

Introduction to Final Report of the IRG

When the Roman Catholic Bishops Conference of Scotland asked me to establish and Chair the Independent Review Group of the outcomes of the McLellan Commission into Safeguarding in the Church in Scotland, I admit, I came up with a list of other names more qualified than me. I knew little of safeguarding other than the shame that so many of us experience when we see how people have suffered, but when they persisted, I realised that it was not my place to shirk the responsibility, we all have a part to play in trying to set to rights a terrible wrong in such a way that it protects others.

My first imperative was to contact Dr Andrew McLellan, former Moderator of the Church of Scotland, who had chaired the Commission and I cannot overstate the assistance he has been, even coming to give evidence to the IRG.

My next step was to seek assistance in putting together the members of the Group, whose names and professional background are contained in an appendix to this report. I relied on guidance and, without exception, the members have given freely of their time and expertise, sometimes in trying circumstances, and each one of them remained focused on the impact abuse can have on individuals, how to limit the risks and how to help with the suffering.

My lack of first-hand experience of safeguarding made the interaction with survivors heartbreaking. Some came forward either to the IRG or privately to me, often anonymously. I had no way of putting to rights what had been done to them, nor could I investigate, but they just wanted someone to know how it affected the rest of their lives. Survivors must be at the heart of the new professional organisation going forward.

I learned a huge amount from the members of the IRG, and although I do not have safeguarding experience, I do have considerable experience of delivery, often in difficult and controversial circumstances.

When we started the professional audits, there were those who opposed such an action, and that was a challenging time, and on one or two occasions it was necessary to confront those objections, much of it was fear of the unknown, sometimes it was the novelty of being challenged. We did, in the end, succeed. Over time those involved in the various Dioceses began to see the value of the audits, and by the last audit it was obvious that those in the front line of delivery had recognised that the audits were not composed to complain but to help and to introduce new ideas and ways of working that could bring progress. The IRG owes a lot to the Social Care

Institute of Excellence, in particular, Dr Sheila Fish who oversaw quality assurance in the audits and Jane Bee and Jane Scott, who conducted the audits in the field.

I regret that we did not properly extend our activity to the Religious in Scotland, we tried but the complexity of the oversight structures of all the various religious orders defeated our resources and I encourage SCSSA to make early contact with them. It is now a small community and having met with them, I know that there is real enthusiasm for help in dealing not just with difficult issues which have come to light in Lady Smith's inquiry, but also the future.

There are groups that we were not able to reach out to, seminarians is one such group and it is also necessary to bear in mind that there are those who are wrongly accused, proper and consistent structures need to exist to deal with such cases.

Bishop Toal, who is the lead on safeguarding within the BCOS, has given of his time unstintingly and has been a considerable support. Furthermore, our main point of contact with BCOS has been Michael McGrath, the Assistant General Secretary, we cannot thank him enough. Michael attends the first part of our meetings, works with us on parish-based audits and is always available. In the transition now to the SCSSA he has been prepared to listen and contribute to our deliberations. In addition our thanks to Monsignor Bradley and Father Gerry McGuinness who as general secretary to BCOS, were of great assistance to the IRG.

Our thanks also goes to BCOS, from embracing the theological foundation of safeguarding to providing the resources for audit, which has been substantial, they have listened and acted. The point of auditing is not to find fault, it is to identify what works and a determination to put it into action, in some cases, learning from others.

Finally, in a career that has been interesting to say the least, it will be the members of the IRG that have taught me most, and their knowledge, experience and professionalism is inspirational.

And I do not forget our Administrator, Richard Riley.

Now we hand over to Lady Rae and the SCSSA, I wish them well,

Helen Liddell

8th October 2022

A summary of the work of the Independent Review Group monitoring the response of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland to the McLellan Report recommendations

Introduction

1.1 The Independent Review Group (IRG) was established by the Bishops' Conference of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland in response to the recommendations of the McLellan Commission. The Very Reverend Dr Andrew McLellan, a former Moderator of the Church of Scotland, was asked by the Bishops to review the current safeguarding policies, procedures and practice within the Catholic Church in Scotland. (see appendix 1)

1.2 The IRG held its first meeting in May 2017. The chair, Helen Liddell, Rt Hon Baroness Liddell of Coatdyke, was invited by the BCOS to Chair the IRG in December 2016 and she recruited the group members (see appendix 2)

1.3 The membership of the IRG comprised a mixture of professionals representing a broad range of perspectives, covering social work, education, police, the voluntary sector and inspection/regulation, among them a previous member of the McLellan Commission. All members had extensive experience of the delivery and oversight of quality safeguarding policy, practice and procedures. This range of experience ensured that monitoring was robust, review was independent of any received point of view and the focus at all times was on the needs and interests of children, the elderly and the vulnerable.

Remit

2.1 The remit set for the IRG was as follows:

- *To review the output of each of the working groups established to progress the recommendations contained in the McLellan Report and provide feedback to the BCOS

- *To review the safeguarding work of the 2 archdioceses and 6 dioceses in Scotland

- *To inform the BCOS of conclusions in relation to the implementation of the McLellan Report as reflected in safeguarding audits

2.2 The initial approach proposed by BCOS to convene a range of working groups was not followed through. The necessary reforms and recommendations of the IRG were taken forward directly by the BCOS ably supported by an assistant secretary to the Conference.

2.3 Initially it was suggested to the IRG that the McLellan recommendations had been superseded by the Church's own safeguarding action plan. It is, however, the view of the IRG that the McLellan recommendations remained the basis of scrutiny and it was against these recommendations that improvement was measured, to do otherwise would be to suggest a lack of support for the work of the McLellan Commission.

2.4 It is self evident that the route to credible and reliable safeguarding practice is through changes in culture, capacity, and capability through training, learning and reflection, and doing so with the utmost open mindedness and transparency.

2.5 Safeguarding is a word often used but frequently misunderstood. It is often thought of as a technical term. Good safeguarding is not a question of ticking boxes and assuming that the job is done when all the tasks have been completed. It does require effective policies and procedures, consistently implemented. Safeguarding is, however, only effective when deeply embedded in the culture and theology of the Church. It goes beyond having legally certified systems and procedures. Safeguarding must become a core part of the mission of the Church to protect the vulnerable at every stage of life.

“In God's Image”

3.1 On 19th March 2018 each of the 8 Bishops in Scotland signed a new set of safeguarding standards, “In God's Image”. These guidelines replaced the manual “Awareness and Safety in our Catholic Communities”. “In God's Image” is an instruction on safeguarding for all canonical jurisdictions in Scotland and subject to the full canonical authority of the Catholic Church, based on best international practice. It was produced following a brief period of consultation and was introduced for an initial period of three years. Following further consultation a revised version, “In God's Image 2”, came into effect on 8th September 2021.

3.2 “In God's Image” has served as the foundation for the revised self-administered annual audits and the standards and template of the annual improvement plan in each diocese

3.3 The IRG reviewed the 2017 self administered audit returns and provided detailed feedback to the BCOS. In summary, it was the view of the IRG that the 2017 audit was limited and although it provided some quantitative information there was little context, analysis or qualitative comment. The absence of detailed reflection allowed little or no basis to identify good practice or areas in need of improvement regarding safeguarding procedures and practice. Many returns gave the appearance of being completed in order to comply rather than to collate, learn, act and improve. There were also a number of information gaps. Thus, the adoption of “In God’s Image” as agreed standards and the reform of the audit arrangements in line with IRG recommendations, represented a major step forward. The annual audit of parishes within Diocese is now much more professional and therefore useful.

3.4 However, to complement the revised internal cross diocesan audits the IRG decided to commission a round of external and detailed audits, professionally administered, to examine the actual state of play in each Archdiocese and Diocese to enable a clear position statement for each diocese but also to support improvements in scrutiny practice. This is a process that has proved useful in other countries. It gives a clear indication of practices which are successful and shortcomings that could be addressed. The audits took place at a rate of two a year, with three in the final year, now concluded.

3.5 The IRG commended the BCOS for their readiness to agree to fund independent audits of, initially, two dioceses, Galloway and St Andrews and Edinburgh, by professionals in social care, the Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE) and Children in Scotland (CIS).

3.6 The first two audits were not without a range of difficulties and misunderstandings. The IRG remained determined to promote external insight and the commitment of the BCOS to reforming safeguarding practice was demonstrated by overcoming obstacles and in due course funding audit of each diocese and using that process to embed best practice.

3.7 This has been a unique exercise for the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland and much has been learned, not least benefiting from the ability of the IRG to act as “honest broker”. In the light of the process of commissioning SCIE the IRG formed the view that a safeguarding service external to the Church was necessary as a permanent feature. A note on the issues arising from the audits is at appendix 3.

Those Affected by Abuse.

4.1 The issue of support for survivors of abuse is one of the most challenging for any organisation. Reaching out with regret and humility to those who have been harmed is essential. Moreover, providing strong evidence of effective support for survivors is central to restoring the credibility of the Church as survivors appear not to have been the priority in the past.

4.2 Awareness of abuse can and does evoke a sense of institutional shame. This has too often led to a general feeling of helplessness, and a deep repentance has been inhibited by organisations taking the path of denial and defensiveness. The Church is aware of its legacy in this regard. The Church is putting in place stronger safeguarding arrangements with the aim that they are fully fit for purpose and it was part of the work of the IRG to monitor these arrangements. The remit of the IRG did not cover the investigation of past events. However, the IRG acknowledged that abuse is not an historic event for the victim but has consequences that continue to damage and disrupt and cannot be forgotten or ignored.

4.3 The IRG argued that the impact of abuse and the failure in the past to respond appropriately were issues that affected all Church members as well as the very specific and inexcusable hurt caused to those abused.

4.4 The IRG recognised the difficulty of speaking to individuals who had suffered abuse to fully represent their experiences, insight and wisdom. The IRG was not contacted by all bodies claiming to represent victims of clerical abuse but did meet and benefit from the perspectives and compassion of a number of individuals directly affected.

4.5 Much still needs to be done to ensure victims of abuse are seen, heard and supported by the Church and the process of healing is continued. Improvement in policy and openness to learning from the audit process has started to shift culture. However, the IRG recognises that further investment is required to develop a properly resourced professional safeguarding service. Commitment to creating a dedicated, independent safeguarding service which supports the development needs of the eight dioceses; drives consistency; is empowered to independently investigate concerns or complaints and can act without bias in all its affairs is critical to rebuilding trust with congregations and the general public.

The Formation of an Independent Safeguarding Service.

5.1 The IRG consistently argued strongly for an independent safeguarding service fully resourced to provide advice, training and quality assurance. Output from the professional audits added weight to this judgement.

5.2 There was and remains a distinct need for a key strategic role at national level to sustain the positive impact that independent scrutiny and support, and critical friendship, has begun to make to the quality and consistency of safeguarding across all parts of the Church in Scotland. The administration of the Church is built on autonomy of the Bishops and that is recognised. However, the decisions of the Bishops to augment their authority by acting collectively by giving full commitment to the McLellan recommendations and devising and implementing the 8 standards of “In God’s Image”, is to be commended. It was therefore important that this shared commitment, and a “One Church” approach, was taken forward by sustaining the work that had begun in providing detailed feedback and critical friendship to each diocese regarding their action plan and issues arising from their audit returns. The IRG were strongly of the view that a clear plan to ensure that a national challenge and support function was retained and reinforced. Thus it was the view of the IRG that the Bishops should formally delegate authority to a fully independent and empowered national organisation to hold safeguarding in the Church in Scotland to account. Independence along the lines of the Irish model, whose Director gave evidence to the IRG, by establishing a charitable limited company, was proposed to provide the opportunity for safeguarding strategic leadership, and expertise in planning without in any way contradicting the independence of the dioceses.

5.3 This critical role had previously been undertaken by the Assistant General Secretary to the BCOS, and the IRG commended his initiative and hard work. It is essential that this work be built on by ensuring that there is a national function with the appropriate authority, credibility and expertise, well networked and accountable and properly resourced. While ongoing challenge and support can continue to help the Church identify and address the issues raised by the McLellan Report, further work is required to fully meet that report’s recommendations. The challenge is to build on the recent improvements to ensure that the new arrangements become a sustainable system for challenge and support, similar to the function of the Irish National Safeguarding Office. The IRG welcomes the work that has resulted in the decision that a more independent professional facility be introduced in Scotland.

5.4 Challenges, however, remain as the Church moves from the necessary focus on ensuring consistency in its operational arrangements towards a

more challenging and reflective focus on evaluating the impact of its actions. Cultural change is still required to ensure that safeguarding is a core element of all aspects of the work of the Church. There remains a particular need to reflect on the role of survivors and their ability to contribute to and inform future provision. Furthermore, there is a need to embed a clear coherent and credible “whistleblowers” policy.

5.5 Not only is there a core need to ensure every allegation of abuse is investigated thoroughly, objectively and with compassion, but also to remember that the challenge of maintaining safe practice is about the here and now, demonstrating that lessons from the past have been learned and acted upon. Every aspect of society must be alert to the potential risk of abuse and act to secure effective and focused activities with a clear safeguarding perspective.

5.6 Creating a “One Church” approach to safeguarding has been an essential first step. Sharing good practice, resources and, autonomy is essential. Building on the progress of recent years, BCOS’s commitment to creating an independent safeguarding service provides the beginnings of the necessary additional layer of support and does so in a way that does not undermine the long-established autonomy of the Bishops in their individual Dioceses. Supplementing diocesan capacity with a professional, independent structure of safeguarding, underpinned by training and monitoring, can ensure that the most vulnerable in our society get the protection they deserve. This is a lesson learned around the world and we are very grateful to those in other countries who gave us the benefit of their experience.

5.7 The IRG stressed repeatedly the importance of rigorous independence and open-mindedness in the task of safeguarding. It is the foundation of reform to restore consistent credibility and confidence in the Church’s safeguarding structures. Thus the newly formed Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (SCSSA) needs evolving autonomy to employ specialists, commission audits and provide training, advice, challenge and support. The new service should be seen to provide independent oversight not be subject to any external pressure. The core purpose needs to be agreed policy, best practice and clear procedures which, when implemented, have a demonstrable impact

5.8 The Church responded to the IRG’s recommendations to ensure a “One Church” approach through its plan to establish the SCSSA. The BCOS has accepted the recommendation that any evaluation of quality safeguarding should be measured against a set of key principles as well as through the revised IGI standards.

5.9 These principles are the need to:

- ensure consistency,
- develop capacity,
- define accountability
- establish sustainability and,
- measure quality outcomes through independent monitoring and evaluation.

The challenge going forward will be to establish safeguarding structures and outcomes that fully comply with both the standards and the organisational principles.

5.10 Emphasising culture change has been a core feature of IRG recommendations. A clear purpose, quality relationships and shared values of an organisation and, crucially, behaviours at all times consistent with the identified and agreed purpose and values were seen as essential. Culture, however, is not in isolation the cause of an organisation's ills nor is "culture change" the remedy. Culture is neither a destination nor an outcome. Culture change is what you are left with after the implementation of the necessary changes following review and organisational redesign. Culture is not a fix but the core part of how an organisation behaves not just towards and with its clients, but also with wider stakeholders such as the families and communities whom the organisation serves and with all its staff.

5.11 The Church has made significant progress in complying with agreed safeguarding standards. The success of that progress will be measured in future behaviours. More requires to be done to ensure that the full range of Church activity involving children, young people or vulnerable adults has safe practice at its intrinsic heart. The IRG recognises that all members of the Church have suffered as a consequence of the reputational damage caused by past abuse, here and elsewhere. Restoring credibility is a work in progress and the need to remain outward-looking, inclusive and with safeguarding as a core part of all values and practice cannot be ignored. A strong start has been made.

5.12 McLellan set an ambitious agenda based on expertise, open-mindedness and an external perspective. The BCOS responded with thoroughness and commitment. The IRG monitored, harried and recommended best practice. The future is dependent on the Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (SCSSA) and its governance arrangements. We wish it well.

The IRG concluded its work on October 8 2022

Appendix 1

Principal recommendations of the McLellan Commission

1. Support for the survivors of abuse must be an absolute priority for the Catholic Church in Scotland in the field of safeguarding.
2. The “Awareness and Safety” manual should be completely revised or rewritten.
3. There must be some external scrutiny and independence in the safeguarding policies and practices of the Catholic Church in Scotland.
4. Effectiveness and improvement must be measured at every level of safeguarding in the Church.
5. A consistent approach to safeguarding is essential: consistent across different parts of Scotland and consistent across different parts of the Church.
6. Justice must be done, and justice must be seen to be done, for those who have been abused and for those against whom allegations of abuse are made.
7. The priority of undertaking regular high-quality training and continuous professional development in safeguarding must be understood and accepted by all those involved in safeguarding at every level.
8. The Catholic Church in Scotland must set out a theology of safeguarding which is coherent and compelling.

Appendix 2

Membership of the IRG

Helen Liddell (Baroness Liddell of Coatdyke) Chair, is a former Member of Parliament and Secretary of State for Scotland. She is a member of the House of Lords.

Bartolomeo Biagini is an educational consultant. He was formerly a lead HM inspector of education with responsibility for inclusion across all sectors of education and was involved in child protection inspections. He also held senior leadership posts within education authorities in Scotland, including a depute director post as head of learning communities within South Lanarkshire Council.

Gordon Jeyes OBE was the UK's first Director of Children's Services and was the first Chief Executive of Ireland's Child and Family Agency (Tusla). He is chair of the audit and risk committee for the Legal Aid Board in Ireland and chairs the National Children's Hospital (Ireland) Community Benefit Group.

Lisa Markham is a safeguarding practitioner with wide experience including work in criminal justice settings and within the Church in the Diocese of Hallam, Sheffield.

Roisin McGoldrick is a former member of the McLellan Commission. She is a registered social worker and is currently employed as a teaching fellow in the School of Social Work and Social Policy at Strathclyde University.

Lesleyann Russell is an independent advisor specialising in safeguarding for trusts and foundations . She currently works for the Scottish Government leading policy work to embed United Nations Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law. Prior to this she held senior grant making roles at BBC Children in Need for 10 years and was the lead safeguarding trainer for the Association of Charitable Foundations.

Donald Urquhart is the National Safeguarding Adviser to the Scottish Episcopal Church with considerable experience of public protection and safeguarding in both Scotland and England. He is a retired police officer and has worked as both a lead officer and an independent chair of child protection committees in Scotland.

Appendix 3

Summary emerging from the SCIE Audits and from IRG reports.

Area of improvement:

- Awareness and commitment to addressing safeguarding requirements including a growing emphasis on personal responsibility across the Church
- Some evidence of developing collaboration towards a “One Church” approach
- Introduction of standards and, equally importantly, a developing commitment to meeting key principles such as ensuring transparency and sharing of best practice

Areas requiring further development:

- Theological leadership by the Bishops and governance arrangements have still to impact consistently within Dioceses and across the wider Church
- Strategic leadership has yet to ensure consistency of expectations including a commitment to embedding cultural change
- While action planning is linked more effectively to audit and review there is a need to measure improvements, develop risk assessments, share what is working and inform future training through identifying areas requiring further development. In particular there is a need to develop further enhanced safeguarding training specifically for seminarians.
- Consistency and accountability still require development to move from compliance towards ownership as a core value
- Links with external agencies and religious organisations are still at an early stage of development to inform and enhance good practice
- Conflict resolution and support for those who raise issues of concern are still underdeveloped including engagement with and input from survivors

Comment by Dr Andrew McLellan

“ The IRG Report is to be welcomed. The IRG has helped the Catholic Church to take two very important steps forward. The establishment of a “One Church” structure should ensure uniformity of approach everywhere (although it is disappointing that religious orders are not yet fully included in the governance arrangements)

The creation of an Independent Safeguarding Service is very important , and will help to restore the trust of members of the Church and of the general public .

The Report justly acknowledges that there is still much to be done. To embed safeguarding in the theology and culture of the Church is still a task to be embraced by the whole Church, and will inevitably take time and determination. And the report is right to stress the need “to ensure victims of abuse are seen , heard and supported by the Church and the process of healing is continued”. It is very important that no-one ever loses sight of them”

October 2022