.

February 20, 2025- 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 NBSCCCI was delighted to welcome eleven (11) attendees to this event. The day covered a range of topics relating to safeguarding, including:

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

February 26, 2025, and December 4, 2025 – Designated Liaison Person training

The NBSCCCI hosted and presented a full-day training twice last year with an experienced Social Worker and DLP Julie McCullough co-facilitating. This training was designed for people who had recently taken on the role of Designated Liaison Person or Deputy DLP, or who had never been able to attend role-specific training before. Thirty-two (32) DLP's or Deputy DLPs attended the training sessions. It covered areas including:

- Clarifying the role of DLP.
- Hearing safeguarding concerns and record keeping.
- Communication and supervision.
- Conducting an internal report on cases for the Church authority.

d) Facilitating National Formation Programme

Head to Heart

The Head to Heart is a formation programme, which seeks to provide participants with a deeper understanding of the core elements of child safeguarding. The NBSCCCI has worked with seminarians in formation from St Patrick's College Maynooth and Redemptoris Mater, Dundalk.

An adapted version of the Head to Heart program for those in the Permanent Diaconate continues to be successfully delivered in two modules each year.

In 2025, the NBSCCCI were delighted to work with their counterparts in Scotland to deliver a brief overview of the Head to Heart program via Zoom to Irish seminarians completing a propaedeutic year at the Royal Scots College in Salamanca.

In the reporting year, three induction sessions, along with the following six modules, were delivered over six days:

- **Boundaries** - This module was designed to allow participants to consider the concept of boundaries and how good management of self, links with integrity in ministry and child safeguarding.
- **Impact of Abuse** - This module included input from a survivor of abuse and included content on reporting allegations and the impact that abuse has on the individual, their family and their community.
- **Theology and Safeguarding** - This module provided an opportunity for reflection on the importance of safeguarding within sacred texts (scripture) and sacred traditions of the Church.
- **The History and Legislative Context** - This module set the current situation in the context of public inquiries, legislation and Vatican Norms.
- **Children's Rights**- This module provided an overview of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; obligations on signatories (The Holy See, Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland as part of the UK). To explore how to translate the articles of the Convention into practice with specific reference to priestly ministry.

Pastoral Theology Students- St Patrick's College Maynooth

Staff from the NBSCCCI delivered training on safeguarding to pastoral theology students in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth to ensure the 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 and the NBSCCCI facilitator then held a reflection session following placements to explore how the students found safeguarding measures within their work environments.

In addition, staff from the NBSCCCI facilitated training on the new Youth Ministry programme within St Patrick's College, Maynooth.

Loreto House Religious Formation Programme

Staff from the NBSCCCI delivered training to students in the formation programme in Loreto House, Dublin in November of 2025. The students consisted of ordained or vowed religious from countries across the world who attend Loreto House as part of their formation. The input by the NBSCCCI focused on the development of the core safeguarding standards, with an emphasis on creating and maintaining safe environments.

e) Supporting Child Safeguarding Internationally

Some religious congregations based in Ireland also have missions abroad. For some of these congregations, the religious leaders have concerns about how well safeguarding practice is developing in the other countries in which they minister. To assist with this matter guidance on creating international safeguarding policies forms part of the core Standard: Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding in *A Safe and Welcoming Church: Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024*.

f) Developing Policy, Guidance and Resources

To support the implementation of *A Safe and Welcoming Church: Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland 2024*, the NBSCCCI revised and updated its guidance based on changes in legislation or best practice.

Changes to the guidance during 2025 focused on the following areas:

- Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding: Updates to S1.A Guidance on Safe Recruitment Procedures, supported employment schemes.
- Responding Pastorally according to Civil and Canon Law: Updates to R1.A Guidance on reporting suspicions, concerns, knowledge of allegations of abuse; updates following changes to Tusla guidance.
- Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding: Updates to S1.B. Guidance on Vetting, updates re satisfying terms of EU directive 2011/93 and changes to Garda Vetting processes regarding the verification of applicant Identity.
- Responding Pastorally according to Civil and Canon Law: Updates to R1.A Guidance on Reporting Suspicions, Concerns, Knowledge or allegations of abuse, inclusion of R1.A Template 3 *Safeguarding Report Form to An Garda Síochána*

g) Responding to Emerging Issues to Support Best Practice

Briefing Papers

All briefing papers can be viewed here <https://www.safeguarding.ie/publications/national-board-publications>.

Ecclesiastical Provincial Area Meetings

The NBSCCCI presents at Ecclesiastical Provincial Area Meetings, hosted by the Archbishop of a given Ecclesiastical province at least once a year. In 2025, four meetings were held, one in each of the Ecclesiastical provincial areas of Dublin, Tuam, Armagh and Cashel & Emly.

The aim of these meetings is for staff from the National Office to meet with bishops, provincials, superiors and safeguarding personnel from Church bodies to discuss developments in child safeguarding across the previous twelve months. Meetings in 2025 focused on the impact of Church policy on Safeguarding; *A Safe and Welcoming Church; Safeguarding Children Policy and Standards for the Catholic Church in Ireland, 2024*, along with interactions with statutory bodies such as An Garda Síochána, Tusla and the Office of the Data Commissioner.

For the first time in 2025, the two Church survivor/victim support agencies, *Towards Peace* and *Towards Healing* were invited to present alongside the NBSCCCI at these meetings.



Meetings

Collaboration with Church personnel, other Church bodies, statutory and voluntary partners are crucial to NBSCCCI staff keeping abreast of new developments in safeguarding. During 2025, there was a significant increase in collaborative meetings.

The following is a listing of the main meetings and their purpose:

For the 2025 (1 st April to 31 st December) Reporting Period	Purpose of Meeting
IEC	CEO and Chair update IEC on Safeguarding developments and NBSCCCI plans/initiatives.
SBNI Interfaith Committee	The CEO was nominated by the IEC and AMRI to attend this Committee which is a part of the SBNI (Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland) structures.
National Protective Services Bureau	The creation and implementation of a reporting form specific for Church bodies to An Garda Siochana.
Tusla	Opportunity to discuss policy, procedure and practice issues
Allianz	Discussion on guidance for safeguarding children and adult safeguarding
Permanent Diaconate Team	Meeting with those in charge of the permanent diaconate programme to discuss development of Head to Heart course and modules for 2025/2026 academic year.
Rector and Formators of St Patricks College Maynooth	Reviewing Head to Heart and agreeing modules are dates for 2025/2026 academic year.
Pastoral Programmes Co-Ordinator	Arranging training for Pastoral Theology candidates on safeguarding.
Rector of Redemptoris Mater Seminary	Reviewing Head to Heart and agreeing modules are dates for 2025/2026 academic year.
Data Protection Commissioner and members of his team.	Meeting to discuss and review the Data protection requirements while conducting Independent Reviews of practice and Case Management in Church Bodies.
RSM sub groups	Meetings occurred multiple times across each of the four sub-groups with the NBSCCCI involved in each meeting.

For the 2025 (1 st April to 31 st December) Reporting Period	Purpose of Meeting
Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors	Presentation at conference and engagement on the universal guidelines for child protection.
One in Four	Safeguarding discussions and collaboration on a number of occasions in 2025.
Church of Ireland	Safeguarding discussions and collaboration x 2 in 2025.
International Safeguarding Conference	Sharing best practice and NBSCCCI involvement in subgroups for the conference.
Safeguarding Board of Northern Ireland	Trauma Informed Practices and engagement around the NBSCCCI participating in the Interfaith Committee of the SBNI.
AMRI & Executive	Providing updates and listening to understand developing issues
Porticus	NBSCCCI Conference and Post-conference Evaluation.
Enclude	Database support x 6 times
Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (SCSSA)	Learning from shared practice
Safeguarding Board of Northern Ireland	Attendance at their Conference on Embedding Trauma Informed Practice across NI
Online The Centre for Safeguarding Minors and Vulnerable Adults	Sharing best practice
Rector of Beda College	Reviewing Safeguarding Training for Irish Seminarians in the Beda and ensuring they meet the requirements of 'Head to Heart'.
ICPO	Sharing best practice in responding to allegations and policy development.
Trocaire	Engaging with the Director of Safeguarding on the work completed by Trocaire on safeguarding
Australian Safeguarding Group	Sharing examples of good practices.



Operational Plan and Objectives

The following specific objectives will be undertaken in 2026

- Staff to continue to participate in the RSM Implementation Groups on Survivor/Victim Engagement, Communications, Adult Safeguarding and Safeguarding Structures.
- Commence 3rd tranche of Reviews of Safeguarding Practice in individual Church Bodies based on 2024 Child Safeguarding Policy.
- Publish 2 GAP Papers (carried over from 2025).
- Commence planning for 2027 National Conference on 'Nurturing a Culture of Safeguarding'.
- Contribute to preparatory discussions and participate in, the National Synod in October 2026.



Board and Other Corporate Information

Dr. Keith Holmes, Chair

Is a Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist. He was formerly 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 Psychiatry of Ireland. Keith joined the Board in 2009.

Ms. Marie Kennedy

Has a background in social work and has 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 Children and Family services management. Marie joined the Board in 2008.

Fr. Martin Whelan

Is a priest of the Galway Diocese and is 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. Fr Martin joined the Board in February 2021.

Ms. Phil O'Laoide

Is a retired solicitor having practiced for almost 40 years, first in her own general practice, and then for 27 years as managing solicitor and Regional Manager with the Legal Aid Board.

Her expertise was mainly in family, child care law, and human trafficking. Since retirement, she has been the Regional Prison Support Officer for Samaritans Ireland and Branch Prison Liaison Officer for her

local Branch of the Samaritans in Athlone. She currently leads the Prison Team, and she trains and supports prisoners to be Samaritan Listeners. Phil joined the Board in May 2021.

Ms. Gillian McGrath

Gillian has a background in education and is currently a member of the Board of the Education Authority, Northern Ireland. She was formerly the CEO of the Catholic Education Partnership and the Director of Education in the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS); and prior to that, she served as a primary school principal. She was 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. Gillian joined the Board in February 2022.

Fr Joe McDonald

Joe McDonald is a priest of the Dublin diocese ordained in 2006. He is presently Moderator of the St Mobhi Grouping of Parishes in north Dublin with particular responsibility for Our Mother of Divine Grace, Ballygall and St Columba's, Iona Road. Fr Joe joined the Board in September 2024.

Ms Catherine Walsh - Joined the Board in December 2025

Catherine is a Tusla Social Worker on the Child Abuse Substantiation Procedure Team, assessing historical abuse allegations and evaluating any current risk to children. She also works with individuals who have convictions or are under Garda investigation to determine their contact with children. Catherine is also a qualified Specialist Interviewer working alongside An Garda Síochána, conducting recorded interviews with children involved in Garda investigations for use in criminal proceedings.

Members of National Case Management Committee

Mr. Iarfhlaith O’Neill: Chair - retired High Court Judge

Mr. Aidan Gordon: National Board CEO, Secretary to NCMC

Sr Helen O’Riordan: Loreto Sister, Ferns Diocese. Experience in the area of pastoral Support for Victims

Fr Michael Mullaney: Archdiocese of Cashel and Emly – Canon Lawyer

Mr. Peter Kieran: Ex HSE senior Child Care manager, with experience from Waterford and Lismore Diocesan Case Management Panel in risk assessment and management

Ms. Ann Confrey: Civil Lawyer, formerly worked with Mason Hayes and Curran

Fr Brendan O’Rourke: Therapist with respondents

Ms. Miriam Tallon: Former Probation Officer

Management of National Office

Mr. Aidan Gordon: Chief Executive Officer, (appointed April 2024. Aidan is a qualified Social Worker with over 30 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 the Director of Safeguarding in the Archdiocese of Armagh.

Ms. Carolyn McDermott: Director of Training and Support – Lyn has worked in the social care field since qualifying as a social care practitioner in 1992. Lyn has worked within the disability and mental health sectors in frontline, supervisory and management roles. She has worked in learning and development for the last number of years.

Ms. Julie McCullough: Director of Safeguarding- Julie is a graduate of Queens University, Belfast and the University of Edinburgh, she is a qualified CORU registered social worker with over twenty years’ experience in community, pediatrics, and church settings. Julie was formerly Child Protection Officer in the Archdiocese of Dublin and most recently Director of Safeguarding/ DLP for the Irish Province of Carmelites and the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers). Julie has been an NBSCCCI accredited trainer since 2014 and a training tutor since 2021

Ms. Imelda Ashe: Company Secretary and Administrator.

Ms. Ann Cunningham: Administrator.

Training Tutors: Fr Paddy Boyle, Eleanor Kelly, Avril Halley, Maureen Walsh, Garry Kehoe, Rosarie O’Riordan and Caroline Brogan - supporting the Director of Training and Support in the delivery of the Training and Support Strategy.

Other Corporate Information

The Members of the Board comprise the Directors of Coimirce, a company limited by guarantee without a share capital (Co. Number 465899). The Members of Coimirce comprise nominees of each of the Episcopal Conference of Irish Bishops and AMRI

(Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland). The Episcopal Conference of Irish Bishops and A.M.R.I. are described as the ‘Sponsoring Bodies’ of the National Board in this report.

The registered office and address of Coimirce is New House, St Patrick’s College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare.

Company Secretary: Imelda Ashe

Website Address: www.safeguarding.ie





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

