



Uniting Church in Australia

Annual Report to the National Office of Child Safety

Implementation of Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

30 November 2018



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Uniting Church Values Statement in relation to the Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse

The Uniting Church believes that God has given us the gift of the Spirit to "constantly correct that which is erroneous" in our life (Basis of Union, Para 18). Therefore, we will not hide from the truth, however painful that may be, and we will seek, with compassion and humility, to address whatever issues and challenges may emerge for us. We will say "sorry" to anyone who was sexually abused when in our care and, in consultation with those so affected, actively seek for ways to make amends for what happened in the past and identify how we can best offer support into the future. In all of this we are guided by the Word of God, remembering the teaching of the Apostle Paul: "Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable... think about these things" (Philippians 4:8).

From the beginning of our life together as the people of God within the Uniting Church in Australia, we have sought through prayer, and a spirit of consensus, to discern what it means to confess Jesus as Lord and Head over all things (Basis of Union, Para 3). At the time of Inauguration, the Assembly spoke to the nation in a statement that has guided and encouraged us ever since to be a church that honours Christ in all that we say and do. The statement declared, in part, that "we affirm our eagerness to uphold basic Christian values and principles, such as the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life, and the proclamation of truth and justice... We pledge ourselves to seek the correction of injustices wherever they occur" (Statement to the Nation, National Assembly, June 1977).

To adopt such a stance in the life of our nation means that we must be willing to examine our own motives and behaviour and be open to accept the close scrutiny of others. In that regard the Uniting Church welcomes the decision of the Federal Government to establish a Royal Commission on the sexual abuse of children in both public and church institutions, and pledges itself to cooperate fully and honestly with the process the Commission will implement. The sexual abuse of children is criminal behaviour that is totally abhorrent and unacceptable.

Introduction

In the six years since the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was established, the Uniting Church in Australia – its congregations, Synods, schools and agencies – have been deeply engaged in the work of the Commission. The Royal Commission was sobering for our leadership, our congregants and our staff and we have engaged in deep reflection on our theology and recognition of children and their safety, in the life of our Church. We have taken action at a theological and practical level.

This report has provided us with the opportunity to document the considerable work that has been undertaken across the life of the Church, to highlight where we have made improvements in the safety of children in contact with our Church and to understand where there are areas where we still have work to do.

The Uniting Church is committed to providing children with the safest possible environments in our Churches and in our services. We have a real and passionate drive to improve our safety culture, and we aim to be an institution that is child safe and child friendly, where children are not only welcomed and safe, but are supported to thrive.

Our understanding of institutional child safety has deepened, thanks to the work of the Royal Commission and the brave survivors who told their stories. We understand better our risk areas and we are strongly committed to addressing risk, putting children's interests at the centre of our work, hearing children's voices, making our physical, spiritual and cultural environments safe and nurturing for children, and ensuring we respond quickly and appropriately if abuse does occur.

Throughout the life of the Royal Commission, we have had direct engagement with the related case studies, participated in roundtables, developed policy submissions and closely monitored the work of the Commission to learn from all case studies and research reports. In response to lessons learned and the Commission's recommendations, as a whole Church we have taken the following actions:

Governance

- established national and Synod (state) level task groups to closely monitor and engage with the work of the Royal Commission, and now to understand the impact of and implement the recommendations of the Commission
- appointed an Executive Officer at the national level to lead the Church's response to the Royal Commission
- amended Church regulations to automatically withdraw recognition of a Minister if the Minister is convicted of a criminal offence of a sexual nature in relation to a minor
- developed a proposal for a national mechanism (currently the subject of consultation and adoption across the Synods) to lead the Church's child safety work post-Royal Commission which will take forward policy development and implementation, national education activities and monitor compliance
- had ongoing engagements with state/territory and the Australian governments on legislative and system reform in response to the Commission's recommendations

- convened a series of workshops across the country for our agency CEOs, practitioner networks, Synods and schools to brief them on the Royal Commission recommendations and understand the impact they are having on the safety of children in the life of the Uniting Church
- introduced regular reporting on progress to national and Synod governance bodies

Child Safe Organisations

- developed the Uniting Church National Child Safe Policy Framework and undertaken a review of the Framework in light of the Royal Commission's report on Child Safe Organisations (in particular what are now the Child Safety Standards)
- established an implementation plan for the Framework, with resources to aid implementation
- engaged with networks across the Church to support implementation of the Framework in various contexts
- established a project to review and consolidate Professional Standards for Ministry Agents to ensure behavioural expectations are clear and enforceable
- established a Persons of Concern project to provide a framework for Churches about how to deal with 'known offenders' in congregational settings
- developed the 'toolkit for listening' to provide guidance on good practice for ensuring children's voices are valued and listened to across the life of the Church
- established child safe units or allocated child safety responsibilities to dedicated staff and volunteers in various institutions

Compliance

- created an annual national audit process against the Child Safe Policy Framework
- completed mapping of audit and compliance responsibilities nationally
- developed a checklist to support implementation of the Child Safe Policy Framework

Redress

- established a National Interim Redress Framework for the Uniting Church
- established interim (or continued and refined) redress or ex-gratia process in various Synods
- participated in consultation processes with the Commonwealth regarding the National Redress Scheme, including advocating for a scheme which applies to a broad range of survivors
- given evidence to a Senate committee regarding redress legislation
- facilitated ecumenical discussions regarding redress
- committed nationally to model litigant principles
- established a single national entity to facilitate the Church's participation in the National Redress Scheme
- undertaken significant historical records management processes in some Synods and agencies to understand holdings and provide easier access for survivors

National Redress Scheme

At the time of writing this report, the Uniting Church is actively working to complete all requirements for operational participation under the scheme. The Uniting Church is committed to the National Redress Scheme and is working diligently to meet the requirements for participation.

The Uniting Church were a major proponent of a national scheme throughout the Royal Commission, and we announced we would opt in to the NRS in June this year soon after it was opened to survivors, and before the scheme began in July. To join the Scheme, the Church has created a single national legal entity to streamline the process of engaging with redress applications across the six Synods that make up the Uniting Church.

Due to the legal structure of the Uniting Church, there are complex legal and governance arrangements involved - the referral of powers between different entities, establishing internal and external systems to aid in the processing of requests for information from the redress scheme and ensuring we are ready to support survivors in any engagement they wish to have with the Church. All of this work is well advanced, with the Church anticipating having all requirements met and information provided to the scheme by the end of 2018.

Our commitment

At the Synod, agency and school levels, much has been done in response to the learnings and recommendations of the Royal Commission. Many of these are documented in responses to the specific recommendations that follow in this report. These are not exhaustive but illustrative. We are a large and complex organisation, comprised of many entities which vary in size, scope and legal structures, regulated by Church law, entity constitutions and by-laws, state/territory and federal laws and regulations, industrial instruments, funding agreements, quality frameworks and standards. Some of our operating environments are highly regulated, others have very little regulation.

These are the challenges we face as a Church. This does not make us any less committed to the safety of children in contact with our services but demonstrates that our environments are many and varied in relation to risks and responses.

As such, the activities underway to improve the safety of children in our Church are many and varied. In this report we document our general response to the recommendations, provide a case study on each theme, then a high level overview of the range of work that has been undertaken or is in progress.

We are united in our values in the care and protection of children:

Compassion	We will deal with children compassionately and with an understanding of their vulnerabilities.
Respect	We respect the boundaries of professional relationships and respect the rights of every person to feel safe while in contact with our services.
Justice	We will seek justice for those who have been harmed.
Working together	We will work together to create a culture of individual

and collective responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of children and to create friendly, welcoming spaces for children.

Leading through learning

We will be leaders by undertaking a continuous improvement approach to the protection of children and to offering child friendly services.

We will never stop striving to become a child safe organisation and to right the wrongs of the past.

SECTION 1: IDENTIFYING THE INSTITUTION

Section 1 asks institutions to identify the name and sector of their institution. This question will determine the scope of section 3 for each institution. Section 1 will also ask institutions to provide any relevant background or contextual information on their organisation such as its structure and governance arrangements.

About the Uniting Church

On 22 June 1977, the Uniting Church in Australia was inaugurated by a union of the Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia (the three churches). The Church is the first church to be created in and for Australia.

The Church is presently the third largest Christian denomination in Australia. Throughout Australia there are around 1,065,000¹ members and adherents.

The Church is a diverse and wide spread organisation with inter-related national, state, regional and local structures. The Church is established by Acts of Parliament in each State and Territory, and its legal structure (The Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust) similarly is a State/Territory entity administered by each State/Territory Synod.

The incorporation of the Enabling Acts across jurisdictions inevitably creates variance within the individual legislation. However, there is significant consistency across the Enabling Acts, with the significant elements of the Enabling Acts being constant across jurisdictions.

Whilst the Property Trusts in each jurisdiction provide the legal identity for the Church, the church operates as an unincorporated association of individual members.

The Church is governed by a number of non-hierarchical inter-related councils that each has responsibility for various functions or roles within the Church. The key structures of the Church are local suburban Congregations, regional Presbyteries, Synods with state wide responsibilities and Assembly which has national responsibilities. The role of each of these will be addressed in further detail below.

For decades, the Church has established and maintained institutions that provide both residential and non-residential services to children such as schools, university colleges, hospitals, children's homes, out-of-home care and child care centres.

The origins and contemporary roles of institutions in the church and community are based on theological and missiological rationales. That is, these missional and pastoral activities of the Church are generally carried out through institutions of the

¹ According to the 2013 Uniting Church Census of Congregations and Ministers by Ruth Powell, Miriam Pepper, Nicole Hancock, Sam Sterland and Claudia Mollidor, dated March 2014

Synods, such as schools and agencies, and hence, fall under the control of the respective Synod bodies.²

Prior to the inauguration, the three churches had approved a *Basis of Union* as the basis on which the union would occur. The *Basis of Union* is a foundational document which continues to guide the Church. It is a schedule in the various State Acts and Territory Ordinances.

In addition to the *Uniting Church in Australia Act 1977* and the *Basis of Union*, the other key documents which address the Church's structure, governance and the status are the Constitution of the Uniting Church in Australia, including the Preamble; and the Regulations of the Uniting Church in Australia, the most recent version promulgated in September 2018.

Uniting Church structure defined in the Basis of Union

Clause 15 of the *Basis of Union* sets out the structure and governance of the Church. It provides for the Church to be governed through inter-related councils as follows:

- The Assembly (the national council)
- The Synods (the regional councils)
- The Presbyteries (the district councils)
- The Congregation (congregational councils) and The Elders' or Leaders' Meeting (the council within a congregation or group of congregations)

The inter-related structure of the Church sees each council having overlapping tasks and responsibilities that it is responsible for within the Church. Each council can provide services to children.

Clause 15 of the *Basis of Union* outlines the framework in which these inter-related councils will operate, it provides:

The Uniting Church recognises that the responsibility for government in the Church belongs to the people of God by virtue of the gifts and tasks which God has laid upon them. The Uniting Church therefore so organises its life that locally, regionally and nationally government will be entrusted to representatives, men and women, bearing the gifts and graces with which God has endowed them for the building up of the Church. The Uniting Church is governed by a series of inter-related councils, each of which has its tasks and responsibilities in relation both to the Church and the world.

The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ alone is supreme in his Church, and that he may speak to it through any of its councils. It is the task of every council to wait upon God's Word, and to obey God's will in the matters allocated to its oversight. Each council will recognise the limits of its own authority and give heed to other councils of the Church, so that the whole body of believers may be united by mutual submission in the service of the Gospel.

The form of government of the Church is unlike that of other churches, including its own predecessor denominations. Three particular features are noteworthy:

² Regulation 3.7.4.7

- it is a conciliar form of governance - meaning that rather than power being vested in an individual, for example a bishop, the episcopacy is vested in the council;
- decisions taken in one council may bind the whole Church (e.g. the decision of a presbytery to ordain a person must be accepted by the whole Church), notwithstanding that in some areas more than one Council can make some aspect of the decision (e.g. property dealings); and decisions are made by councils not individuals. The councils operate under the consensus decision-making procedures outlined in the Church's "Manual for Meetings". The theological rationale behind this is found in an understanding that the Church seeks to discern the Spirit of God through the gathered community rather than through individuals;
- Related Entities: Regulation 3.4.7.4 contemplates a spectrum of institutions that may be associated with or operated by or on behalf of the Church. Institutions can include unincorporated or incorporated bodies³. The spectrum of relationships between the Church and institutions is wide-ranging. At one end the Church, through its respective Synod, is able to "*determine what institutions shall be continued, established, conducted or discontinued*"⁴, incorporate bodies⁵ or authorise an affiliation or membership⁶ relationship between the Synod and another body.

Unincorporated associations

An unincorporated association is able to claim an association with the Church as it is either established or maintained by the unincorporated association that is the Church.⁷

An unincorporated association derives authority from the Church through the internal management processes of the Church and its relationship with a property trust is determined by its place within the internal organisation of the Church. As a result, these bodies "*do not have a legal existence of their own and come under the umbrella of a Property Trust*"⁸. Unincorporated associations "*are regarded as bodies undertaking activities as part of the Synod*"⁹.

Incorporated associations

The association between the Synod and separately incorporated institutions is essentially bi-dimensional. This association has a pastoral dimension established through elements of common Ethos and shared mission. It may and frequently does also have a governance dimension. The governance dimension is relevant in so far as detailed in the constitution of the institution.

³ Regulation 3.4.7.4(a)(i)

⁴ Regulation 3.4.7.4(b)(ii)

⁵ Regulation 3.4.7.4(c)

⁶ Regulation 3.4.7.4(b)(ii)

⁷ Regulation 3.4.7.4

⁸ At Paragraph 1.2 of "*Guidelines for members of boards, committees and councils of organisations associated with the Uniting Church*". Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. 3rd Edition. 2002. See also Regulation 3.4.7.4(f)

⁹ At Paragraph 1.2 of "*Guidelines for members of boards, committees and councils of organisations associated with the Uniting Church*". op. cit.,

Children in contact with the Uniting Church

The Uniting Church, through its schools, agencies and congregations provides a wide-range of services directly to children, including:

- Youth/children's ministry activities within Church settings (Sunday school, youth groups, camps, etc)
- Local, regional and national camps or gatherings
- Child care
- Out-of-home care
- Boarding and day schools
- Hospital and health services
- Mental health services
- Disability services
- Child and family services such as telephone and face to face counselling, domestic violence programs and refuges, family intervention services, community recovery
- Homelessness services

SECTION: 2 GENERAL REPORTING AGAINST RECOMMENDATIONS RELEVANT TO ALL INSTITUTIONS

Section 2 asks institutions to report against four questions. These four questions cover two themes (1) making institutions child safe, and (2) and children's voices.

THEME 1: Making institutions child safe

Under theme one, institutions will be asked to report against three specific measures as follows:

Measure 1.1: New or revised code of conduct, policies and procedures for child safe institutions

(Volumes 6, 7) (Recommendations 6.4-6.6, 7.8)

1. **Recommendation 6.4** - All institutions should uphold the rights of the child. Consistent with Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all institutions should act with the best interests of the child as a primary consideration. In order to achieve this, institutions should implement the Child Safe Standards identified by the Royal Commission. Response Accept in principle. All Australian Governments will continue to work together to consider how to best achieve the objectives of this recommendation.
2. **Recommendation 6.5** - The Child Safe Standards.
3. **Recommendation 6.6** – Core Components of the Child Safe Standards.
4. **Recommendation 7.8** - Consistent with Child Safe Standard 1: Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture, institutions should have a clear code of conduct ...

The Church believes that all institutions should act and make decisions consistent with human rights. This includes that having the best interests of children as a primary consideration in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the best interests principle in Article 3.

The Church notes that no jurisdiction but for Victoria has substantially enacted the Child Safe Standards into legislation. However, we have adopted the Child Safe Standards into our National Child Safe Policy Framework and individual Synods, schools and agencies have adopted the Child Safe Standards into policy and practice.

We note that over recent months, even in the absence of legislated child safe standards, many funders are seeking certification from funded service providers that the child safe standards are being adopted in the provision of services to children. In effect, the commitment to and implementation of the standards has become a condition of funding agreements.

It would be valuable for there to be national consistency on the standards and we look forward to adoption of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations by the Council of Australian Governments. The culture and practice they create will be broader than sexual abuse and drive safer environments for children across the community.

Description of measures implemented prior to December 2018:

CASE STUDY

NATIONAL CHILD SAFE POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Uniting Church's National Child Safe Policy Framework was initially approved and enacted in 2015. With the release of the Commission's *Child Safe Organisations* report in 2016 the Church set about reviewing and updating the Framework to ensure that it reflected the Child Safe Standards and best practice in organisational child safety as recommended by the Commission. It also took into account lessons learned in the Commission's work since it was initially drafted. Consultation took place across the Church and the Assembly Standing Committee approved the revised framework in 2017. The Framework will be reviewed again in 2019.

The Framework operates as the overarching policy setting document, articulating the principles that all child safety policies throughout the Church should mirror. It is established as a policy framework in order to recognise the variety of contexts in which the Church engages with Children, and that those contexts may also be subject to different legislative and regulatory oversight. Therefore a framework provides a foundation document which can be adopted into a variety of contexts.

As an overarching document, the Framework seeks to provide direction on a range of issues with respect to the safety of children. These include: developing leadership, governance and a culture of child safety; enabling children and families to participate in decision making; ensuring openness and transparency; respecting diversity and promoting equity; further developing clear codes of conduct; adopting evidence based policies and procedures (which sit under the Framework); ensuring child safety is prioritised in recruitment, orientation and training processes; engaging strong supervisory and support processes; further developing comprehensive response and reporting processes; keeping good records; and ensuring regular review and continuous improvement processes are in place.

To support implementation of the framework, an implementation plan and checklist was developed, along with direct engagement by the Executive Officer to assist the different areas of the Church to understand and implement the framework in their context.

Other actions we are taking in relation to the Child Safe Standards include:

- a) targeted education for leaders across Church councils and agency and school boards, to ensure a broad understanding of institutional child safety issues, knowledge of regulatory obligations and establishment of a safety culture

- b) reviewing and improving Codes of Conduct, professional standards requirements, induction processes, recruitment and screening processes for compliance with best practice set out in the Standards
- c) commencing development of a National Training and Education Strategy to ensure consistent training across the life of the Church, particularly in the largely unregulated congregational settings
- d) annual audit of implementation of the standards/national policy framework and noting areas and actions for ongoing improvement
- e) reviewing processes in relation to recruitment, screening and ongoing supervision of volunteers
- f) requiring staff and volunteers to undertake annual training and sign statements of commitment to child safe practice
- g) ensuring staff and volunteers who are mandatory reporters are clear on their obligations to do so
- h) using values based recruitment processes to ensure that those who are seeking roles working with children have a clear understanding of professional boundaries and the right motivations for wanting to work with children
- i) formal supervision of staff in roles working with vulnerable children
- j) ensuring that reporting and complaints processes are child focused and widely known and accessible to children and families, staff and volunteers
- k) in addition to internal processes, the Synods of NSW and ACT and Victoria and Tasmania must comply with Reportable Conduct Schemes and all Synods must comply with external regulatory requirements.

Prospective work that will be undertaken post-2018 to implement this measure:

Work will continue to embed the Child Safe Standards into the culture of the Church.

We will continue to work with relevant government bodies to ensure implementation of the Child Safe Standards in their jurisdiction.

CASE STUDY

NATIONAL PROGRAM FOR IMPLEMENTATION

A key measure that we have been undertaking through 2018 and into 2019 is a series of workshops and briefings across the country to understand the impact of the Child Safe Standards across the life of the Church and the work that is being done to implement them.

These have taken place with agency CEOs; the UnitingCare Australia Child, Young People and Families network; the Synod and Presbyteries in Queensland, Western Australia, Northern Territory, South Australia; schools in Western Australia; and the UnitingCare Australia aged care network. Further briefings and workshops will be undertaken with the UnitingCare Australia disability network, Synods/Presbyteries and schools in other jurisdictions; Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress; and multi- and cross- cultural communities of the Church.

This work is invaluable in helping the Church to interpret the Commission's recommendations into action in the different contexts in which we operate, look for opportunities to share resources and knowledge and to work together, and also to understand where we still need to take action to improve the safety of children. We are committed to continuing this program throughout 2019.

This will complement and inform the work of the Safe Church Unit which will commence in early 2019. This will be a Unit established nationally with support from all Synods, charged with leading implementation of safe church measures across the life of the Church.

Further actions will include:

- a) developing a national Code of Conduct for lay workers in the conciliar life of the Church
- b) developing benchmarks for assessing implementation of the Child Safe Policy Framework
- c) developing a National Education and Training Strategy to ensure consistent levels of knowledge and understanding across the conciliar life of the Church
- d) conducting annual national audits of implementation of the Child Safe Policy Framework and implementation of recommendations of the Royal Commission.

**Measure 1.2: Improvements to institutional responding and reporting
(Volume 7) (Recommendation 7.7 and 7.8)**

Recommendation 7.7

Consistent with Child Safe Standard 6: Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused, institutions should have a clear, accessible and child-focused complaint handling policy and procedure that sets out how the institution should respond to complaints of child sexual abuse. The complaint handling policy and procedure should cover: a. making a complaint b. responding to a complaint c. investigating a complaint d. providing support and assistance e. achieving systemic improvements following a complaint.

Recommendation 7.8

Consistent with Child Safe Standard 1: Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture, institutions should have a clear code of conduct that:

- a. outlines behaviours towards children that the institution considers unacceptable, including concerning conduct, misconduct or criminal conduct
- b. includes a specific requirement to report any concerns, breaches or suspected breaches of the code to a person responsible for handling complaints in the institution or to an external authority when required by law and/or the institution's complaint handling policy
- c. outlines the protections available to individuals who make complaints or reports good faith to any institution engaging in child-related work (see Recommendation 7.6 on reporter protections).

The Church accepts all elements of these recommendations. The National Child Safe Policy Framework sets out the need for complaints processes to be clear and accessible for children, families, staff and volunteers, commits us to reviewing incidents to continuously improve child safe policy and practice, holds us to high standards of record keeping and commits us to a culture of reporting and cooperation with authorities.

Our Codes of Conduct vary from context to context and we are committed to regular review and improvement. Our aim is to have clear expectations of behaviour at all levels of the institution and to hold people accountable for their own behaviour, their role in setting the culture and for living out our commitments through example.

Across the conciliar life of the Church, the Professional Standards Project is underway. This work will include a review of the Code of Ethics for Ministry Agents. A project to develop a Code of Conduct for lay workers will commence in early 2019.

Description of measures implemented prior to December 2018:

CASE STUDY

CHILD FOCUSED COMPLAINTS PROCESSES: 'SPEAK OUT' in confidence

The Synod of NSW/ACT has established a Safe Church Unit and in 2018, launched Speak Out – a clear, accessible and child focused complaint handling platform and hotline. Speak Out provides an easy to find, multi-pathway process which invites people to “Speak out” rather than using the language of “complaint” or “report”. Speak Out can be used anonymously at the discretion of the reporter.

The Synod Safe Church Unit has also developed a range of resources to clarify reporting processes and what action is to be taken following a report, to support the disclosure process and to appropriately respond to occurrences of abuse.

Other actions include:

- a) synods, congregations, agencies and schools have taken action to make reporting concerns as accessible as possible. There is still more work to be done to ensure that these are child friendly across all contexts
- b) Codes of Conduct have been reviewed across agencies and schools and Code of Conduct training is being included in induction processes. Systems improvements are helping to systematise and monitor initial and refresher training for staff and volunteers
- c) information about reporting/complaints processes are made available to children and families using our services and schools and attending our Synods. In many cases, it is available in age appropriate language and consideration is being given to other languages that might be required
- d) increasing use of complaints or whistle-blower phone lines operated externally to the service

Prospective work that will be undertaken post-2018 to implement this measure:

CASE STUDY

UnitingCare Queensland Code of Conduct for Interactions with Children

UnitingCare Queensland will roll out systematic induction and training, including child safety awareness and Code of Conduct training across its 17 400 employees and 10 000 volunteers, based on the levels of contact they have with children in their roles.

This will ensure new starters know clearly what behaviour is expected of them, and that staff and volunteers receive refresher training in accordance with their roles and contact with children.

Other actions include:

- a) continuing to review and improve complaints handling processes, including reviewing individual matters to look for lessons and opportunities to improve
- b) sharing resources across the life of the Church to ensure that examples of good practice are informing the way we manage complaints and support reporting processes
- c) continuing to educate people across the life of the Church on the signs of grooming and abuse so that people feel comfortable reporting “concerns” rather than waiting for “evidence” that abuse is occurring

- d) striving toward cultures where the interests of children are paramount and make sure this message is clear across the life of the Church

Measure 1.3: Improvements to recordkeeping and information sharing

Recommendation 8.1 –

To allow for delayed disclosure of abuse by victims and take account of limitation periods for civil actions for child sexual abuse, institutions that engage in child-related work should retain, for at least 45 years, records relating to child sexual abuse that has occurred or is alleged to have occurred

Recommendation 8.4 –

All institutions that engage in child-related work should implement the following principles for records and recordkeeping, to a level that responds to the risk of child sexual abuse occurring within the institution.

We accept the recommendations of the Royal Commission and have taken steps to improve record keeping policies, procedure and practice across the life of the Church. For contemporary incidents and allegations of abuse, we are committed to transparency and to helping those who experience abuse deal with that in a timeframe that is appropriate to their individual needs.

In relation to historical documents, a number of our Synods, schools and agencies have dedicated resources to undertake projects to locate, sort and catalogue their document holdings. This means that more records are available to survivors of abuse and in a more timely way. We do not underestimate the value of such documents to survivors, and other former residents of institutions in helping them to piece together what in some cases, were very fragmented lives.

Description of measures implemented prior to December 2018:

CASE STUDY

JOINT VENTURE – Heritage Services, Synod Legal, Uniting Vic/Tas

This free service exists to support a person who spent some or all of their childhood in out-of-home care services provided by the Uniting Church in Victoria, and their family members.

The service can help access information about the person or their family member's time in care and support them in the journey to better understand their past.

The service can also help with:

- Searching and providing information such as records, photographs, historical material and other documents
- Supporting them through the process of release of information – for example, help with reading, contextualising and understanding the content of records
- Searching for family members or other significant people
- Assisting with applications for records from other agencies and records holders
- Providing counselling support
- Making referrals to external counsellors

- Making referrals to a range of external health and social support services
- Organising reunions¹⁰

Other work includes:

- a) the development/review of records management policies and procedures to support the implementation of the Commission's recommendations
- b) amendments to formal records retention and disposal programs for compliance with the recommendations
- c) improved centralisation of records and reporting to improve the value and accessibility of information held

Prospective work that will be undertaken post-2018 to implement this measure:

CASE STUDY:

Electronic Document and Records Management System

The Synod of NSW/ACT is rolling out an Electronic Document and Records Management System (EDRMS). This is available to Presbyteries, Congregations and other Church entities. It involves records management training program to ensure staff and members are aware of their recordkeeping obligations.

The system provides a 'single source' for records and data can be aggregated for learning to occur. The operational detail of the system is still being worked through.

Further work will include:

- a) ongoing review of policy, procedure and practice for retaining and disposing of records
- b) improvements to the coordination of record keeping to help identify trend/patterns of behaviour that could be indicative of poor practice or a high risk of abuse or grooming, and to keep documents in a systematic, ordered way that will be searchable into the future
- c) improvements to case note taking for staff in roles that directly care for children
- d) work to improve the documentation of the life of children in out-of-home care so that they have a reference and memories of their time in care and access to important information about their lives

¹⁰ <https://www.vt.uniting.org/services/child-youth-family/uniting-heritage-service/>

THEME 2: CHILDREN'S VOICES

Measure 2.1: Children participate in decisions that affect them

(All relevant volumes and recommendations)

Information about how children are able to express their views and how their voices have been incorporated into child safe practices, including the design of policy and decision-making

The Church recognises that children are a vital part of our mission. Until recently, this has been recognised implicitly, with the result that, while we deliver services to children across the life of the Church, we have not always been good at seeking out and hearing their voices in the work we do. The Commission's work highlights that where children are not heard, their rights and needs can be overlooked.

We now not only recognise their need to be heard, but in fact that both children and the broader community thrive where we are explicit in including children in decisions that affect them. This includes service design, complaints processes, decision making about families and children, and the importance of recognising peer relationships. Our approach increasingly reflects the philosophy of "nothing about me, without me".

Description of measures implemented prior to December 2018:

CASE STUDY

Children at UnitingCare West

UnitingCare West offers a broad suite of services to assist children at risk. Central to their services is the belief that all children have the right to be supported in a nurturing environment where they feel safe, valued and heard.

Children have been involved with designing their own complaints process, including designing the Children's Complaints brochure and the Young Peoples' Complaints brochure.

Children across UCW's services were invited to participate in a colouring competition to design a poster for the Child Safe work within UCW, and opportunity was taken to talk to the children about child safety during that competition.

All children in out-of-home care services are actively engaged in how houses operate and services are offered. They do this via: weekly house meetings; creating and reviewing agreements regarding 'how we will live together'; providing client satisfaction responses to internal surveys; and also via departmental tools such as View Point. All case meetings include children and young people who are supported to attend and be active participants in all care related meetings that they are able to. All children and young people in UCW care are actively encouraged to be members of CREATE.

Other work includes:

- a) individual programs have developed local practices appropriate to the type of services and the children and families utilising them
- b) children are being involved in the interpretation of policy frameworks to understand what they mean for the service they are involved in
- c) children's representatives are being included in some forums
- d) children's input is being sought on program and activity design across the life of the Church

Prospective work that will be undertaken post-2018 to implement this measure

CASE STUDY:

TOOLS FOR LISTENING

This resource has been developed by the Uniting Church to enable the implementation of Principle 2 from the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations: "Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously" and recommendations of the Royal Commission, that:

- children and young people are involved in the strategic development, design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives
- children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously
- families and communities are informed and involved

Tools for Listening will assist in the process of consulting, involving and collaborating with children, young people and adults on programs and activities in any Uniting Church entity.

Tools for Listening can be used when planning or reviewing programs and activities to:

- Consult with community members, families and children when planning a new program or activity
- Include and consider feedback when reviewing a program or activity
- Inform people new to a program or activity about codes of conduct and the feedback process¹¹

Other work underway includes:

- a) ongoing work for all agency consumers, including children and young people, to have influence within and to be able to contribute feedback and comment on matters in which they are involved
- b) increasing establishment of networks of practitioners and child safety champions within agencies, schools and congregations to harness staff expertise and experience, build child safe systems and processes and ensure shared practice knowledge across programs and service sites
- c) resources are being developed to help support all areas of the Church to put practical measures in place to make sure children's voices are welcomed and valued

¹¹ <https://assembly.uca.org.au/tools-for-listening>

SECTION 3: REPORTING AGAINST INSTITUTIONS SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

This section asks institutions to report on the recommendations made by the Royal Commission that are specific to their organisation. It will be populated based on the information that is provided in Section 1.

ALL RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Recommendations 16.31 – 16.35 – Child Safe Standards Recommendations

1. **Recommendation 16.31** All institutions should implement the 10 Child Safe Standards
2. **Recommendation 16.32** Religious organisations should adopt the Royal Commission's 10 Child Safe Standards
3. **Recommendation 16.33** Religious organisations should drive a consistent approach to the implementation of the Royal Commission's 10 Child Safe Standards
4. **Recommendation 16.34** Religious organisations should work closely with relevant state and territory oversight bodies to support the implementation of and compliance with the Royal Commission's 10 Child Safe Standards
5. **Recommendation 16.35** Religious institutions in highly regulated sectors, such as schools and out-of-home care service providers, should report their compliance with the Royal Commission's 10 Child Safe Standards to the religious organisation to which they are affiliated

The Church accepts these recommendations. As previously noted, the Child Safe Standards have been included in the Church's National Child Safe Policy Framework. This framework is subject to regular review.

The Church is currently anticipating sign off of these elements as standards across Australian jurisdictions. The establishment of nationally consistent, legislated standards will provide a further foundation upon which to continue to drive implementation throughout the life of the Church.

The Church notes that many jurisdictions have already begun to include reporting against these standards as part of reporting and acquittal processes, and anticipates greater levels of engagement with governments going forward.

The Church, as previously identified, developed an implementation plan and resources to enable the Church to engage the new framework, and review policy suites for alignment and best practice. These resources have enabled the Church to develop greater alignment of policy and process across the Church.

Description of measures implemented prior to December 2018:

The Church refers to its answers in relation to Volume 6 on the Child Safe Standards and awaits the opportunity to engage with governments in relevant jurisdictions to achieve these recommendations.

Prospective work that will be undertaken post-2018 to implement this measure:

The Church refers to its answers in relation to Volume 6 on the Child Safe Standards and awaits the opportunity to engage with governments in relevant jurisdictions to achieve these recommendations.

Recommendations 16.36 – 16.50

1. **Recommendation 16.36** Consistent with Child Safe Standard 1, each religious institution in Australia should ensure that its religious leaders are provided with leadership training both pre- and post-appointment, including in relation to the promotion of child safety.
2. **Recommendation 16.37** Consistent with Child Safe Standard 1, leaders of religious institutions should ensure that there are mechanisms through which they receive advice from individuals with relevant professional expertise on all matters relating to child sexual abuse and child safety. This should include in relation to prevention, policies and procedures and complaint handling. These mechanisms should facilitate advice from people with a variety of professional backgrounds and include lay men and women.
3. **Recommendation 16.38** Consistent with Child Safe Standard 1, each religious institution should ensure that religious leaders are accountable to an appropriate authority or body, such as a board of management or council, for the decisions they make with respect to child safety.
4. **Recommendation 16.39** Consistent with Child Safe Standard 1, each religious institution should have a policy relating to the management of actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may arise in relation to allegations of child sexual abuse. The policy should cover all individuals who have a role in responding to complaints of child sexual abuse. Response Noted.
5. **Recommendation 16.40** Consistent with Child Safe Standard 2, wherever a religious institution has children in its care, those children should be provided with age-appropriate prevention education that aims to increase their knowledge of child sexual abuse and build practical skills to assist in strengthening self-protective skills and strategies. Prevention education in religious institutions should specifically address the power and status of people in religious ministry and educate children that no one has a right to invade their privacy and make them feel unsafe.
6. **Recommendation 16.41** Consistent with Child Safe Standard 3, each religious institution should make provision for family and community involvement by publishing all policies relevant to child safety on its website, providing opportunities for comment on its approach to child safety, and seeking periodic feedback about the effectiveness of its approach to child safety.
7. **Recommendation 16.47** Consistent with Child Safe Standard 7, each religious institution should require that all people in religious or pastoral ministry, including religious leaders, undertake regular training on the institution's child safe policies and procedures. They should also be provided with opportunities for external training on best practice approaches to child safety.
8. **Recommendation 16.49** Codes of conduct in religious institutions should explicitly and equally apply to people in religious ministry and to lay people.
9. **Recommendation 16.50** Consistent with Child Safe Standard 7, each religious institution should require all people in religious ministry, leaders, members of boards, councils and other governing bodies, employees, relevant contractors and volunteers to undergo initial and periodic training on its code of conduct. This training should include: a. what kinds of allegations or complaints relating to child sexual abuse should be reported and to whom b. identifying inappropriate behaviour which may be a precursor to abuse, including grooming c. recognising physical and behavioural indicators of child sexual abuse d. that all complaints relating to child sexual abuse must be taken

seriously, regardless of the perceived severity of the behaviour.

The Church accepts these recommendations.

As previously noted, the Church has adopted the Child Safe Standards into the National Child Safe Policy Framework. The church anticipates national agreement and legislation of standards/principles across Australian jurisdictions.

The Church, again, as previously identified, developed an implementation plan and resources to enable the Church to engage the new framework, and review policy suites for alignment and best practice.

Additionally, the measures below have been undertaken or are anticipated.

Description of measures implemented prior to December 2018:

Activity includes:

- a) boards/governing bodies regularly focus on risk and challenges management on risk mitigation and consider child safety issues at an enterprise and business unit/local level
- b) communities of practice have been established (sometimes including external advisors and government representatives) to drive change and provide advice on good practice
- c) annual Safe Church audits take place
- d) one-on-one support for Church councils to ensure that they understand their obligations, to promote safe church policies and resources, seek information about child safety measures and answer questions
- e) introduction of mandatory training and awareness sessions, including on grooming

Prospective work that will be undertaken post-2018 to implement this measure:

As we are committed to continuous improvement, we will continue to refine our child safe measures. This will be guided by the work of the Safe Church Unit.

Recommendations 16.42 – 16.46

The below recommendations fit within Child Safe Standard 5: People working with children are suitable and supported

1) Recommendation 16.42

Consistent with Child Safe Standard 5, each religious institution should require that candidates for religious ministry undergo external psychological testing, including psychosexual assessment, for the purposes of determining their suitability to be a person in religious ministry and to undertake work involving children.

2) Recommendation 16.43

Each religious institution should ensure that candidates for religious ministry undertake minimum training on child safety and related matters, including training that:

- (a) equips candidates with an understanding of the Royal Commission's 10 Child Safe Standards
- (b) educates candidates on:
 - i. professional responsibility and boundaries, ethics in ministry and child safety
 - ii. policies regarding appropriate responses to allegations or complaints of child sexual abuse, and how to implement these policies
 - iii. how to work with children, including childhood development
 - iv. identifying and understanding the nature, indicators and impacts of child sexual abuse.

3) Recommendation 16.44

Consistent with Child Safe Standard 5, each religious institution should ensure that all people in religious or pastoral ministry, including religious leaders, are subject to effective management and oversight and undertake annual performance appraisals.

4) Recommendation 16.45

Consistent with Child Safe Standard 5, each religious institution should ensure that all people in religious or pastoral ministry, including religious leaders, have professional supervision with a trained professional or pastoral supervisor who has a degree of independence from the institution within which the person is in ministry.

5) Recommendation 16.46

Religious institutions which receive people from overseas to work in religious or pastoral ministry, or otherwise within their institution, should have targeted programs for the screening, initial training and professional supervision and development of those people. These programs should include material covering professional responsibility and boundaries, ethics in ministry and child safety.

The Uniting Church accepts these recommendations.

Phases of ministry

The Uniting Church uses a process, described as Phases 1 – 4, to talk about ministry education and formation:

- Phase 1 is the Period of Discernment, for any and all in the church to discern how God may be calling them for service in the Church
- Phase 2 is the core phase of ministry preparation by candidates for Minister of the Word and Deacon
- Phase 3 refers to the three years post ordination and focuses on ongoing consolidation and training
- Phase 4 is continuing education for ministry.

The process of candidature for ministry (following phase 1 and prior to phase 2) in the Uniting Church entails, alongside the various interviews exploring appropriateness for and call to ministry, a process of external psychological assessment, psychological interview and reporting prior to the candidate being accepted into training for ministry. This has been a part of our process for some time, and includes psychosexual assessment. It is not until a candidate successfully completes all of these processes, that they are accepted as a candidate and move into the training phase.

The training phase (phase 2) includes tertiary level theological studies, together with a mandated formation process of not less than six semesters. The formation process explores ethical and foundational understandings of the nature of ministry. One key element of this formation process, relevant to the recommendations, is an exploration of the ethical boundaries for ministry agents, and the ethical issues that ministry agents will confront. This begins a formal and lifelong engagement with the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for ministry agents in the Uniting Church.

Throughout formation, and throughout ministry practice, the Code of Ethics is applied to the various contexts in which ministry occurs:

- Ministry in congregations
- Ministry in non congregational settings (chaplaincy etc)
- Ministry with multi and cross cultural communities
- Ministry with Indigenous communities
- Ministry with children and families

Training explores a variety of issues that are foundational for ministry including, but not limited to:

- boundaries
- the pastoral relationship
- power dynamics
- professional exercise of ministry
- accountability

These are highly relevant to the safety of children in congregational and ministry placement settings.

The implementation of the National Child Safe Policy Framework has engendered reflection and renewal of Synod policies and processes. This renewal has included review of education and training for all people, including those who are training for ministry. This review, particularly as to how education and training occurs for ministry candidates, is ongoing. The Uniting Church has an oversight body for educational and formation standards, the Standards for Ministries Committee, which governs standards for all candidates across the Church. This body is working to understand the impact of the Royal Commission's recommendations to identify how they will be expressed through the standards expected of candidates nationally.

Foundational ministry years, the first three years of ministry practice (phase 3), are supported by the Presbytery in which the new ministry agent is placed, together with ongoing training available through the relevant theological college. This support operates in a number of forms, however, seeks to be relevant to the ministry agent cohort involved in the process at any given time. This phase involves regular, mandatory, Code of Ethics training and child safety training sessions alongside all ministry agents.

In terms of ongoing development of ministry agents skills for ministry, the Church has produced "Seeking A Heart of Wisdom", a document outlining an invitation to lifelong learning, suggesting three broad areas:

1. Academic theological study (e.g. Biblical studies, systematic theology, missiology, church history, culture and society)
2. Ministry practice and skills (e.g. preaching, community development, leadership development, pastoral care, justice, education methods)
3. Spiritual Growth and Formation (e.g. training in spiritual direction, attendance at spiritual retreats, ethical ministry and practice)

Continuing education is an expectation of ministry agents in the Church, which is overseen by the Presbytery in which a ministry agent is placed.

CASE STUDY

Admission of Ministers from other Churches

The Admission of Ministers process is the method by which ordained ministers of other denominations can apply to be admitted as a minister of the Uniting Church in Australia. It also has the responsibility to process applications made by former Ministers who wish to be readmitted as Uniting Church Ministers.

The process includes:

- a formal application
- interviews
- intentional mentoring through an initial period of supervised ministry
- final decision making process for reception

As part of the formal application process, ministry agents from other churches are expected to provide:

- resume
- certified copies of proof of identity documents
- certified copies of ordination documents

- certified copies of education certificates and academic record
- letter of good standing
- statement of understanding of the polity of the church
- statement of Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice

Throughout this process, the Church is conscious of the need to consider placement history, reasons for leaving a placement and checking the good standing of a person, as well as regulatory checks, including working with children checks.

Recommendations 16.51 – 16.57

These Recommendations relate to Child Safe Standard 6: Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused.

6) Recommendation 16.51

All religious institutions' complaint handling policies should require that, upon receiving a complaint of child sexual abuse, an initial risk assessment is conducted to identify and minimise any risks to children.

7) Recommendation 16.52

All religious institutions' complaint handling policies should require that, if a complaint of child sexual abuse against a person in religious ministry is plausible, and there is a risk that person may come into contact with children in the course of their ministry, the person be stood down from ministry while the complaint is investigated.

8) Recommendation 16.53

The standard of proof that a religious institution should apply when deciding whether a complaint of child sexual abuse has been substantiated is the balance of probabilities, having regard to the principles in *Briginshaw v Briginshaw*.

9) Recommendation 16.54

Religious institutions should apply the same standards for investigating complaints of child sexual abuse whether or not the subject of the complaint is a person in religious ministry.

10) Recommendation 16.55

Any person in religious ministry who is the subject of a complaint of child sexual abuse which is substantiated on the balance of probabilities, having regard to the principles in *Briginshaw v Briginshaw*, or who is convicted of an offence relating to child sexual abuse, should be permanently removed from ministry. Religious institutions should also take all necessary steps to effectively prohibit the person from in any way holding himself or herself out as being a person with religious authority.

11) Recommendation 16.56

Any person in religious ministry who is convicted of an offence relating to child sexual abuse should: in the case of Uniting Church ministers, have his or her recognition as a minister withdrawn

12) Recommendation 16.57

Where a religious institution becomes aware that any person attending any of its religious services or activities is the subject of a substantiated complaint of child sexual abuse, or has been convicted of an offence relating to child sexual abuse, the religious institution should:

- (a) assess the level of risk posed to children by that perpetrator's ongoing involvement in the religious community
- (b) take appropriate steps to manage that risk.

The Church accepts all elements of these recommendations and had implemented all of these elements prior to the Final Report of the Royal Commission being released.

Description of measures implemented prior to December 2018:

Recommendation 16.51 is covered by the National Child Safe Policy Framework developed by the Assembly and implemented in Synods in each of their child safety policy suites. The implementation processes have ensured broad engagement with the revised framework across the Church.

In regards to Recommendations 16.52 – 16.55, we refer in the first instance to Section 5 of our Regulations. This section identifies the discipline processes of the Church, including specific regulations related to sexual abuse allegations. These regulations are subject to cyclical review.

Further, the Church has commenced a Professional Standards project exploring how our ministry agents might be better resourced and have more structured supervision in order to support their offering high quality ministry.

In regards to Recommendation 16.57, the Church refers to the Person of Concern Policies sitting throughout the Church at Synod level. These policies are reviewed cyclically as part of the ongoing continuous improvement processes of the Church.

Description of measures implemented post December 2018:

The review in relation to Recommendation 16.57 relates to a collaborative project being undertaken across the Church to establish a Person of Concern Policy Framework. This framework would provide aligned policy and processes nationally to ensure risks are appropriately managed and safety for all people in church communities is enhanced.

OUT-OF-HOME CARE PROVIDERS

(VOLUME 12, RECOMMENDATIONS 12.6 – 12.19)

Recommendation 12.6

In addition to a National Police Check, Working With Children Check and referee checks, authorisation of all foster and kinship/relative carers and all residential care staff should include: a. community services checks of the prospective carer and any adult household members of home-based carers b. documented risk management plans to address any risks identified through community services checks c. at least annual review of risk management plans as part of carer reviews and more frequently as required.

Recommendation 12.7

All out-of-home care service providers should conduct annual reviews of authorised carers that include interviews with all children in the placement with the carer under review, in the absence of the carer.

Recommendation 12.10

State and territory governments, in collaboration with out-of-home care service providers and peak bodies, should develop resources to assist service providers to: a. provide appropriate support and mechanisms for children in out-of-home care to communicate, either verbally or through behaviour, their views, concerns and complaints b. provide appropriate training and support to carers and caseworkers to ensure they hear and respond to children in out-of-home care, including ensuring children are involved in decisions about their lives c. regularly consult with the children in their care as part of continuous improvement processes.

Recommendation 12.11

State and territory governments and out-of-home care service providers should ensure that training for foster and relative/kinship carers, residential care staff and child protection workers includes an understanding of trauma and abuse, the impact on children and the principles of trauma-informed care to assist them to meet the needs of children in out-of-home care, including children with harmful sexual behaviours.

Recommendation 12.12

When placing a child in out-of-home care, state and territory governments and out-of-home care service providers should take the following measures to support children with harmful sexual behaviours: a. undertake professional assessments of the child with harmful sexual behaviours, including identifying their needs and appropriate supports and interventions b. to ensure their safety c. establish case management and a package of support services d. undertake careful placement matching that includes: i. providing sufficient relevant information to the potential carer/s and residential care staff to ensure they are equipped to support the child, and additional training as necessary ii. rigorously assessing potential threats to the safety of other children, including the child's siblings, in the placement.

Recommendation 12.13

State and territory governments and out-of-home care service providers should

provide advice, guidelines and ongoing professional development for all foster and kinship/relative carers and residential care staff about preventing and responding to the harmful sexual behaviours of some children in out-of-home care.

Recommendation 12.16

All institutions that provide out-of-home care should develop strategies that increase the likelihood of safe and stable placements for children in care. Such strategies should include: a. improved processes for ‘matching’ children with carers and other children in a placement, including in residential care b. the provision of necessary information to carers about a child, prior to and during their placement, to enable carers to properly support the child c. support and training for carers to deal with the different developmental needs of children as well as managing difficult situations and challenging behaviour.

Recommendation 12.18

The key focus of residential care for children should be based on an intensive therapeutic model of care framework designed to meet the complex needs of children with histories of abuse and trauma.

It is foundational to our mission to support those at the margins, and children in the out-of-home care system are among the most vulnerable. We accept our practice is fundamental to the experiences these children have in care and we are committed to doing better for them.

The Church and its out-of-home care institutions are committed to best practice and continuous improvement and will continue to work with state and territory governments in system reforms which assist in the stability of placements, the training of foster and kinship carers, therapeutic support for children with harmful sexual behaviours, appropriate matching of children with other children and carers, including children in decision making about them and effective regulation and quality outcomes.

The Royal Commission’s recommendations are accepted, noting that further analysis may be required as implementation progresses.

Description of measures implemented prior to December 2018:

Actions underway across jurisdictions have included:

- a) review of carer recruitment process to identify opportunities to improve safety;
- b) hiring a trauma specialist in OOHc as a Practice Lead
- c) appointment of a Child Safe Principal Practitioner
- d) engaging in evidence-based therapeutic models and case management to support children and young people with harmful sexual behaviours
- e) regular structured supervision of staff working in out-of-home care
- f) investigating methods for preventing placement breakdown
- g) using a placement matching tool
- h) working closely with government departments to try to support children through the system, including to find suitable placements for children with harmful sexual behaviours
- i) developing consistent training requirements across levels, increasing requirements as seniority increases

- j) contributing to government consultations around system reforms

Prospective work that will be undertaken post-2018 to implement this measure:

Our out-of-home care services are committed to continuous improvement and actions include:

- a) refining carer recruitment process in line with recommendations
- b) ensuring trauma-informed and therapeutic practice
- c) ensuring children's voices are present in relation to their own case management, and also in service and system improvements
- d) improving staff recruitment and induction processes to enhance staff retention to support the stability of placements
- e) reviewing and updating theoretical and practice handbooks, training and policies for residential care services.

NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS
(VOLUME 13, RECOMMENDATIONS 13.1 – 13.6)

Recommendation 13.1

All schools should implement the Child Safe Standards identified by the Royal Commission.

Recommendation 13.5

Boarding hostels for children and young people should implement the Child Safe Standards identified by the Royal Commission.

Recommendation 13.6

Consistent with the Child Safe Standards, complaint handling policies for schools (see Recommendation 7.7) should include effective policies and procedures for managing complaints about children with harmful sexual behaviours.

The Church and its schools accept these recommendations.

Church affiliated schools, both incorporated and unincorporated, operate throughout metropolitan and regional Australia. Each of these schools is governed by a School Council/Board. While the formal governing relationships vary from school to school, the Church, through Synods, are investing considerably in building relationships and networks which support collaboration and cross resourcing.

The National Child Safe Policy Framework applies to Uniting Church Schools. In addition to the Framework, each of the schools operates in a regulated environment. The policies for the protection of children and the prevention of child sexual abuse that operate within the schools have been developed and implemented in a manner that meets their specific legal obligations under relevant State/Territory laws, and their funding agreements. Licensing and accreditation processes for educational services also have requirements which impact on the safety of children. This includes meeting quality standards set down by regulators, applying working with children check regimes and meeting mandatory reporting obligations.

In many cases, regulatory requirements are more prescriptive than the Framework. However, we believe that the strength of the Framework for schools is in setting the culture within which these services operate to ensure that child safety is more than just a compliance exercise. As a result, each of the schools has developed their own policies, which are specific to their respective operating environment.

In addition to specific child safety policies, complaints handling processes are also the subject of cyclical review and continuous improvement processes. Many of our institutions have whistleblower policies in place. These apply more broadly than child safety but can provide a complementary process to make staff more likely to raise issues about matters that cause them concern.

As previously noted, the revision of the National Child Safe Policy Framework incorporated the elements identified by the Royal Commission. Therefore, under the

current policy framework, these elements are applied to each setting through their own internal policy suites.

Information about policies and procedures, along with reporting processes, are made widely known and easily available to staff, students and caregivers.

Description of measures implemented prior to December 2018:

The Church notes that schools are already highly regulated with a focus on child wellbeing. Further, the Church looks forward to the introduction of arrangements by governments.

The Church's schools' child safety policies, guidelines and practices also apply to its boarding houses, along with boarding specific policies and practices. Staff suitability for working safely with children is explored at recruitment and sound induction takes place, along with ongoing professional development.

Student protection policies and associated abuse and grooming detection and reporting guidelines are in place or being developed.

Prospective work that will be undertaken post-2018 to implement this measure:

We are committed to continuous improvement, audit and review of child safety policies, procedures and practices to ensure all children involved in the life of a school are free from harm and protected.