

The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

October 2022

Volume 1



INDEPENDENT INQUIRY
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

HC 720

The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

October 2022

A report of the Inquiry Panel
Professor Alexis Jay OBE
Professor Sir Malcolm Evans KCMG OBE
Ivor Frank
Drusilla Sharpling CBE

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the Inquiries Act 2005**

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Foreword by Professor Alexis Jay OBE

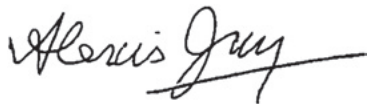
In accordance with my statutory duty, I have delivered a copy of this report to the Home Secretary. It draws on the entirety of the Inquiry's work and makes important recommendations to protect future generations of children from sexual abuse.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation of the professionalism and commitment shown by all staff associated with the Inquiry.

In particular, I wish to thank my colleague Panel members – Professor Sir Malcolm Evans KCMG OBE, Ivor Frank, and Drusilla Sharpling CBE – for their invaluable assistance to me in my role as Chair. I am also grateful to John O'Brien, Brian Altman KC and Martin Smith, as Secretary, Lead Counsel and Solicitor to the Inquiry, respectively, for the advice and guidance which they have given to the Panel throughout the Inquiry's work.

Above all, I want to pay tribute to the many thousands of victims and survivors who came forward and told the Inquiry about the abuse they experienced. As Chair, I observed first hand the courage and bravery of so many who spoke candidly about the shocking acts perpetrated

against them. I urge the UK government, the Welsh Government and all other relevant institutions to implement promptly the Inquiry's recommendations which are designed to protect children from sexual abuse in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alexis Jay". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Professor Alexis Jay OBE

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report is the final statutory report published by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (the Inquiry). In accordance with the Terms of Reference, it sets out the main findings about the extent to which State and non-State institutions failed in their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation and makes recommendations for reform. It draws on the Inquiry's 15 investigations and 19 related investigation reports, the *Interim Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse* and 41 other Inquiry reports and publications. The Inquiry has made 20 recommendations in this report. These final recommendations complement the 87 recommendations contained in the previously published investigation reports (including six which have been restated).

There are nearly 13 million children in England and Wales, each of whom needs and deserves to be protected from harm. Babies, toddlers and children are potentially at risk, with current estimates indicating that 1 in 6 girls and 1 in 20 boys experience child sexual abuse before the age of 16. In March 2020, the Office for National Statistics estimated that 3.1 million adults in England and

Wales had experienced sexual abuse before the age of 16. Reflecting the guiding principle that the child's welfare is paramount, the Inquiry's recommendations are focussed on making England and Wales places for children to grow up safely and thrive.

The work of the Inquiry over the past seven years demonstrates that:

- child sexual abuse and exploitation takes many forms but can involve vile and painful acts such as vaginal and anal rape;
- children, particularly those who are sexually exploited, are often degraded and abused by multiple perpetrators;
- historically, inadequate measures were in place to protect children from the risk of being sexually abused – sometimes there were none at all;
- individuals and institutions often thought children were lying when they tried to disclose what was being done to them;
- victims were frequently blamed as being responsible for their own sexual abuse;
- within statutory agencies with direct responsibility for child protection there was too little emphasis on the complex and highly

skilled work of child protection. Decisions about children were not unequivocally based on the paramount interests of the child;

- multi-agency arrangements still lack focus on child protection;
- there is still not enough support available to both child and adult victims and survivors;
- child sexual abuse is not a problem consigned to the past, and the explosion in online-facilitated child sexual abuse underlines the extent to which the problem is endemic within England and Wales;
- the devastation and harm caused by sexual abuse cannot be overstated – the impact of child sexual abuse, often lifelong, is such that everyone should do all they can to protect children; and
- this is not just a national crisis, but a global one.

At the heart of this report are the Inquiry's recommendations to help protect children. There needs to be a greater priority and focus, politically and across society as a whole, on protecting children from sexual abuse. The establishment of the Child Protection Authorities in England and in Wales, coupled with national public awareness campaigns, are designed to ensure that the spotlight remains directed at preventing child sexual abuse.

These recommendations will be reinforced by cabinet-level ministerial positions for children to provide senior leadership and increased priority within government. One of the aims of the public awareness campaign is to inform the public about the action they should take if they know or suspect a child is being sexually abused. This will complement the recommendation for a new law of mandatory reporting making it a legal requirement for those who work in regulated activity or work in a position of trust to report child sexual abuse.

The impact of past failures to protect children from sexual abuse and to support those who have been harmed is incalculable. To address this, the Inquiry considers that a redress scheme must be established to make some reparation for the harm suffered.

Background and context

The sexual abuse and exploitation of children is criminal and morally wrong. There is no excuse for those who perpetrate this crime. It has never been right or excusable whenever it occurred. To a significant extent, this also applies to those who knew about the abuse but did nothing, as well as to those who actively covered it up or contrived to assist a perpetrator in escaping justice or avoiding the scrutiny of the statutory authorities.

As the Inquiry progressed, the extent of the global crisis in child sexual abuse and exploitation became increasingly clear. This is manifested in one way by the number of national and institutional inquiries being conducted across the world – including in the US, Australia, Ireland, Germany, France, Spain and Japan. The extraordinary, soaring numbers of child victims of internet-based sexual abuse also confirm the scale of the problem, providing evidence that the sexual abuse of children cannot be conveniently committed to the annals of history. Millions of child sexual abuse images can be accessed within just three ‘clicks’, many of which depict young children and babies.

Nearly every one of the Inquiry’s investigation reports concluded that the true scale of sexual abuse of children is likely to have been much higher than the actual numbers recorded, and this continues to be the case with current methods of data-gathering. Information collected by children’s services shows high numbers of assessments where child sexual abuse and exploitation is identified as a risk factor, but the number of children placed on child protection plans under the primary category of child sexual abuse is comparatively low.

In surveys, girls were at least three times as likely as boys to describe experiences of child sexual abuse. Disabled participants were twice

as likely to describe such experiences as non-disabled participants, and those who lived in a care home were nearly four times as likely to have experienced child sexual abuse. Those who had experienced childhood neglect were nearly five times as likely to have experienced child sexual abuse as those who had not.

While many may think that child sexual abuse is not a matter that affects them, the economic and social costs of child sexual abuse affect everyone. In December 2021, the Home Office published a study into the costs relating to children whose contact sexual abuse began or continued in the year ending March 2019. The estimated cost to society exceeded £10 billion.

Over decades, society's responses to child sexual abuse have reflected its attitude towards children. At worst, within some institutions, children have been treated as commodities at adults' disposal to do with as they wished. In the mid-20th century, child sexual abuse was not believed to be widespread. There was even a belief that there was such a thing as a 'seductive child'. The notion that child sexual abuse was 'not harmful' persisted into the 1990s and, in some professional spheres, responses to it were seen as 'over zealous' and characterised as a 'moral panic'. In the 2000s, some responses became more child-focussed, but others continued to deflect blame away from

perpetrators and institutions, especially in the area of child sexual exploitation. While some of these attitudes have been challenged, there remains an incomplete public understanding of child sexual abuse, exploitation and power dynamics. Children cannot consent to their own abuse, and questions of empowerment, inclusion and hearing children's voices are still not being fully addressed.

This report is the culmination of a public inquiry, the focus of which was the institutional responses to child sexual abuse in England and Wales 'in living memory'. Examining past failures across such a broad spectrum of institutions and organisations, coupled with the contributions of many thousands of Truth Project participants, has provided the Inquiry with a unique body of knowledge, enabling it to make recommendations to protect future generations of children.

Common themes across institutions

The breadth of the Inquiry's investigations across diverse settings has identified many common themes directly relevant to child sexual abuse. These themes have occurred across many different institutions.

The pain and suffering caused to victims and survivors often affected many aspects of their lives. Relationships – whether personal, familial or sexual

– suffered. Physical, emotional and mental health was damaged, in some cases beyond repair. The institutional responses often involved insincere apologies and the inadequate provision of support and counselling, thereby compounding the harm.

The deviousness and cruelty of perpetrators was limitless. Children were threatened, beaten and humiliated. Those with disabilities or other vulnerabilities were often deliberately selected for that very reason. Offenders groomed victims and befriended parents in order to create a veneer of genuine affection which not only enabled the abuse to be committed but often inhibited the subsequent reporting of any disclosure.

The protection of personal and institutional reputations above the protection of children was a frequent institutional reaction. Statutory agencies were not informed, perpetrators were ‘moved on’ and there were failures by those in authority to thoroughly investigate allegations. Records about child sexual abuse allegations were not kept.

Some institutions had no child protection policies and procedures. Where policies and procedures were in existence, they were often inadequate or not complied with. Inspections of institutions were, at times, lacking. Recommendations made following internal or external reviews were infrequently implemented and sometimes ignored.

Online-facilitated child sexual abuse magnifies the risk to children both nationally and internationally. Escalating production and sharing of child sexual abuse material and the live streaming of sexual abuse affects children of all ages but particularly those aged under 13 years.

The scale and extent of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation are difficult to ascertain as data collection is poor. The available data present a confused and confusing picture, and there is no consistent approach to the recording of data, including by key statutory agencies such as the police and local authorities. The prevalence figures cited in this report cover all forms of child sexual abuse and there are no data which separate abuse which takes place within a family environment from that which takes place in institutions.

Problems in the criminal justice system included investigative and prosecutorial failures. Disruption tactics, which operate to prevent offenders from committing sexual offences against children, were underused. Delays in the system mean victims and survivors often have to wait years for the case to conclude.

The Inquiry also identified wider societal issues where responses to children's disclosures were characterised by embarrassment, fear and disbelief. There needs to be greater public

awareness of the scale and scope of child sexual abuse and exploitation in order to improve our response to children who are abused.

Investigation reports

The following summaries set out the key issues to emerge from each of the Inquiry's 15 investigations. The summaries do not include reference to any subsequent developments, whether positive or negative.

The investigation into the **Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales** revealed a sorry history of child sexual abuse where abusive priests and members of religious orders and institutions preyed on children for prolonged periods of time. Between 1970 and 2015, the Church received more than 3,000 complaints against more than 900 individuals connected to the Church. In the same period, there were 177 prosecutions, resulting in 133 convictions. Millions of pounds have been paid to victims and survivors in civil proceedings. Since 2016, there have been more than 100 reported allegations of recent and non-recent child sexual abuse every year. The true scale of abuse over a 50-year period is likely to be much greater.

Responses to disclosures about child sexual abuse have been characterised by a failure to support victims and survivors – in stark contrast to the positive action often taken to protect perpetrators and the reputation of the Church.

The reactions of Church leaders over time were marked by delay in implementing change, as well as reluctance to hold individuals to account or to make sincere apologies. On occasions, they conveyed a grudging and unsympathetic attitude to victims and survivors. In order to shake off the failures of the past, real and lasting changes to attitudes are needed.

Although there have been some improvements to current safeguarding arrangements, more recent audits have identified weaknesses. The culture and attitudes in the Roman Catholic Church have been resistant to change.

During the Roman Catholic Church case study on the **Archdiocese of Birmingham**, the Archdiocese accepted that it was responsible “*for institutional failings which on occasion permitted the sexual abuse of children to continue when it might otherwise have been stopped*”.

The publication of the Nolan report in 2002 was a significant milestone for the Roman Catholic Church because it examined the Church’s child protection arrangements and made recommendations for structural and procedural

reforms. The Cumberlege report was published in 2007 and was intended to identify further reforms. The recommendations of these reports set a clear and unequivocal direction for the Church and were intended as a springboard for major change. While some improvement has been noted in the Archdiocese of Birmingham since the publication of these reports, there were still significant gaps in their child safeguarding arrangements.

The Inquiry widened its understanding of the role of the Roman Catholic Church in education through the English Benedictine Congregation (EBC) case studies incorporating **Ampleforth and Downside Abbeys and schools** and **Ealing Abbey and St Benedict's School**.

The Ampleforth and Downside case study heard evidence of appalling sexual abuse inflicted over decades on children aged as young as seven at Ampleforth and 11 at Downside.

Ten individuals – mostly monks connected to these institutions – have been convicted or cautioned in relation to offences involving sexual activity with a large number of children, or offences concerning pornography. Many perpetrators did not hide their sexual interests from the children.

Rather than refer a suspected perpetrator to the police, in several instances the Abbot of the particular school confined the individual to the Abbey or transferred him and the known risk to

a different parish or other location. For much of the period under consideration by the Inquiry, the overriding concern was to avoid contact with the local authority or the police at all costs, regardless of the seriousness of the alleged abuse or actual knowledge of its occurrence.

Time and time again, the most senior clergymen in the EBC and in the two Abbeys, including past presidents of the EBC, admitted wrong-headed judgements and expressed regret at past failures to protect children.

Child sexual abuse was extensive at Ealing Abbey. Since 2003, two monks and two lay teachers have been convicted of multiple offences involving the sexual abuse of over 20 children between the 1970s and 2008. In 2016, the deputy head was convicted of offences relating to the possession of indecent images of children.

There was a culture of excessive corporal punishment. Physical abuse in many cases was used as a platform for sexual gratification and a means by which to instigate sexual abuse. Corporal punishment was used to punish boys who sought to protect themselves or others from sexual abuse.

It appeared that many in St Benedict's School and Ealing Abbey – teachers and monks alike – were aware of sexually abusive behaviour but were seemingly powerless to do anything about

it. Gossip amongst boys and staff was rife and complaints, including from parents, failed to trigger any action from the school. On the rare occasion information was passed on to the authorities, little if any action was taken.

Headteachers and Abbots did little to improve child protection activity at St Benedict's School. Child sexual abuse was played down. When cases were reported to the police, investigative mistakes were made and, on the rare occasions allegations were referred to the Crown Prosecution Service, the analysis of the evidence was sometimes deficient. Not until much later in time were the named perpetrators finally brought to justice.

The **Anglican Church** investigation examined whether the Church of England and the Church in Wales protected children from sexual abuse. Current safeguarding arrangements were also considered. A total of 390 people associated with the Church of England from the 1940s to 2018 were convicted of sexual offences against children. In 2018, 449 concerns were reported to the Church about recent child sexual abuse, of which more than half related to Church officers. Latterly, a significant amount of offending involved downloading and possession of indecent images of children.

As with other religious organisations, the Anglican Church is marked by its explicit moral purpose in teaching right from wrong. In the context of child sexual abuse, the Church's neglect of the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of children and young people in favour of protecting its reputation was in conflict with its mission of love and care for the innocent and vulnerable.

Safeguarding arrangements in the Church of England were under-resourced until 2015, when resources increased considerably. Changes were also made which aimed to ensure that the advice of safeguarding staff should not be ignored. Nevertheless, there were still some occasions when the advice was disregarded.

The Church of England failed to respond consistently to victims and survivors with sympathy and compassion, accompanied by practical and appropriate support. This often added to the trauma of those who had experienced child sexual abuse by individuals connected to the Church. While there have been important improvements in child protection practice, the Church of England still has more to do to rebuild the trust of victims and survivors. Some internal past case reviews were flawed and inaccurate, and there was a tendency to minimise offending.

In recent years, a number of clergy in the Church in Wales have been deposed from holy orders following sexual assaults on children, or for offences concerning indecent images of children. No precise data on actual numbers are available.

A Historic Cases Review, published in 2012, concluded that there was a need to improve compliance with existing safeguarding policies and adopt additional policies to improve child protection. Further improvements are still required, particularly in the area of record-keeping and the capacity of provincial safeguarding officers.

The **Anglican Church** investigation considered two case studies. The first was the **Diocese of Chichester**, where there had been multiple allegations of sexual abuse against children. Over 50 years, 20 individuals with a connection to Chichester Diocese, including four clergymen, were convicted of sexual offending against children. The responses of the Diocese were marked by secrecy, prevarication, avoidance of reporting alleged crimes to the authorities and a failure to take professional advice. Internal reviews failed to expose the nature and scale of the problem within the Diocese. Instead, they were used by Church leaders to act out their personal conflicts and antagonisms. The reviews ultimately came to nothing until 2011, when the Archbishop of Canterbury intervened by ordering a Visitation.

The second case study concerned **Peter Ball**, who was a bishop in the Chichester Diocese before becoming Bishop of Gloucester. In 1993, he was cautioned for gross indecency. In 2015, Ball pleaded guilty to further offences, including misconduct in public office and indecent assault in which he admitted that he had abused his position as Bishop of Lewes and Bishop of Gloucester to offend against 17 teenagers and young men. One victim, Neil Todd, was seriously failed by the Church and ultimately took his own life. At the time, the Church discounted Ball's behaviour as trivial and insignificant, displaying callous indifference to Mr Todd's complaints. The Archbishops' Council accepted that the Church had displayed "*moral cowardice*" in response to the allegations.

The Inquiry found failings in the response of Lord Carey, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, including showing Ball a degree of compassion which he did not extend to his victims and not disciplining Ball after he was cautioned. Other people of prominence also supported Ball but without any consideration of the experiences of Ball's victims.

The Inquiry also conducted a thematic investigation into **Child protection in religious organisations and settings**. In total, 38 religious organisations, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, new religious movements, non-conformist

Christian denominations, non-trinitarian Christian denominations, Paganism and Sikhism, provided evidence to the Inquiry.

Respect for a diversity of beliefs is the hallmark of a liberal democracy but can never be used to justify harm to a child. There were significant barriers to effective reporting of child sexual abuse, including victim-blaming and notions of shame and honour. In some religious traditions and communities, children are not taught about sex or sexual relationships. The Inquiry was told by representatives of some faiths that in some languages there were no words for rape, sexual abuse or genitalia.

Not all religious organisations had adequate child protection policies, despite the advice readily accessible in the public domain. In some, safe recruitment practices were not always followed and there was limited uptake of child protection training offered by local authorities. While some religious organisations had effective systems in place for responding to child sexual abuse, this was not the case across the board. Very few had arrangements in place for the provision of counselling or therapy sessions for victims and survivors.

Some religious organisations provide education and services to children through supplementary schooling or out-of-school provision. There are also a number of unregistered schools providing

full-time education. Serious concerns were expressed by Ofsted that a minority of out-of-school settings were putting children at risk by failing to adhere to basic child protection standards.

The **Cambridge House, Knowl View and Rochdale** investigation focussed on child sexual abuse in Rochdale and institutional failures to protect vulnerable boys in care. This included Cambridge House hostel for boys and young men where the Inquiry heard about the predatory activities of Cyril Smith. Between 1962 and 1965, Smith, who was not medically qualified, conducted ‘medical examinations’ on a number of boys, including of their genitalia. Smith’s prominence and standing in Rochdale in the mid-1960s allowed him to exert pressure on others locally, in particular to keep quiet about any allegations of abuse. Years later, in 1998 and 1999, for reasons unconnected to Smith’s position, the Crown Prosecution Service wrongly advised that Smith should not be charged. Knowl View School was basic and bleak, providing neither care nor education. Staff were at best complacent, and at worst complicit, in the abuse they knew to be taking place.

Senior council officials in social services and education departments were at fault for failing to treat the problem of sexual abuse at Knowl View School with any urgency. In evidence, the council

leader lied to the Inquiry when he denied all knowledge of the issues about child sexual abuse at Knowl View.

Police investigations into other individuals involved in the sexual exploitation of boys from Knowl View School in the town centre toilets also resulted in no charges being brought, despite the police knowing their identities and having obtained disclosures from the young victims. These failures, along with those relating to the allegations against Smith, deprived victims and complainants of the opportunity of seeing perpetrators being brought to justice.

For more than five decades, **Nottingham City Council and Nottinghamshire County Council** failed in their statutory duty to protect children in their care from sexual abuse, perpetrated primarily by predatory residential staff and foster carers. The Inquiry received evidence of approximately 350 complainants who made allegations of child sexual abuse from the 1960s onwards. In residential care, there were poor recruitment practices, low staffing ratios, few qualified staff and little training. In some instances, a sexualised culture prevailed, with staff behaving wholly inappropriately towards children, paving the way for sexual abuse. It was as if anyone could carry out the important work of being a substitute parent to damaged

children. Residential care carried little priority with senior managers, even when they were aware of escalating numbers of allegations of sexual abuse.

From the mid-1970s to the 1990s, the picture was equally poor in foster care. Recruitment, assessment and support of foster carers, and supervision of children's placements, were inconsistent and almost casual. When allegations of abuse were made, Council staff were too willing to take the side of the foster carers and to disbelieve the child.

Neither Council learned from its mistakes, despite commissioning many reviews which made clear what changes were needed in their care systems to stop the sexual abuse of children. Nor did they have a satisfactory approach to addressing the issue of harmful sexual behaviour amongst children in their care.

It is hard to comprehend the cruelty and sexual abuse inflicted on children in the care of **Lambeth Council** over many years, by staff, by foster carers and their families, and by 'volunteers' in residential settings. By 2020, the Council was aware of 705 former residents of three children's homes examined in this investigation who had made complaints of sexual abuse. Foster care was equally bad, with foster carers not adequately vetted or made the subject of criminal records

checks. A review of criminal records checks in the late 1990s led to Lambeth Council's foster care placements being reduced by one-third.

In the 1980s, the culture of Lambeth Council was dominated by politicised behaviour and turmoil, as it took on the government of the day. In 1986, its stance in failing to set a council tax rate resulted in 33 councillors being removed from their positions. This preoccupation meant the majority of members were distracted from their primary task of providing good-quality public services, including children's social care. Despite what was claimed to be a 'progressive' political agenda, bullying, intimidation, racism, nepotism and sexism thrived, and were set within a context of corruption and financial mismanagement, which permeated much of Lambeth Council's operations. All of this directly impacted on the safety and protection of children in care.

With one or two exceptions, a succession of elected members and senior officials ought to have been held accountable for allowing the sexual abuse of children in their care to continue over decades. Lambeth Council was only able to identify one senior Council employee, over the course of 40 years, who was disciplined for their part in this catalogue of failures to address child sexual abuse. Many reports commissioned by Lambeth Council also described serious failures

in services and staff practices which rendered children unsafe, often from the people paid to look after them. Nobody in relevant positions of authority during that time could truthfully have said they did not know about the abuse of children. The conclusion was therefore unavoidable that those who ran Lambeth Council for the most part simply did not care enough to prioritise the protection of children.

The investigation into **Child sexual exploitation by organised networks** examined six case study areas across England and Wales to obtain an accurate picture of current practice of police and local authorities, at a strategic level and by examination of individual cases.

The accounts of the victims and survivors in the case studies demonstrate the cruelty of perpetrators towards the children they exploit. It confirmed that the sexual exploitation of children by networks was not a rare problem confined to a small number of areas with high-profile criminal cases but was widespread.

There appeared to be a flawed assumption that this problem was on the wane. Data presented to the Inquiry at a national level and in the six case study areas were confused and confusing, marked by inconsistencies, unexplained trends and variations. In addition, the ethnicity of victims and alleged perpetrators was rarely recorded.

Children in residential care and those with a disability are at a heightened risk of being sexually exploited. There is a national shortage of suitable residential care placements for children who are at risk of or have experienced child sexual exploitation. This has resulted in some older victims being placed in unsuitable accommodation, without proper support or supervision, making them at increased risk of further exploitation.

The investigation on **the Internet** focussed on the rapidly growing problem of online-facilitated child sexual abuse. Increased access to and use of the internet have enabled a section of society to misuse it to distribute indecent images of children; to groom and manipulate children to commit sexual acts on-screen, often for the purpose of sexual exploitation; and to live stream the sexual abuse of children from around the world, including from the UK. Those affected live in fear that images of them being sexually abused remain available on the internet indefinitely. The harm done to children and their families is incalculable.

In particular, there has been a recent, significant increase in child sexual exploitation online, including live streaming appalling abuse. For example, the sexual abuse of children was live streamed for money, at times at the direction of the person paying to view the abuse.

While most internet companies either prohibit or discourage children under 13 years from accessing their platforms, the Inquiry repeatedly heard evidence that under 13-year-olds easily accessed their services and that they were at significant risk of being groomed. Industry witnesses spoke of their companies' commitment to preventing online child sexual abuse, but action taken by industry was too often reactive and sometimes seemingly motivated by the desire to avoid reputational damage caused by adverse media reporting. Technology has been developed to detect online-facilitated child sexual abuse. However, there needs to be greater collaboration across the industry to demonstrate that the internet companies are doing more than paying lip service to their stated commitment to protecting children.

There remains the question of end-to-end encryption, and the stark debate between protection of privacy and protection of children. A technical solution is now overdue to assist the detection of online-facilitated child sexual abuse, and to make the internet safe for all children.

The investigation of the experiences of sexual abuse by **Children outside the United Kingdom** started with an examination of **Child Migration Programmes**. Over a period of many years before and after the Second World War, successive UK governments allowed children to be removed

from their families, care homes and foster care in England and in Wales to be sent to institutions and families abroad without their parents. After the war, around 4,000 children were migrated, mainly to Australia.

The children lived in many settings characterised by physical and emotional abuse and neglect, as well as sexual abuse. The treatment of many of these children was akin to torture and had lifelong consequences. When they tried to report their experiences, the children were disbelieved and intimidated, often with violence. Some were lied to about their family background, and even about whether their parents were alive or dead.

While a number of organisations participated in child migration programmes, it was the overwhelming conclusion of the Inquiry that, after the Second World War, the UK government was primarily to blame for the continued existence of the programme. It was a deeply flawed policy that caused lifelong damage to many children, and immediate financial redress was required for surviving child migrants.

In phase 2 of the investigation, the Inquiry also examined the sexual abuse of children by UK nationals and residents outside the UK. The full scale of this offending was unknown but was undoubtedly extensive. Moreover, the sexual abuse of children abroad does not have to take

place abroad. In 2018, the National Crime Agency estimated that some 80,000 people in the UK could pose a threat to children online, increasingly through live streaming.

The Inquiry was concerned by the under-use of civil orders, which can be used to restrict foreign travel. In addition, when these orders are made they can be circumvented by travelling to the restricted country via another route. The powers to prosecute offenders in England and Wales for child sexual abuse offences committed abroad are now set out in section 72 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. There have been a small number of prosecutions under this section – more needs to be done to raise awareness of these powers in police forces. Increased cooperation between law enforcement agencies internationally depends on raising the number of international liaison officers to work with partners in high-risk countries.

The operation of the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) caused some concern for employers in England and in Wales who were required to obtain a DBS certificate when seeking to engage staff to work with children overseas. Institutions based overseas cannot request a DBS check and must rely on an International Child Protection Certificate. There were some

discrepancies between the two certificates and the system as a whole was confusing and capable of exploitation by offenders.

The **Westminster** investigation concerned institutional responses to allegations of child sexual abuse and exploitation involving people of public prominence who were associated with Westminster. It was unacceptable that at the time of the public hearing in this investigation (March 2019) some political parties had chosen not to put appropriate safeguarding and child protection policies in place.

Several cross-cutting themes recurred throughout the investigation, including undue deference by police, prosecutors and political parties towards politicians and others in public life; differences in the treatment of wealthy and well-connected individuals, as opposed to those who were poorer, more deprived and without access to networks of influence; failures to put children and their welfare first; and the prioritisation of reputation over the needs and safety of children.

Political parties showed themselves to be more concerned about political fallout than safeguarding and, in some cases in the past, the honours system prioritised reputation and discretion in making awards with little or no regard for victims of nominated persons.

There was ample evidence that individual perpetrators of child sexual abuse were linked to Westminster but, despite some assertions to the contrary, there was no evidence of an organised ‘Westminster paedophile network’.

The investigation concerning **Institutional responses to allegations involving the late Lord Janner of Braunstone QC** focussed on the institutional responses to allegations of child sexual abuse in circumstances where there had been no conviction or judicial finding of fact that the alleged abuse occurred. It was necessary to conduct much of the public hearing in closed session to protect the identity of complainants who are entitled to lifelong anonymity under the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1992.

In two of the three police investigations into the allegations made by complainants, there were failures in the way Leicestershire Police investigated the allegations and, despite some isolated efforts by police officers to remedy the position, the complainants were not given sympathetic treatment. However, the Inquiry found no evidence that the police were unduly influenced or placed under improper pressure not to pursue the allegations.

In Operation Magnolia (2000 to 2001), statements containing two complainants’ allegations relating to Lord Janner were not provided by Leicestershire

Police to the Crown Prosecution Service when they should have been. This was a significant and unjustifiable failing. There was also strong suspicion that children in local authority care were not to be trusted and so complainants were ignored.

In Operation Dauntless (2006 to 2007), there appeared to be a reluctance to progress the police investigation and the Crown Prosecution Service advice about this Operation lacked detail and was strategically flawed.

More generally, Leicestershire County Council accepted that during the 1970s and 1980s it failed to take children's concerns about physical and sexual abuse seriously and admitted that its responses were inadequate.

Children in custodial institutions are some of the most vulnerable in society. At the time of the public hearing in July 2018, there were around 900 children detained by the criminal justice system in either a young offender institution (YOI), a secure training centre (STC) or a secure children's home (SCH).

This investigation concentrated on the period from 2009 to 2017, at the start of which over 3,000 children were in custody. Many of these children were engaged in regular offending, including violence and sexual abuse, following unhappy and disrupted childhoods. The accounts

of adult survivors of child sexual abuse who were detained in custodial institutions in the earlier years were among the worst the Inquiry has heard. Recent inspection reports from Ofsted and HM Inspectorate of Prisons raised serious concerns about the safety of children in several units in the custodial estate.

Complaints of sexual abuse in YOIs and STCs were rarely investigated properly, with little evidence of involvement of the statutory authorities, signifying a failure to adhere to normal child protection procedures. Forms of control such as pain compliance techniques, approved by the Ministry of Justice, were particularly intimidating for children who had been sexually abused.

Throughout this investigation, the differences between the regimes in YOIs and STCs and those in SCHs became increasingly clear. The latter are more child centred, with better staff ratios and training requirements. These institutions are subject to similar standards of care to those applied by Ofsted to children's homes. A serious concern is the uneven availability of SCHs which accept children detained for criminal justice reasons, with none in London and the south-east of England.

Custodial institutions for children were under-resourced. Staff turnover was unacceptably high, not helped by structural change and instability, following attempts by various governments to provide an effective model of care and control.

The **Accountability and Reparations**

investigation heard that many victims who sought reparations for child sexual abuse found the experience of the legal processes involved were sometimes hostile, baffling, frustrating and futile.

The redress available for victims and survivors included punishment of the perpetrator, compensation from an individual or institution, acknowledgement that the abuse occurred, an apology, an explanation of how the abuse was allowed to happen, an assurance of non-recurrence, and counselling or other support.

In the criminal justice system, a report to the police may lead to prosecution, conviction and imprisonment of the perpetrator and a compensation order being made. A criminal allegation must be proved to a high standard – so that the jury are sure (formerly beyond reasonable doubt) – but there is no time limit for the complaint to be made. A Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority award may be sought.

A complaint in civil law is, by contrast, usually for compensation from an institution which has legal responsibility for the perpetrator. A civil

law complaint must be proved on the balance of probabilities but must usually be brought within three years of the abuse or by the 18th birthday of the complainant. However, very few victims and survivors of child sexual abuse bring their claims before the age of 21.

None of the processes associated with the remedies available adequately compensated victims and survivors for the distress and suffering brought about by their experiences of child sexual abuse. Many felt forced to give up rather than pursue a process that caused such distress and was often characterised by delay over many years.

The **Residential schools** investigation examined a broad range of educational settings and contexts in which staff had been convicted of the sexual abuse of pupils, or in which serious safeguarding concerns had arisen. This included residential specialist music schools, residential special schools and boarding schools, and other mainstream schools and was complemented by *Non-Recent Sexual Abuse in Residential Schools: An account submitted by Counsel to the Inquiry concerning eight closed residential schools*. The Inquiry found evidence of teachers and others exploiting their positions of trust to abuse children in all the various educational settings it considered.

The investigation report includes many deeply distressing cases of sexual abuse, the signs of which went unnoticed or were not responded to appropriately. Some staff were reluctant to report concerns, while some headteachers found it inconceivable that staff might abuse children. Many were also unaware of their roles in relation to safeguarding. Although some perpetrators have been brought to justice, many have not. Likewise, many in positions of authority and responsibility have not been held to account for serious failures of leadership and governance.

In the specialist music schools examined, the reputations of both the musicians and the schools were often seen as more important than their victims and potential victims when allegations were made or concerns were raised. The response was similar when concerns were raised about well-liked and generally respected members of staff in other school contexts, in both the independent and state sectors.

Despite 20 years of enhanced focus on safeguarding, schools are not as safe for children as they should be, and children's interests do not always come first when allegations or concerns of sexual abuse arise. The Inquiry identified many shortcomings in current systems of protection, regulation, oversight and enforcement, including the scope and practical operation of the DBS

scheme, workforce regulation, inspection systems and standards. Statutory guidance is not always sufficiently precise and clear. Some staff were reluctant to report concerns, in part fearful of the consequences of doing so. When concerns were raised, they were not always referred to statutory authorities when they should have been. Where the threshold for formal referral was not met, there was confusion regarding what, if any, further steps should be taken, and by whom.

The thematic investigation about **effective leadership of child protection** built on the Inquiry's findings on leadership across its investigations. There was a mixed picture in many institutions. The worst examples involved people in charge of institutions who demonstrated indifference, even hostility, to victims, despite evidence or suspicion of wrongdoing by perpetrators. These attitudes were communicated as acceptable from the top of the institution through its various levels, leaving victims with few, if any, adults to trust.

There is no doubt that good leadership is essential to better outcomes for vulnerable children. Staff who are unclear about their role, lack confidence in their managers or leaders, and do not base their practice on the unequivocal primacy of the best interests of the child will not deliver good child protection, whatever the setting.

The public hearing identified several important dimensions to good leadership practice. These included embedding child-centred values, making child protection everyone's responsibility, creating strong governance and clear individual accountability, providing a visible role model of listening to children and involving them, ensuring diverse and inclusive practice, creating a 'speak up' culture, gathering good data and making best use of it, and learning from institutional failure.

This report

This final Report by the Inquiry comprises two parts.

The voices of victims and survivors

'Victims and Survivors' Voices' uses the words of those who have been sexually abused to describe what happened to them. Some of the content is therefore explicit, but these experiences and perspectives are at the heart of this Inquiry.

Each account represents a life fundamentally altered and affected by the abuse. The harm brought about by sexual abuse cannot be overestimated or ignored – education, familial relationships, sexual relationships, mental, emotional and physical well-being, job prospects can all be affected. In some cases it has driven victims to self-harm and even take their own life.

It is difficult to imagine what it feels like to be silenced or dismissed when trying to tell someone that you have been sexually abused. This happened so often to victims and survivors that many gave up trying to report what had happened to them. That is why the Truth Project – designed to enable victims and survivors to share their accounts in a confidential setting – was such a vital part of the Inquiry’s work, and why ‘Victims and Survivors’ Voices’ represents a cornerstone of the Inquiry’s analysis and recommendations.

More than 6,200 victims and survivors contributed to the Truth Project – for some, it was the first time they had spoken about the child sexual abuse they had suffered. Across the Inquiry’s work, victims and survivors recounted the barriers they faced when reporting abuse. Many felt a deep sense of shame about what had been done to them; they worried about the consequences of reporting the abuse. Some victims and survivors were too young at the time of the abuse to recognise that what had happened to them was abusive; some did not have the vocabulary to describe that abuse.

Accounts revealed how sexual abuse was often accompanied by physical abuse or neglect at home. Many of the acts perpetrated caused agonising physical pain, most often inflicted by an abuser who was known to the victim and whom they trusted. The Inquiry heard how difficult it was

for many victims and survivors to report what was happening to them and how many were ignored or not taken seriously.

Many victims and survivors who contributed to the Inquiry's work were motivated to share their accounts in order to try to help prevent other children being abused. As a result, this report starts with the victims and survivors.

As well as the contributions made to the public hearings, victims and survivors assisted the Inquiry through the Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel and the Victims and Survivors Forum. Engagement was enhanced by discussions with young people, the LGBTQ+ community and specialist organisations assisting victims of child sexual abuse from ethnic minority communities. Each group described particular concerns, but common themes emerged that were reflected throughout the Inquiry's work: lack of trust in institutions that were supposed to help and a failure to understand and respond appropriately to the impact of the sexual abuse as well as cultural and other related issues.

The Inquiry's recommendations for change

'The Inquiry's Conclusions and Recommendations for Change' is derived from the evidence that was heard at the public hearings, the accounts given

to the Truth Project and the work conducted by the Inquiry's research programme. It considers the institutional response to child sexual abuse allegations by examining the various ways in which institutions and organisations protect children, and investigate and respond to child sexual abuse. The accounts of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and the institutions that were responsible for protecting children have led to the important recommendations and changes for improvement described in detail in this report.

Institutions, whether state or non-state, should not rely on children coming forward as the sole means of identifying and detecting child sexual abuse. Most statutory agencies provide simple information on their websites about how to recognise indicators of potential sexual abuse, and what to do if an individual suspects abuse has occurred. It is evident from these summaries that child sexual abuse came to the attention of people in authority in institutions in many different ways, at different times, and with widely varying responses, or none at all.

All institutions involved on a regular basis with children must be proactive and vigilant. If information about known or suspected sexual abuse is held by anyone in the institution, the information must be acted upon and proper investigation must take place, regardless of

cultural, religious, educational or societal norms and beliefs. There should be no exceptions to this requirement.

While many of the investigations considered the response to non-recent allegations of child sexual abuse, Part J considers current and emerging challenges facing the institutional response. In particular, the much-anticipated regulation of the internet as set out in the Online Safety Bill is likely to be implemented after the publication of this report and so the efficacy of the new regime will not be properly understood for some time to come. Nonetheless, the Inquiry welcomes the introduction of both Ofcom as the online safety regulator and the *Interim Code of Practice on Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*.

Child protection must be given the priority it deserves and needs. To achieve this, and to counter the lack of responsiveness across many of the institutions and the individuals associated with them, the Inquiry has made 20 recommendations in this report. These recommendations are all designed to tackle systemic weaknesses in organisations and practices which have left children vulnerable to abuse, exposed them to harm or denied them access to justice.

Three recommendations form the centrepiece of the Inquiry's work.

The first relates to the introduction of a statutory requirement of mandatory reporting. In effect, it requires individuals in certain employments (paid or voluntary) and professions to report allegations of child sexual abuse to the relevant authorities. Failure to do so in some circumstances could lead to the commission of a new criminal offence of failure to report an allegation of child sexual abuse when required to do so.

The second concerns the establishment of a national redress scheme for England and for Wales, to provide some monetary redress for child sexual abuse for those who have been let down by institutions in the past. This is a fixed-term scheme with straightforward processes to ensure that, as far as possible, victims and survivors secure efficient access to the help they need. The redress scheme is not a substitute for criminal or civil justice systems and it does not replace the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority. The government should seek contributions to the scheme from the institutions affected.

The third recommendation is intended to secure the long-term spotlight on child sexual abuse through the creation of a Child Protection Authority (CPA) in England and in Wales. The CPAs will have powers to inspect any institution associated with children. They will not replace current inspectorates in relation to the statutory

authorities, but may require inspection of those authorities by existing inspectorates. The CPAs over time will become centres of expertise, and may extend their child protection functions to other forms of harm experienced by children. They will also, in due course, monitor implementation of the Inquiry's recommendations and report regularly on progress.

Other recommendations in this report include:

- a single set of core data relating to child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation;
- the creation of a cabinet-level Minister for Children;
- a public awareness campaign on child sexual abuse;
- a ban on the use of pain compliance techniques on children in custodial institutions;
- amendment of the Children Act 1989 to give parity of legal protection to children in care;
- registration of care staff in residential care, and staff in young offender institutions and secure training centres;
- improved compliance with statutory duties to inform the Disclosure and Barring Service about individuals who may pose a risk of harm to children;
- extending the disclosure regime to those working with children overseas;

- extended use of the barred list of people unsuitable for work with children;
- more robust age-verification requirements for the use of online platforms and services;
- mandatory online pre-screening for sexual images of children;
- a guarantee of specialist therapeutic support for child victims of sexual abuse;
- a code of practice for access to records pertaining to child sexual abuse;
- removal of the three-year limitation period for personal injury claims brought by victims; and
- further changes to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme.

As this report demonstrates, child sexual abuse has devastated the lives of children in England and Wales and continues to do so. The protection of children from these crimes requires an uncompromising commitment to the swift implementation of all the Inquiry's recommendations. The Inquiry expects the UK government, the Welsh Government and specified institutions to act upon its recommendations promptly and publish details of the steps they have taken within six months of the publication of this report.

I. Victims and Survivors' Voices

Part A

Introduction

Introduction

1. ‘Victims and Survivors’ Voices’ recognises the experiences of approximately 7,300 victims and survivors of child sexual abuse who participated in the Inquiry’s work.¹ It reflects their accounts of child sexual abuse and draws on experiences recounted to the Inquiry of the institutional responses that followed.

2. The language used to refer to individuals reflects the different ways in which victims and survivors engaged with the Inquiry. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of victims and survivors who spoke to the Inquiry through the Truth Project or participated in the Inquiry’s research. Ciphers (eg ‘AN-A89’) have been used for complainant core participants or other witnesses who provided evidence in the Inquiry’s investigations. The real names of victims

¹ The headings in ‘Victims and Survivors’ Voices’ reflect the voices of victims and survivors. It is not possible to provide a precise figure for the number of victims and survivors who participated in the Inquiry’s work, as many participated in more than one way (ie Truth Project, investigations, research), sometimes anonymously.

and survivors have been used where complainant core participants have chosen to waive their right to anonymity.

3. Statistics are based on 5,862 victims and survivors who participated in the Truth Project between June 2016 and October 2021 and consented to their information being used for research purposes.² Figure A.1 provides an overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of those Truth Project participants.

² The analysis that informed ‘Victims and Survivors’ Voices’ only used the experiences and information of Truth Project participants who gave consent for their information to be published or, for the quantitative data included, used for research. Accounts provided by these Truth Project participants also had to be in scope of the Inquiry’s research remit to be included. Some participants decided they did not want their experiences, information or views to be published or used for research – these have been excluded from the analysis. Findings cannot be applied to the general population of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. The underlying data behind these statistics, including *n* values, are contained within the [data compendium](#) to this report.

4. By describing the experiences of victims and survivors, the Inquiry aims to increase public and institutional understanding about child sexual abuse and the impact it can have on victims and survivors.

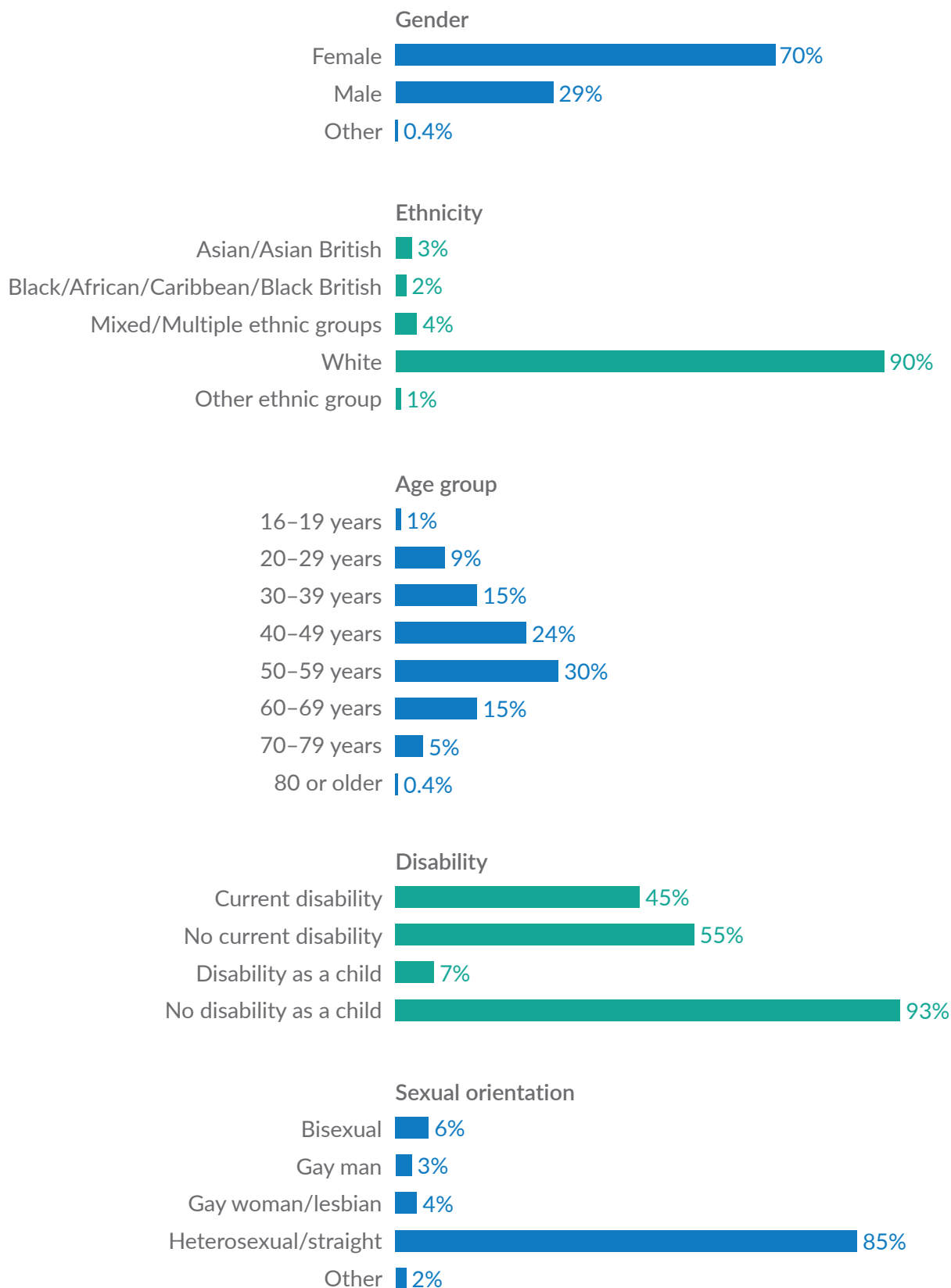


Figure A.1: *Socio-demographic characteristics of Truth Project participants at the time of attending the Truth Project**

* The socio-demographic data of Truth Project participants were gathered by the completion of a voluntary monitoring form or through information shared with facilitators and assistant facilitators during Truth Project sessions. The groupings and terminology used to describe socio-demographic characteristics are based on those used by the Office for National Statistics: Cultural identity – Office for National Statistics.

Part B

**“Why I chose to share
my experience”**

“Why I chose to share my experience”

B.1: Introduction

1. It can be extremely difficult for victims and survivors to speak about their experiences of child sexual abuse. Revisiting traumatic childhood experiences can cause significant distress. Prior experiences of being silenced, blamed or not taken seriously can discourage victims and survivors from disclosing child sexual abuse again. Despite these challenges, many victims and survivors chose to share their experiences with the Inquiry. For some, it was the first time they had ever spoken about being sexually abused as a child (Figure B.1).



Figure B.1: *Proportion of Truth Project participants who told the Inquiry that participating in the Truth Project was the first time they had ever spoken about being sexually abused as a child*

B.2: “To protect children”

2. Victims and survivors wanted to help protect children. Fifty-four percent of Truth Project participants shared their experiences of child sexual abuse to help prevent it from happening to someone else. Farida said: *“I need to help other people so they don’t go through what I did”*.³ Natalia described the sense of meaning that sharing her experience gave her: *“I don’t want my life to count for nothing. I don’t want no other boy or girl to go through what I did”*.⁴ RS-A299 said:

*“I want to somehow represent people that didn’t have a voice, that weren’t considered ... I want to protect the people that it potentially could happen to in the future.”*⁵

RS-A299, Residential schools investigation

3. Victims and survivors hoped that sharing their experiences would *“educate people”*, so that the public are *“aware this goes on”*.⁶ Alf said: *“I just wanted to get my story out ... to illustrate how*

³ Farida

⁴ Natalia

⁵ RS-A299 20 November 2020 32/17-21

⁶ *“People don’t talk about it”: Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities*, IICSA, June 2020, p46

*violence and sexual abuse can affect a child and what to look out for”.*⁷ AR-A24 hoped things would change:

*“It may be too late for me, although I will never give up. I do, however, hope that the situation will change, particularly for those who have not yet disclosed. I hope that they will be listened to, properly supported during the disclosure process, and have access to thorough investigations”.*⁸

AR-A24, Accountability and reparations investigation

B.3: “To be heard”

4. Many victims and survivors wanted their experiences to be heard. Twenty-one percent of Truth Project participants wanted the opportunity to tell someone in authority about their experiences; 15 percent wanted their account to be believed. For some, this was because they had previously not been listened to or taken seriously when they disclosed that they had been sexually abused. Barbara said: *“I want my voice heard, I want it on record ... I am not the child in the police station”.*⁹ This point was often emphasised by deaf Truth Project participants, who particularly

⁷ Alf

⁸ AR-A24 (read) 27 November 2018 62/25-63/14

⁹ Barbara

valued the opportunity to communicate about their experiences. Lysa is deaf and came to the Truth Project because she wanted to be listened to and believed.¹⁰

5. Victims and survivors said it was valuable for their recovery from child sexual abuse to be heard without judgement. Hollie said: *“I can now say I’m finally being heard, and can ... grieve for the person I might have been if I had not been a victim of child abuse”*.¹¹ Others spoke of waiting a lifetime to share their experiences:

“I’m 65, and the Truth Project is the first support I’ve felt I’ve had in my whole life where I can actually tell a story. So I’ve waited a very long time”.¹²

Ethnic minority communities research
participant

B.4: “To seek closure”

6. Some victims and survivors, including 16 percent of Truth Project participants, wanted to seek some form of closure to being sexually abused as a child. Maddy said that participating

¹⁰ Lysa

¹¹ Hollie

¹² *“People don’t talk about it”: Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities*, IICSA, June 2020, p82

in the Truth Project “*almost feels like an end to it*”.¹³ Corrine felt that she could now “*let it go*”.¹⁴ Participating in the Truth Project was described as symbolic for some victims and survivors. Sharon said: “*I am still alive, I came to the Truth Project because I could have been dead*”.¹⁵

7. Sharing their experiences with the Inquiry was also an opportunity for victims and survivors to take back some of the power that sexual abusers took from them. Janine said: “*I am doing this for five year old me*”,¹⁶ while Barny commented:

*“These monsters have taken enough from me; today little Barny is going to speak.”*¹⁷

Barny, Truth Project participant

B.5: “To motivate others”

8. Some victims and survivors said that they wanted to encourage other victims and survivors to recognise that they are more than the sexual abuse they experienced. Lionel explained that he did not want being sexually abused as a child to define him. He felt it was possible for victims and survivors to overcome child sexual abuse: “*it’s*

¹³ Maddy

¹⁴ Corrine

¹⁵ Sharon

¹⁶ Janine

¹⁷ Barny

not all doom and gloom, you can rise above it.¹⁸

Similarly, Clyde said that in addition to participating in the Inquiry’s work, he was writing a book about his experiences. He hoped that by sharing his experiences, others could learn that there is “*life after abuse*”.¹⁹

¹⁸ Lionel

¹⁹ Clyde

Part C

“What life was like for me”

“What life was like for me”

C.1: Introduction

1. Many victims and survivors who participated in the Inquiry’s work described themselves as having vulnerabilities that they felt sexual abusers exploited. Fifty-two percent of Truth Project participants spoke about experiencing at least one other form of child abuse and neglect, in addition to sexual abuse (Figure C.1). The proportion of Truth Project participants who reported other forms of abuse and neglect was higher amongst those who reported a disability (59 percent) than those who did not report a disability.

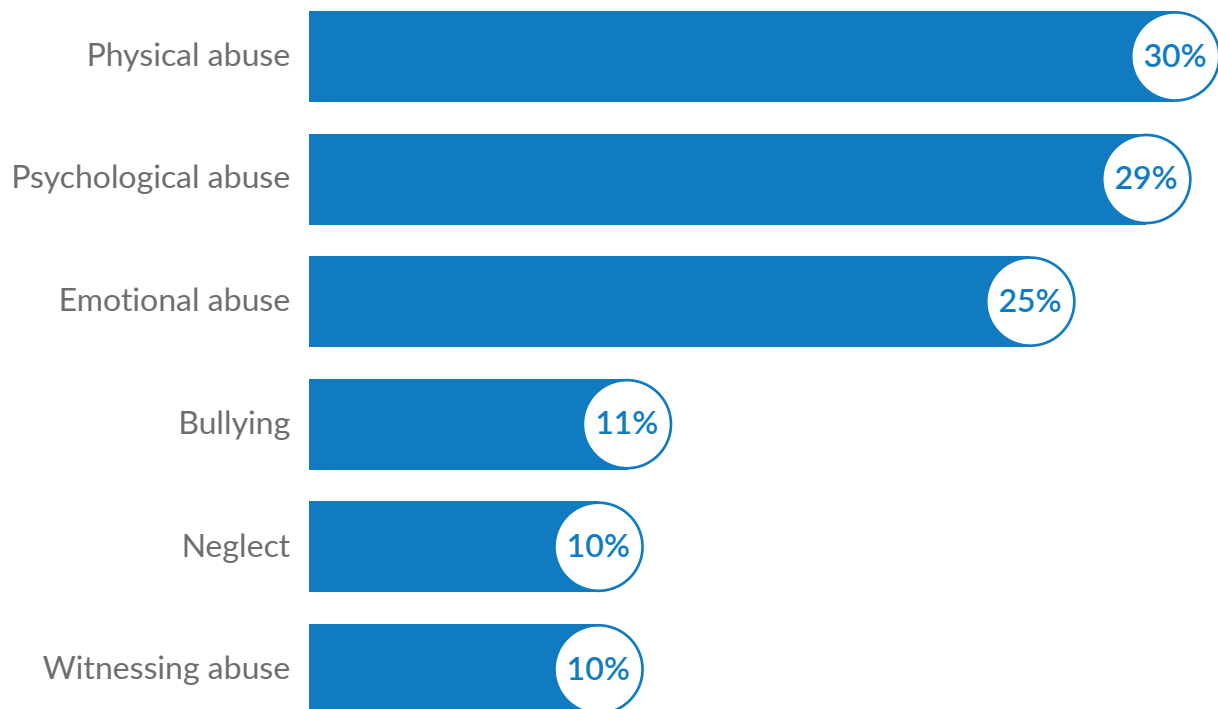


Figure C.1: *Proportion of Truth Project participants who reported experiencing other forms of child abuse and neglect**

* Please note that 48 percent of victims and survivors did not report experiencing any other type of child abuse and neglect. In addition, some victims and survivors reported experiencing multiple other types of abuse and neglect. Therefore percentages in this graphic do not sum to 100 percent.

2. These victims and survivors often felt failed by the adults and professionals around them, even before they had been sexually abused. William said his parents were “*good manipulators*” and neither the police nor social care seemed to take action to

protect him from domestic violence and neglect. He felt badly let down and said that as a result, “*my brain got broken a bit when I was young*”.²⁰

3. Not all victims and survivors spoke about adverse childhood experiences prior to being sexually abused. For many, sexual abuse was the only form of child abuse that they experienced. Some described a “*happy*”²¹ and “*normal childhood*”,²² or a “*steady upbringing*”.²³ Josiah spoke about enjoying school: “*I made friends and had a very happy life*”.²⁴ Victims and survivors sometimes reflected on the contrast between their childhood before sexual abuse and their life thereafter. Alistair described his childhood as “*idyllic*”, but after he was sexually abused he “*never felt like a normal child*” again.²⁵ Shauna said that she had a happy childhood and enjoyed school, but “*life changed dramatically*” when her secondary school teacher began grooming her.²⁶ Zachary said: “*I wish I could go back to the boy I was when I was eight. I was very happy*”.²⁷

²⁰ William

²¹ Monty

²² Dilan

²³ Ollie

²⁴ Josiah

²⁵ Alistair

²⁶ Shauna

²⁷ Zachary

C.2: “I became a punch bag”

4. Victims and survivors sometimes described growing up in violent environments in which sexual abuse accompanied, or was preceded by, physical abuse.

5. Some victims and survivors experienced violence at the hands of their parents. Eva described her family as seemingly “*respectable and middle class*”, but at home her father physically abused her from a young age.²⁸ She recalled trying to stay awake at night with her back against her bedroom door, as she believed that her father might kill her. As a very young child, Nico would hear his older sibling screaming from their parents’ bedroom. When he was five years old he found out why: “*I guess that my father felt five years was old enough to whip*”.²⁹ From that point, Nico was regularly violently beaten by his father: “*My only relief was when he was whipping my sibling, he wasn’t whipping me*”.³⁰

6. Others said that adults responsible for their care had “*free rein*” in institutions and appeared to be able to do as they pleased with the children.³¹ One Truth Project participant described being

²⁸ Eva

²⁹ Nico

³⁰ Nico

³¹ Spencer

“*dehumanised*” by the heavy physical punishments administered at her children’s home in the 1960s.³² Another individual, CM-A2, recalled being wrongly punished for having stolen an apple from his orphanage’s apple tree in the late 1950s:

*“It was a ritualised punishment, dragged out in excruciating detail to maximise my panic and humiliation ... The pain from this beating made me nearly pass out.”*³³

CM-A2, Child migration programmes investigation

7. Victims and survivors often said that those abusing them appeared to derive pleasure from inflicting pain on children. Tayla recalled that her mother “*seemed to enjoy dishing out punishments*”.³⁴ RC-A154 described repeated physical abuse in the 1970s by a member of school staff “*known for his sadistic wrath*”: “*He would beat me every week, or every other week, for no reason at all ... He had no reason to dislike me*”.³⁵ CS-

³² *Victim and survivor voices from the Truth Project (June 2016–June 2017)*, IICSA, October 2017, pp61–62

³³ CM-A2 (read) 28 February 2017 74/23-75/5

³⁴ Tayla

³⁵ RC-A154 (read) 5 December 2017 6/13-18

A371 said that the man who sexually exploited her was “*violent*” and that he would “*hit me and laugh about it*”.³⁶

8. Victims and survivors who grew up in violent environments reflected on how it influenced their perception of sexual abuse. The woman who ran the children’s home in which Deshawn lived was extremely violent. When he was first sexually abused, Deshawn said that he did not think of it as “*something terrible*” because his sexual abuser was less violent than the woman who ran the children’s home.³⁷

C.3: “I was abused emotionally”

9. Victims and survivors often described being emotionally abused as children. This included being threatened, insulted, deliberately excluded and emotionally manipulated. Orson said his mother regularly refused him food, locked him in cupboards, pulled his hair out and punched him while he was sleeping. He remembered social workers being “*in and out*” of his life, but said that little action was taken to protect him.³⁸

³⁶ CS-A371 22 September 2020 79/19-22

³⁷ Deshawn

³⁸ Orson

10. It was particularly common for victims and survivors to say that they were bullied by the person who sexually abused them. Adela described her family as outwardly respectable. However, behind closed doors, she was emotionally, physically and sexually abused by her father.³⁹ Other victims and survivors described an intimidatory culture in the institution in which they were sexually abused. RS-A1 described how children were made to feel demoralised in the competitive, bullying atmosphere at private music school: “*that is absolutely the ideal breeding ground for abuse to flourish*”.⁴⁰

11. Some victims and survivors were subjected to racism. LA-A456 was told by children’s home staff that they would make her “*clean and white*”.⁴¹ LA-A24 also experienced racist abuse while in care and said that being in his children’s home “*made my whole life hell*”.⁴² Malia said that racism was rife at her school. As a result, she felt that no one took any interest in her: “*You was black, no one gave a shit*”.⁴³ LGBTQ+ victims and survivors often described growing up in homophobic

³⁹ Adela

⁴⁰ RS-A1 1 October 2019 73/10-11

⁴¹ LA-A456 (read) 29 July 2020 157/17

⁴² LA-A24 (read) 6 July 2020 94/15-16

⁴³ Malia

environments. One woman, who is a lesbian, said that as a child she thought it was “*disgusting*” to be gay due to her mother’s homophobia.⁴⁴

12. Some female victims and survivors described experiencing sexism as children. Binali said that she and her sisters were kept under tight control and not allowed out, but that the “*boys ... did pretty much everything they wanted to*”.⁴⁵ One 14-year-old girl said: “*My boy mates ... they make rape jokes, they make like sexist jokes, and they know it’s jokes but they don’t realise the effects*”.⁴⁶ A female member of the Victims and Survivors Forum reflected on the cultural messages girls receive, saying that female bodies are seen as “*both a temptation and a commodity*”.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *Engagement with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning + victims and survivors*, IICSA, May 2022, p20

⁴⁵ Binali

⁴⁶ *Learning about online sexual harm*, IICSA, November 2019, p70

⁴⁷ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Protected Characteristics: Summary Report*, IICSA, February 2021, p9

C.4: “I was neglected and surrounded by chaos”

13. Victims and survivors frequently described the environments in which they grew up as extremely chaotic. NO-A49 grew up in the late 1990s and 2000s. He described his cramped and “*chaotic*” upbringing: “*there were on occasion up to 23 people living in a three-bedroomed house*”.⁴⁸

Victims and survivors who grew up in tumultuous environments often said they were failed first by their family and then by professionals who did not take sufficient action to ensure their safety. Dillan said: “*All I wanted was some help ... maybe people didn’t know how to help then ... but these were professional people*”.⁴⁹

14. Some victims and survivors were raised by parents or carers who were not able to meet their basic needs or provide a supportive home. One Truth Project participant recalled not being fed properly and never being shown any affection: “*my parents never gave me cuddles, never said I love you, never tucked me in at night*”.⁵⁰ Some also spoke of poor physical conditions at home:

⁴⁸ NO-A49 5 October 2018 24/7-9

⁴⁹ Dillan

⁵⁰ Benicio-Dwayne

*“My father lived in one room with no windows, no heating, no hot water and no working toilet. I lived there for many months and slept in his bed”.*⁵¹

Truth Project participant

15. Victims and survivors who described chaotic upbringings often said that their parents left them in the care of unsuitable adults. Mairi described being regularly left alone with “*whoever was willing to look after me*”.⁵² In some cases, victims and survivors were placed at direct risk of sexual abuse. Jasmin was sometimes cared for by her mother’s ‘pimp’. He sexually abused Jasmin. She said: “*at first he was really nice. He put his arms around me, kissed my head and made me feel safe*”.⁵³

16. Neglect at home led to some victims and survivors being placed into local authority care. Some described initial feelings of relief and optimism at escaping their home environment. Leon’s mother struggled with mental health issues; he felt relief when he was first placed into care because he was able to get away from her

⁵¹ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of children’s homes and residential care*, IICSA, November 2019, p32

⁵² Mairi

⁵³ Jasmin

unpredictable behaviour.⁵⁴ Another Truth Project participant described relief at escaping an unsafe home environment:

*“[The children’s home] was the most amazing place for me, initially; I was safe ... I felt, ‘I’ve got a safe place, I’m okay. I don’t have to watch my mum being beaten to a pulp; I don’t have to see all of that.’”*⁵⁵

Truth Project participant

17. Some children who were placed into care were neglected by the institutions responsible for their care. Many victims and survivors who were sexually abused in children’s homes between the 1960s and 1990s described their placements as “cold”,⁵⁶ “frightening”⁵⁷ and “uncaring”.⁵⁸ LA-A351 described how it was “normal” for her daily routine to involve stealing food.⁵⁹ Without this she would have had “nothing to eat”.⁶⁰ Foster care placements were described similarly. L46 was placed in

⁵⁴ Leon

⁵⁵ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of children’s homes and residential care*, IICSA, November 2019, p34

⁵⁶ LA-A305 (read) 6 July 2020 76/24

⁵⁷ LA-A308 (read) 6 July 2020 75/5-6

⁵⁸ LA-A321 1 July 2020 28/23

⁵⁹ LA-A351 6 July 2020 112/19

⁶⁰ LA-A351 6 July 2020 112/17

foster care in the 1970s; she was physically and emotionally abused, including not being fed properly and “*being treated like a slave*”.⁶¹

18. Such care placements were sometimes described as worse than the homes from which children were removed. This cycle of harm was extremely difficult for victims and survivors:

*“You go into a children’s home already damaged, we’re already damaged before we get to that point; we’re not going there for a holiday ... it should’ve been a place of safety.”*⁶²

Truth Project participant

19. Neglect left victims and survivors feeling as though no one cared what happened to them. Adrienne said: “*In a life of chaos it’s like being a ghost – you are the last thing anyone thinks of*”.⁶³ Many felt that perpetrators exploited their vulnerability in the knowledge that no one was looking out for them.

⁶¹ L46 (read) 5 October 2018 97/15-18

⁶² *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of children’s homes and residential care*, IICSA, November 2019, p4

⁶³ *Adrienne*

C.5: “I was never in one place long enough”

20. Victims and survivors who were placed in residential care or custodial institutions often described being moved frequently. Morton said that he was sent to almost 20 different care homes.⁶⁴ A lack of warning and explanation exacerbated feelings of instability around placement moves. Victims and survivors thought that this made them more vulnerable to sexual abuse.

21. Some victims and survivors said that their frequent placement moves appeared to facilitate sexual abuse directly. Each time Donald moved to a new custodial institution, he was asked to hand staff a letter. Given how often these staff sexually abused him, Donald felt it was inevitable that whomever he handed the letter to was likely to be his next sexual abuser.⁶⁵

22. Victims and survivors who were not in care also described how significant life changes, such as moving schools or to a new place, destabilised them. Some victims and survivors felt that the negative impact of significant changes made them more vulnerable to sexual abuse. Charmaine said that her family moved house every year. She

⁶⁴ Morton

⁶⁵ Donald

thought this transient lifestyle meant that her father could easily hide the fact that he was sexually abusing her.⁶⁶

C.6: “I had a deep sense of loneliness”

23. Some victims and survivors described a prevailing sense of loneliness in their childhood. As adults, victims and survivors reflected on whether loneliness made them more vulnerable to sexual abuse, as they lacked love and affection. Eliza said: “*I was looking for attention ... for someone to want me*”.⁶⁷ Reuben felt that the boys who sexually abused him exploited his loneliness: “*I was lonely, not popular, at school ... I wanted to get friends and they took advantage of me*”.⁶⁸

24. Loneliness was commonly experienced by victims and survivors whose parents were absent or not able to care for them. Olivia’s father worked long hours and her mother was preoccupied caring for her siblings. Although she understood why she was left to her “*own devices*”, Olivia said “*I felt very lonely and abandoned*”.⁶⁹ Beth spoke about being left alone to deal with her mother’s

⁶⁶ Charmaine

⁶⁷ Eliza

⁶⁸ Reuben

⁶⁹ Olivia

very poor mental health following the death of her father. When an older man approached her, Beth felt like she finally had someone who she could speak to: “*He came across as very understanding and supportive ... I felt like I had someone I could turn to*”.⁷⁰

25. Victims and survivors who grew up in institutions often felt lonely as children. LA-A158 said that she was “*very isolated*” at her children’s home in the 1950s–1960s.⁷¹ Conall described his boarding school in the 1960s as “*a place of fear and loneliness*” where children were strictly controlled.⁷² One Truth Project participant described their feelings about being placed in a custodial institution: “*they might as well put you on Mars*”.⁷³ Danni said that she was “*homesick and lonely*” at boarding school in the 1980s and felt that this made her more vulnerable to sexual abuse.⁷⁴ RS-A6 attended a residential special school in the 2000s and said that he felt “*trapped*”, “*hundreds of miles away*” from anyone he knew.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ [Beth](#)

⁷¹ [LA-A158 \(read\) 29 June 2020 29/5](#)

⁷² [Conall](#)

⁷³ [Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in custodial institutions, IICSA, April 2020, p41](#)

⁷⁴ [Danni](#)

⁷⁵ [RS-A6 7 October 2019 133/2-12](#)

C.7: “I didn’t know that you can be sexually abused online”

26. Young victims and survivors spoke about how the internet and social media have increased children’s vulnerability to sexual abuse. Many described wanting access to the internet from a young age: *“It’s your first year at secondary school, that’s where all the pressure really comes in – who’s got the most friends ... followers”*.⁷⁶ One young engagement participant said: *“No one wants to start social media when you’re 16. You want to start earlier. That’s when you grow your following”*.⁷⁷ Morgan said that as an 11-year-old she accessed online teenage dating sites by lying about her age.⁷⁸ It was common to hear that children did not feel sufficiently informed about online-facilitated child sexual abuse. One young person said:

“When we were told about child sexual abuse, we always think about rape ... face to face. But I think with gaming as well, all of my friends play Xbox, sometimes you can get matched with 42-year-old [men] from America

⁷⁶ *Learning about online sexual harm*, IICSA, November 2019, p35

⁷⁷ *Engagement with children and young people*, IICSA, June 2021, p28

⁷⁸ *Morgan*

... nothing like that was talked about."⁷⁹

Learning about online sexual harm
research participant

27. In particular, sending 'nudes' was frequently described as commonplace: "*the whole Snapchat thing – and sending nudes on Snapchat – it's just normal*".⁸⁰ Many felt that their parents were not fully aware of the risks posed by the internet and "*being brought up around this sort of social media culture*".⁸¹ Kiya said: "*my mum had no idea about it ... so by the age of about 10 or 11 I was probably speaking to people I shouldn't be*".⁸²

28. Some young victims and survivors felt that perpetrators sought out insecure and vulnerable children on social media. Concerns were raised about apps which functioned "*like Tinder for kids*" and others that promoted conversations between strangers.⁸³ Nola described an online game for

⁷⁹ *Learning about online sexual harm*, IICSA, November 2019, p45

⁸⁰ *Learning about online sexual harm*, IICSA, November 2019, p47

⁸¹ *Learning about online sexual harm*, IICSA, November 2019, p36

⁸² Kiya

⁸³ *Engagement with children and young people*, IICSA, June 2021, p29

teenagers which encouraged players to interact with each other. However, she said it became clear that adults used this website too.⁸⁴

Part D

“I was sexually abused”

“I was sexually abused”

D.1: Introduction

1. This Part describes victims and survivors’ experiences of child sexual abuse. Their courage to speak about this abuse enabled the Inquiry to understand the full extent of the harm inflicted on children.

D.2: “The person who sexually abused me”

2. Victims and survivors said that there is no typical sexual abuser. One child challenged common assumptions: perpetrators “*are portrayed as evil, dirty villains and in reality they look like everyone else*”.⁸⁵ Melvin said: “*sometimes the friendliest, most personable people are the worst abusers*”.⁸⁶

3. The majority of victims and survivors were sexually abused solely by a man or by multiple men (89 percent of Truth Project participants). Isaac was anally raped by a male teacher in his

⁸⁵ *Engagement with children and young people*, IICSA, June 2021, p11

⁸⁶ *Melvin*

school changing rooms. He has vivid memories of the pain of the assault: “*I can’t describe how awful it is*”.⁸⁷

4. A much smaller proportion reported being sexually abused by a man and a woman acting together (7 percent of Truth Project participants). Betsy grew up in the 1960s. Her parents sent her to live with another couple, who told her that they were going to teach her about sex. The couple sexually abused Betsy, including making her watch them performing sexual acts. Betsy was told off for “*telling fairytales*” when she told the police.⁸⁸ Fewer victims and survivors reported sexual abuse perpetrated solely by a woman (3 percent of Truth Project participants). In 2013, one child in a custodial institution stated that: “*a female officer touches my bum and dick and grabs me during searches*”.⁸⁹

5. Most victims and survivors described a single period of time during which child sexual abuse was perpetrated, although this could be prolonged and in most cases lasted for several years. Other victims and survivors reported being sexually abused on multiple, unrelated occasions

⁸⁷ Isaac

⁸⁸ Betsy

⁸⁹ *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Pen portraits (HMYOI Werrington)

throughout their childhood. Twenty-nine percent of Truth Project participants reported two or more periods of sexual abuse during their childhood. Between the ages of 5 and 10 years old, Nicole was vaginally, anally and orally raped by a series of older boys.⁹⁰ Later, when she was a teenager, her brother-in-law began to repeatedly rape her.

6. The majority of victims and survivors were sexually abused by people they knew. In particular, almost half of Truth Project participants described sexual abuse by family members (Table D.1).⁹¹ This was more common amongst female victims and survivors than male victims and survivors. Heidi's father told her "*this is our little secret*" when he raped her.⁹² She was eight years old at the time. From the age of six, Humaira was sexually abused, including being raped, by her older brother. She believed her parents knew about the abuse because they eventually sent him away to live with a relative.⁹³

⁹⁰ Nicole

⁹¹ The Inquiry's Terms of Reference required it to focus primarily on institutional failings. Many victims and survivors who participated in the Truth Project were sexually abused in their family home or outside of an institution, but otherwise failed by those in institutions.

⁹² Heidi

⁹³ Humaira

Table D.1: *Who Truth Project participants were sexually abused by, by participants' sex**

Relationship of perpetrator to Truth Project participant	Percentage of Truth Project participants		
	Female	Male	All
Family member	58	23	47
Another child, not related	14	16	14
Educational staff	8	24	12
Religious staff	3	12	6
Foster carer/family	3	2	3
Residential care worker	2	7	3
Health professional	3	2	2
Sports staff	1	3	1
Custodial institution staff	0	2	1
Defence forces personnel	0	1	1

* In this table, 'staff' refers to formally employed, contracted and voluntary or unpaid staff.

7. Other victims and survivors were sexually abused by adults they knew outside of their family. The majority of male Truth Project participants were sexually abused by someone outside of their family. This included school staff, those in religious organisations and those responsible for the care of children, such as foster carers and residential care staff (Table D.1). Such people were sometimes held in high esteem by their friends, family or community. One Truth Project participant described the man who sexually abused her as “a

cool teacher ... everybody loved him".⁹⁴ Victims and survivors often spoke about how the sexual abuser's role or position enabled them to spend time alone with children. Howard was sexually abused by a nurse in hospital, "*a person of trust in the perfect job to abuse*".⁹⁵

8. In more recent accounts, a number of victims and survivors reported being sexually assaulted by someone they met online. Jonny was raped by a man he met in a chatroom: "*I froze and didn't fight back ... I had lots of bruising ... he hit and raped me*". He said: "*From that point, my life fell apart*".⁹⁶

9. Some victims and survivors were sexually abused by other children. In most cases, this happened either in the family home, in a school or in a children's home. Oliver described being forced into violent "*sexual slavery*" by an older pupil when he was a young child. He said: "*I didn't see it as abuse at the time; just something really, really terrible*".⁹⁷ May was also sexually abused at primary school.⁹⁸ She described how, between the ages of five and seven, another child regularly

⁹⁴ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of schools*, IICSA, December 2020, p48

⁹⁵ *Howard*

⁹⁶ *Jonny*

⁹⁷ *Oliver*

⁹⁸ *May*

sexually abused her by inserting objects and his fingers into her vagina. She now believes that the boy was being sexually abused and may have been mimicking what he had seen.

10. A minority of victims and survivors were sexually abused by those with whom they had no relationship or connection. Some described being sexually abused by a stranger on a single occasion. When Soraya was about 12 years old, a man exposed himself and masturbated in front of her and her friends.⁹⁹ Her friends ran away, and the man orally and anally raped Soraya. Alicia was raped in her bed by a man when she was eight years old. She said: “*He was a complete stranger. I’ll never know who he was ... it just happened*”.¹⁰⁰

11. Most victims and survivors were sexually abused by an individual perpetrator, although some were sexually abused multiple times by different perpetrators. Gerrard was regularly physically and sexually abused by “*a constant stream of men and older boys*”.¹⁰¹ CS-A372 said that when she was 14 years old she was forced to perform oral sex on more than 20 men.¹⁰² A few months later, she was abducted, held at gunpoint and again forced to perform oral sex on a group of men. Phoebe was

⁹⁹ [Soraya](#)

¹⁰⁰ [Alicia](#)

¹⁰¹ [Gerrard](#)

¹⁰² [CS-A372 21 September 2020 17/2-10](#)

forced into sex work and made to “*service*” scores of men each day. She said: “*I was like a little fish in a shark tank*”.¹⁰³

12. Victims and survivors who were abused by multiple perpetrators often described this as being organised. Some victims and survivors described being exploited by groups or networks of abusers. The Inquiry was told about one victim and survivor, Daisy, who in the early 2000s was sexually exploited and passed around for sex to between 100 and 150 men.¹⁰⁴ From the age of 11, Jodie was sexually exploited by four men, who were paid in return for offering her to other men for sex. On one occasion, one of the sexual abusers incited two teenage boys to rape her simultaneously. Jodie said about her experiences: “*I sometimes forget how big it is until I talk about it*”.¹⁰⁵

13. A small number of victims and survivors spoke about sexual abuse being organised within an institution. Hugh described a masked group entering his school dormitory at night to select children to be sexually abused.¹⁰⁶ Samuel was brought up in a religious organisation focussed on

¹⁰³ Phoebe

¹⁰⁴ Daisy 21 September 2020 20/14-15

¹⁰⁵ Jodie

¹⁰⁶ Hugh

discipline, which he described as a cult.¹⁰⁷ Samuel said that the elders were extremely violent towards the children and sometimes raped them.

D.3: “I was groomed and manipulated”

14. Victims and survivors, including 24 percent of Truth Project participants, reflected on how sexual abusers ‘groomed’ or manipulated them.¹⁰⁸ For many, this was something that they only understood later in life. Neve said: *“I can see that over the years he did things that I would now describe as grooming”*.¹⁰⁹

15. While common, not all victims and survivors were groomed before being sexually abused. NO-A5 described a member of staff at his children’s home taking him to the laundry room in the middle of the night and *“out of nowhere he spun me around, put me over that table, and he raped me”*.¹¹⁰ NO-A5 said that there was

¹⁰⁷ Samuel

¹⁰⁸ Although the term ‘grooming’ has come into more general usage in recent years, the use of emotional manipulation in order to sexually abuse children was observed throughout the time periods examined by the Inquiry.

¹⁰⁹ Neve

¹¹⁰ NO-A5 2 October 2018 162/3-5

“no grooming beforehand”.¹¹¹ When he was 11 years old, Mick was raped by his optician. He remembered being given a glass of water beforehand which made him feel sick and dizzy; his next memory was of lying face down on the floor, in excruciating pain as the optician raped him. The optician said: *“it’s your own fault, you’re so beautiful”*.¹¹²

16. Others described how their circumstances meant that there was no ‘need’ for grooming, and said that perpetrators had absolute power over them and could sexually abuse them at their will.¹¹³ Becca said that when she was a very young child her father was able to get into her bed to sexually abuse her.¹¹⁴ Katie described inescapable sexual abuse in a children’s home:

*“I was running away, trying not to get raped. I had a single room; the night staff would come in and I would scream and shout.”*¹¹⁵

Katie, Truth Project participant

¹¹¹ [NO-A5 2 October 2018 162/14](#)

¹¹² [Mick](#)

¹¹³ [Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in healthcare contexts](#), IICSA, December 2020, p35; [Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in custodial institutions](#), IICSA, April 2020, p37

¹¹⁴ [Becca](#)

¹¹⁵ [Katie](#)

“I didn’t realise what had happened to me”

17. Many victims and survivors described being groomed and manipulated into sexual abuse. Often perpetrators gave children a huge amount of attention, making them feel “*special*”.¹¹⁶ Alyssa was sexually groomed online from the age of 10. She said that the men who sexually abused her flattered her and made her feel good: “*I was getting the attention online that I never got elsewhere*”.¹¹⁷ Alyssa said: “*I didn’t realise what happened to me online was sexual abuse until I was 18 years old*”.¹¹⁸ CS-A12 said that the men who sexually exploited her pretended that she was “*part of their family*”:

“They gave me somewhere where I felt like I belonged and somewhere where I felt like I was wanted”.¹¹⁹

CS-A12, Child sexual exploitation in organised networks investigation

18. It was common for victims and survivors to tell the Inquiry how, as children, they thought that sexual abuse was an expression of love or affection. Janine said she thought sexual abuse

¹¹⁶ [Leila](#)

¹¹⁷ [Alyssa](#)

¹¹⁸ [Alyssa](#)

¹¹⁹ [CS-A12 22 September 2020 18/14-17](#)

was “*how daddies showed love*”.¹²⁰ Amanda described being told by the man who raped her that he was “*teaching her to love*”.¹²¹

19. Other perpetrators led victims and survivors to believe that sexual abuse was normal. This was commonly described by victims and survivors who were sexually abused as very young children. When Margaret was nine, she was told that sexual acts were “*what women do*”.¹²² From the age of seven, Lathika was sexually abused by her uncle. When she was later sexually abused by two other adult men, she “*just presumed it was normal*” because of the earlier abuse.¹²³ Young female victims and survivors reflected on the ‘normalisation’ of online child sexual abuse: “*I have to deal with it every day ... it’s kind of like a normal thing for girls now*”.¹²⁴

20. Some victims and survivors were manipulated to believe that they were in a consensual sexual relationship as children. Michelle said she thought she loved the teacher who sexually abused her and that “*their relationship was a romance*”.¹²⁵ She

¹²⁰ [Janine](#)

¹²¹ [Amanda](#)

¹²² [Margaret](#)

¹²³ [Lathika](#)

¹²⁴ [Learning about online sexual harm, IICSA, November 2019, p5](#)

¹²⁵ [Michelle](#)

said: “*he made me trust him, made me believe he had the same feelings for me*”. Stuart was groomed into an “*inappropriate relationship*” with a man in his choir, who was about 20 years his senior. Stuart said that many people knew but, despite him being below the age of consent, “*no one did anything to stop it or spoke to me about it*”.¹²⁶

21. As adults, many victims and survivors reflected on these ‘relationships’ and felt a sense of betrayal when they realised that they were sexually abused. Isla-Rose described feeling unsure of what had happened: “*I felt as if I was in love with him, but now I see this as a result of his manipulation*”.¹²⁷ RS-A301 said that looking back he could see that “*it was inappropriate, really*”.¹²⁸

22. Some children were made to think that they were playing games during sexual abuse. From a very young age, Aryana’s older brothers made her play a ‘game’ in which the boys punished their sisters with sexual acts.¹²⁹ Macy was sexually abused by two girls at school during “*truth or dare*” type games.¹³⁰ She was forced to perform oral sex

¹²⁶ [Stuart](#)

¹²⁷ [Isla-Rose](#)

¹²⁸ [RS-A301 18 November 2020 141/23](#)

¹²⁹ [Aryana](#)

¹³⁰ [Macy](#)

and was penetrated by various objects. Macy was seven years old at the time. She sometimes bled as a result.

23. A number of victims and survivors said that they were given drugs and alcohol to facilitate child sexual abuse. This was particularly common in the context of child sexual exploitation. When CS-A373 was 12 years old, she was given cannabis before being raped and forced to perform oral sex.¹³¹

Gracie was trafficked to different locations, where she would be raped by multiple men she did not know. The man who arranged this plied her with alcohol and often spiked her drinks: *“I never drank so much in my life”*.¹³²

24. Victims and survivors of child sexual abuse who were groomed online were often deceived by perpetrators. Perpetrators commonly lied about their age and identity to sexually abuse children. When Amy was a child she began chatting online to a male she thought was 18 years old. He turned out to be a much older teacher and he sexually abused her multiple times.¹³³

¹³¹ CS-A373 21 September 2020 17/24-18/1

¹³² Gracie

¹³³ Amy

“I couldn’t make it stop”

25. The vast majority of victims and survivors were sexually abused over many years. Amongst experiences shared by Truth Project participants, the average period during which sexual abuse took place was four years. This was longer for girls than for boys (five years and three years, respectively). It was common for victims and survivors to describe being manipulated so perpetrators could keep sexually abusing them. RS-A3 was told by her violin tutor that he would kill himself if she told anyone he was sexually abusing her.¹³⁴ Fazeen’s teacher threatened to harm himself if she ended their ‘relationship’ or reported it.¹³⁵

26. Victims and survivors often lived in fear. The man who raped Zoe showed her videos of other girls crying as he held a weapon. She said: “*If he hadn’t been arrested I don’t know how I would have escaped it ... I was terrified*”.¹³⁶ The male teacher who sexually abused Tasmin had a “*fierce*” emotional hold over her: “*I did feel trapped*”.¹³⁷ Ciar described how, for a long time, she felt unable to stop communication with the man who sexually abused her online:

¹³⁴ *Residential Schools Investigation Report, Pen portraits (RS-A3)*

¹³⁵ *Fazeen*

¹³⁶ *Zoe*

¹³⁷ *Tasmin*

*“When I tried to disengage, he threatened to screenshot our messages and show everyone how disgusting I was for seeing the things he’d sent ... I was terrified and felt trapped.”*¹³⁸

Ciar, Truth Project participant

27. In some cases, sexual abusers exploited a child’s poverty. Lysa’s older brother gave her money after sexually abusing her; she said her family were short of money and the children were often not given dinner money.¹³⁹ Lorna, who lived in the Philippines, was forced to perform sexual acts that were live-streamed online for foreigners to watch. She did these “shows” three times a day and was paid US\$6.¹⁴⁰ She used the money to buy food. Others described how they were manipulated into sexual acts in return for food. One Truth Project participant said that the person who sexually abused him exploited the fact that as a child he “*never had sweets or treats ... because we had nothing*”.¹⁴¹

28. In other accounts, victims and survivors described perpetrators deliberately undermining their credibility to continue sexually abusing

¹³⁸ Ciar

¹³⁹ Lysa

¹⁴⁰ *Children Outside the United Kingdom Investigation Report*, Pen portraits (Lorna)

¹⁴¹ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports*, IICSA, June 2020, p30

them. Dana said that her father started sexually abusing her when she was seven; he would steal possessions from other family members and blame her. Dana thought that this was an attempt to stop her family trusting her, so they saw her as a “*bad child*”.¹⁴²

D.4: “I was just a child”

29. Most victims and survivors described being sexually abused from a young age. Seventy-nine percent of Truth Project participants said that they were aged 11 or under when they were first sexually abused (Figure D.1). Victims and survivors who were abused as infants or toddlers often could not recall when exactly the abuse started. Donna said her father sexually abused her from as far back as she could remember.¹⁴³ Victims and survivors who were sexually abused at a very young age sometimes described the physical difference between them and the sexual abuser. Mary-Beth simply said: “*He was so big and I was so little*”.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² [Dana](#)

¹⁴³ [Donna](#)

¹⁴⁴ [Mary-Beth](#)

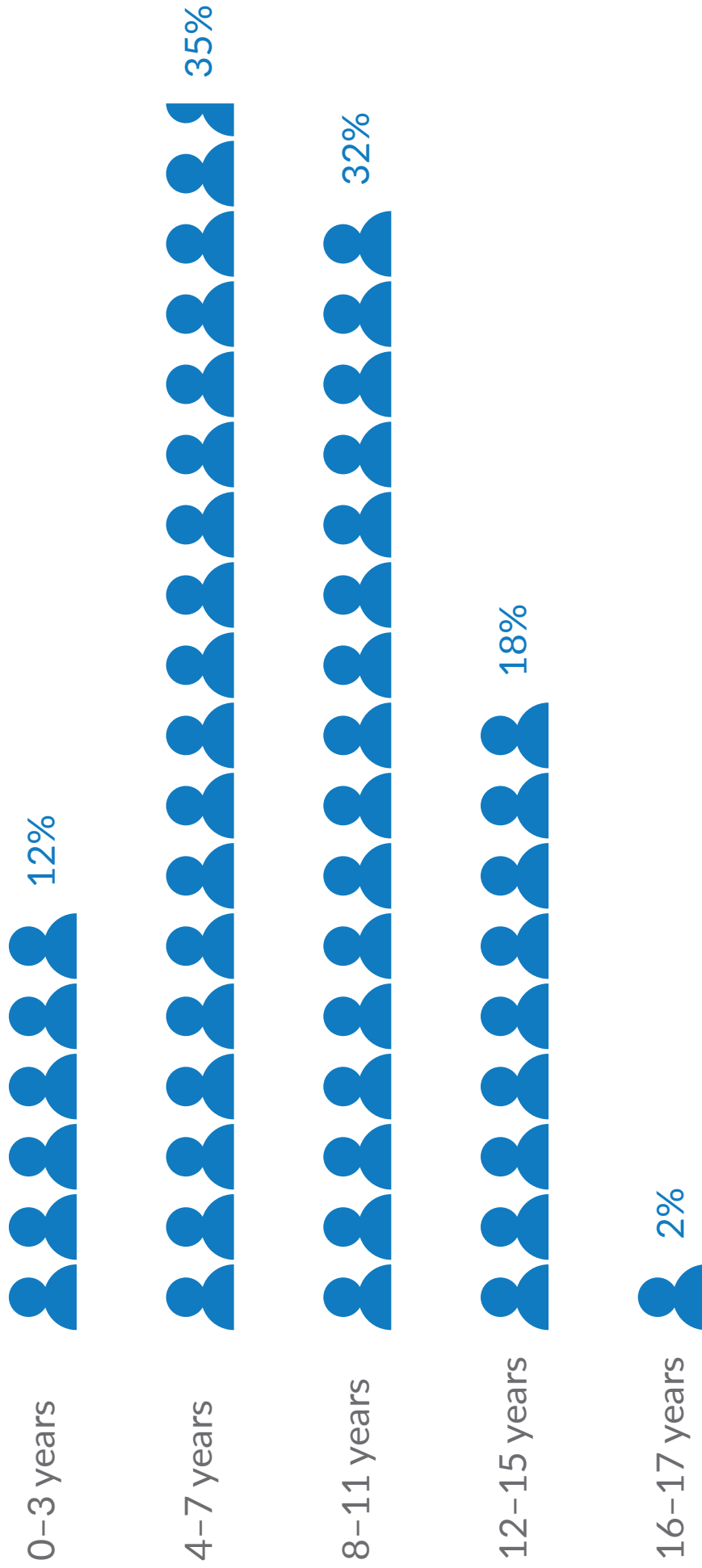


Figure D.1: Age at which child sexual abuse began for Truth Project participants

30. Other victims and survivors were first sexually abused as teenagers. Those who were sexually abused after they had turned 16 were sometimes made to feel that they were not experiencing sexual abuse, as they were above the legal age of consent. One Truth Project participant recalled that shortly after his 16th birthday, the woman who sexually abused him said “*well, at least you’re legal now*”.¹⁴⁵

31. More female than male victims and survivors talked about experiencing sexual abuse beginning at a very young age (Figure D.2). Fifty-four percent of female Truth Project participants and 32 percent of male participants were first sexually abused when they were under the age of eight. By contrast, the majority of male Truth Project participants (68 percent) reported sexual abuse beginning when they were aged eight years or older.

¹⁴⁵ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of schools*, IICSA, December 2020, p40



Figure D.2: Age at which child sexual abuse began for Truth Project participants, by sex

32. Victims and survivors sexually abused by a family member, foster carer or member of their foster family reported sexual abuse beginning at a younger age than those abused by staff in institutions such as residential care or schools (Figure D.3). Ninety percent of Truth Project participants who were sexually abused by a family member and 78 percent of those abused by their foster carer said that the abuse began when they were aged 11 or younger. Elspeth’s earliest recollections of being raped by her father are from before she started primary school.¹⁴⁶ Joyce was raped by her older brother from as far back as she could remember.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Elspeth

¹⁴⁷ Joyce

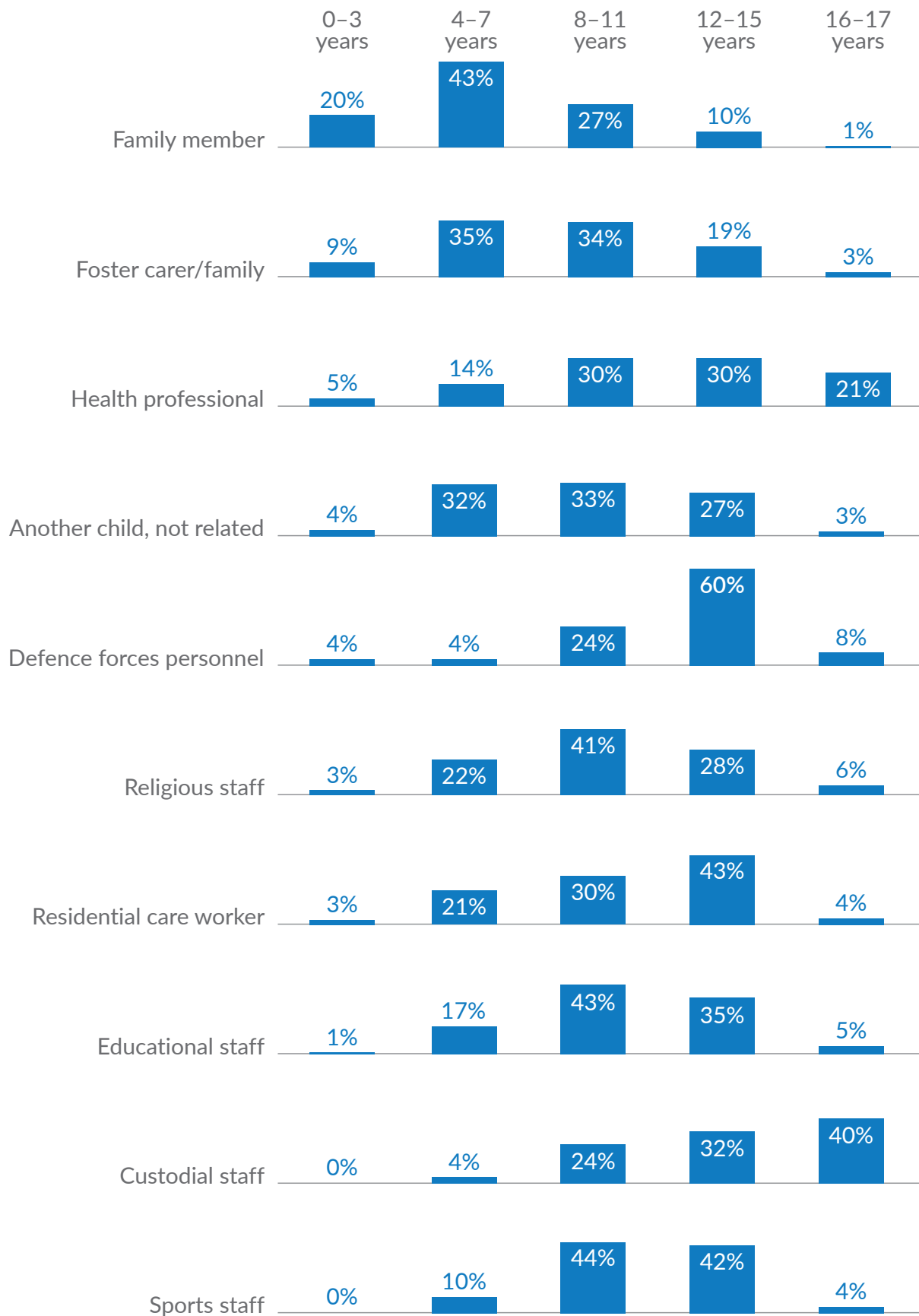


Figure D.3: Age at which child sexual abuse began for Truth Project participants, by who the perpetrator was*

* In this figure, ‘staff’ refers to formally employed, contracted and voluntary or unpaid staff. Some of the data in this figure are influenced by the age at which children were likely to have had contact with individuals. For example, it is unlikely that a child under the age of 10 would be abused by someone in a custodial institution as the Youth Custody Service is responsible for children aged 10–17 years old.

D.5: “I was sexually abused”

33. Victims and survivors described different types of sexual abuse. Eighty-one percent of Truth Project participants spoke about some form of contact sexual abuse, such as oral, vaginal or anal rape. Guy’s father orally raped him as a young child. He said: “*I couldn’t breathe*”.¹⁴⁸

34. Many victims and survivors described multiple forms of contact sexual abuse. Often child sexual abuse began with touching and later involved penetrative acts. Maddy was sexually abused by a school caretaker from the age of eight. The caretaker befriended Maddy by giving her sweets and praising her schoolwork. Initially, he forced her to touch and kiss his penis. The caretaker then began to orally and vaginally rape Maddy.¹⁴⁹ Another victim and survivor described the effect of

¹⁴⁸ Guy

¹⁴⁹ Maddy

a perpetrator moving “*step by step*” towards sexual abuse: “*Because the transition was so gradual, I didn’t even actually see it as ... abnormal, because of the process, if you like*”.¹⁵⁰

35. Other victims and survivors described non-contact sexual abuse, such as being forced to watch pornography, watch sexual acts, or take and share sexual images. Around one in five Truth Project participants (22 percent) reported being exposed to adult sexuality. Victims and survivors who reported non-contact sexual abuse often said this was accompanied by contact abuse. Katherine’s father regularly made her watch and then re-enact pornography with him.¹⁵¹ This included oral rape. She was five years old when the abuse began. When Heather was six or seven years old, her foster brother made her copy and perform “*really horrible, horrible things*” from the pornographic magazines he showed her.¹⁵²

36. Sometimes, victims and survivors said that sexual abusers took explicit images of them, or showed them explicit images of others. One victim and survivor, who was sexually abused in the 1970s, was shown sexual magazines and

¹⁵⁰ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports*, IICSA, June 2020, p33

¹⁵¹ *Katherine*

¹⁵² *Heather*

books by a teacher at his school.¹⁵³ Daran’s mother took photographs of her boyfriend masturbating and raping her son.¹⁵⁴ Victims and survivors also described instances in which they were photographed or filmed while naked. RS-A345 described his distress at finding out that his boarding school housemaster had secretly filmed him, including in the shower and while masturbating.¹⁵⁵

37. Younger victims and survivors described being asked to exchange explicit images online, often after a period of sexual grooming. Morgan described how she was groomed into sending explicit pictures and videos online aged 11.¹⁵⁶ Nola was subjected to years of online sexual abuse by a man who took photos of her. She recalled: *“If I played along he was OK, but if I ever pushed back the threats got worse. It was a never ending spiral as he had worse and worse pictures of me”*.¹⁵⁷

38. Some victims and survivors described how perpetrators used the cover of ‘normal’ activities, such as medical examinations or sports coaching, to sexually abuse them. One Truth Project participant was sexually abused while swimming:

¹⁵³ [Jack-Bob](#)

¹⁵⁴ [Daran](#)

¹⁵⁵ [RS-A345 17 November 2020 22/3-25-23/1](#)

¹⁵⁶ [Morgan](#)

¹⁵⁷ [Nola](#)

“he would ... do stuff under the water, acting like he’s teaching me to swim”.¹⁵⁸ The youth group leader who sexually abused Billy touched his genitals and explained that he was *“checking to make sure it was ok”*.¹⁵⁹ RO-A1 was told that he needed to remove his clothes to be checked for nits and to see whether he had washed himself *“properly”*.¹⁶⁰

39. The physical experience of sexual abuse was often described by victims and survivors as full of terror. Dehenna was regularly sexually abused by her grandfather from the age of five. She was not able to breathe because of *“the weight of him”* and would beg him to stop.¹⁶¹ Philida-May described struggling to breathe when the man who sexually abused her was on top of her.¹⁶²

40. The horror and cruelty inflicted on victims and survivors during child sexual abuse was often extreme. Jonah described being subjected to *“choreographed”*, *“humiliating”* and *“sadistic”* sexual abuse by two men. He said: *“I thought they were*

¹⁵⁸ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports*, IICSA, June 2020, p32

¹⁵⁹ *Billy*

¹⁶⁰ *RO-A1 10 October 2017 65/24-25-66/1-5*

¹⁶¹ *Dehenna*

¹⁶² *Philida-May*

going to kill me ... I still can't comprehend how he could do what he did".¹⁶³ Jonah was just 10 years old at the time.

41. Victims and survivors described feeling demeaned during child sexual abuse. AN-A117 described being “*terrified*” and “*humiliated*” by the bishop who forced him to masturbate in front of other boys.¹⁶⁴ Oscar described the headmaster of his preparatory boarding school as “*sadistic beyond comprehension*”. Oscar described how another teacher’s “*idea of entertainment*” was to strip him naked and make him recite verbs. Sometimes the teacher beat his penis with a hairbrush. Oscar said that on one occasion he passed out from pain.¹⁶⁵

42. Victims and survivors often said that perpetrators laughed at their suffering. Kiara was once locked in a bathroom with a gang member so he could rape her, as the other members of the gang cheered outside. She cried and begged him to stop.¹⁶⁶ RC-A30 was sexually abused by a male teacher at a boarding school over a number of years, who “*humiliated*” her:

¹⁶³ [Jonah](#)

¹⁶⁴ [AN-A117 23 July 2018 119/4, 124/10](#)

¹⁶⁵ [Oscar](#)

¹⁶⁶ [Kiara](#)

“He would always have this really kind of quite creepy but very fixed smile on his face, like it was a joke that I somehow wasn’t getting. I felt very awkward and uncomfortable ... he was laughing and smiling”.¹⁶⁷

RC-A30, Roman Catholic Church investigation

43. Victims and survivors frequently described being “*frozen with fear*” during sexual abuse.¹⁶⁸ Bryn recalled feeling that he could not move due to his shock at being sexually assaulted.¹⁶⁹ Mabon said that he was so fearful while being anally raped that he “*could not scream*”.¹⁷⁰

44. Many victims and survivors said that they felt confused after they were sexually abused. Children often did not understand what had happened to them. After Lucie was raped, aged five or six, she found “*sticky stuff*” inside her.¹⁷¹ She had no idea what had happened to her.

¹⁶⁷ RC-A30 29 November 2017 107/6-11

¹⁶⁸ Horrence

¹⁶⁹ Bryn

¹⁷⁰ Mabon

¹⁷¹ Lucie

Part E

“I kept trying to tell them”

“I kept trying to tell them”

E.1: Introduction

1. Victims and survivors often said that the adults around them failed to notice that they were being sexually abused as a child, despite clear signs. Many described significant and often insurmountable hurdles to telling anyone what was happening to them. Sixty-seven percent of Truth Project participants did not tell anyone that they were being sexually abused at the time of the abuse.¹⁷² A higher proportion of Truth Project participants of Asian ethnicity (73 percent) than of white (66 percent), black (68 percent) and

¹⁷² An additional 7 percent of participants only disclosed some incidents of sexual abuse, but not every incident.

mixed (65 percent) ethnicities did not disclose that they were being sexually abused at the time of the abuse.¹⁷³

2. Experiences shared with the Truth Project indicated that over time there has been a gradual increase in children disclosing that they have been sexually abused (Figure E.1). Despite this, victims and survivors’ reasons for not disclosing sexual abuse when they were children were broadly similar, no matter when the abuse took place.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Groupings and terminology used to describe ethnicity are based on those used by the Office for National Statistics: Cultural identity – Office for National Statistics. Asian refers to people who identified as being from Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Chinese or other Asian backgrounds. Black refers to people who identified as being from Black, African, Caribbean, Black British or other Black backgrounds. Mixed refers to people who identified as being from mixed or multiple ethnicities. Percentages represent Truth Project participants who did not disclose any incident of child sexual abuse at the time; a small additional group of victims and survivors disclosed some incidents of sexual abuse at the time, but not all.

¹⁷⁴ See data compendium to this report.

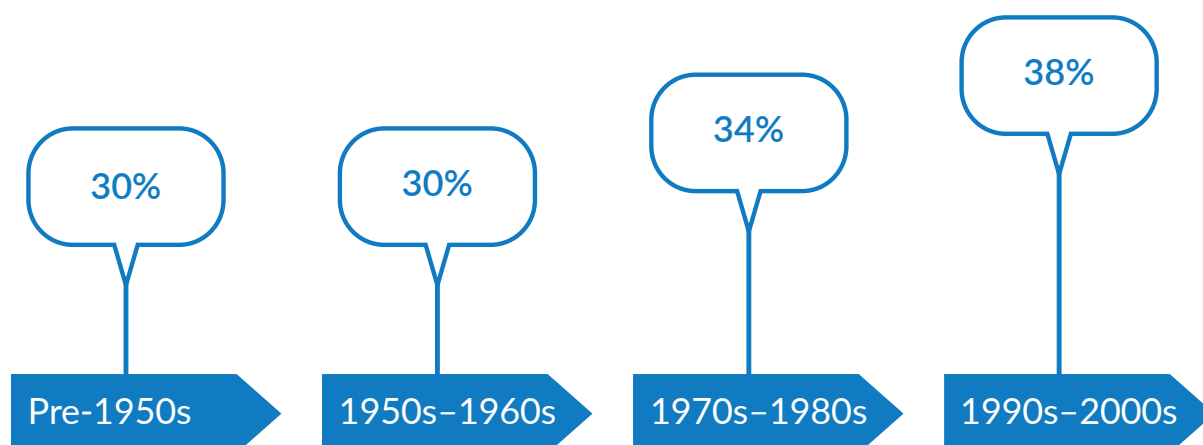


Figure E.1: *Proportion of Truth Project participants who disclosed child sexual abuse at the time of the abuse, by the time period in which they were sexually abused*

E.2: “The signs were all there”

3. Victims and survivors spoke about changes in their physical health and behaviour as a result of being sexually abused as a child. Behavioural changes were sometimes described as an attempt to communicate that they needed help. Many struggled to believe that physical or behavioural changes went unnoticed or were not questioned. One Truth Project participant said: *“I think it’s odd ... to think that all of that can happen and nobody can notice it happening”*.¹⁷⁵ Failures to detect physical and behavioural changes left children feeling trapped. Nora said: *“I remember saying*

¹⁷⁵ *Victim and survivor voices from the Truth Project (June 2016–June 2017)*, IICSA, October 2017, p15

*a little prayer not to wake up in the morning as I really did not want to be there ... there was no way out”.*¹⁷⁶

“They missed all the physical signs”

4. Victims and survivors repeatedly said that there were clear physical signs that they were being sexually abused as children. They reported bleeding, swelling and pain. Often no one appeared to notice these visible signs or recognise that they could indicate sexual abuse. May was sexually abused in the 2000s and the 2010s. One day at primary school she told a staff member that she was bleeding from her bottom and that a man had hurt her. The staff member cleaned May up but did not take any further action.¹⁷⁷

5. Some victims and survivors had contact with healthcare services as a result of injuries sustained through sexual abuse. When she was primary school age, Rach’s father raped her so violently that her mother took her to hospital: “*this was one of the only occasions my mum held me*”. Rach had stitches and was admitted to hospital. Her mother told staff that her daughter had fallen on a stick. No one at the hospital appeared to question this and Rach was returned home, where her father

¹⁷⁶ Nora

¹⁷⁷ May

continued to vaginally and anally rape her.¹⁷⁸

One research participant described a GP visiting her at home:

*“A GP was called ... I was examined and he said he could find nothing. I’d been raped. There was blood on the bed. Yes. There was blood on the bed. I was five years old. The GP couldn’t find a problem.”*¹⁷⁹

Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities research participant

6. Some victims and survivors said that medical professionals failed to identify clear signs of child sexual abuse. Between the ages of four and seven, Tiffany saw her family GP almost a dozen times with symptoms associated with urinary tract infections, but this sign of sexual abuse was apparently not recognised.¹⁸⁰ Female victims and survivors sometimes started to take the contraceptive pill as children. Eve-Marie was sexually abused in the 1990s. As a child, she regularly attended a sexual health clinic with sexually transmitted infections. Aged 12, she was

¹⁷⁸ Rach

¹⁷⁹ *“People don’t talk about it”: Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities*, IICSA, June 2020, p75

¹⁸⁰ Tiffany

prescribed the contraceptive pill. No one appeared to recognise these physical signs of sexual abuse. Eve-Marie said: “*nobody cared*”.¹⁸¹

7. In some cases, female victims and survivors became pregnant during childhood after being raped. Professionals sometimes failed to recognise that this indicated sexual abuse. Henrietta described giving birth aged 12 after being violently raped by her father. A social worker was aware of the pregnancy but failed to take action after Henrietta’s parents “*concocted a story*”.¹⁸²

“It was a cry for help”

8. Victims and survivors were often frustrated that no one picked up on the warning signs evident in their own behaviour. One Truth Project participant said: “*there’s so many moments ... where I was genuinely crying out to people and there was nothing, no one to listen to me*”.¹⁸³ Zachary said that his behaviour deteriorated so much that he was excluded from school, yet still no one considered what was behind this change. He said: “*I wanted someone to notice ... a teacher,*

¹⁸¹ Eve-Marie

¹⁸² Henrietta

¹⁸³ Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in healthcare contexts, IICSA, December 2020, p45

or someone".¹⁸⁴ One Truth Project participant felt that his behavioural issues contributed to him being placed into care: "*The care system had always made me out to be this awful child, but really ... I was just acting out from what had happened to me*".¹⁸⁵

9. Many victims and survivors felt that they became more withdrawn as a result of being sexually abused – but no one asked them if anything was wrong. Savannah was sexually abused by a teenage babysitter. She remembered trying to create time on her own with her teacher by asking to stay behind and tidy the classroom at playtime, yet her teacher never asked her if she was okay.¹⁸⁶ Ruben found out that social workers frequently described him as "*withdrawn and troubled*".¹⁸⁷ Despite this, Ruben said that his records do not show that there was any exploration of why this might have been.

10. Victims and survivors often said that their attendance at school suffered as a result of having been sexually abused, yet this was not recognised as a warning sign. Natalia grew up in the 1970s and 1980s. From the age of about three, she

¹⁸⁴ Zachary

¹⁸⁵ Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports, IICSA, June 2020, p54

¹⁸⁶ Savannah

¹⁸⁷ Ruben

was sexually abused by her grandfather. She did not feel safe outside of her home and regularly missed school. One year, Natalia missed more than 200 days of school before anyone contacted her parents: “*that’s how insignificant I was, no one noticed I was missing for a year*”.¹⁸⁸ Breen did not attend school at all during the four years in which she was sexually abused during the 2010s. Although social services were involved with the family, Breen said that they took no action in response.¹⁸⁹

11. Victims and survivors sometimes felt that the adults around them seemingly did not explore child sexual abuse as a possible reason for the deterioration in their mental health as children. Tonia was raped by her mother’s boyfriend for several years up until the age of seven. She was referred to children’s mental health services for anger management training. Despite this, and attempts to tell people what was wrong, she said that nobody explored why her mental health deteriorated so significantly.¹⁹⁰ Adrienne was raped multiple times by groups of men as a child and saw a counsellor and a psychiatrist during this period. She said that she was labelled an

¹⁸⁸ Natalia

¹⁸⁹ Breen

¹⁹⁰ Tonia

“attention seeker”.¹⁹¹ She described her frustration at the assumptions made about the changes in her mental health: *“I was ‘crazy’, because I was traumatised”*.¹⁹²

12. Some victims and survivors felt that racism led to the adults around them ignoring changes in their behaviour, such as poor performance or attendance at school. One research participant felt that professionals saw him as a *“difficult black boy”*, which resulted in a failure to recognise that he was *“a vulnerable person ... who was actually crying out for help”*.¹⁹³ Alvita, who is of African-Caribbean heritage, experienced sexual abuse from the age of 7 until she was 14, during the 1990s and 2000s. As a result, she struggled at school and *“never handed in a piece of work”*. She said that *“the teachers didn’t care ... I used to think that if I was a different colour, brown, lighter, white, I would have been treated differently”*.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Adrienne

¹⁹² Adrienne

¹⁹³ “People don’t talk about it”: Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities, IICSA, June 2020, p66

¹⁹⁴ Alvita

E.3: “Telling someone about what had happened to me”

13. Victims and survivors who were sexually abused as children faced complex hurdles to telling anyone what was happening to them (Figure E.2). For many, telling someone felt impossible and they only felt able to disclose later in life.

“There was no one I could go to, no one to tell”

14. As children, some victims and survivors felt they had no one to tell that they were being sexually abused. Brinda said that she came from a “*very traditional family*” and did not feel that she could tell her parents that she had been raped: “*The expectation was I would have an arranged marriage. Sex before marriage was not a ‘thing’*”.¹⁹⁵ One child victim and survivor described feeling trapped with no one to tell:

“It’s kind of a trap really, you don’t know what to do because you don’t know what the options are; it’s like telling somebody to get outside of a room when you can’t see any

¹⁹⁵ Brinda

*windows or doors in a way.”*¹⁹⁶

Learning about online sexual harm
research participant

15. It was especially common to hear that victims and survivors who grew up in residential institutions felt that they had no one to whom they could disclose sexual abuse. RS-A6 said there was no one outside of his residential school who he could speak to about sexual abuse perpetrated by older pupils: *“They’ve put you in a home that’s essentially hundreds of miles from anyone you know”*.¹⁹⁷ In particular, victims and survivors described staff in children’s homes and custodial institutions as *“coming and going on different shifts”*, which prevented them from building trust and feeling able to disclose.¹⁹⁸ Some also said that being moved frequently had an impact on their ability to disclose:

*“I never stayed in one place long enough to feel like I had any one adult who I could trust to report what had happened to me at the time.”*¹⁹⁹

A76, Children in the care of the
Nottinghamshire Councils investigation

¹⁹⁶ *Learning about online sexual harm, IICSA, November 2019, p53*

¹⁹⁷ *RS-A6 7 October 2019 130/23-25*

¹⁹⁸ *A76 (read) 5 October 2018 115/20-21*

¹⁹⁹ *A76 (read) 5 October 2018 118/21-23*



Figure E.2: *Reasons why Truth Project participants did not disclose child sexual abuse at the time of the abuse**

* Truth Project participants often gave multiple reasons for not disclosing child sexual abuse, therefore the percentages in this figure do not sum to 100 percent.

“I was so young, I didn’t know what was going on”

16. Some victims and survivors said that when they were children they did not recognise that they were being sexually abused. Victims and survivors abused as very young children often described having a sense that what was happening to them was “*bad*”, but they did not know it was sexual abuse.²⁰⁰ As a result, they did not know that they should tell anyone what had happened. Malika’s stepfather regularly sexually abused her from the age of about eight, but Malika said “*I was so young I didn’t know what was going on*”.²⁰¹

17. Victims and survivors who were frequently sexually abused from a young age sometimes said that they became “*normalised*” to the abuse.²⁰² This was described as a very powerful barrier to disclosure. Conall was physically and sexually abused by his headteacher in the 1960s; the abuse

²⁰⁰ “*People don’t talk about it*”: *Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities*, IICSA, June 2020, p34

²⁰¹ *Malika*

²⁰² *Evonne*

included being beaten while naked with heavy implements. Conall said that, at the time, he did not recognise this as sexual abuse, thinking it was just “*a normal form of discipline at a boarding school*”.²⁰³ Ethan said that he did not tell anyone that he was being sexually abused because it had become normalised for him and society did not speak about child sexual abuse.²⁰⁴

18. Some sexual abusers appeared to show children love, affection and kindness. Victims and survivors said that, as children, this meant that they did not know they were being sexually abused or that they should tell anyone. CM-A22 described her confusion after being sexually abused by a man in the family she was sent to live with:

*“Because it was done in the guise of a loving father’s behaviour, I was completely confused about whether it was right or wrong and to say something about it – and actually it was normal? How could I say anything, not knowing ... you don’t even know that you should report such a thing.”*²⁰⁵

CM-A22, Child migration programmes investigation

²⁰³ Conall

²⁰⁴ Ethan

²⁰⁵ CM-A22 8 March 2017 22/17-23

19. Young victims and survivors highlighted particular difficulties in recognising and reporting online-facilitated child sexual abuse. One 16-year-old said:

*“I was with my friends and saw messages, it was like, ‘Get your tits out’, we were just laughing about it ... we didn’t see it as, ‘Oh my gosh, this man wants to see my boobs’”.*²⁰⁶

Learning about online sexual harm
research participant

“I felt deeply ashamed”

20. As children, many victims and survivors felt deeply ashamed about being sexually abused. Dewi said simply *“as a child, I was ashamed”*.²⁰⁷ Shame often prevented children from feeling able to tell anyone what had happened to them. Shame was more commonly cited as a reason for not disclosing at the time by men (22 percent of male Truth Project participants) than by women (15 percent of female Truth Project participants).

21. Some men described being ashamed that they felt unable to fight back while being sexually abused. Drew said he felt ashamed that he did not *“resist”* being sexually abused by a maintenance

²⁰⁶ *Learning about online sexual harm, IICSA, November 2019, p53*

²⁰⁷ Dewi

man at school.²⁰⁸ Men who were sexually abused by women often felt ashamed because of this. August had “*so much shame*” about being sexually abused by a female staff member at his school. His schoolmates thought it was just “*a bit of a laugh*”.²⁰⁹

22. Female victims and survivors often described shame related to sexist stereotypes. In particular, some girls felt that they would be viewed negatively for having “*allowed*” the sexual abuse to happen.²¹⁰ Miyanna reflected on this: “*It’s like everything is always the woman’s fault*”.²¹¹ When Kiya was 12 years old, she was raped by a man who groomed her online. Her friend called her a “*slag*” and, as a result, Kiya felt “*trapped ... I couldn’t tell anyone what had happened*”.²¹² Sally was raped on her way home from school as a teenager. She was sure that she would be blamed if she told her family and thought of herself as a “*slut*”.²¹³

23. Other victims and survivors said that they did not disclose child sexual abuse because of the shame it would bring to their family and community. Maksud felt deeply ashamed that he had been sexually abused by an imam while reading from

²⁰⁸ [Drew](#)

²⁰⁹ [August](#)

²¹⁰ [Dot; Cindy](#)

²¹¹ [Miyanna](#)

²¹² [Kiya](#)

²¹³ [Sally](#)

the Quran. He said he found it impossible to tell anyone what had happened.²¹⁴ Ebrah never reported that she had been sexually abused to the police. She felt deeply ashamed, and worried that her mother would not be able to cope with the community knowing her daughter had been sexually abused.²¹⁵ Some female victims and survivors in South Asian communities described a fear that child sexual abuse would damage their prospects of getting married:

“For a child sexual abuse to take place would basically [mean to] have sex outside of marriage, ... so it’s like this whole stigma attached to you as well as being damaged goods.”²¹⁶

Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities research participant

“I was too terrified to say anything”

24. Many victims and survivors did not tell anyone that they were being sexually abused as a child because they were scared of what would happen if they did. Linda described her childhood fears: *“Would I be taken away? Would I be moved away*

²¹⁴ Maksud

²¹⁵ Ebrah

²¹⁶ “People don’t talk about it”: Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities, IICSA, June 2020, p38

*from the school? Vilified? Would he hunt me down and kill me?”*²¹⁷ Many feared being taken into care. Lorena was sexually abused by her adoptive father and brother, but did not tell anyone because “*I knew I would end up in a children’s home and that could be worse*”.²¹⁸ Some LGBTQ+ victims and survivors said they were terrified that their sexuality would be found out if they disclosed child sexual abuse. One member of the Victims and Survivors Forum said that this “*was such a threat in my mind that everything had to be kept quiet*”.²¹⁹

25. Often victims and survivors were threatened by the person who sexually abused them. LA-A25 said that the housefather in her children’s home threatened that “*he’d kill me ... he said he could get me locked up and no-one would believe me, and I’d be away forever*”.²²⁰ Threats silenced victims and survivors. Many described feeling frightened, powerless and trapped, unable to escape the sexual abuse:

“I was on my own in the sick bay and [the head of house] proceeded to anally rape me. I thought I was going to die from the pain

²¹⁷ [Linda](#)

²¹⁸ [Lorena](#)

²¹⁹ [Engagement with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning + victims and survivors](#), IICSA, May 2022, p21

²²⁰ [LA-A25 6 July 2020 59/11-14](#)

*caused by the rape. During the course of the rape, [the head of house] said to me: ‘Say that I’ve been here and I’ll kill you’. I was 11 years old at the time.”*²²¹

Colin Watson, Children in custodial institutions investigation

“I asked myself, who’d believe you?”

26. Some victims and survivors did not tell anyone that they were being sexually abused as they were worried that no one would believe them:

*“I thought people wouldn’t believe me. I might get in trouble. My friend wouldn’t want to be friends with me anymore.”*²²²

Kerry, Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse research participant

27. Often this fear stemmed from being explicitly told by perpetrators that they would not be believed. Sharan’s stepfather used to say: *“you tell your mother and she’ll believe me over you”*.²²³ Perpetrators’ power and status also led to a fear that victims and survivors would not be believed:

²²¹ Colin Watson (read) 10 July 2018 34/1-6

²²² *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p36

²²³ Sharan

*“I believe that a man who is a padre was a man of God and being in the army he was a higher rank than my father and so I didn’t think anyone would believe me.”*²²⁴

AN-A15, Anglican Church investigation

28. Many victims and survivors reflected on the inherent power imbalance between adults and children. Cultural attitudes towards children were seen to enhance this imbalance. Victims and survivors worried that they would be assumed to be lying if they said they were sexually abused. Hurriya was sexually abused by her primary school teacher in the 1970s. She did not tell anyone about the abuse at the time because *“nobody really believed children back then”*.²²⁵ LA-A154 said: *“the message I received repeatedly, including from schoolteachers, was that they believed adults, not kids”*.²²⁶

“I didn’t have the words”

29. As children, some victims and survivors did not know how to describe sexual acts and so felt unable to tell anyone what was happening to them. Aruna grew up in the 1970s. She was sexually abused by a male family friend when she was around six years old. She said: *“I knew what he*

²²⁴ AN-A15 6 March 2018 5/24-6/2

²²⁵ Hurriya

²²⁶ LA-A154 29 July 2020 174/19-175/1

*was doing was wrong, but I didn't tell anyone. At that age, I didn't know how to even say it".*²²⁷ Often this was connected to not understanding what constituted sexual abuse. Isla-Rose grew up in the 2000s. She described the boundaries in her house as “skewed”; she was not allowed any privacy and her father regularly walked around naked. Isla-Rose did not know when her father began raping her. She only understood that it was rape aged 13, when she attended a talk on sexual assault at school: *“I had been trying to tell people for years, but I couldn't because I didn't understand what it was that was exactly wrong. I didn't have the words for it”.*²²⁸

30. Others felt unable to describe what was happening to them because they did not think they were allowed to speak about body parts or sexual acts. Aniyah was raped by her neighbour on a weekly basis. She said: *“Sometimes I thought about telling my mum, but I didn't know what words to use and I wasn't allowed to use ‘rude’ words”.*²²⁹

31. Victims and survivors who communicated non-verbally sometimes described being unable to disclose abuse. Gianna is Deaf but was not allowed to use sign language at school. She was hit with a ruler whenever she tried. As a result, she

²²⁷ Aruna

²²⁸ Isla-Rose

²²⁹ Aniyah

was unable to tell anyone that she had been raped by two men.²³⁰ Veronica is deaf but was placed in a children’s home run by staff who could not sign. One of the staff members sexually abused Veronica, including trying to penetrate her with a rounders bat. Veronica said that not even her social worker could sign and, as a result, she could not tell anyone about the sexual abuse.²³¹

32. Other victims and survivors who had communication difficulties said that they tried to tell someone that they were being sexually abused but their disclosure was not understood. The mother of LA-A26 described her daughter as having “*significant communication difficulties*”²³² and wondered whether her “*allegation had been dismissed because of her disability*”.²³³

“No one asked”

33. Victims and survivors commonly felt that, as children, no one asked whether they wanted to tell them anything or if they were being sexually abused. Vayla said that on two occasions the police raided her family home, which she suspected was in relation to child sexual abuse images. However, she said that the police never

²³⁰ [Gianna](#)

²³¹ [Veronica](#)

²³² [LA-A26 31 July 2020 59/6-8](#)

²³³ [LA-A26 31 July 2020 64/11-13](#)

spoke to the children and the sexual abuse by her father continued: *“I couldn’t say anything, but I wanted them to rescue me. I wish I’d had a voice”*.²³⁴ Florence’s father was imprisoned for sexually abusing her step-siblings. Florence said that after serving his sentence, he was permitted to return home, where he regularly raped her. Neither the police nor social services *“asked me if anything had happened to me, despite the fact my father was convicted of abusing lots of others”*.²³⁵ Evie went from being a *“high-achiever”* to not attending school, taking drugs and attempting suicide at 16 after being sexually abused in the 2000s and 2010s. She said: *“nobody ever asked me any questions. Not once”*.²³⁶

34. Some victims and survivors felt that adults did not ask the *“right questions”* to support them to disclose sexual abuse.²³⁷ Sinead said: *“if I had been asked ‘Is anyone hurting you?’, I would have told”*.²³⁸ RS-A7 described what would have supported him to disclose that he was being sexually abused:

²³⁴ Vayla

²³⁵ Florence

²³⁶ Evie

²³⁷ RS-A7 9 October 2019 61/19-21

²³⁸ Sinead

*"The way I answer questions is very literal, I think because of the nature of my learning difficulties. So, for example, if, instead of skirting around the subject, [the teacher] had asked me straight out if [the Head of Care] touched my private parts, then I would have told her 'Yes' he did."*²³⁹

RS-A7, Residential schools investigation

Part F

“All I needed was just one person to act”

“All I needed was just one person to act”

F.1: Introduction

1. The majority of victims and survivors did not disclose child sexual abuse at the time that it was happening. Just 33 percent of Truth Project participants who discussed disclosure said that they disclosed that they were being sexually abused at the time.²⁴⁰ Most disclosed to a parent, the police or someone within the institution in which they were abused (Figure F.1).

²⁴⁰ This percentage relates to Truth Project participants who disclosed at least one incident of child sexual abuse at the time. This includes some participants who disclosed all incidents, and others who only disclosed some incidents but not others.

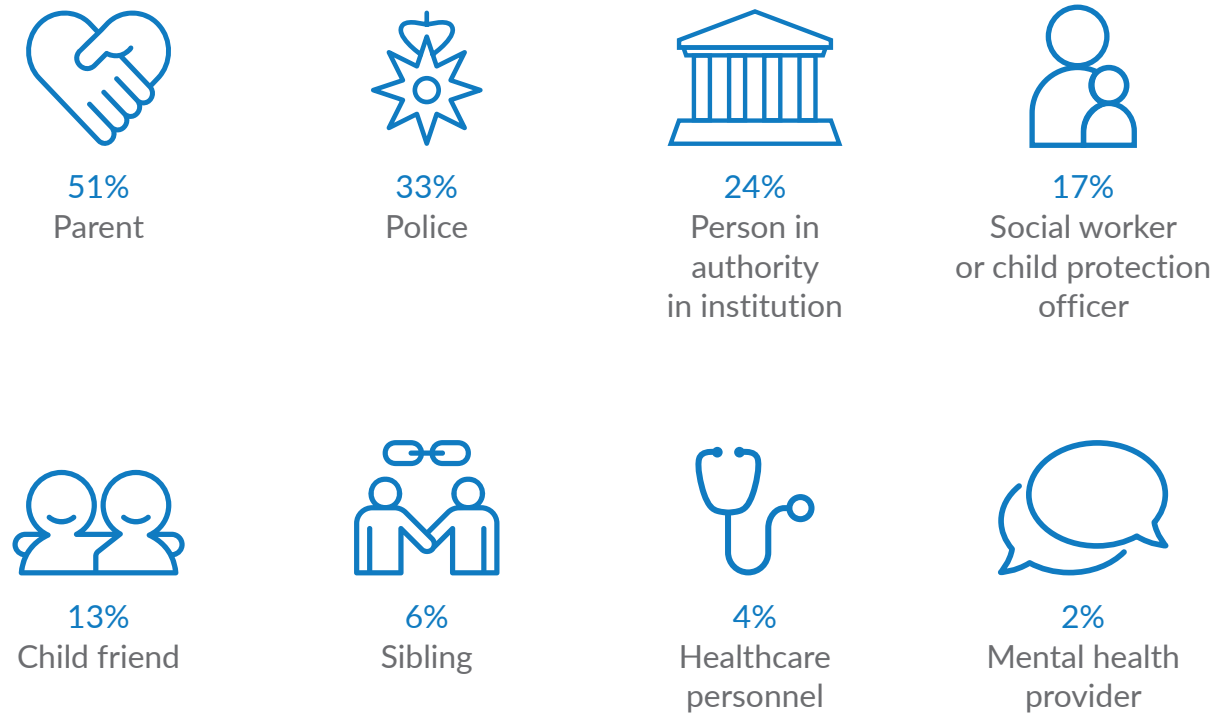


Figure F.1: *People to whom Truth Project participants disclosed at the time of their child sexual abuse*

2. Amongst those who did disclose child sexual abuse at the time, the majority said that they did not receive the help and protection that they needed. Victims and survivors often said that the person to whom they disclosed responded inadequately. Many victims and survivors were accused of lying, were blamed or were silenced. These experiences were common, whether victims and survivors disclosed as children in the 1950s or 2010s. Victims and survivors commonly said that negative responses to disclosures meant they never wanted to talk about their experiences of child sexual abuse again.

3. Although victims and survivors who participated in the Inquiry’s work often described negative experiences of disclosure, some did report action being taken. For example, 7 percent of Truth Project participants said that the institution to whom they disclosed contacted the police. Other participants described being removed from the abusive environment (7 percent), the perpetrator being removed (7 percent) or receiving counselling and support (2 percent). Victims and survivors who described action being taken in response to their disclosure were in the minority.

F.2: “No one took it seriously or did anything about it”

4. Many victims and survivors described repeated attempts to tell someone that they were being sexually abused but no one seemed to take them seriously. Of those who disclosed sexual abuse at the time it was happening, 47 percent of Truth Project participants said that no action was taken. Many spoke of their desperation to be taken seriously:

“Honestly, ... the social worker ... I did tell her, I did write her letters, I did communicate ... but I was always told I was attention seeking or, ‘No, don’t be saying that’, ‘No, no, they

wouldn't do that, no' that was the way it always was and I didn't go there.”²⁴¹

Truth Project participant

5. Some victims and survivors were mocked when they disclosed sexual abuse. One Truth Project participant disclosed to a healthcare professional within the same institution but no action was taken. He recalled: “*When I reported the first incident I got laughed at. I just got laughed at ... there was nowhere really for me to turn*”.²⁴²

6. Other victims and survivors said that the person to whom they disclosed did not appear to take their allegation seriously enough to contact social care or the police. Hanaya was 18 when she took part in the Truth Project. A few years before, she had disclosed to her teacher that she had been sexually abused as a younger child.²⁴³ He took no action, only telling her what would happen to the abuser according to their faith.

7. Some victims and survivors said that the person to whom they disclosed contacted their parents instead of social care or the police. On three

²⁴¹ *Victim and survivor voices from the Truth Project (June 2016–June 2017)*, IICSA, October 2017, p15

²⁴² *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in healthcare contexts*, IICSA, December 2020, p43

²⁴³ *Hanaya*

occasions, Daran reported that he was being raped by his mother's boyfriend.²⁴⁴ He first spoke to his GP, then the police and finally a teacher at school. On each occasion, the professional phoned his mother and took no further action. His mother physically abused Daran for reporting the abuse. Sheryl was sexually abused by her father. She told a teacher at school that she was being abused but the only action they took was to contact her parents. Sheryl stressed the importance of not making assumptions based on appearances: *"I came from a middle class respectable background, with professional and articulate parents. People often judge on appearances"*.²⁴⁵

8. In a few cases, victims and survivors said that someone witnessed them being sexually abused but still failed to act. LA-A304 described a member of staff in her children's home seeing her being sexually abused. The member of staff *"walked straight back out again"* and *"didn't do anything to stop what was going on or ask what was going on"*.²⁴⁶ When Laakia was around six years old, her father began touching her, kissing her and *"doing things"* to her while she was sitting on his lap.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ [Daran](#)

²⁴⁵ [Sheryl](#)

²⁴⁶ [LA-A304 31 July 2020 36/12-15](#)

²⁴⁷ [Laakia](#)

She remembered her mother coming into the room when this was happening but she did nothing to stop the abuse.

9. Some victims and survivors said that their experiences of child sexual abuse were not taken seriously due to racism and sexism. One member of the Victims and Survivors Forum thought that being a “*bi-racial black female*” meant that care home staff saw her as a “*consenting and willing participant*” when she was raped.²⁴⁸

10. Other victims and survivors suggested that professionals feared allegations of racism and that this was prioritised over their safety. Prisha said that professionals were so afraid of being called racist that they dismissed her allegations of sexual abuse as “*cultural differences*” when she was a child.²⁴⁹ One Forum member described how their race and religion affected their interaction with a doctor:

“They didn’t want to help or intervene or protect me because I am a Sikh, they were more concerned about being racist

²⁴⁸ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Protected Characteristics: Summary Report, IICSA, February 2021, p15*

²⁴⁹ *Prisha*

*than helping and rescuing a child who was being abused.”*²⁵⁰

Member of the Victims and Survivors Forum

11. Many victims and survivors described feeling trapped when sexual abuse was not taken seriously. Inaction often facilitated further sexual abuse. Cole reflected on how different things could have been *“if just one person had listened to me”*.²⁵¹

F.3: “They called me a liar”

12. Often victims and survivors were accused of lying when they told someone that they were being sexually abused. Only 5 percent of Truth Project participants who disclosed child sexual abuse to an institution at the time of the abuse said that they were believed when they disclosed.²⁵² Jaden mentioned in front of the police that he was being raped regularly in his children’s home. The police officer responded by saying *“we don’t need to hear your fucking lies”*.²⁵³ Peyton was sexually abused throughout her childhood during

²⁵⁰ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Protected Characteristics: Summary Report, IICSA, February 2021, pp20–1*

²⁵¹ *Cole*

²⁵² This percentage is of those who disclosed child sexual abuse and spoke about the response.

²⁵³ *Jaden*

the 1990s and 2000s, starting when she was four. Although hospital staff had found bruising around her genitals and finger marks around her neck, she said a police officer accused her of causing the injuries to herself.²⁵⁴

13. Some victims and survivors said that they were accused of lying because the perpetrator was considered by others to be a reputable person. RC-A494 said that when he disclosed that he had been abused, including being stripped naked and lashed with a leather strap, he was simply told: “*Nuns wouldn’t do that. They are nice people*”.²⁵⁵ Others felt that their background seemed to influence the chance of their disclosure being dismissed. Mercy grew up in a violent and neglectful home. She said that teachers saw her as a “*problem child*” and did not believe her when she told them she had been raped by multiple men.²⁵⁶ Victims and survivors who were sexually abused in a healthcare context often said that they were labelled as “*sick*” or “*crazy*” when they told healthcare professionals that they were being sexually abused.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ [Peyton](#)

²⁵⁵ [RC-A494 16 November 2018 2/9-23](#)

²⁵⁶ [Mercy](#)

²⁵⁷ [Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in healthcare contexts](#), IICSA, December 2020, pp44, 47, 50

14. Victims and survivors were sometimes ‘punished’ for telling ‘lies’ when they disclosed sexual abuse. Serennah grew up in the 1960s. When she told her teacher that she was being raped by her stepfather, she was called a liar and slapped.²⁵⁸ NO-A319 said that in 1975 he was physically assaulted by a member of staff at his children’s home after disclosing sexual abuse by another staff member.²⁵⁹ Victims and survivors also suffered other forms of harm after being accused of lying about child sexual abuse. During the 2000s, Sally-Ann was sexually abused by her brother from the age of about five. Aged 15, she was kicked out of her family home and accused of lying by her parents when she disclosed the sexual abuse.²⁶⁰

F.4: “It was guilt, blame and shame”

15. A number of victims and survivors said that they were blamed for having been sexually abused. This was frequently related to sexist or homophobic attitudes. When Lorelai told her mother that she had been sexually abused by a man, her mother said: *“you must have encouraged him ... the way*

²⁵⁸ Serennah

²⁵⁹ INQ002577_016

²⁶⁰ Sally-Ann

you dressed”.²⁶¹ Adelyn was accused of trying to “seduce” the man who had sexually abused her as a child in the 2000s. She said she was portrayed as a “*whore*”.²⁶² One Forum member was told that his being sexually abused “*was a result of being homosexual*”.²⁶³ Another Truth Project participant described the reaction of his brother to the fact that he was sexually abused:

*“He’s like, ‘he’s the “gay boy” and “cock boy” ... He’s saying what happened to me was my fault, I asked for it ... ”.*²⁶⁴

Truth Project participant

16. Other victims and survivors were blamed for having got the sexual abuser ‘in trouble’. Sarah was blamed by her local community for being sexually abused by a married man. As a result, Sarah felt that she “*had corrupted older men and was responsible for a marriage break-up*” and that “*I deserved the hate from the community*”.²⁶⁵ As a child in the early 2000s, CS-A12 said that

²⁶¹ Lorelai

²⁶² Adelyn

²⁶³ *Engagement with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning + victims and survivors*, IICSA, May 2022, p24

²⁶⁴ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of children’s homes and residential care*, IICSA, November 2019, p81

²⁶⁵ Sarah

the police blamed her when they found her in a car with the men who were sexually exploiting her: *“They’d turn around to us and say ... ‘You’re going to get the drivers into trouble with your behaviour’”*.²⁶⁶

17. Victims and survivors often explained that being blamed as a child for having been sexually abused had a significant and long-lasting impact on their life and their recovery from child sexual abuse. Evelyn described feelings of self-loathing and of having no right to be upset.²⁶⁷ Diya said that it took her years *“to understand I didn’t do anything wrong”*.²⁶⁸

F.5: “They wanted to cover it up”

18. Some victims and survivors said institutions tried to cover up the sexual abuse they reported to prevent external authorities from knowing about it. Just 7 percent of Truth Project participants who disclosed child sexual abuse at the time of the abuse said that the police were informed about their allegation.

19. Victims and survivors said that some institutions removed the perpetrator from their position but did not report the sexual abuse to

²⁶⁶ CS-A12 22 September 2020 22/1-16

²⁶⁷ Evelyn

²⁶⁸ Diya

the police or social care services. Kenny thought it was a “*cover-up*” when the choirmaster who sexually abused him was replaced without any other action.²⁶⁹ When Danni told her school that a teacher had sexually abused her, the school told her parents “*you must not tell the police, we will handle it in-house*”. The teacher was then moved to another school. Danni said: “*for almost 30 years I have felt guilty about that. What if he did it to other kids?*”.²⁷⁰ Tim said that the headteacher who sexually abused him was moved to another school without investigation following allegations being made against him.²⁷¹ He said that, more recently, the local authority destroyed files relating to the allegations, which he felt was part of a cover-up.

20. A number of victims and survivors said that some institutions appeared to prioritise their reputation or interests above the safety of children. Victims and survivors also described how familial reputations seemed to be valued over and above their welfare as children. Aimie said her family were focussed on protecting her grandfather’s reputation after he repeatedly sexually abused her.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ Kenny

²⁷⁰ Danni

²⁷¹ Tim

²⁷² Aimie

21. Some victims and survivors described how the culture within a particular institution or community discouraged reporting allegations of child sexual abuse to the police. In 2014, PR-A2 disclosed that she was sexually abused in a madrassa and met with an imam to discuss this. He told her “*not to rock the boat*” given the potential for shame and dishonour, as well as possible reprisals from the community.²⁷³ Carrie-Ann was raised as a Jehovah’s Witness. She explained that her social worker, who was also a Jehovah’s Witness, discouraged her from reporting that she had been sexually abused by her family members, saying: “*You know how Jehovah feels about liars*”.²⁷⁴

²⁷³ [INQ005151_002](#)

²⁷⁴ [Carrie-Ann](#)

Part G

“The impact of child sexual abuse”

“The impact of child sexual abuse”

G.1: Introduction

1. Nearly all Truth Project participants (94 percent) reported that child sexual abuse had a negative impact on them (Figure G.1).²⁷⁵ Some victims and survivors said that it shaped their whole life:

“Words do not do justice to the scale of the impact ... It has affected and continues to affect every aspect of my being, body, mind and soul. I was so young that I will never know who I could have been had it never happened.”²⁷⁶

Celeste, Truth Project participant

²⁷⁵ Truth Project participants were not asked directly about the impact of child sexual abuse.

²⁷⁶ Celeste

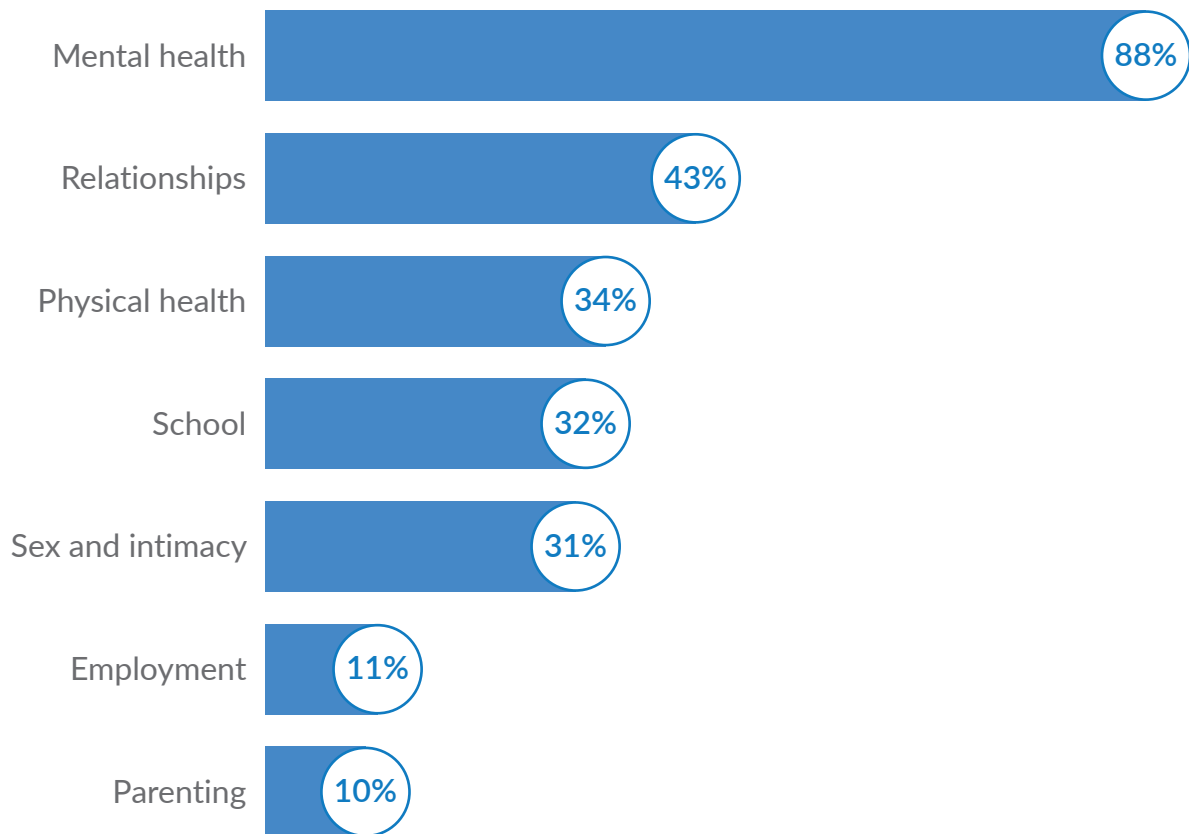


Figure G.1: *Proportion of Truth Project participants who reported a specific impact of child sexual abuse*

G.2: “I have been affected in different ways, at different times”

2. Victims and survivors described how their experiences of the impact of child sexual abuse changed over time.

3. Some victims and survivors initially repressed their experiences of child sexual abuse. One Truth Project participant said: *“I just buried it deep, deep,*

deep down".²⁷⁷ JA-A1 said that he tried to "*bury the awful memories finding it too shameful*".²⁷⁸ Attempts to bury child sexual abuse sometimes resulted in harm later in life:

*"I suppose the repression of what had happened manifested a raging, angry, dysfunctional, post-traumatic syndrome-type person. I'm dysfunctional, I'm a wreck; I'm a psychological total nervous wreck."*²⁷⁹

Truth Project participant

4. In many cases, a significant life event triggered the impact of child sexual abuse to emerge suddenly later in life. Pablo was sexually abused throughout his childhood. He said he suppressed the harm it caused until his wife fell pregnant. At that point, "*life became unbearable*": he began to experience flashbacks and depression. He struggled with fears that he might sexually abuse his own children.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports*, IICSA, June 2020, p54

²⁷⁸ *INQ006312_013*

²⁷⁹ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of schools*, IICSA, December 2020, p71

²⁸⁰ *Pablo*

5. Some victims and survivors said that the impact of child sexual abuse came and went throughout their lives. Sharon described intermittent periods of self-sabotage, usually occurring after personal achievements. She wanted to “*become [her] potential*”.²⁸¹ Others described significant difficulties earlier in their life, followed by a long period of stability and recovery. Often, these victims and survivors mentioned a single turning point, such as receiving effective treatment for mental health conditions or drug addiction. Dougal committed a criminal offence but the judge did not send him to prison, saying “*I hope you get the help you deserve*”.²⁸² Dougal described this as an important turning point for him; he received rehabilitation treatment for his drug addiction and was progressing on his recovery programme.

G.3: “I rescued myself, that’s who rescued me”

6. Victims and survivors said that coping with the impact of child sexual abuse helped them appreciate their resilience.

²⁸¹ Sharon

²⁸² Dougal

7. For some victims and survivors, recovering from the trauma of child sexual abuse created inner strength, “*competence and self-reliance*”.²⁸³ Michelle said: “*my experiences have made me a very strong and independent person – a lot of my life I had to fend for myself*”.²⁸⁴

8. A number of victims and survivors emphasised that their experiences of child sexual abuse did not “*define*” the rest of their life.²⁸⁵ Nita said that “*it has had an impact ... it has not defined me*”.²⁸⁶ Some described this as a conscious decision. Kaye said: “*I will not let the bad experiences of my life define me. But they are a part of what I am ... I am proud of myself for surviving*”.²⁸⁷ Vivien reflected on the assumptions people make about victims of sexual abuse:

“I see myself as a whole person with positive traits ... I’ve got some difficulties and challenges that I’ve been able to process and work through and still live a very functional life ... I don’t want to be seen as

²⁸³ Leese

²⁸⁴ Michelle

²⁸⁵ Jenna

²⁸⁶ Nita

²⁸⁷ Kaye

*somebody dysfunctional or have assumptions made about me.*²⁸⁸

Vivien, Truth Project participant

9. Some victims and survivors highlighted their positive attitude to life despite experiencing child sexual abuse. Catriona said she was proud to be a positive person.²⁸⁹ Others described the importance of acknowledging past trauma while recognising the positive: *“It’s good to try to look at the positive things whilst acknowledging the past hasn’t been great”*.²⁹⁰

10. Victims and survivors sometimes felt that their experiences gave them an enhanced sense of empathy. Max said that while he felt angry about being sexually abused, it has made him empathise with children who experience difficulties.²⁹¹ Some described how they have chosen to help other victims and survivors. Victims and survivors commonly said that supporting others in turn assisted their own journey towards recovery. Robert said that supporting children as a family therapist enabled him to turn *“something that happened that was awful into something that was ... bringing good”*.²⁹²

²⁸⁸ Vivien

²⁸⁹ Catriona

²⁹⁰ Brett

²⁹¹ Max

²⁹² Robert Montagu 27 March 2019 19/18-20/9

G.4: “My suffering is invisible to the eye”

11. Many victims and survivors emphasised this sense of resilience in the context of coping with the severely negative impact of child sexual abuse. The vast majority described child sexual abuse as having had a negative impact on their mental health.

“I am traumatised”

12. Many victims and survivors said they were traumatised by child sexual abuse. Olivar described the “*traumatic long-term effect*” of sexual abuse: “*I’ve thought about it for over 50 years*”.²⁹³ Twenty percent of Truth Project participants explicitly said that they were experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder.²⁹⁴

13. The impact of trauma was described to the Inquiry in different ways. Some victims and survivors felt “*tormented*” by child sexual abuse.²⁹⁵ Laurie said: “*hardly a day goes by where I do*

²⁹³ Olivar

²⁹⁴ For more information on post-traumatic stress disorder, please refer to: *The impacts of child sexual abuse: A rapid evidence assessment*, IICSA, July 2017, pp62–64

²⁹⁵ Amber

*not think about the events from 58 years ago”.*²⁹⁶

Charles also described the lifelong torment of child sexual abuse:

*“It doesn’t go away. So many wonderful things have happened in my life but this is the one I think about. For many years I would try and push it away, but it didn’t stay there, it kept coming forward.”*²⁹⁷

Charles, Truth Project participant

14. Others felt that flashbacks emerged at random times. Pamela said that she was unable to cope when the “*torrent*” of memories of child sexual abuse came at her.²⁹⁸ Twenty-four percent of Truth Project participants reported experiencing traumatic nightmares, which “*haunted*” them and had an impact on their ability to sleep.²⁹⁹ RC-A596 said that the priest who sexually abused him “*still appears in my nightmares*”.³⁰⁰

15. Some victims and survivors described being “*triggered*” by things that reminded them of being sexually abused as children.³⁰¹ Andres said that he did not feel he “*lived a normal life*”

²⁹⁶ Laurie

²⁹⁷ Charles

²⁹⁸ Pamela

²⁹⁹ Marlin

³⁰⁰ MPS004245_002

³⁰¹ Kelly

and that “*sometimes things just trigger the awful memories*”.³⁰² The school caretaker who sexually abused Vicky carried a large set of keys and “*to this day*” she hates the sound of rattling keys.³⁰³ RS-A2 said that being sexually abused by her violin teacher “*greatly affected*” her relationship with music:

*“I’ve not played classical music since leaving there. I find it hard to listen to. I’ve burnt most of my music.”*³⁰⁴

RS-A2, Residential schools investigation

“I am anxious and depressed”

16. Victims and survivors, including 36 percent of Truth Project participants, often said that they had depression following child sexual abuse. Xavier described feeling “*misery, bewilderment*” after being sexually abused as a child.³⁰⁵ For many people, depression continued into their adult life. Riona said that for most of her life she had been “*miserable, depressed*”.³⁰⁶ Specifically, many felt

³⁰² Andres

³⁰³ Vicky

³⁰⁴ RS-A2 1 October 2019_29/23-24 30/3-5

³⁰⁵ Xavier

³⁰⁶ Riona

a sense of grief over what they lost due to sexual abuse. India said: *“I was never able to be nurtured ... I have to grieve for the childhood I never had”*.³⁰⁷

17. Victims and survivors also often described experiencing anxiety (33 percent of Truth Project participants). Anxiety was more commonly reported amongst women than men (36 percent and 26 percent of Truth Project participants, respectively). Bledig said that he often experiences a *“‘fight or flight’ feeling”*.³⁰⁸ For some, this had an impact on their day-to-day lives:

*“I had anxiety walking down the street. I couldn’t, I couldn’t open doors for people. Like, I couldn’t really function.”*³⁰⁹

Truth Project participant

18. Some victims and survivors described feeling on edge and unsafe at all times. Isabel said that, as a child, she went through periods of not washing as she was scared of getting undressed. She would ask her mother to sit in the bathroom with her because she was frightened to be left alone.³¹⁰ Tamzin explained that she feels constantly vigilant,

³⁰⁷ [India](#)

³⁰⁸ [Bledig](#)

³⁰⁹ [Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of schools](#), IICSA, December 2020, p71

³¹⁰ [Isabel](#)

and can not tolerate anyone touching her: *“I can’t join in with things in case anyone touches me ... I freak out”*.³¹¹

“I have no idea who I was meant to be”

19. Child sexual abuse often negatively affected victims and survivors’ self-esteem, either as children, as adults or throughout their life. A quarter of Truth Project participants reported low self-esteem. A greater proportion of female than male Truth Project participants reported low self-esteem as an impact (28 percent and 21 percent, respectively). Karyn shared that she has lived with a *“crippling lack of self-worth”* most of her life.³¹² Similarly, August said: *“I had a constant feeling I was never going to make anything of myself”*.³¹³ Aparna explained the difficulty she experienced in trying to overcome these feelings:

*“I’ve tried to build up my self-esteem but it can unravel in seconds. I’m afraid to be truly joyful because I feel tainted – damaged goods.”*³¹⁴

Aparna, Truth Project participant

³¹¹ Tamzin

³¹² Karyn

³¹³ August

³¹⁴ Aparna

20. Feeling “*damaged*”³¹⁵ or “*contaminated*”³¹⁶ was something that many victims and survivors described. Jade said she felt “*dirty and unclean ... I hated myself*”.³¹⁷ Similarly, Marista said: “*I felt and still feel disgusting ... not worth anything*”.³¹⁸

21. Child sexual abuse sometimes undermined victims and survivors’ confidence in who they were. One victim and survivor said: “*my sense of identity’s been lost ever since*”.³¹⁹ Clive “*didn’t feel like a ‘real man’*” as a result of being sexually abused.³²⁰ A small group of victims and survivors said that they had been diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder and that this was connected with being sexually abused as a child.³²¹

³¹⁵ Lou

³¹⁶ Aiden

³¹⁷ Jade

³¹⁸ Marista

³¹⁹ “People don’t talk about it”: Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities, IICSA, June 2020, p79

³²⁰ Clive

³²¹ Dissociative identity disorder (DID) was previously referred to as ‘multiple personality disorder’. Someone diagnosed with DID may feel uncertain about their identity and who they are. Dissociative disorders – NHS

Samual described his experience of dissociation: *“trauma victims dissociate, but you are also on constant alert”*.³²²

22. Others described confusion about their sexuality as a result of being sexually abused. This was much more common amongst men than women (12 percent and 2 percent of Truth Project participants, respectively). Colt felt that child sexual abuse *“twisted”* his sexual identity.³²³ Having been sexually abused by two men, Iain said that he slept with lots of women to prove his sexual identity.³²⁴ LGBTQ+ victims and survivors frequently described an impact on their sexuality. One member of the Victims and Survivors Forum said: *“It took me a while to come out as I attached my child sexual abuse with being gay”*.³²⁵ Another Forum member said that it took her *“a long time to realise I was a lesbian”* because she felt that her *“complete lack of sexual connection”* with men

³²² Samual

³²³ Colt

³²⁴ Iain

³²⁵ Engagement with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning + victims and survivors, IICSA, May 2022, p12

was related to having been sexually abused as a child.³²⁶ A small group of victims and survivors said that their sexuality was questioned by others:

*“When people learn of my experiences of sexual abuse, there has always been a follow-up question ‘Do you think this is why you’re ... a lesbian?’”*³²⁷

Member of the Victims and Survivors Forum

23. Those who were sexually abused in a religious organisation sometimes said that they lost their personal faith (including 20 percent of Truth Project participants). Aalia stopped going to the mosque and lost her Islamic faith after she was sexually abused.³²⁸ AN-A11 said that it was “*very, very difficult*” to be brought up with faith and to have it “*shattered*” by the men who sexually abused him.³²⁹

“I feel guilty”

24. Victims and survivors often described feeling responsible for having been sexually abused. Twenty-seven percent of Truth Project participants

³²⁶ *Engagement with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning + victims and survivors*, IICSA, May 2022, p19

³²⁷ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Protected Characteristics: Summary Report*, IICSA, February 2021, p15

³²⁸ Aalia

³²⁹ AN-A11 20 March 2018 82/6-10

reported feelings of guilt. Bryce said that he felt guilty that he was not “*braver*” at the time and did not stop the abuse happening to him.³³⁰ Even though Rhonda told someone that she was being sexually abused, she blamed herself for not doing more to stop it: “*I feel so guilty about not stopping it. I know I was a child and I didn’t have the responsibility, but I feel guilty*”.³³¹

25. Some victims and survivors felt guilty for not telling anyone about the sexual abuse. They worried that other children may have been sexually abused by the same perpetrator and felt that this would somehow be their fault. Siriol said that she carried feelings of guilt that she “*let it*” happen to her sibling and that she could not protect them from the sexual abuse.³³² Flora said that she was tormented with feelings of guilt, wondering whether the man who sexually abused her had abused other children:

*“How many other people did he do it to ... was it just me ... could I have stopped it?”*³³³

Flora, Truth Project participant

³³⁰ Bryce

³³¹ Rhonda

³³² Siriol

³³³ Flora

G.5: “Self-destruct mode”

26. Some victims and survivors described considering or actually harming themselves as children, or later in life.

27. Victims and survivors described some of their actions as children as attempts to “*self-destruct*”.³³⁴ Danielle described her behaviour after being sexually abused as a child: “*I would just self destruct ... I would go off the rails and I didn’t care*”.³³⁵ Jorge said he went into “*self-destruct mode*” after he was sexually abused. He stopped attending school and was kicked out of the family home.³³⁶ Robb said that, after he was sexually abused by his teacher, he “*became completely crazy*”; he went on a “*one-man mission*” to sabotage his education and he failed all his exams.³³⁷

28. Many victims and survivors, including 19 percent of Truth Project participants, reported physically self-harming as a result of the child sexual abuse they experienced. This was more commonly reported amongst women than men (21 percent and 13 percent of Truth Project participants, respectively). Alys was sexually

³³⁴ Skye

³³⁵ Danielle

³³⁶ Jorge

³³⁷ Robb

abused by her father for many years; as a result, she self-harmed throughout her childhood. She recalled trying to fix the damage to her legs with superglue.³³⁸ For some, self-harming felt like a way to communicate their suffering to others. Others self-harmed to make themselves less attractive:

*“I became obsessed with cutting my legs and my arms. And it was more my face. Because he would constantly say ‘You’re so pretty’ ... I would start scratching and pinching my face and trying to disfigure my face ... Because I thought, if I don’t look pretty, he won’t touch me”.*³³⁹

Truth Project participant

29. Almost a fifth of Truth Project participants said that they had previously attempted suicide.³⁴⁰ Suicide attempts were often related to mental health conditions linked to being sexually abused. One Truth Project participant described themselves as becoming “*psychotic*” and said: “*I was quite*

³³⁸ Alys

³³⁹ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of religious institutions*, IICSA, May 2019, p51

³⁴⁰ For comparison, in 2020 MHFA England reported that 6.7 percent of the general population had attempted suicide: *Mental Health Statistics*, MHFA England, October 2020.

determined to kill myself at times”.³⁴¹ Elaine experienced serious mental health problems as a result of being sexually abused and said: “*I eternally feel bad*”. She has attempted to kill herself on more than one occasion and lost a limb as a result.³⁴²

30. Victims and survivors who attempted to take their own life, self-harm or self-destruct sometimes reflected on the fact that they were still alive now, despite the pain they experienced. Zoya said: “*I used to wake up and hope I was dead. Now I wake up and I’m so glad I’m alive*”.³⁴³ Angela said she was motivated to participate in the Inquiry’s work because “*I am still alive ... I am a survivor ... this is why I am speaking to you*”.³⁴⁴

G.6: “It has affected me physically”

31. Child sexual abuse often had an impact on the immediate or long-term physical health of victims and survivors (including 34 percent of Truth Project participants). The most commonly reported

³⁴¹ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in healthcare contexts*, IICSA, December 2020, p50

³⁴² Elaine

³⁴³ Zoya

³⁴⁴ Angela

physical health concerns were musculoskeletal issues, such as osteoporosis and hypermobility (12 percent of Truth Project participants); neurological issues, such as migraines, dementia, epilepsy and seizures (10 percent); issues of chronic pain or fatigue, including fibromyalgia (9 percent); and physical injury directly resulting from the child sexual abuse (8 percent).

32. Sexual abuse can cause serious physical harm to children. Some victims and survivors bled from their anus or vagina after being sexually abused. May was anally raped by a male family member which caused her to bleed.³⁴⁵ Others mentioned extreme bruising. One Truth Project participant described looking in the mirror after he had been sexually abused:

*“I could not believe the injuries: the whole of my back from the top was black and blue ... and it dripped blood where the skin had been broken”.*³⁴⁶

Truth Project participant

³⁴⁵ May

³⁴⁶ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of schools*, IICSA, December 2020, p68

33. It was very common for child sexual abuse to leave victims and survivors in “*searing pain*”.³⁴⁷ Torze remembered waking up in the middle of the night with a boy on top of her. As he raped her she felt “*extreme pain between her legs*”.³⁴⁸ Eleri was left in pain after her foster father raped her: “*I remember struggling to lie comfortably*”.³⁴⁹ In some cases, injuries sustained during sexual abuse had a long-term impact on physical health. Stephanie said that she was physically damaged by child sexual abuse and as a result intimacy is difficult.³⁵⁰ As an adult, Anne-Maria had to have a hysterectomy due to the injuries she sustained through being raped from a young age.³⁵¹

34. Some girls became pregnant as a result of being raped. This was reported by 6 percent of female Truth Project participants. Some gave birth. LA-A327 recalled how she was “*raped continuously*” at her children’s home and gave birth at the age of 15.³⁵² Female victims and

³⁴⁷ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in healthcare contexts*, IICSA, December 2020, p30

³⁴⁸ Torze

³⁴⁹ Eleri

³⁵⁰ Stephanie

³⁵¹ Anne-Maria

³⁵² LA-A327 6 July 2020 44/19-20, 46/2-5, 46/12-16, 49/14-16

survivors who were physically as well as sexually abused sometimes experienced miscarriages. Danielle became pregnant twice following sexual abuse. She experienced two miscarriages as a result of violence inflicted by the young person who sexually abused her.³⁵³

35. Victims and survivors described how child sexual abuse led to disordered eating patterns. Marcia said that in her early teens she used food as a means of control, fluctuating between undereating and overeating. She wanted to change her physical appearance as she thought having a woman's body was "*dangerous for her*".³⁵⁴ LA-A61 said that she uses food "*as a punishment*" and does not eat if she feels she has "*done something wrong*".³⁵⁵ RS-A345 described the impact on him and his classmates of being secretly filmed by a teacher while showering:

*"He suffered with sort of image problems ... and then I think developed an eating disorder where ... he lost a significant amount of weight in a very short period of time."*³⁵⁶

RS-A345, Residential schools investigation

³⁵³ Danielle

³⁵⁴ Marcia

³⁵⁵ LA-A61 29 July 2020 87/20-24

³⁵⁶ RS-A345 17 November 2020 30/11-17

G.7: “Drinking and drugs”

36. Many victims and survivors described how they became reliant on alcohol or drugs during or following their experiences of child sexual abuse. Alcohol abuse was more commonly reported amongst male than female Truth Project participants (21 percent and 15 percent, respectively). Drug abuse was also reported more often by male participants (15 percent of male participants compared with 10 percent of female participants).

37. Some victims and survivors were given alcohol and drugs during child sexual abuse. This sometimes led to dependence. Daisy said that she started taking cocaine after being introduced to drugs by a man who “*severely*” physically and sexually abused her.³⁵⁷ Aged 12, Silas was drugged two or three times a week by a doctor who “*put an injection in [his] arm*” and sexually abused him.³⁵⁸

38. Victims and survivors occasionally used alcohol and drugs to escape their memories of child sexual abuse. LA-A354 said that when he was 15 he started drinking and taking drugs as he was “*really trying to blur out*” his childhood.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ Daisy

³⁵⁸ Silas

³⁵⁹ LA-A354 20 July 2020 21/19

Zak said that he began drinking heavily and taking drugs after recollections of child sexual abuse started to return to him.³⁶⁰

G.8: “My education suffered”

39. Victims and survivors commonly stated that their education was significantly disrupted as a result of being sexually abused as a child. Thirty-two percent of Truth Project participants spoke about the impact of child sexual abuse on their education.

40. Some victims and survivors were prevented from attending school or receiving an education. Lyndon did not receive any education for two years while living in a children’s home, where he was being sexually abused. He was 30 when he learned to read and write properly.³⁶¹ Others refused to go to school as it was where they were being sexually abused. Before he was sexually abused, RC-A622 “*enjoyed going to school*” and had “*aspirations of being a vet or naval pilot*”.³⁶² However, RC-A622 said “*I feared going to school once the abuse started*” and he began truanting, stealing and drinking excessively.³⁶³

³⁶⁰ Zak

³⁶¹ Lyndon

³⁶² RC-A622 8 February 2019 83/21-84/3

³⁶³ RC-A622 8 February 2019 84/4-9; 84/13-14

41. Many victims and survivors felt unable to participate fully at school due to the sexual abuse they were experiencing. Sixteen percent of Truth Project participants reported academic difficulties, with 8 percent reporting leaving school early. One Truth Project participant said that he struggled to concentrate to such an extent that he left school, aged 16, at the same educational grade as he had achieved aged eight.³⁶⁴ For those who were sexually abused at school, this impact was particularly acute. Cassy endured sexual abuse at her private boarding school. By the time she was in her mid-teens, she could no longer continue with her education.³⁶⁵

42. Other victims and survivors were successful in their education. Some referenced their experiences of sexual abuse as a motivation to work hard and achieve: they wanted to throw themselves into their education to escape sexual abuse. Faith did well at school and went to university. She described education as “*my saving grace*”.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ *Victim and survivor voices from the Truth Project (June 2016–June 2017)*, IICSA, October 2017, p110

³⁶⁵ Cassy

³⁶⁶ Faith

G.9: “My employment prospects”

43. Some victims and survivors described having had successful careers, despite the impact of being sexually abused as a child. Others felt that child sexual abuse had negatively affected their employment prospects. Eleven percent of Truth Project participants mentioned the impact that child sexual abuse had had on their employment. More male than female participants discussed an impact on employment (16 percent of males compared with 10 percent of females).

44. Seven percent of Truth Project participants reported a difficulty in maintaining work as a result of child sexual abuse. Four percent said that they were unable to work at all. Disrupted education often affected employment opportunities. LA-A7 explained this lifelong impact of child sexual abuse: “*my education suffered and I didn’t get any qualifications. This then affected my life afterwards and being able to get employment*”.³⁶⁷ One Truth Project participant described how the impact that child sexual abuse had had on his mental health had affected his employment:

“But the nightmares and the memories were never far away, and I would have to have a year, 18 months, 2 years off of work, had more

³⁶⁷ LA-A7 29 July 2020 140/7-12

counselling, a bit of medication, and wind myself down.”³⁶⁸

Truth Project participant

45. A small number of victims and survivors said that they had a criminal record, which affected their employment prospects. Often this was linked to being sexually abused as a child. Nigel was regularly raped by a group of three adult men from the age of 10. At the time, in the 1960s, homosexual acts between men were illegal. At the age of 14 he was charged with buggery and was convicted. Many years later, the conviction still prevented Nigel from applying for jobs which require a criminal records check. Nigel said that he would like to do voluntary work in his retirement but has not applied for fear of what a records check would reveal.³⁶⁹

G.10: “I don’t know what a healthy relationship looks like”

46. Many victims and survivors felt that being sexually abused as a child had affected their ability to form and maintain relationships. Some felt that they were not able to connect to others. Bryce said

³⁶⁸ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of schools*, IICSA, December 2020, p73

³⁶⁹ Nigel

that he had never married nor had children “*for the simple reason I couldn’t live with anyone who knew what had happened to me*”.³⁷⁰

47. For others, there was an enduring connection between affection and sexual abuse. Gerard said he had difficulties with holding hands³⁷¹ and Laakia said that acts of kindness “*confuse her*”.³⁷² Ebrah described her sadness that she cannot tolerate affection from men, even from her father, “*a wonderful man*”.³⁷³

“I became an easy target”

48. Victims and survivors sometimes felt that being sexually abused as a child made them more vulnerable to being sexually abused again later in their childhood. Ashleigh thought that it was a disclosure of previous sexual abuse which made her choirmaster decide to exploit her vulnerability.³⁷⁴ Marcia said: “*it was like you had a big sign on your head that said ‘prey’*”.³⁷⁵

49. Some victims and survivors said that their romantic relationships as an adult had been consistently abusive. They felt that being sexually

³⁷⁰ Bryce

³⁷¹ Gerard

³⁷² Laakia

³⁷³ Ebrah

³⁷⁴ Ashleigh

³⁷⁵ Marcia

abused as a child meant that they were unable to form healthy relationships. Mary-Beth said she feels she has chosen partners who are “*controlling and intimidating*” as this mirrored her childhood experiences.³⁷⁶ NO-A76 described being unable to understand what a non-abusive relationship would be like:

*“I would say that at no point in my teenage years or early adulthood was any sexual contact I had non-abusive in some way, shape or form. Abusive relationships continued into adulthood as I struggled to even understand what a non-abusive relationship was like”.*³⁷⁷

NO-A76, Children in the care of the Nottinghamshire Councils investigation

“They destroyed any trust I had”

50. The majority of victims and survivors who engaged with the Inquiry were sexually abused by someone they knew and trusted. Victims and survivors repeatedly said that child sexual abuse shattered their ability to trust anyone (37 percent of Truth Project participants). Tanith said that she felt “*wary*” and that her “*trust now is not very easily earned*”.³⁷⁸ Others described trust issues in relation to particular groups of people, generally related

³⁷⁶ Mary-Beth

³⁷⁷ NO-A76 5 October 2018 119/25-120/5

³⁷⁸ Tanith

to the person who sexually abused them. It was most common to hear that victims and survivors struggled to trust men. RS-A1 said that she felt “*generally hostile and wary towards males*”.³⁷⁹ Angharad described how child sexual abuse led her to believe that “*that’s what men were going to do ... abuse me for sex*”.³⁸⁰

“It messed up my relationship with sex”

51. Some victims and survivors felt that being sexually abused led to them being sexually active from a young age. Carolina described her view that she sought out sexual contact as a teenager as a result of the sexual abuse that happened in her early childhood.³⁸¹ Maeve said that she was a hypersexualised young person as a result of experiencing sexual abuse; she “*had pretty much tried everything*” and it all “*just seemed normal*” for her.³⁸²

52. Some victims and survivors developed a strong aversion to sex as a result of child sexual abuse. Thirteen percent of Truth Project participants mentioned an avoidance or phobia of sexual intimacy. Cate said that when she started

³⁷⁹ [RS-A1 1 October 2019 70/19-20](#)

³⁸⁰ [Angharad](#)

³⁸¹ [Carolina](#)

³⁸² [Maeve](#)

to develop sexual feelings she was disgusted.³⁸³ Garry said that he developed a phobia about sex and intimacy that makes him afraid to touch anyone.³⁸⁴

53. Some victims and survivors shared that they had had a large number of sexual partners after experiencing child sexual abuse. For some, this was a way of escaping from or managing the impact of child sexual abuse. Others described having a large number of sexual partners as a negative experience, motivated by low self-esteem. Lorna described herself as promiscuous and said she often had sex when she didn't really want to.³⁸⁵ Jo-ann said that she became promiscuous because *“I felt that's all I was for”*.³⁸⁶

G.11: “It changed how I parented”

54. It was very common for victims and survivors to reflect on the impact of child sexual abuse on their experiences of parenting or their adult relationships with children. Ten percent of Truth Project participants reported a discomfort or lack of confidence in parenting as a result of being sexually abused.

³⁸³ Cate

³⁸⁴ Garry

³⁸⁵ Lorna

³⁸⁶ Jo-ann

55. Many victims and survivors said that they were hypervigilant about their children’s safety. Esme shared that she did not allow anyone into her home or to be alone with her children.³⁸⁷ Marc said that he knows he needs to “*balance ... paranoia and overprotection*”.³⁸⁸ Other victims and survivors chose not to have children as a result of being sexually abused as a child. Patrick said he did not have children for fear that they might experience similar abuse.³⁸⁹

56. Some victims and survivors felt that they struggled to parent well. Some described how they struggled to connect with their children. Jimi said he had difficulties bonding with his children,³⁹⁰ while Dean said that hugging his children was difficult as it would trigger memories of his having been sexually abused.³⁹¹

57. Other victims and survivors felt that their experiences of child sexual abuse meant that they were a better parent. Lilly is proud of herself for “*breaking the chain*” by giving her children consistent and loving parenting.³⁹² Gloria said that

³⁸⁷ Esme

³⁸⁸ Marc

³⁸⁹ Patrick

³⁹⁰ Jimi

³⁹¹ Dean

³⁹² Lilly

she is loving and compassionate, and when she had children vowed she would always protect them and never leave them.³⁹³

Part H

“My experience of support”

“My experience of support”

H.1: Introduction

1. Victims and survivors who participated in the Inquiry’s work often needed support to help them cope with and recover from the impact of being sexually abused as a child. Being able to access the right support at the right time was often described as extremely beneficial. However, many chose not to seek support or found it challenging to find effective support when it was needed. Some victims and survivors felt that this exacerbated and added to the impact of being sexually abused. The majority of experiences described in this Part were recent.

H.2: “I haven’t sought support”

2. Victims and survivors who were able to access effective support when they needed it described this as being “*invaluable*”.³⁹⁴ Despite this, many victims and survivors, including 64 percent of Truth Project participants, said that they had not sought support from others. Fewer male Truth Project participants had sought support than female participants (33 percent and 38 percent, respectively).

³⁹⁴ Warren

3. Some victims and survivors said that they struggled to admit to themselves or to others that they needed support. RS-A299 said that, despite “severe” post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, *“there wasn’t anything in my eyes that needed to be fixed because there wasn’t anything necessarily wrong”*.³⁹⁵

4. Stigma associated with mental health problems influenced some victims and survivors’ decisions not to seek help. Others described feeling that they should not *“make a big fuss”*.³⁹⁶ Fear of speaking about child sexual abuse was another reason that victims and survivors did not feel able to seek help. Kerry said: *“I don’t know if I’m brave enough”* to seek support.³⁹⁷

5. Some victims and survivors reported feeling unable to ask for support due to fear or previous experience of homophobic or racist prejudice. One individual, who is LGBTQ+, said that there was an *“added fear of homophobia”* for them.³⁹⁸ A member of the Victims and Survivors Forum who

³⁹⁵ RS-A299 20 November 2020 26/6, 26/18-20

³⁹⁶ *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p62

³⁹⁷ *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p65

³⁹⁸ *Engagement with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning + victims and survivors*, IICSA, May 2022, p25

was racially abused at school said: “*reaching out and asking for help from a country I felt was hostile towards me was almost impossible*”.³⁹⁹

6. Victims and survivors who were sexually abused in the 1940s and 1950s commonly said that they had not sought therapeutic support because they did not believe it would be relevant or useful to them. Fred said that one of the reasons he had not sought support was because “*I wouldn’t have thought it would be any psychological help to me*”.⁴⁰⁰ Overall, older Truth Project participants were less likely to report having sought support than those who grew up in the 1960s onwards (Figure H.1).

³⁹⁹ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Protected Characteristics: Summary Report*, IICSA, February 2021, p18

⁴⁰⁰ *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p61

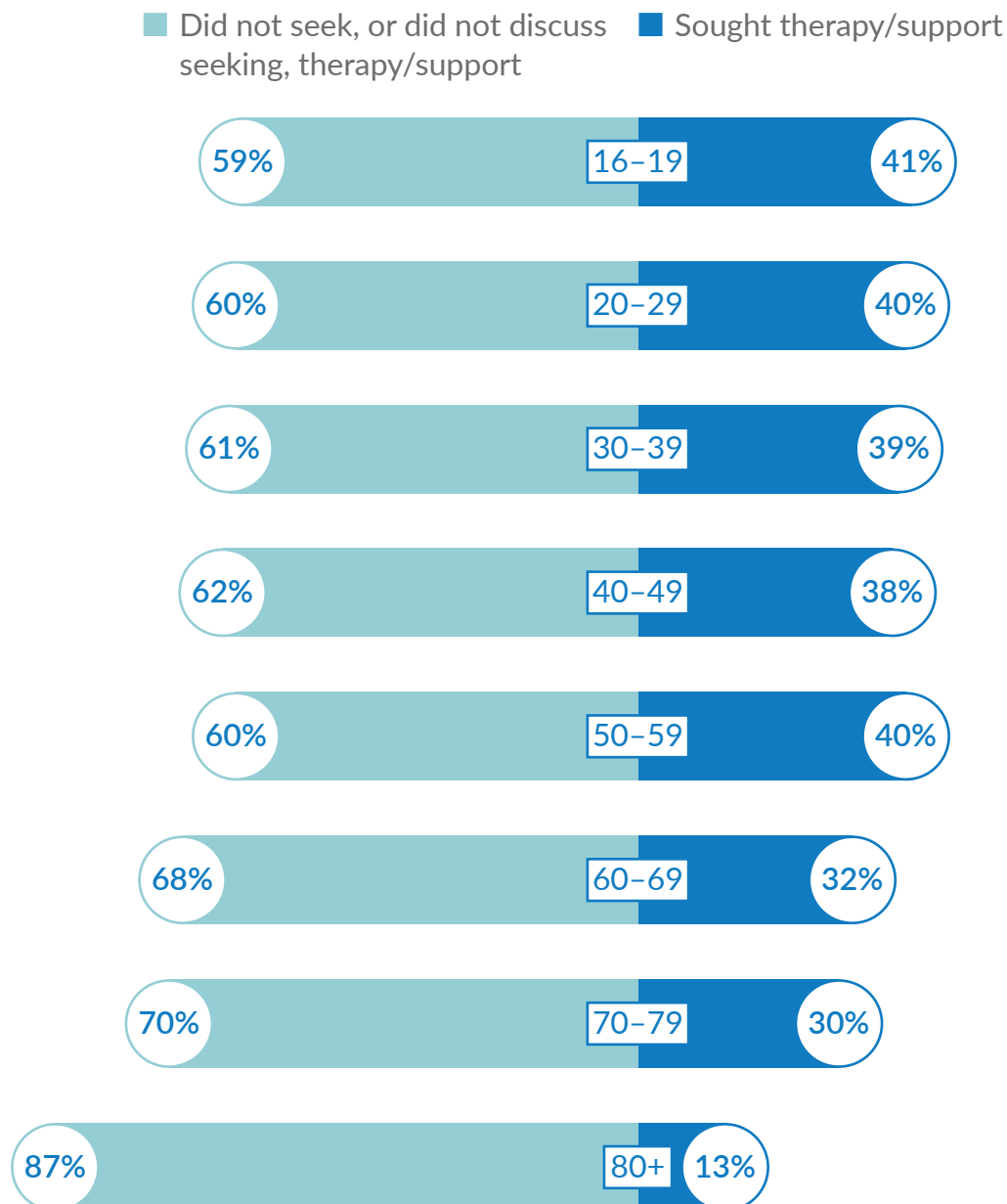


Figure H.1: *Proportion of Truth Project participants who reported having sought therapy or support, by participant’s age at the time of their Truth Project session**

* This analysis is based on Truth Project participants who, during their Truth Project session, discussed having sought therapy or support. Truth Project participants were not asked whether they had sought therapy or support. Therefore,

it is possible that some participants who did not discuss seeking support may have sought support but chose not to speak about it during their Truth Project session.

H.3: “It made a huge, huge difference to me and my life”

7. For many victims and survivors, effective support at the right time had a significant positive impact. Some felt that therapy was the “*best thing*”⁴⁰¹ they’d ever done or remarked that they did not believe they would be alive without the support of services.⁴⁰² Edna felt that “*getting in early*” with “*immediate help*” was critical.⁴⁰³

8. Often victims and survivors’ sense of well-being improved as a result of effective support. For Alun, therapy “*turned everything around*”.⁴⁰⁴ Ronan said that he had tried to take his own life but that counselling helped him process his feelings about experiencing child sexual abuse. He was still

⁴⁰¹ *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p32

⁴⁰² *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Redress: Summary Report*, IICSA, October 2020, p14

⁴⁰³ *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p39

⁴⁰⁴ Alun

using the coping strategies he learnt in therapy to manage the impact of the sexual abuse.⁴⁰⁵ Eric felt that counselling positively changed his world view:

*“So many people just think the world is a nasty place. I used to believe that when I was younger but I don’t believe that any more.”*⁴⁰⁶

Eric, Truth Project participant

9. Other victims and survivors spoke about the positive impacts of specialist support. Some said that support empowered them to release misplaced feelings of guilt about being sexually abused as a child. John said: *“I always blamed myself ... they made me realise that I was a child and wasn’t in control”*.⁴⁰⁷ Victims and survivors who had positive experiences of support services also described reductions in trauma symptoms. Nic said: *“My hyper-vigilance, which used to be a very strong sense, is hugely reduced. Generally, I sleep better. I am more relaxed. I’m not as twitchy”*.⁴⁰⁸

10. Victims and survivors said that accessing support helped them to better understand what happened to them as children and the impact of

⁴⁰⁵ Ronan

⁴⁰⁶ Eric

⁴⁰⁷ *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p50

⁴⁰⁸ *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p51

child sexual abuse. Jemma saw a specialist who explained how trauma can affect the body. This helped her understand why she felt the way she did and made her feel “*more in control again*”.⁴⁰⁹ Daisy had therapy from a specialist sexual violence and abuse organisation. Although at first she was unable to speak because “*it felt bleak, grey, dark*”, gradually the support helped her to piece together the timeline of the sexual abuse she experienced.⁴¹⁰ Accessing support also taught victims and survivors how to cope with the impact of sexual abuse. One Forum member said support was necessary to help them “*work through [their] buried feelings and trauma*” so they were strong enough to “*face the truth and take control*”.⁴¹¹ Another Forum member said that support enabled them to “*go on to the next step*”.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁹ Jemma

⁴¹⁰ Daisy

⁴¹¹ Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Redress: Summary Report, IICSA, October 2020, p14

⁴¹² Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Redress: Summary Report, IICSA, October 2020, p14

H.4: “Their sensitivity and empathy”

11. Some victims and survivors reflected on the features of support services which helped them to cope with the impact of child sexual abuse.

12. The value of specialist help from professionals who “*have been trained ... in sexual abuse*” was often mentioned.⁴¹³ Jessie described a positive experience of being supported by a specialist sexual abuse support charity. The staff were well trained and focussed on helping her to cope and move forward.⁴¹⁴

13. Often victims and survivors said that counselling allowed them to share their experiences of child sexual abuse in a safe way with a non-judgemental individual. NO-A51 said that counselling allowed him to work with a “*person who is not going to judge me for the things that have happened to me*”.⁴¹⁵

14. Others described how being taken seriously and being shown empathy supported their recovery journey. Olivia said that for her the most important thing was “*making the person feel believed. Being*

⁴¹³ *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p66

⁴¹⁴ *Jessie*

⁴¹⁵ *NO-A51 4 October 2018 40/5-7*

sympathetic and allowing them the time to open up".⁴¹⁶ Child victims and survivors also said that support services that accepted and believed them helped them feel less isolated.⁴¹⁷

15. Some victims and survivors had positive experiences of support groups. A sense of solidarity was commonly described as an important aspect of this form of support. Laura attended a course with other victims and survivors; she felt that it is *"best to be in a group where people understand you completely"*.⁴¹⁸ Another victim and survivor, who set up a group for people from *"different BME communities"*, said: *"Peer empowerment is so important. We're able to come together once a month, and able to empower and encourage each other"*.⁴¹⁹ A number of male victims and survivors felt that connecting with other men who were sexually abused as children helped them:

⁴¹⁶ *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p49

⁴¹⁷ *Engagement with children and young people*, IICSA, June 2021, p18

⁴¹⁸ *Laura*

⁴¹⁹ *"People don't talk about it": Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities*, IICSA, June 2020, p89

“To describe to a group of other men ... and see them hear that in a very accepting and non-judgemental way, was probably one of the most powerful experiences of my life.”⁴²⁰ Nic, Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse research participant

H.5: “I just wanted some support – I had nothing”

16. Getting access to the right help was likened to a “*nightmare merry-go-round*” for many victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.⁴²¹ Confusion about access routes and referral processes was mentioned frequently. Victims and survivors remembered how, as children, professionals themselves did not know how to get them help. Some also described a “*fight*” to access services as an adult:

“The impression that I got was that there were some resources out there but you had to [be] prepared to fight tooth and nail for them. And for a person who is actually genuinely

⁴²⁰ *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p38

⁴²¹ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Redress: Summary Report*, IICSA, October 2020, p14

and consistently struggling, that's nearly impossible to get to."⁴²²

Truth Project participant

17. Some victims and survivors, including children, said that they were turned away from statutory support services because they did not qualify for help. Often victims and survivors said that services would not provide support unless they met certain criteria. One Forum member said that they felt:

*"One needs to be at the point of wanting to end one's life before there can be a meaningful intervention from mental health services."*⁴²³

Member of the Victims and Survivors Forum

18. It was particularly common to hear that children who had been sexually abused did not meet the criteria for statutory mental health support. Children also felt that, in effect, they had to be suicidal or thinking of harming themselves to receive help. One young victim and survivor

⁴²² *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports*, IICSA, June 2020, p65

⁴²³ *Engagement with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning + victims and survivors*, IICSA, May 2022, p37

described the desperation that this generated: “*I was thinking about cutting myself or jumping out of a window to get any help*”.⁴²⁴

19. When victims and survivors did qualify for support services, they often faced a long wait before they could access that support. It was common to hear that victims and survivors waited for months, but some waited much longer: AR-A13 was on a waiting list for three years to receive counselling.⁴²⁵ Accessing support was described as a ‘postcode lottery’ for both child and adult victims and survivors. One young victim and survivor said that she had had to travel a long way from home for counselling, which increased her distress.⁴²⁶

20. Being unable to access support when it was needed left many in emotional distress. Susan was “*desperate*” when she sought help but “*the NHS wait was too long*” so instead her GP signposted her towards a private counsellor.⁴²⁷ Ruth described how she “*felt almost at boiling point*” but still had to wait months to be referred for counselling. When

⁴²⁴ *Engagement with children and young people*, IICSA, June 2021, p19

⁴²⁵ AR-A13 30 November 2018 65/21-23

⁴²⁶ *Engagement with children and young people*, IICSA, June 2021, p18

⁴²⁷ *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p58

support came, she felt it was “*too little, too late*”.⁴²⁸ Others were never able to access help. Edna said: “*I was waiting and waiting and waiting ... I just got lost off the system ... I didn’t try again*”.⁴²⁹

21. Some victims and survivors said that they struggled to access support services because they were not accessible for those with disabilities. Carolina, who is deaf, said that there was inadequate provision of support services for deaf children who have been sexually abused.⁴³⁰ Victims and survivors with physical disabilities sometimes said they experienced difficulties when trying to access specialist voluntary sector services.

H.6: “It didn’t work for me”

22. Some victims and survivors found the services they accessed ineffective. In particular, the amount of support offered was often inadequate. Many described limits being placed on the number of therapy sessions available to them. Some victims and survivors said that this created pressure and did not enable them to build trust with the person providing support. One victim and survivor described how the professional who supported

⁴²⁸ *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p58

⁴²⁹ *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p58

⁴³⁰ Carolina

them “*just wanted to do the prescribed six sessions*” and “*move on*”.⁴³¹ Another said that the length of their support sessions was too short and as a result accessing support felt like “*a waste of time really*”.⁴³²

23. Victims and survivors described how positive experiences of support were undermined by an insufficient number of sessions. One victim and survivor spoke about meeting a “*very, very good*” counsellor who “*helped a lot*”.⁴³³ However, they were only able to offer stints of six to eight weeks: “*I wish there could have been more but I understand that resources were very limited*”.⁴³⁴ Edna described how the number of sessions she was offered was not enough time to trust someone or “*scratch the surface*”.⁴³⁵

24. Many victims and survivors said that they struggled to find services equipped with the specialist understanding to meet their needs.

⁴³¹ *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p5

⁴³² *Victim and survivor voices from the Truth Project (June 2016–June 2017)*, IICSA, October 2017, p132

⁴³³ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports*, IICSA, June 2020, p65

⁴³⁴ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports*, IICSA, June 2020, p65

⁴³⁵ *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p39

Some were turned away from services because counsellors did not have the “*necessary tools*”⁴³⁶ or felt psychologists were not “*adequately qualified*” to support victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.⁴³⁷ One Forum member described being stuck between providers:

*“My mental health difficulties put me in a catch-22. Child sexual abuse support organisations won’t support me because of that, and mental health support organisations won’t support me because of my child sexual abuse history.”*⁴³⁸

Member of the Victims and Survivors Forum

25. Often victims and survivors wanted to access support services that were tailored. Women frequently said that they only wanted to speak to a female counsellor. Tynna described her disappointment at being allocated a male counsellor; she had such difficulty relating to him that she cancelled her support sessions.⁴³⁹ Victims and survivors from minority ethnic groups described being reluctant to use support services which “*do not look like yourselves*” as “*they will not*

⁴³⁶ [INQ003826_004](#)

⁴³⁷ [INQ003826_003](#)

⁴³⁸ [Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Protected Characteristics: Summary Report, IICSA, February 2021, p17](#)

⁴³⁹ [Tynna](#)

*be culturally aware of what’s going on for you, or they may not be able to comprehend”.*⁴⁴⁰ LGBTQ+ victims and survivors often said that they found it difficult to find support services which “*show loudly and clearly that they are open and welcoming and understanding of LGBTQ+ people and their experiences*”.⁴⁴¹

26. Even where specialist services were available, victims and survivors often felt that provision was in short supply. As an adult, Robert provided a counselling service for male survivors. However, when he decided to seek support for the child sexual abuse that he had experienced, the police referred him to the service that he himself ran, as it was the only provider of appropriate support available. This made Robert feel like taking his own life.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ *“People don’t talk about it”: Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities*, IICSA, June 2020, p85

⁴⁴¹ *Engagement with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning + victims and survivors*, IICSA, May 2022, p37

⁴⁴² *INQ003826_001*

Part I

**“I want acknowledgement
and accountability”**

“I want acknowledgement and accountability”

I.1: Introduction

1. Victims and survivors often felt a strong need for the child sexual abuse to be acknowledged and for someone to be held accountable.

2. Despite this, a considerable number of victims and survivors said that they had never sought any form of acknowledgement or accountability. Some did not know how. Many worried that it would be a traumatic experience without any meaningful benefit. Indeed, those who had negative experiences of seeking acknowledgement or accountability often said that they felt there was “no point” reporting child sexual abuse:⁴⁴³

“I have no faith in the system or that justice will be done. It would have been much better if the council had said, ‘We are listening’ without judging me and then conducted a proper investigation without a fight.”⁴⁴⁴

L25, Children in the care of the

Nottinghamshire Councils investigation

⁴⁴³ Ashleigh

⁴⁴⁴ L25 26 October 2018 41/6-10

3. This Part describes a combination of recent and non-recent experiences. It was more common for positive experiences to be recent. However, the themes that emerged from negative experiences were similar, irrespective of the time period in which they happened.

I.2: “I wanted accountability and justice”

4. An acknowledgement that child sexual abuse had occurred was important to many victims and survivors. One member of the Victims and Survivors Forum said that “*first and foremost*” they wanted “*an acknowledgement that it did happen and that it shouldn’t have been allowed to happen*”.⁴⁴⁵ Some victims and survivors specifically wanted access to their childhood records as a form of acknowledgement. Without this, they felt “*a lack of closure ... a feeling of perpetual childhood*”.⁴⁴⁶

5. Many victims and survivors said that they wanted to receive an apology for the sexual abuse they experienced. Jason said: “*I just want someone*

⁴⁴⁵ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Redress: Summary Report*, IICSA, October 2020, p13

⁴⁴⁶ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Accessing Records: Summary Report*, IICSA, March 2020, p8

to say sorry".⁴⁴⁷ RS-A299 described the value of an apology: *"it's the acknowledgement of, 'Yes, there was wrongdoing ... and we do take even an emblem of responsibility'"*.⁴⁴⁸

6. Some victims and survivors described a strong desire for formal accountability, including through the criminal justice system. One Truth Project participant said simply: *"I want justice ... I want justice. I want justice"*.⁴⁴⁹ Three percent of Truth Project participants who disclosed child sexual abuse at the time said that their disclosure eventually resulted in the perpetrator being convicted.

7. Victims and survivors reported mixed feelings about financial compensation. For some, it was the only way to recognise the *"spectacular financial loss(es)"* associated with child sexual abuse.⁴⁵⁰ For others, it felt like *"blood money"*.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁷ Jason

⁴⁴⁸ RS-A299 20 November 2020 31/17-20

⁴⁴⁹ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of schools*, IICSA, December 2020, p64

⁴⁵⁰ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Redress: Summary Report*, IICSA, October 2020, p14

⁴⁵¹ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Redress: Summary Report*, IICSA, October 2020, p8

Indira said: *“I just want an apology, I don’t want compensation”*.⁴⁵² Seven percent of Truth Project participants who had previously disclosed child sexual abuse said that they had sought financial compensation.

I.3: “I have been let down by everyone and everything”

8. Victims and survivors who tried to seek acknowledgement and accountability often felt let down by institutions. Hussain said that he was told he was *“tarnishing the reputation of the Muslim religion”* and described feeling *“let down”* by Muslim authority figures *“who have authority to deal with this”* but prevented him from speaking out about being sexually abused as a child.⁴⁵³ Many described such experiences as mirroring what happened to them as children:

“I have completely lost faith in the police and I regret trying to do things the right way. I have been completely let down. I feel badly let down by the social care system. I was sexually abused by those who were supposed to be

⁴⁵² Indira

⁴⁵³ Hussain

caring for me."⁴⁵⁴

P13, Children in the care of the
Nottinghamshire Councils investigation

9. Victims and survivors who felt let down commonly described institutions failing to take action when they sought acknowledgement or accountability. It seemed to some that institutions were not interested in understanding or acknowledging their experiences. Alice felt let down by both the police and the institution in which she was sexually abused: "*we've not had justice and we've been treated with such disdain ... there is no recognition that we've been failed*".⁴⁵⁵ Even though the children's home manager who sexually abused Bryce was convicted, the responsible local authority never apologised:

*"I never got an apology from social services for everything they put me through ... for placing me into a community where people are meant to look after you, not harm you but look after you, and that is a failure on both counts."*⁴⁵⁶

Bryce, Truth Project participant

10. A number of victims and survivors talked about the police not taking formal action after they reported child sexual abuse. For some, this was

⁴⁵⁴ P13 26 October 2018 59/6-10

⁴⁵⁵ Alice

⁴⁵⁶ Bryce

because the perpetrator had died before the report was made. For other victims and survivors, the perpetrator died while the case was progressing through the criminal justice system. Donovan said it was a “*punch in the gut*” when the man who sexually abused him died before the case reached court.⁴⁵⁷

11. Some victims and survivors said that the police did not take action because they thought there was not enough evidence to support the allegation. RO-A9 was told by a police officer that there was “*no evidence, ... nothing they could do*” when he reported that he had been sexually abused.⁴⁵⁸ Bernard recently reported to the police that he was sexually abused in the 1960s. He described the first police officer he saw as “*completely uninterested ... saying it was all too long ago*” for action to be taken.⁴⁵⁹

12. A number of victims and survivors said that no explanation was provided about why the police did not take action. This often left them feeling confused and frustrated. Estelle said that she reported her experiences of sexual abuse to the police twice but, on both occasions, no action was taken. She told the police that she was concerned the perpetrator could be abusing other children.

⁴⁵⁷ Donovan

⁴⁵⁸ RO-A9 17 October 2017 15/5-6

⁴⁵⁹ Bernard

The officer replied: “*oh well they all say that*”.⁴⁶⁰ Ada was sexually abused by a police officer in the 2010s. The police carried out an internal investigation but warned Ada not to take the case to court because her name would probably be made public.⁴⁶¹

13. Other victims and survivors described initial positive interactions with the police but found that progress towards accountability through the criminal justice system stalled later on. Monique said that on two separate occasions, first as a child and later as an adult, the police officers to whom she reported made it clear that they believed she was sexually abused. However, on both occasions, the Crown Prosecution Service decided not to proceed with the case. Monique found this very upsetting and difficult to understand.⁴⁶² Beverley said that she was devastated by the Crown Prosecution Service’s decision not to proceed with the case. She felt the perpetrator “*had got away with it ... he had won*”.⁴⁶³

14. Some victims and survivors lost faith in those in positions of authority as a result of being let down when they sought acknowledgement and accountability. One Forum member described that

⁴⁶⁰ [Estelle](#)

⁴⁶¹ [Ada](#)

⁴⁶² [Monique](#)

⁴⁶³ [Beverley](#)

being refused access to their childhood medical records “*has led to mistrust in health professionals and ... [an] inability to access healthcare services when needed*”.⁴⁶⁴ Feelings of regret were common amongst victims and survivors who felt that they had been let down. One child victim and survivor said:

*“Now I regret having gone to the police. If I had to give advice to someone, I would say, ‘get help but don’t report’.”*⁴⁶⁵

Engagement with children and young people participant

I.4: “I was not taken seriously”

15. Many victims and survivors said that their experiences of child sexual abuse were not treated seriously when they sought acknowledgement or accountability. Some victims and survivors felt the severity and impact of child sexual abuse was minimised. One Forum member said that a police officer dismissed their experience of sexual abuse

⁴⁶⁴ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Accessing Records: Summary Report*, IICSA, March 2020, p11

⁴⁶⁵ *Engagement with children and young people*, IICSA, June 2021, p22

as “*dormitory tomfoolery*”.⁴⁶⁶ Lexi told the police that she had been raped and sexually assaulted by a group of boys but was told that this was just young people “*experimenting*”.⁴⁶⁷

16. Victims and survivors stressed how invalidating it was when institutions refused to take their experiences of child sexual abuse seriously. Evin said that, even though the person who sexually abused him was convicted, the institution would only say that Evin “*may*” have been sexually abused. He found this response “*incredible*” and it made him very angry.⁴⁶⁸ Some victims and survivors felt that not being taken seriously as an adult mirrored the response they received when they disclosed sexual abuse as a child. Silas said: “*I was a kid then. Who would believe a kid ... 53 years on, still trying to get someone to believe me*”.⁴⁶⁹

17. When victims and survivors’ experiences were taken seriously, this was often a significant step in their journey to recovery. AR-A87 described being happy that he had been believed, even though his civil claim was ultimately denied:

⁴⁶⁶ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on the Criminal Justice System: Summary Report*, IICSA, May 2019, p3

⁴⁶⁷ *Lexi*

⁴⁶⁸ *Evin*

⁴⁶⁹ *Silas*

*“I was happy because the judge himself turned around and said in court that he believed every word that I had said. To me ... it was a small win on my behalf because the judge himself believed me.”*⁴⁷⁰

AR-A87, Accountability and reparations investigation

18. Victims and survivors also described how the responses they received from institutions downplayed their experiences of child sexual abuse. One Forum member recalled being told that the institution in which they were sexually abused as a child considered that they had “*consented*” to the sexual abuse.⁴⁷¹

19. Some victims and survivors felt that perpetrators were given sentences that did not recognise the seriousness of child sexual abuse. Ben said that in the early 2000s a judge gave the man who sexually abused him a fine and not a custodial sentence. Ben remembered thinking “*I’ve had bigger parking fines*”.⁴⁷² The man who raped Isobel was given a one-year suspended sentence and 200 hours of community service. She said: “*I could have screamed. There was no*

⁴⁷⁰ AR-A87 5 December 2018 110/23-111/3

⁴⁷¹ Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Redress: Summary Report, IICSA, October 2020, p9

⁴⁷² Ben

recognition from the court: ‘You did wrong. You’ve impacted on the rest of her life’”.⁴⁷³ Fenella felt that such experiences were commonplace: *“Even if there’s a successful conviction the penalty is minimal. And this affects the victim’s trust in the ... justice system”*.⁴⁷⁴

20. Other victims and survivors felt that the financial compensation they received did not reflect the seriousness of their experiences. Forty-one percent of Truth Project participants who had sought and received compensation said that they were satisfied with it. One Forum member said that the amount of financial compensation they received was calculated on the basis that the damage was *“non permanent”*:

“I was so angry ... how could they say it wasn’t permanent? I was 45 years old. I had been suffering with depression all my life. How could they possibly know it wasn’t permanent? I was furious. Not only did he steal my childhood but he stole my future”.⁴⁷⁵

Member of the Victims and Survivors Forum

⁴⁷³ Isobel

⁴⁷⁴ Fenella

⁴⁷⁵ Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Redress: Summary Report, IICSA, October 2020, p8

I.5: “I was forgotten about”

21. Victims and survivors frequently described how they felt marginalised and sidelined while seeking acknowledgement or accountability. June said that she felt “*dismissed*” after reporting child sexual abuse to the police.⁴⁷⁶ RC-A61 said that he felt “*completely irrelevant*” to criminal proceedings.⁴⁷⁷

22. Some victims and survivors felt sidelined by the communications they received from institutions. Alexandria described never being updated on the progress of the police investigation into her allegations of child sexual abuse. This triggered traumatic memories.⁴⁷⁸ NO-A49 first requested his social care records in 2015, when he was just 20 years old. He described his frustration at the delays and denials he encountered: “*after two and a half years of waiting for records, you lose faith*”.⁴⁷⁹

23. Other victims and survivors felt that the interests of the person who sexually abused them were prioritised. Pauly felt that the police put a lot of effort into accommodating the man who sexually abused him, but did not give the same

⁴⁷⁶ June

⁴⁷⁷ RC-A61 29 November 2017 63/19

⁴⁷⁸ Alexandria

⁴⁷⁹ NO-A49 5 October 2018 77/8-9

consideration to him.⁴⁸⁰ Many Forum members shared the view that perpetrators often had the “*upper hand*” in criminal justice processes.⁴⁸¹

24. Some victims and survivors felt marginalised due to discriminatory attitudes or treatment. One Truth Project participant thought he was viewed as “*unworthy*” or “*unreliable*” because he was a child in care.⁴⁸² Many victims and survivors who disclosed sexual abuse as children said that they felt excluded from subsequent processes due to their age. RS-A7 felt that the Crown Prosecution Service should have engaged with him as a child: “*I had my own mind and my own thoughts*”.⁴⁸³

Aeson is Deaf. Although a sign language interpreter was provided when he gave evidence during criminal proceedings, this was not provided for the remainder of the trial. As a result, he was not able to hear the rest of the proceedings, including the verdict: “*having no interpreter to impart this information made me very emotional*”.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸⁰ Pauly

⁴⁸¹ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on the Criminal Justice System: Summary Report*, IICSA, May 2019, p12

⁴⁸² *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in custodial institutions*, IICSA, April 2020, p49

⁴⁸³ RS-A7 9 October 2019 70/18

⁴⁸⁴ Aeson

I.6: “I was treated with such disdain”

25. Victims and survivors often described experiencing a lack of care, sensitivity or empathy. Eliza was sexually abused as a child in the 1990s and reported the abuse shortly after it ended. She said that the police responded by saying that she could destroy someone’s reputation by making such allegations.⁴⁸⁵ Meghan was sexually abused as a child in the 2010s. She said that when she reported the abuse to the police, they began the interview by telling her that she could ruin the perpetrator’s life.⁴⁸⁶ P4 described her interactions with the police after she reported child sexual abuse in 2017:

“I believe that the police treated me appallingly when I reported the abuse. ... When I was interviewed, I felt like they didn’t believe me and then they just texted me to say they were closing the investigation. They offered me no compassion or sensitivity.”⁴⁸⁷

P4, Children in the care of the Nottinghamshire Councils investigation

⁴⁸⁵ [Eliza](#)

⁴⁸⁶ [Meghan](#)

⁴⁸⁷ [P4 4 October 2018 161/25-162/5](#)

26. Some victims and survivors said that they were insulted by institutions when they sought acknowledgement and accountability. One child victim and survivor said that a police officer referred to her as a “*little bitch*”.⁴⁸⁸

27. Victims and survivors also described the process of seeking acknowledgement and accountability as intrusive. Many felt that they were the subject of investigation rather than the perpetrator. RO-A117 said that her life was “*ripped open*” as the police investigated “*everything*” about her: “*there was no part of my life that wasn’t investigated, which was devastating*”.⁴⁸⁹ A number of Forum members felt that they were still recovering from the invasive nature of the investigation years after it had concluded.⁴⁹⁰

28. Giving evidence about child sexual abuse was often described as very challenging. Some victims and survivors said that police officers did not appear to understand the impact of reliving traumatic events, and how this might affect their

⁴⁸⁸ *Engagement with children and young people*, IICSA, June 2021, p21

⁴⁸⁹ RO-A117 6 December 2017 43/10-12

⁴⁹⁰ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on the Criminal Justice System: Summary Report*, IICSA, May 2019, p5

participation in the investigation process.⁴⁹¹ Others highlighted the impact of repeatedly recounting their experience of child sexual abuse. LA-A7 recalled feeling forced to “*relive events that I had tried to forget*”.⁴⁹² AR-A87 described how going through multiple civil trials was “*very, very difficult ... it nearly split me and my wife up*”.⁴⁹³

29. Many victims and survivors spoke about how emotionally difficult it was to be cross-examined about their allegations in court. In 2019, CS-A12 gave evidence in a criminal trial. She described the defence barrister referring to sexist stereotypes during cross-examination: “*I was accused of being a slag ... I was told, like, it was all my fault ... I was literally torn apart on that stand*”.⁴⁹⁴ Some victims and survivors said that they were re-traumatised by the court process. Daisy said she now has “*nightmares about that day in the court. Rather than putting it right it was just another time I was traumatised*”.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹¹ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on the Criminal Justice System: Summary Report*, IICSA, May 2019, p5

⁴⁹² LA-A7 29 July 2020 139/19-21

⁴⁹³ AR-A87 5 December 2018 113/2-6

⁴⁹⁴ CS-A12 22 September 2020 50/1-4

⁴⁹⁵ Daisy

30. Victims and survivors who gave evidence in court as children described similar experiences. Numerous child victims and survivors said being cross-examined was very difficult. One Truth Project participant who was under the age of 13 when he gave evidence in court described his experience as “*traumatic*”.⁴⁹⁶ The defence persistently tried to discredit him:

*“the line of questioning that the defence took was that [the perpetrator] was just somebody who ... actually cared for me and was trying to do a good thing”.*⁴⁹⁷

Truth Project participant

31. Victims and survivors often felt that the processes involved in seeking acknowledgement and accountability meant that they needed therapeutic support. However, many said that they were not offered or referred to formal support services. Roberta said that as a child she was not offered any support during or after the criminal trial at which she gave evidence: “*when you don’t have the support at 12 years old it has knock-on effects*”.⁴⁹⁸ Annalise described a similar absence of support when she gave evidence as an adult. As a

⁴⁹⁶ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports*, IICSA, June 2020, p49

⁴⁹⁷ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports*, IICSA, June 2020, p49

⁴⁹⁸ Roberta

result, she wished she had been murdered instead of sexually abused, *“it would have been a lot easier and less painful”*.⁴⁹⁹

I.7: “It took so long”

32. Victims and survivors often felt that the processes they went through to seek acknowledgement and accountability were long and drawn out. Angelina said that it was three years before the criminal trial of the man who sexually abused her began.⁵⁰⁰ Young victims and survivors described similar experiences. During the Inquiry’s engagement with children and young people, one child said: *“I was just waiting and waiting. It took months. I didn’t know what was going on”*.⁵⁰¹ In particular, victims and survivors who attempted to view their childhood records described the process as long and complex. This had an impact on their ability to seek justice or compensation.⁵⁰² Kirsty endured a three-year wait to access her social services records.⁵⁰³

⁴⁹⁹ Annalise

⁵⁰⁰ Angelina

⁵⁰¹ Engagement with children and young people, IICSA, June 2021, p21

⁵⁰² Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in custodial institutions, IICSA, April 2020, p7

⁵⁰³ Kirsty

33. Delays caused considerable frustration and distress. One Forum member said that their pursuit of redress from the institution in which they were sexually abused had “*lasted years*” and “*has been a time of hypervigilance and anxiety on an almost daily basis*”.⁵⁰⁴ Some victims and survivors regretted reporting child sexual abuse because of the protracted process that followed:

*“I think if I had my time again, I would not have come forward, the reason for that being is the amount of time that it took for these court procedures to take place. It took approximately 12 to 13 years of my life away ... the only people that actually benefited from this particular trial was actually the lawyers.”*⁵⁰⁵

AR-A36, Accountability and reparations investigation

34. Victims and survivors were often disappointed when, after a long and complex process, they did not get the acknowledgement or accountability they had sought. One Forum member felt they were “*lost in a roundabout of systems, poking in the dark*” after trying to access their childhood

⁵⁰⁴ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Redress: Summary Report*, IICSA, October 2020, p9

⁵⁰⁵ *AR-A36 5 December 2018 120/12-21*

records.⁵⁰⁶ Many described how they felt when perpetrators were found not guilty in a criminal court. Ailish became “*angry beyond belief*” during criminal proceedings in which she was asked to describe an intimate feature of her sexual abuser, only for her evidence to then be discredited.⁵⁰⁷ The perpetrator was eventually found not guilty. Ailish said that the trial made her feel that no one cared about her and that she went through the difficulty for nothing. One Truth Project participant said: “*The not guilty verdict was a huge blow. I remember just crying, you feel like it was completely wasted pain*”.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁶ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Accessing Records: Summary Report*, IICSA, March 2020, p5

⁵⁰⁷ Ailish

⁵⁰⁸ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports*, IICSA, June 2020, p49

Part J

“We need change”

“We need change”

J.1: Introduction

1. Victims and survivors who participated in the Inquiry’s work often described the changes that they wanted to see to protect children from sexual abuse in the future (Figure J.1). Many also spoke about changes they felt were needed to how institutions respond to victims and survivors. In total, more than 15,000 suggestions for change were made. Victims and survivors were united in the view that change was urgently needed.

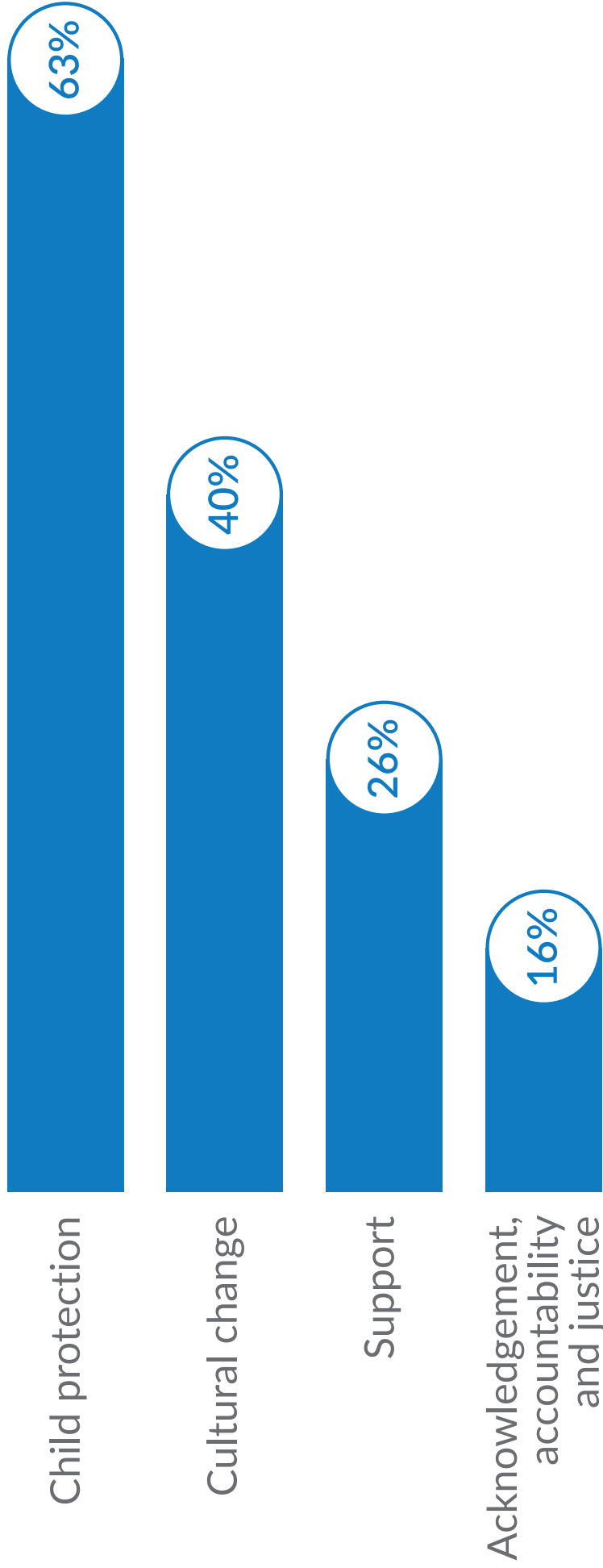


Figure J.1: *Proportion of Truth Project participants who suggested change is needed, by theme*

J.2: “Better child protection”

2. The majority of victims and survivors who participated in the Inquiry’s work made suggestions for changes that they felt the government and institutions should introduce to better protect children from sexual abuse.

3. Victims and survivors often spoke about the necessity of widespread change to prevent child sexual abuse from happening. Todd suggested that “*radical re-thinking, root and branch reform, is required across all sectors*”.⁵⁰⁹ Some reflected on the need for significant changes to the ‘system’ to protect children from experiencing child sexual abuse like they had:

*“Stop this from ever happening. Stop it somehow. It’s got to be stopped. The system is drastically wrong. These are life-changing injuries. Not a broken leg. They’re catastrophic injuries. Please help to do something.”*⁵¹⁰

AR-A41, Accountability and reparations investigation

4. Victims and survivors also suggested reform was needed in specific institutions or sectors. In particular, victims and survivors who were sexually abused whilst in local authority care frequently said that the social care system needed

⁵⁰⁹ Todd

⁵¹⁰ AR-A41 30 November 2018 50/12-17

to change. Nina described the social care system as *“rotten from the top to the bottom”* and said that it needed *“systematic reform”*.⁵¹¹ Another Truth Project participant suggested that there needs to be *“a general improvement in the treatment of and care for children”* and that *“children’s homes need to value and nurture children”*.⁵¹²

5. Some victims and survivors suggested that preventative actions should be focussed on perpetrators and those who are likely to sexually abuse children. Some victims and survivors thought that more should be done to identify this group and understand their motivations. Several victims and survivors suggested that perpetrators should receive more support, for example through prevention and treatment programmes. This could include safe spaces where perpetrators can seek help, as well as education on the impact of their behaviours:

“I think we need to talk about the perpetrator as much as the victim, because my feeling is, if you don’t deal with the perpetrator, you’re

⁵¹¹ Nina

⁵¹² *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of children’s homes and residential care*, IICSA, November 2019, p89

*always going to have that victim.”*⁵¹³

Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority
communities research participant

“Education and training about child sexual abuse”

6. Many victims and survivors suggested that people who work with children should be better trained and supported to identify signs of child sexual abuse, such as physical symptoms or changes in behaviour. Bernie suggested: *“if sudden changes are seen in children, then just ask the question”*.⁵¹⁴ Others noted the difficulties that children have in disclosing sexual abuse and suggested that *“there needs to be training in place to support disclosure”* so that children *“might feel more confident about talking about their concerns and fears”*.⁵¹⁵

7. Victims and survivors made many suggestions for how specific professionals should be trained to respond to concerns and allegations about child sexual abuse. For example, Lexi felt that the police

⁵¹³ *“People don’t talk about it”: Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities*, IICSA, June 2020, p83

⁵¹⁴ Bernie

⁵¹⁵ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of schools*, IICSA, December 2020, p86

should be better trained in how to deal with reports of child sexual abuse, so that they are more understanding and supportive.⁵¹⁶ Kathleen felt that individuals working in schools in particular should be better trained in spotting signs of abuse.⁵¹⁷ Many victims and survivors suggested that religious leaders should receive training on child sexual abuse and safeguarding.⁵¹⁸ Adele felt strongly that social workers should be better trained in listening to children.⁵¹⁹

8. Victims and survivors, including 28 percent of Truth Project participants, emphasised the importance of children receiving education on child sexual abuse. Kaz said: *“it’s sad, but they need to be taught at an early age”*.⁵²⁰ Suranne suggested that education about sexual abuse would mean that children were *“more likely to speak up”*.⁵²¹ Habiba suggested that children should be taught about consent and personal space from when they start school. However, reflecting on her own

⁵¹⁶ Lexi

⁵¹⁷ Kathleen

⁵¹⁸ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of religious institutions, IICSA, May 2019, p66*

⁵¹⁹ Adele

⁵²⁰ Kaz

⁵²¹ Suranne

experience, she stressed that professionals should recognise that some children may have already been sexually abused:

*“I was really triggered and understood for the first time what had happened to me was of a sexual nature. However, there was no understanding at the time that this video might be triggering for child abuse victims and sitting watching the movie, I felt unable to speak up.”*⁵²²

Habiba, Truth Project participant

9. Young victims and survivors made many suggestions for how relationships and sex education could be improved. In particular, grooming was frequently mentioned. One child said that they felt strongly that *“at school you should be taught about inappropriate relationships and grooming”*.⁵²³ Children also stressed that better and more regular education on online-facilitated child sexual abuse was needed, and at an earlier age. One 16-year-old research participant suggested that such education *“should actually start when young people start getting mobile phones”*.⁵²⁴

⁵²² Habiba

⁵²³ Engagement with children and young people, IICSA, June 2021, p14

⁵²⁴ Learning about online sexual harm, IICSA, November 2019, p59

10. A number of victims and survivors suggested that parents should be offered guidance and support on child sexual abuse. Some specifically mentioned information on signs of sexual abuse and how to communicate openly with children and respond to disclosures.

“Reporting child sexual abuse”

11. Victims and survivors frequently highlighted the importance of reporting allegations of child sexual abuse. In particular, 32 percent of Truth Project participants suggested that there should be a dedicated person to whom children can disclose child sexual abuse. Many also suggested changes were needed to ensure children disclosing sexual abuse are adequately supported:

“You can’t always stop an incident happening but you can help people to feel safe reporting it.”⁵²⁵

Loz, Truth Project participant

12. A large number of victims and survivors suggested that the government should introduce legislation making it a statutory requirement for individuals and institutions to report known or suspected child sexual abuse. Eighty-nine percent of members of the Victims and Survivors Forum who responded to the Inquiry’s survey on mandatory reporting said that they would like to

⁵²⁵ Loz

see mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse introduced in England and in Wales.⁵²⁶ Victims and survivors who spoke in favour of mandatory reporting described the potential benefits:

*“If there had been a mandatory law when I reported my child sexual abuse then perhaps my abuser would have been brought to justice. Possibly many other abusers would be prevented from continuing to harm children if their first incidence was reported under a mandatory law.”*⁵²⁷

Member of the Victims and Survivors Forum

13. Many victims and survivors felt that mandatory reporting would lead to a cultural change within institutions and across society. One Truth Project participant suggested that *“reporting concerns should become a normal process in society”*.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁶ *Mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse: A survey of the Victims and Survivors Forum, IICSA April 2019, p3*

⁵²⁷ *Mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse: A survey of the Victims and Survivors Forum, IICSA, April 2019, p3*

⁵²⁸ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in custodial institutions, IICSA, April 2020, p66*

14. While many adult victims and survivors were in favour of mandatory reporting, some young victims and survivors had different views.⁵²⁹ In particular, young victims and survivors suggested that mandatory reporting requirements could discourage children from disclosing sexual abuse. One child said: *“I wouldn’t tell if I knew that it would be reported to the police”*.⁵³⁰

“Independent inspection and oversight”

15. Many victims and survivors felt that child protection inspections needed to be improved. While some were of the view that inspections should be carried out by an independent body, others advocated existing inspection regimes should become more rigorous.

16. Some victims and survivors suggested that all individuals working with children must be appropriately vetted and that current vetting processes should be more thorough. Cyrah said: *“it’s not about nosing ... if you choose to be*

⁵²⁹ *Engagement with children and young people*, IICSA, June 2021, p1

⁵³⁰ *Engagement with children and young people*, IICSA, June 2021, p25

involved with a child, you need to open up your life".⁵³¹ Others specifically suggested improvements to the Disclosure and Barring Service.

17. Often victims and survivors suggested that institutions, services and agencies such as schools, police, healthcare services and social services should improve their ways of working together. This included better communication and information-sharing between professionals. In particular, victims and survivors stressed the importance of victims and survivors not "*having to tell the same story again and again*":⁵³²

*"There should be more joined-up thinking. Police, social services and schools should be working together to share records."*⁵³³

Member of the Victims and Survivors Forum

J.3: "We need support"

18. Many victims and survivors made suggestions about support services for those who were sexually abused as children. In particular, it was frequently suggested that more support services should be made available. Connor emphasised

⁵³¹ Cyrah

⁵³² Mal

⁵³³ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Accessing Records: Summary Report*, IICSA, March 2020, p14

the importance of victims and survivors being able to access mental health support: “*unless they engage with it, they can’t move forward*”.⁵³⁴ Victims and survivors often commented that increased access should be combined with increased public awareness about support services.

19. Some victims and survivors emphasised the importance of child victims and survivors being able to access support services. Bryn suggested that every sexually abused child should be offered the right counselling or support as soon as possible.⁵³⁵ Guy said that he would like to see more support for children who have been sexually abused “*so they can have a healthy future*”.⁵³⁶

20. Victims and survivors made many specific suggestions for how support services could be improved. In particular, it was often suggested that the waiting times for support services should be reduced and that long-term support should be provided free of charge. Erik emphasised this point and said that he “*was lucky and could afford to pay – lots can’t*”.⁵³⁷ Some also advocated more specialist support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. Ruth felt that there

⁵³⁴ Connor

⁵³⁵ Bryn

⁵³⁶ Guy

⁵³⁷ Erik

should be more people who are “*trained in child sexual abuse. Not a generalised counsellor ... but somebody that is specifically trained*”.⁵³⁸

J.4: “Cultural change”

21. Victims and survivors repeatedly spoke about the importance of increasing knowledge and awareness of child sexual abuse to drive necessary cultural change in institutions and society:

*“Ignorance and silence enable abuse. Not talking about it doesn’t mean it won’t happen. Education and conversation about abuse can help change that.”*⁵³⁹

Keyleigh, Truth Project participant

22. In particular, many suggested that there should be greater awareness that child sexual abuse can have a severe and lifelong impact. One Truth Project participant said that “*education for the general public is required about ... how experiences of non-recent abuse can still affect people throughout their lives*”.⁵⁴⁰ Others said that

⁵³⁸ *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p69

⁵³⁹ Keyleigh

⁵⁴⁰ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports*, IICSA, June 2020, p69

they wanted the public and institutions to better understand that individuals can recover from child sexual abuse and childhood trauma.

23. Victims and survivors described their view that child sexual abuse must stop being a “*taboo subject*” that people are reluctant to discuss.⁵⁴¹

One Truth Project participant said that “*as a society we need to be open and speak out about sexual abuse*”.⁵⁴² It was suggested that informed and open conversations about child sexual abuse could dispel harmful myths:

*“There’s often also a belief that [child sexual abuse] happens to ‘others’, that ‘nobody I know’ will be affected by it – and this is so wrong. We need to be making sure people know that ... it can and does affect anybody.”*⁵⁴³

Member of the Victims and Survivors Forum

⁵⁴¹ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Culture: Summary Report*, IICSA, November 2019, pp3–4

⁵⁴² *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in custodial institutions*, IICSA, April 2020, p66

⁵⁴³ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Culture: Summary Report*, IICSA, November 2019, p4

24. Victims and survivors also suggested that more open conversations would help to reduce the stigma associated with child sexual abuse. It was suggested that this was particularly necessary in some ethnic minority communities.⁵⁴⁴ Many felt that changing how society talks about child sexual abuse could help victims and survivors to understand and disclose their experiences:

*“We need to have more publicity on what the symptoms are if you have been abused. Break it down into what boys may suffer and also what girls may suffer. That way the victim may feel more confident in coming forward.”*⁵⁴⁵

Member of the Victims and Survivors Forum

25. In order to encourage more open conversations about child sexual abuse, victims and survivors said that there should be *“more information available”*, increased *“public conversation”* and campaigning to raise awareness.⁵⁴⁶ In addition, the media was seen as

⁵⁴⁴ *“People don’t talk about it”: Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities*, IICSA, June 2020, pp40–42

⁵⁴⁵ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Culture: Summary Report*, IICSA, November 2019, p4

⁵⁴⁶ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Culture: Summary Report*, IICSA, November 2019, p8

having an important role. Victims and survivors highlighted that the media should neither sensationalise nor downplay child sexual abuse. One young victim and survivor suggested that a sensitive but straightforward approach was needed: *“If they want to make a change, they have to tell it like it is, that’s the only way people will start taking notice of it”*.⁵⁴⁷

26. Some victims and survivors made suggestions for the cultural change needed in specific institutions. In particular, it was common to hear that victims and survivors felt cultural change was needed in residential institutions, such as residential schools and children’s homes, and also in custodial institutions. Arnold said that change was needed in boarding schools in particular so that the culture was *“one in which people are not strong and silent, but strong and verbal”*.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁷ *Engagement with children and young people*, IICSA, June 2021, p12

⁵⁴⁸ *Arnold*

J.5: “Accountability and reparations”

“They need to be held accountable”

27. Victims and survivors repeatedly made suggestions for how institutions should acknowledge and be held accountable for child sexual abuse:

*“They can’t undo what happened, but I’d like the organisation to acknowledge it and to show how they prevent it happening today.”*⁵⁴⁹

Member of the Victims and Survivors Forum

28. Many also expressed their desire to receive an apology for the child sexual abuse they experienced. One victim and survivor said: “So many people never apologise or say these words, ‘I am so sorry this happened to you’”.⁵⁵⁰

29. Some victims and survivors wanted financial compensation to be provided by the institution in which they were sexually abused. This was often felt to be an effective way to hold the institution to account. IN-H1 gave evidence about her son and

⁵⁴⁹ *Victims and Survivors Forum consultation on redress: Summary report, IICSA, October 2020, p15*

⁵⁵⁰ *Victims and Survivors Forum consultation on redress: Summary report, IICSA, October 2020, p12*

daughter who were sexually abused online. She suggested that internet companies should provide compensation to her children: *“it should be their responsibility to pay compensation for anything that goes wrong”*.⁵⁵¹ Other victims and survivors wanted financial compensation from institutions to fund support services.

30. Victims and survivors often suggested that institutions should maintain accurate records about children with whom they engage. Many advocated longer record-retention periods and clearer rights for victims and survivors to access information about them:

*“A lot of the stress that comes with accessing records is a lack of knowledge about the systems, the processes. Someone knows the process and the language to use, it would be helpful if there were people out there to help [victims and survivors] in their journeys.”*⁵⁵²

Member of the Victims and Survivors Forum

“The criminal justice system”

31. A considerable number of victims and survivors said that there should be more police officers with specialist training in child sexual

⁵⁵¹ IN-H1 14 May 2019 17/9-10

⁵⁵² *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Accessing Records: Summary Report*, IICSA, March 2020, p13

abuse. Suggestions were also made about the way that the police communicate with victims and survivors. Others emphasised the importance of the police signposting victims and survivors to support services. Victims and survivors also thought that the Crown Prosecution Service should communicate more clearly on verdicts, sentencing and “*around their decisions not to prosecute*”.⁵⁵³

32. Victims and survivors repeatedly spoke about the need for better support and guidance for those going through court proceedings. One Truth Project participant said that “*court processes need to more explicitly and sensitively consider and acknowledge the impact of child sexual abuse on victims and survivors*”.⁵⁵⁴ Many individuals thought that victims and survivors should be allocated a dedicated support worker.⁵⁵⁵ Others suggested

⁵⁵³ *Support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse*, IICSA, August 2020, p71

⁵⁵⁴ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports*, IICSA, June 2020, p69

⁵⁵⁵ Some victims and survivors in England and in Wales are allocated an Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA). ISVAs provide specialist tailored support to victims and survivors of sexual violence and can give impartial information about a victim and survivor’s options, for example in relation to reporting as well as accessing support services.

that more should be done to manage victims and survivors’ expectations of the trial process, including its length and potential outcomes.

33. Many victims and survivors suggested that there should be harsher sentences for perpetrators of child sexual abuse, with some advocating longer prison sentences.

“The sentence massively diminished the crime – it makes me feel worthless.”⁵⁵⁶

Bethany, Truth Project participant

“The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority”

34. A large number of victims and survivors spoke to the Inquiry about the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA). Some thought that public awareness of CICA should be increased. Other victims and survivors called for practical and emotional support when applying for compensation from CICA. In addition, many thought that the eligibility criteria for compensation should be extended to remove time limits and to include victims and survivors with an unspent criminal record. Victims and survivors also felt that those who were sexually abused as children should not have to ‘prove’ the impact the sexual abuse had had on them in order to receive compensation.

⁵⁵⁶ Bethany

“The civil justice system”

35. Victims and survivors frequently suggested that the limitation period for civil claims should be removed. The limitation period imposes a time limit on victims and survivors of non-recent child sexual abuse to bring civil claims against the institution in which they were sexually abused. Many felt that this rule did not account for the barriers to disclosing child sexual abuse that victims and survivors face.

36. A number of suggestions were made to improve victims and survivors’ experiences of the civil justice system. These included, for example, that vulnerable victims and survivors should be better supported to make claims. AR-A78 described why this was necessary: “*victims of child abuse will still be highly vulnerable ... and are therefore far less capable of navigating the civil justice system*”.⁵⁵⁷ Other victims and survivors emphasised the need for more regular, clear communication about the civil justice process. AR-A41 suggested that “*better explanations as to what was happening by the solicitors*” were needed.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁷ AR-A78 29 November 2018 115/4-8

⁵⁵⁸ AR-A41 30 November 2018 134/2-4

II. The Inquiry's Conclusions and Recommendations for Change

Part A

The scope of the Inquiry

The scope of the Inquiry

A.1: Introduction

1. In March 2015, the then Home Secretary established the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse under the Inquiries Act 2005. The Inquiry covered England and Wales. Its purpose and scope were set out in its Terms of Reference, which stated that it was to:

- consider the extent to which State and non-State institutions have failed in their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation;
- consider the extent to which these failings have since been addressed;
- identify further action needed to address any failings identified;
- consider the steps which it is necessary for State and non-State institutions to take in order to protect children from such abuse in future; and
- publish a report with recommendations.

State and non-State institutions referred to in the scope as examples of those within its remit included government departments, the Cabinet Office, Parliament and ministers, local

authorities, the police, prosecuting authorities, schools including private and specialist education, religious organisations, health services and custodial institutions.

2. The Inquiry's Terms of Reference also required it to produce an Interim Report, which was published in April 2018.

3. This report draws on all of the Inquiry's work from 2015 until 2022.

4. There was no limit to the temporal scope of the Inquiry, other than being 'within living memory'.

5. As a statutory inquiry, it had the power to compel individuals and institutions to give evidence and for that evidence to be given under oath (or affirmation).

6. The Inquiry's focus has been on what institutions knew about allegations of sexual abuse and how they responded (if at all), rather than on assessing the truth of any allegation. Its scope did not include sexual abuse of children which occurred within a family setting, as opposed to within an institution. It did, however, include circumstances in which a child disclosed familial abuse to a person in an institution, such as a care home or a religious organisation, and that person or persons failed to act upon this information (or information from a third party) or otherwise failed to identify child sexual abuse.

7. For the purposes of the Inquiry, ‘child’ meant anyone under the age of 18, or anyone over the age of 18 if their abuse started when the individual was under 18 years old. References in this report to ‘child sexual abuse’ also include references to ‘child sexual exploitation’.

Definitions of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation

8. There are many definitions of child sexual abuse, in its various forms, currently in use. At the outset of the Inquiry, the Inquiry used the following definitions:

- **Child sexual abuse:** Sexual abuse of children (which includes child sexual exploitation) involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities. Those activities may involve physical contact and non-contact, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual acts, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse, including via the internet.
- **Child sexual exploitation:** Sexual exploitation of children is a form of child sexual abuse. It involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where a child receives something, for example as a result of them performing, or

another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child realising that they are being sexually exploited – for example being persuaded to share sexual images on the internet or via mobile phones.

9. In the Inquiry’s *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, the Inquiry defined an organised network as being characterised by two or more individuals (whether identified or not) who are known to (or associated with) one another and are known to be involved in or to facilitate the sexual exploitation of children. Being involved in the sexual exploitation of children includes introducing them to other individuals for the purpose of exploitation, trafficking a child for the purpose of sexual exploitation, taking payment for sexual activities with a child or allowing their property to be used for sexual activity with a child. However, as noted in that investigation report, the definition of child sexual exploitation requires regular review to ensure it addresses the changing nature of the harm. The Inquiry also concluded that in relation to the definition of child sexual exploitation:

“The issue of exchange is an unhelpful distraction. Exchange may be present in some cases of child sexual exploitation but not others. The current statutory

definition in England, which provides that, in the absence of exchange, an element of financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator is necessary, is too restrictive. Child sexual exploitation can occur without these elements.”

10. A further description used by the Inquiry was that of ‘harmful sexual behaviour’, which is often used to describe sexual behaviours expressed by children under the age of 18 which are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards themselves or others, and can in some cases be abusive. Over the lifetime of the Inquiry, the use of the phrase ‘harmful sexual behaviour’ has been used to describe variously:

- peer-on-peer sexual abuse;
- behaviour which indicates the child is or may have been the victim of sexual abuse or is a potential abuser (or both); and
- ‘age inappropriate’ or ‘developmentally inappropriate’ sexual experimentation which may or may not be harmful to either or both parties.

The broad nature of the behaviour encompassed by the term – in the absence of government guidance – means there is a danger it may be misused. The Inquiry’s focus has always been on the sexual abuse of children and not on behaviours which do not amount to abuse.

Operation Hydrant

11. The Inquiry was required by its Terms of Reference to refer all allegations of child sexual abuse that it received to the police, so that they could be investigated. Referrals were passed to Operation Hydrant, which is a body independent of the Inquiry. It was set up by the National Police Chiefs' Council to coordinate police investigations into non-recent child sexual abuse. Operation Hydrant receives referrals from a range of organisations and passes them to the relevant police force for investigation.

12. Between March 2015 and March 2022, Operation Hydrant received 10,431 referrals from the Inquiry. While the majority of these referrals have resulted in no further action being taken by the police, over 100 individuals have been convicted and a further 40 defendants have been charged and are awaiting trial.

13. In relation to a number of the referrals, it was possible to identify the type of institution to which the allegation related (Figure A.1).

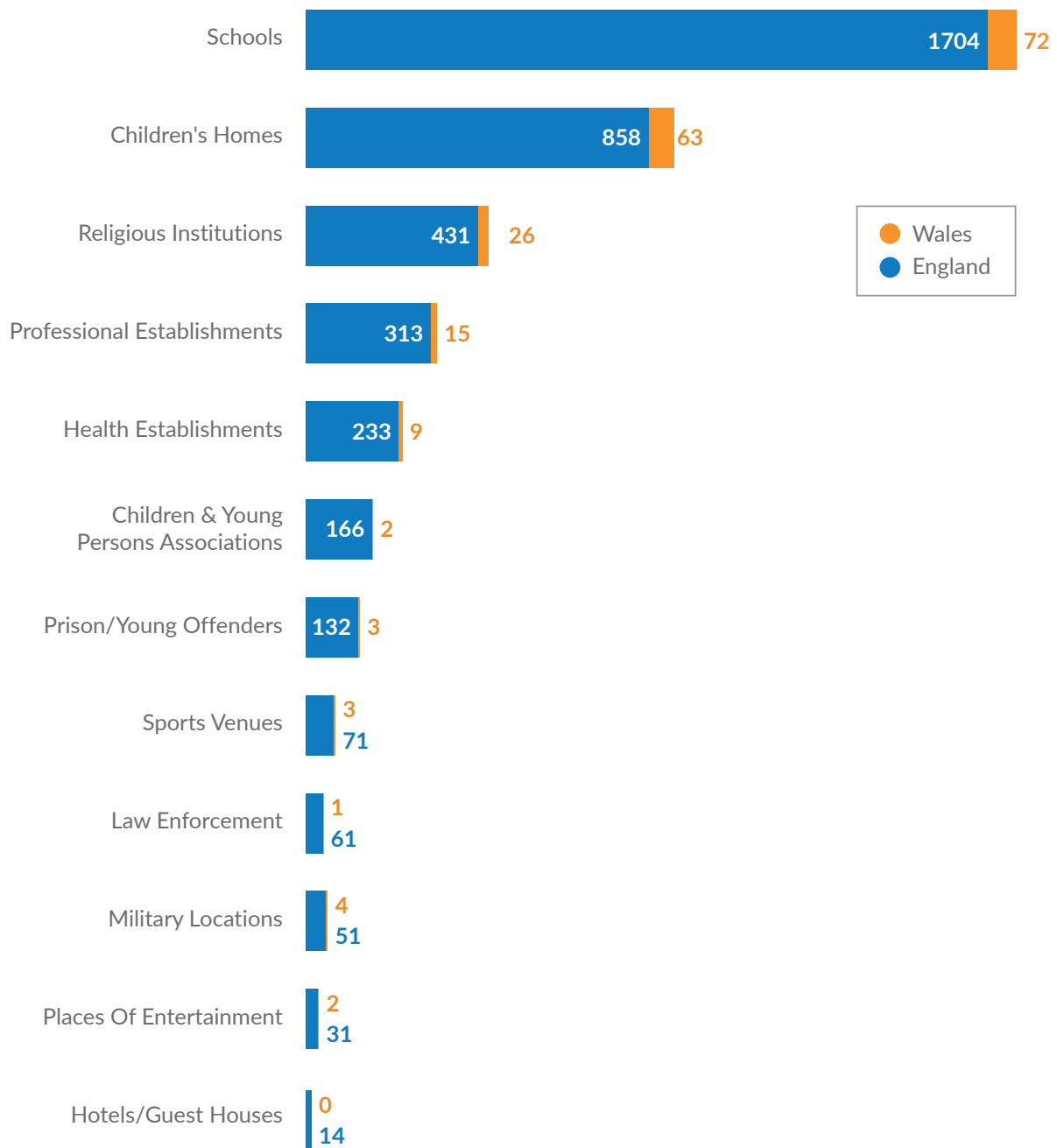


Figure A.1: *Types of institutions where child sexual abuse took place in Inquiry referrals to Operation Hydrant*

Source: See data compendium to this report

A.2: The Inquiry's activities

14. The Inquiry undertook three main strands of activity.

Investigations and public hearings

15. The Inquiry's investigative work underpinned the public hearings, involving a number of investigations chosen on the basis of the criteria for selection published in 2016. The breadth of these investigations enabled the Inquiry to identify any patterns of institutional failings. Each investigation – except for the thematic inquiry into effective leadership of child protection – concluded with a single report or, where necessary, more than one. The findings of the effective leadership of child protection investigation are reflected in this report. In total, 19 investigation reports have been published and are available online.

- *Child Migration Programmes Investigation Report*, published in March 2018;
- *Cambridge House, Knowl View and Rochdale Investigation Report*, published in April 2018;
- *Ampleforth and Downside (English Benedictine Congregation Case Study) Investigation Report*, published in August 2018;
- *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions: 2009–2017 Investigation Report*, published in February 2019;
- *The Anglican Church Case Studies: 1. The Diocese of Chichester; 2. The Response to Allegations against Peter Ball Investigation Report*, published in May 2019;

- *The Roman Catholic Church Case Study: Archdiocese of Birmingham Investigation Report*, published in June 2019;
- *Children in the Care of the Nottinghamshire Councils Investigation Report*, published in July 2019;
- *Accountability and Reparations Investigation Report*, published in September 2019;
- *The Roman Catholic Church Case Study: English Benedictine Congregation: 1. Ealing Abbey and St Benedict's School; 2. Ampleforth and Downside: Update Investigation Report*, published in October 2019;
- *Children Outside the United Kingdom: Phase 2 Investigation Report*, published in January 2020;
- *Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse Linked to Westminster Investigation Report*, published in February 2020;
- *The Internet Investigation Report*, published in March 2020;
- *The Anglican Church: Safeguarding in the Church of England and the Church in Wales Investigation Report*, published in October 2020;
- *The Roman Catholic Church: Safeguarding in the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales Investigation Report*, published in November 2020;

- *Children in the Care of Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, published in July 2021;
- *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report*, published in September 2021;
- *Institutional Responses to Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse Involving the Late Lord Janner of Braunstone QC Investigation Report*, published in October 2021;
- *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, published in February 2022; and
- *The Residential Schools Investigation: Phase 1: Music Schools, Residential Special Schools; Phase 2: Safeguarding: Day and Boarding Schools Investigation Report*, published in March 2022.

Annex 2 contains a summary of the investigation reports.

16. Each report set out the Inquiry's conclusions and, where appropriate, recommendations for change. Annex 3 provides a summary of the Inquiry's 107 recommendations, and the institutional response to each recommendation as at June 2022. Information published on the Inquiry's website also provides additional updates on the institutional response following publication of the Inquiry's investigation reports.

17. More than 200,000 documents, comprising almost two and a half million pages of evidence, were obtained by the Inquiry in the course of its investigations, of which more than 40,000 documents, comprising over 600,000 pages, were disclosed to core participants.

18. The Inquiry obtained written statements from almost 1,000 witnesses. Witnesses included victims and survivors, those directly involved in decision-making or the implementation of those decisions, corporate witnesses speaking on behalf of institutions, and other interested parties.

19. The Inquiry's public hearings took place over 325 days and more than 700 witnesses gave evidence in person. This included accounts from victims and survivors that enabled the Inquiry to understand the extent to which institutions failed to protect them from sexual abuse when they were children. All those who gave evidence in person were offered tailored support to meet their needs throughout the process.

The Truth Project

20. The Truth Project was established to offer the opportunity for victims and survivors to share their experiences in a safe and respectful environment. Over 6,200 victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in England and Wales participated in the Truth Project. The vast majority of participants

(5,862) agreed to be part of (and were in scope of) the research programme and many participants put forward suggestions for change. By doing so, they helped the Inquiry to understand the long-term impact of child sexual abuse and to make recommendations for longer term reform. Their contributions challenged the assumptions that are so often made about the sexual abuse of children. The Truth Project dashboard for June 2016 to October 2021 is included in Annex 4.

21. This was a complex and extensive listening exercise carried out over six years. Each account, whether in person, in writing, or by telephone, video call or audio recording, was anonymised and, where permission had been granted, formed the basis of an analysis by the Inquiry's research team. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of victims and survivors who spoke to the Inquiry through the Truth Project or participated in the Inquiry's research.

22. In order to support and protect victims and survivors, the Inquiry adopted a trauma-informed approach to take account of specific needs resulting from previous traumatic experiences. Trained facilitators were recruited to listen to their accounts and support services were offered, as appropriate.

23. The Inquiry enabled the widest participation of victims and survivors through awareness-raising campaigns across social media and other media outlets. It also worked closely with the charity SignHealth to support D/deaf people.

Research

24. The Inquiry's research programme filled gaps in knowledge about child sexual abuse and ensured that the Inquiry's findings were informed by the latest learning. Activities included bringing together existing research as well as conducting quantitative and qualitative primary research. The Inquiry's research collected fresh data, particularly from focus groups and from the interviews conducted with victims and survivors. Researchers analysed Truth Project information and provided regular updates on the Inquiry website. Twenty-four research and analysis reports have been published during the lifetime of the Inquiry and have, in turn, informed the Inquiry's investigations and reports. Further details of these reports are included in Annex 2.

25. The Inquiry's series of seminars gathered information and views about eight important issues. Each seminar involved a structured discussion among invited participants, including representatives of victims and survivors' groups and organisations. The seminars took place on the following topics:

- The Civil Justice System (November 2016)
- Criminal Injuries Compensation (February 2017)
- Preventing and responding to child sexual abuse – learning from best practice overseas (April 2017)
- Victims and survivors’ experiences: impacts, support services and redress (July 2017)
- The Health Sector (September 2017)
- The Criminal Justice System (November 2017)
- Social and political narratives about child sexual abuse (February 2018)
- Mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse (September 2018, April 2019).

26. Reports summarising each seminar were published and used to inform the Inquiry’s recommendations (see Annex 2 for further information).

27. Throughout the life of the Inquiry, the voices of victims and survivors have been placed at the heart of its work. In addition to the public hearings, the Truth Project and the research programme, victims and survivors have been consulted through a variety of additional arrangements: the Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel, the Victims and Survivors Forum, and specific engagement activities sponsored by the Inquiry. All these

initiatives have supported the fulfilment of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference to enable victims and survivors to share their experiences.

Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel

28. The members of the Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel provided consultative advice on the Inquiry's engagement activities, communications, research and recommendations. This advice ensured that the needs and perspectives of victims and survivors were reflected in the Inquiry's work. All members of the Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel had spent many years supporting adult survivors of child sexual abuse. Their experience, knowledge and advice provided valuable insights and expertise to the Inquiry.

29. At the conclusion of the Inquiry, the Panel members were May Baxter-Thornton, Sheila Coates, Lucy Duckworth, Emma Lewis, Fay Maxted, Kit Shellam and Chris Tuck. We would like to thank them for their contributions to the Inquiry.

Victims and Survivors Forum

30. The Victims and Survivors Forum was open to all victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. By the conclusion of the Inquiry, there were more than 1,700 members across England and

Wales. The members attended online and, where possible, face-to-face events to contribute to the Inquiry's research and policy work. Comments and suggestions about these areas of work were shared with the Chair and Panel to inform their final recommendations. The Inquiry was also assisted by an Ethnic Minority Ambassador.

Engagement activities

31. The Inquiry's Terms of Reference were broad in nature. As a result, the Inquiry's engagement activities provided an opportunity to gain a more in-depth understanding of contemporary issues facing children, members of ethnic minority communities who had experienced child sexual abuse, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning and others (LGBTQ+) community. Although these consultations did not amount to formal evidence, they contributed significantly to the Inquiry's work, as did the support provided by the Victims and Survivors Forum and the Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel.

Engagement with young people

32. In order to obtain the views of young people, the Inquiry held a number of events specifically for young people. Assisted by various charitable organisations, the Inquiry spoke with 56 young

people aged between 11 and 21, and 77 specialist child abuse support workers. A number of important points were expressed by participants:

- young victims and survivors faced long delays in accessing support;
- specialist social workers who support young victims and survivors want to see improvements in how statutory bodies respond to child sexual abuse and exploitation;
- there needed to be a culture shift so that talking about child sexual abuse became as acceptable as other subjects;
- relationships and sex education in schools did not reflect the current challenges facing children and was mostly inconsistent and inadequate; and
- creators of social media apps and internet platforms must take greater responsibility for the protection of children online.

Engagement with support services for ethnic minority communities

33. In order to obtain the views of victims and survivors from ethnic minority communities, specialist support services were consulted throughout England and Wales to enhance the Inquiry's understanding of the impacts of child sexual abuse on victims and survivors from

those communities. Over 100 organisations were consulted and six important issues were expressed by participants:

- services to victims and survivors were mistrusted and considered to be inadequate;
- language was a barrier to disclosure of child sexual abuse – interpreting services were poor;
- there were additional barriers to disclosure in closed communities, particularly in relation to religious and internal support – the Inquiry was told that community leaders sometimes restrict access to external support services in order to protect the community and culture from outside influence or harm;
- some organisations did not recognise or support the cultural and religious needs of victims and survivors from ethnic minority communities;
- some organisations told the Inquiry how shame and honour within communities can silence victims and survivors; and
- some victims and survivors from ethnic minority communities were removed from school relationships and sex education programmes and did not understand the concept of sexual activity – this, in turn, inhibited disclosure.

Engagement with the LGBTQ+ community

34. In order to obtain the views of victims and survivors from the LGBTQ+ community, 31 victims and survivors and 29 organisations were consulted. A number of important issues were expressed by participants:

- Society's views of LGBTQ+ victims and survivors are often built on harmful myths and stereotypes, including the myth that sexual orientation or gender identity of LGBTQ+ victims and survivors is formed in response to the sexual abuse experienced as a child.
- LGBTQ+ victims and survivors experience distinct barriers to disclosing and reporting child sexual abuse. This has led to under-reporting of child sexual abuse by LGBTQ+ victims and survivors.
- Relevant support services are hard to find and LGBTQ+ victims and survivors often have to rely on personal recommendation rather than professional referral.

Selection criteria for investigations

35. The Inquiry selected situations suitable for investigation which fell within two categories:

- institution-specific, involving inquiries into particular institutions or types of institution; and

- thematic, concerning a series of broad areas where multiple institutions might have played a role in protecting children from abuse.

36. In selecting situations suitable for investigation, the Inquiry applied the following criteria:

- the situation appeared to the Inquiry to involve credible allegations of child sexual abuse in an institutional setting or by a person who has exploited an official position in order to perpetrate child sexual abuse;
- the institution(s) appeared to the Inquiry, on credible evidence, to have facilitated or failed to prevent child sexual abuse, whether through an act, policy or omission; or
- the institutions(s) or a person acting in an official capacity appeared to have failed to respond appropriately to allegations of child sexual abuse.

37. The Inquiry also selected situations which appeared:

- to be typical of a pattern of child sexual abuse occurring in the sector or context involved;
- to be practically capable of detailed examination through oral and written evidence;
- to involve no significant risk to the fairness and effectiveness of any ongoing police investigation or prosecution; and

- likely to result in currently relevant conclusions or give rise to relevant recommendations.

38. Throughout its work, the Inquiry also took account of the needs of particularly vulnerable children and those from socially excluded or minority groups.

A.3: Common themes

39. Over the course of the Inquiry's work, similar failings, problems, concerns and harms emerged. These have been grouped together into six common topics, experiences and themes:

- common experiences and the impact of child sexual abuse on victims and survivors;
- perpetrator behaviours;
- institutional or organisational failures;
- the role of the internet in facilitating abuse;
- wider societal issues; and
- the criminal justice system.

40. These common themes are distilled from the Inquiry's investigations, some of which stretched back over many years and others which were more contemporary. These subjects are important because they reveal similarities in impact, behaviour, practice and culture that together illustrate the very real challenges that victims and survivors have experienced over the years and, in some contexts, continue to face. These

findings go to the very core of the Inquiry's work and demonstrate how the breadth of the Terms of Reference has enabled the Inquiry to identify common features and parallels across a wide range of institutional and individual responses without necessitating an examination of each and every institution that cares for children.

41. A separate theme relating to criminal justice has been included because, throughout the duration of the Inquiry, witnesses and participants in the Truth Project have expressed concerns about the criminal justice system's efficiency and effectiveness.

Common experiences and the impact of child sexual abuse on victims and survivors

42. The impact of child sexual abuse cannot be overstated because many victims and survivors have experienced harm that has permeated many aspects of their lives. As the accounts set out in Victims and Survivors' Voices and the Inquiry's investigation reports reveal:

- effects of the child sexual abuse, both physical and emotional, were profound and lifelong;
- education, employment and career prospects were often irreparably damaged;

- stable, secure and long-term relationships were hard to achieve;
- sexual intimacy was often difficult;
- children who were ‘groomed’ through use of alcohol and drugs often acquired a long-term dependency or addiction;
- some victims and survivors were driven to self-harming behaviours by shame, guilt and embarrassment, and some were so affected that they tried to take their own lives;
- many victims and survivors of child sexual abuse that occurred in a religious context reported that it had led to a loss of faith or a loss of trust in a religious organisation; and
- some people from ethnic minority communities were either ostracised or chose to leave their family or local community after their child sexual abuse became known.

43. While each victim and survivor inevitably experienced sexual abuse that varied in its nature and in the settings and circumstances in which it was perpetrated, there were common features:

- child sexual abuse was often preceded or accompanied by threats, violence, cruelty and neglect;
- there was excessive corporal punishment in some institutions, including in Roman Catholic and other schools which the Inquiry examined,

custodial institutions and child migrant placements, which was often used as a means in itself of obtaining sexual gratification;

- many children experiencing sexual abuse in a 'closed environment' were captive victims with little scope for reporting abuse to a trusted adult;
- many did not disclose sexual abuse for fear of reprisals;
- victims received grudging and unsympathetic responses to disclosure;
- in many settings, compassion was extended to perpetrators but not to victims, with religious organisations in particular often displaying callous indifference to victims;
- abuse often involved deliberate humiliation of children;
- children in custodial institutions are amongst the most vulnerable in society;
- adult survivors of sexual abuse in custodial institutions in the 1960s described some of the worst abuse the Inquiry heard;
- the use of pain compliance on those aged 18 years or younger in custodial institutions was, and is, a form of physical abuse which contributed to a violent atmosphere in which sexual abuse thrived;
- children with disabilities were particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse; and

- issues with communication could make disclosing abuse more difficult, for example for non-verbal children or those with limited speech.

Perpetrator behaviours

44. The Inquiry has identified similarities in the ways perpetrators targeted and groomed their victims and committed sexual abuse:

- many perpetrators sexually abused more than one child, their offending spanned years, if not decades;
- isolating children from their carers and families in order to commit sexual abuse, for example taking them away for unsupervised trips and holidays, particularly those involving overnight stays;
- threatening or committing violence against a child to secure compliance with sexual abuse;
- some perpetrators were seen as sadistic and predatory by victims;
- identifying vulnerable children who were less likely to have the capacity or capability to complain or protest, including singling out children with disabilities who were unable to communicate what had happened to them;

- adopting a ruse: for example, perpetrators in a position of authority conducted medical examinations when unqualified to do so in order to sexually abuse a child;
- befriending the child's family and carers in order to gain access to the child and eliminate suspicion about the perpetrator's motives – for example, manipulating the situation so that the perpetrator gained access to children alone in their bedrooms;
- plying the child with alcohol, drugs, gifts and affection to create a false impression that the perpetrator was genuinely fond of the child;
- in religious settings, perpetrators were able to shelter behind the moral standing of the institution to deflect allegations, inhibit investigations and belittle survivors;
- posing as friends in online activity with children with the intention of securing indecent images of the child or meeting the child for the purpose of committing sexual abuse in person;
- children in poorer countries (although not limited to those places) were encouraged to live stream sexual abuse for payment – in some instances, perpetrators in England and in Wales offered to pay for the child's education as a means of persuading families to make their children available for such purposes; and

- some perpetrators in England and in Wales deliberately targeted countries where they believed they could sexually abuse children without fear of detection or prosecution by the authorities.

Institutional or organisational failures

45. The breadth of the Inquiry's work demonstrated many common failures and issues across a diverse range of institutional or organisational settings. These can be grouped into broad themes:

- failures of leadership;
- a lack of concern for the child's welfare; and
- inadequate, and sometimes wholly absent, child protection arrangements, with particular problems faced by those in residential care and foster care.

46. Where an allegation was reported to an institution, there were sometimes failures to respond appropriately, with allegations being ignored and not reported to the statutory agencies and records not being kept. Weaknesses in inspection and audit arrangements and redress schemes were also identified, along with the challenges posed by the growth in online-facilitated child sexual abuse.

Leadership, deference and accountability

- Institutions prioritised their own reputations, and those of individuals within them, above the protection of children.
- There were examples in the past of deeply flawed central and local government policies and practices which put political priorities before the welfare of children.
- Those who worked in statutory agencies in senior positions often showed deference to persons of prominence, such as councillors, Members of Parliament and leading clergy, when faced with investigating allegations of sexual abuse.
- Some councillors who were alerted to child sexual abuse ignored the abuse if it was politically inconvenient for them to acknowledge its existence.
- Political and sometimes personal allegiances meant that decision-making by councillors in individual cases was poor, prioritising the interests of staff over the welfare of children when allegations of child sexual abuse were made.

- Adherence to a particular grouping, often of long standing, led to an abuse of power and lack of accountability, and compromised child protection. This was particularly evident in religious organisations and political parties.
- Elected members, governors and senior people in many of the institutions studied by the Inquiry were rarely held accountable for the sexual abuse of children which occurred on their watch, sometimes over decades.
- In the religious settings examined, deference and obedience could prevent or inhibit reporting of allegations and contribute to the abuse of power by those exercising religious leadership or authority.
- Power imbalances were exploited in some settings, including children's homes and custodial institutions, where some staff treated children as 'undeserving' and not worthy of protection from sexual abuse.
- Victims of child sexual exploitation were frequently seen by police and other professionals as making a choice – such as to be 'child prostitutes' who 'consented' to their own abuse – and so their needs were not prioritised and the criminality was not addressed.

- Victim-blaming language was in evidence in almost every institution and was largely unchallenged. In many cases, the Inquiry concluded that there were underlying problems with values and attitudes of those charged with the protection of children.

Children's welfare

- In some areas, the treatment by staff of children in care who were from ethnic minority communities was racist, hostile and abusive. It showed little sensitivity to particular cultural needs such as diet, hair care and clothing.
- Across some institutions there was little recognition of the heightened vulnerability of children with disabilities to being sexually abused.
- In some settings, the external physical environment presented opportunities for sexual abuse which institutions did not monitor or supervise. This included where extensive grounds and outbuildings were frequently misused for sexual activity with children.
- For years, harmful sexual behaviour amongst children took place in residential homes and schools and was left unchecked through a failure by staff to understand its potentially harmful effects.

- Harmful sexual behaviour was often seen as ‘teenage experimentation’ without any victim, despite being accompanied on many occasions by bullying and coercion, frequently of younger children.

Systems and processes

- Most religious organisations examined in the Inquiry’s investigation into child protection in religious organisations and settings had inadequate child protection policies and procedures in place. In some, there were none at all.
- Those in leadership and senior positions assumed responsibility for determining how the institution should respond to an allegation of abuse when lacking the competence to do so.
- There was a tendency in some institutions to move alleged perpetrators from one workplace to another without investigating the allegations or reporting the allegations to the authorities.
- Across some religious institutions and schools, there was a reluctance to refer allegations to the statutory agencies.
- Many institutions knowingly retained in their employment adults who posed a risk to children. They allowed adults who were suspected of

child sexual abuse to leave their employment and sexually offend elsewhere, without alerting any known employers.

- Within some local authorities, trade unions appeared to prioritise their members' individual interests over the protection of children. They were sometimes supported in this by elected members, who failed to take decisions to dismiss individuals who were later convicted.
- Too often, people classed as 'volunteers' were allowed open access to children in care without any vetting, thus creating opportunities for potential child abusers.

Residential care and foster care

- There is a national shortage of suitable residential placements for children who are at risk of, or have experienced, child sexual exploitation.
- Children placed alongside much older children in various settings were left exposed to abuse, with little staff or carer supervision.
- Some children's homes were not a safe environment for children. Staff were threatening and violent, physical abuse was commonplace and children were frightened.

- Children should have been nurtured, cared for and protected, but some councils and other care providers exposed them to sexual abuse perpetrated primarily by predatory residential staff and foster carers.
- In some instances, a sexualised culture existed in residential homes, with staff behaving inappropriately towards children, which paved the way for sexual abuse.
- Residential care in the 1970s and 1980s carried little priority with senior managers, even when they were made aware of escalating numbers of allegations of sexual abuse.
- Some children's homes where sexual abuse had been rife should have been closed sooner than they were.
- Standards of conduct and child protection procedures were frequently put in place, but staff were rarely trained in their use and action was not taken against those who did not comply. Staff ignored these requirements with impunity.
- In the 1980s, there was evidence of failures to vet foster carers properly for their suitability to look after children and failures to carry out criminal records checks.

- When allegations of sexual abuse were made about foster carers, some councils were too willing to take the side of the foster carer and disbelieve the children.
- The use of unregulated placements for older children in care placed some of them at heightened risk of sexual abuse, particularly of child sexual exploitation.

Responses of institutions to allegations

- In close-knit communities and hierarchical institutions – such as educational facilities run by monastic orders, boarding and residential schools, and custodial institutions – normal scrutiny from parents, friends and visitors was restricted.
- Complaints of abuse made by children were rarely listened to or responded to with empathy, concern or action. They were dismissed out of hand without investigation.
- Some institutions went to extreme lengths to avoid contact with, or investigation by, the statutory agencies when allegations of abuse were made and parents were not always informed.
- Some institutions sought to excuse or explain perpetrators' behaviour by spurious reference to 'the standards of the day'.

- The statutory agencies did not always share intelligence and other information about perpetrators with other agencies and organisations.

Data collection and records

- At institutional and national level, poor data collection has led to an incomplete picture of the nature and scale of child sexual abuse and exploitation. Many institutions, including religious institutions and schools, kept no records of allegations of abuse and actions taken. This is one of the reasons that the true scale of sexual abuse of children is likely to be much greater in all settings than has been uncovered by evidence to the Inquiry.
- Records were often incomplete. Some were lost or destroyed, including in some cases through deliberate action, thereby concealing potentially criminal activity. This included personnel records of alleged and known abusers.
- The introduction of document retention policies has improved the availability of records, but access to records by victims is generally a long, complex and often unsatisfactory process.
- The police and social services did not record the ethnicity of victims and alleged perpetrators, as evidenced in the case studies included in the *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*.

Review, audit and inspection

- The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) and other inspectorates, particularly the Social Services Inspectorate, on occasions did not do enough to identify the serious weaknesses in the protection of children in some of the care and educational settings the Inquiry examined. The Independent Schools Inspectorate also had a mixed record in their scrutiny of institutions where sexual abuse of children was taking place.
- Over several years, there were too few multi-agency safeguarding inspections, as opposed to single-agency inspections. These could have provided a more holistic view of the strengths and weaknesses of child protection within an institution, from a range of professional perspectives.
- Many institutions commissioned external reviews of their child protection systems. These reviews identified weaknesses and left those in charge in no doubt that children were at risk of sexual abuse, or that it had already occurred. These findings and recommendations were infrequently acted upon fully or at all.

Apologies, support and redress

- The avenues for redress which the Inquiry examined did not often provide remedies which satisfied the need for accountability and reparations for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.
- In order to obtain a legal remedy, victims and survivors often had to resort to civil litigation, some of which spanned over a decade.
- In civil proceedings, the imposition of a time limit led to injustice for many child sexual abuse victims, for whom it could take years before they felt able to discuss their abuse. This time limit continues to pose problems in current civil claims.
- Inadequate provision of support and counselling for those who experienced sexual abuse remains a serious concern for victims and survivors. This is particularly the case for children, for whom few specialist resources exist and a much more child-centred approach is required.
- The quality and authenticity of apologies from institutions was extremely variable and frequently added to the trauma experienced by victims.
- Historically, some insurers confirmed that they required institutions not to make apologies or offer support of any kind to victims, for fear

of this being interpreted as an admission of liability. If institutions did make apologies in these circumstances, they risked invalidating their insurance.

The internet

- The number of child victims of online-facilitated sexual abuse and the true scale of offending are likely to be far higher than the reported cases.
- Some of this offending involves levels of depravity, such as the rape and violent abuse of babies and toddlers, on an unprecedented scale.
- Internet companies failed to demonstrate that they knew the scale of underage internet use.
- The live streaming of abuse affects children all over the world, including in the UK, the majority of whom are girls aged between seven and 13 years.
- Industry witnesses repeatedly asserted their companies' commitment to preventing child sexual abuse, but their responses at times seemed reactive and intended to counteract adverse media reporting and reputational damage.
- The internet, while bringing great benefits to society, has also been a vehicle to capitalise on opportunities to commit child sexual abuse

through the production and distribution of indecent images of children, grooming and the live streaming of abuse.

- There are often challenges for parents and carers in understanding and tackling online harms to their children, particularly given the speed of technological developments.
- The trade in indecent imagery and live streaming the sexual abuse of children and babies has proliferated to industrial scales and represents a threat to children around the world.

Wider societal issues

- Child sexual abuse and exploitation has been, and still is, under-reported.
- Some parents of some sexually abused children seemed reluctant to accept the possibility that sexual abuse had taken place because the institution associated with the perpetrator was trusted and respected, as were the perpetrators themselves.
- Where the parents were closely associated with an institution, such as a school, on occasions their allegiance to that institution was a more powerful influence than the welfare of their children, even in circumstances where they suspected or were told that the abuse had occurred.

- Child sexual abuse has often been met with embarrassment and fear, leading to a culture of silence when confronted with the reality of that abuse.
- Many in the general public, as well as in the police and other statutory agencies, did not believe children's reports of sexual abuse.
- Sometimes children were considered to be responsible for the sexual abuse that occurred because they had made so-called 'lifestyle' choices.
- Awareness of the scale and scope of child sexual abuse tends to be underestimated throughout society and more needs to be done to increase awareness across England and Wales.
- The trafficking of children for the purposes of child sexual abuse and exploitation is a growing concern.

The criminal justice system

- For some years, the criminal law perpetuated myths about children. It was not until 1988 that the uncorroborated evidence of a child was admissible in evidence.
- On occasions, police forces failed to investigate allegations of child sexual abuse properly, or at all. Allegations were not always treated seriously.

- Links between perpetrators were not always explored during police investigations, so the full picture of child sexual abuse was not identified.
- Hierarchical structures in police forces prevented officers from raising concerns about failures to investigate properly.
- On some occasions, officers expressed prejudicial views about children, particularly about children in the care of the local authority. Officers often ignored the children's complaints and the children were forced to remain in the place where the sexual abuse had taken place.
- Young people, particularly those experiencing sexual exploitation, were sometimes arrested by the police and criminalised for offences arising from their exploitation, while the exploiters remained at liberty to continue offending.
- Intelligence opportunities were lost when some police forces failed to interview missing children thoroughly when they returned or were brought home.
- The data collected by criminal justice agencies did not identify the scale and extent of child sexual exploitation by networks. In the areas under scrutiny, data collection was generally poor, so the authorities could not identify cases for investigation.

- Some police forces had merged analyses of child sexual exploitation with child criminal exploitation, leading to potential failures to distinguish sexual exploitation cases from other crimes.
- Disruption tactics to prevent perpetrators from committing sexual offences against children were underused and poorly recorded, leaving police forces without reliable data to assess the effectiveness of such tactics.
- Undue deference has from time to time been shown to people of prominence by prosecution authorities, particularly in relation to politicians. Some people of prominence were not prosecuted in court, sometimes despite the weight of evidence.
- On occasions, the police or the Crown Prosecution Service wrongly concluded that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute for offences relating to child sexual abuse, on the basis of an assessment of the child's evidence that could not be justified.
- Delays in investigations and criminal proceedings appeared to be endemic within the system such that adult survivors of child sexual abuse had to wait years before their case was finalised.

- Compensation for victims of child sexual abuse was unlikely to come from a convicted defendant. It was not always easy to access or secure payments from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme. Some restrictions on claims (for example, time limits) disadvantaged some applicants whose applications were rejected on these grounds.

Child sexual abuse today

47. Many of the failures described above were prevalent over several decades. More recently, some of the failures have been mitigated, in part, by improvements in prevention, identification, detection and public awareness. Other threats have also emerged, which are addressed in Part J.

48. One of those threats is the reported growth of incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation worldwide. This Inquiry is one of a number that have been, or are in the process of being, conducted across the globe, including in Australia and the Republic of Ireland.

49. There are two specific global issues, however, which the Inquiry notes have had a deleterious impact on responses to child sexual abuse.

49.1. The first is the response to the global financial crisis from 2008 onwards, which led to significant reductions in funding of public services. These services are central to effective

responses to child sexual abuse, and include the police, children's social care, the Crown Prosecution Service, health and education. The financial crisis also directly affected the voluntary and charity sectors, which mainly rely on funding from public services, via the commissioning process and direct grants. At the same time, the demand for children's social care has increased significantly. A National Audit Office report in 2018 noted that local authorities' spending power had fallen by 28.6 percent since 2010. However, between 2010 and 2020, child protection referrals increased by 125 percent and the number of looked after children increased by 24 percent.

49.2. The second global issue is the COVID-19 pandemic. There is clear evidence from national and international organisations of the increase in child sexual abuse (and increased domestic abuse) which has taken place since March 2020. This is generally attributed to stress on families from several different sources, such as financial pressures, school closures and stay-at-home requirements. There has also been an increase in online child sexual abuse during the pandemic. Statutory services, particularly those with a protective role such as social workers and district nurses, have also been affected, with the restrictions in contact with children and adults. Virtual visits and doorstep visits

have had to take the place of in-person visits for much of the time, to prevent the spread of the virus. This is very likely to have led to an incomplete picture of risk to children, as well as presenting ethical challenges to many child protection professionals. A relaxing of COVID-19 restrictions should not, however, be taken to indicate that there will be a consequential reduction in the scale of offending or risk of harm to children. As set out in Part B of this report, the prevalence of child sexual abuse continues to rise.

50. This report is structured thematically and builds on the entirety of the Inquiry's work, including previously published reports. It seeks to draw together what the Inquiry has learned and, unlike previous reports, it is focussed on the future and the ways in which institutions and organisations can and must improve in order to keep children safe. Footnotes are provided to assist the reader in identifying where further information might be found. While inevitably institution or investigation-specific, the footnotes refer to the Inquiry's previous conclusions at the time of the relevant investigation to illustrate the issues covered in this report. These examples are not exhaustive and so should be read in conjunction with the Inquiry's previous publications.

Part B

Child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse

B.1: Introduction

1. Children are sexually abused every day in England and Wales.

1.1. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), an estimated 3.1 million adults in England and Wales have been sexually abused before the age of 16.⁵⁵⁹

1.2. One estimate suggests that the number of children abused in a single year is around 500,000.⁵⁶⁰

1.3. Other estimates suggest that around 1 in 6 girls and 1 in 20 boys are sexually abused before the age of 16.⁵⁶¹

1.4. Over 7,000 children were referred to sexual assault referral centres (SARCs) in England during 2020/21, 20 percent more than in the previous year. This equates to nearly 20 referrals each day. Half of these referrals were for children aged 14 to 17, five out of six of whom were female.⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁹ [INQ006739_003](#)

⁵⁶⁰ [INQ006871_010](#)

⁵⁶¹ [INQ006613_006](#)

⁵⁶² [INQ006871_007](#)

1.5. There has also been a significant rise in online-facilitated child sexual abuse in England and Wales, as well as globally, and in the estimated number of perpetrators who pose a sexual risk to children.

2. As the Inquiry has noted in its investigation reports, the true scale of offending and the number of children abused are likely to be greater than is presently known. Limitations with current methods of data collection have hampered the Inquiry's ability to conduct a realistic assessment of how many of the 12.7 million children in England and Wales have been sexually abused, or are at risk of sexual abuse, by whom and in what settings.⁵⁶³ The current data do not distinguish between familial abuse and abuse committed in an institutional context (the latter being the focus of this Inquiry). Little is known about the ethnicity of victims and survivors and perpetrators.

3. As set out in the UK government's *Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy* (2021):

“Over 83,000 child sexual abuse offences (including obscene publications) were recorded by police in the year ending March 2020, an increase of approximately 267%

⁵⁶³ INQ006948_007

since 2013. Of these, around 58,000 would be considered contact offences, which have increased by 202% in the same period.”⁵⁶⁴

The Strategy recognised that these figures do not include certain sexual offences committed against 16 and 17-year-olds, such as rape, as well as sexual assault committed against children over the age of 13. As an indication, the Strategy noted that exploratory data published by the ONS in January 2020 suggested, where it was possible to identify that the victim or survivor was a child, that there were approximately 73,200 child sexual abuse offences for the year ending March 2019.⁵⁶⁵

4. This significant gap in understanding the scale of child sexual abuse impacts detrimentally on the ability of statutory agencies and other institutions to respond comprehensively to the level and nature of the threat to children. Different forms of child sexual abuse require different institutional responses. The Inquiry therefore recommends improved data collection by key statutory agencies.

⁵⁶⁴ [INQ006448_018](#)

⁵⁶⁵ [INQ006448_018](#)

B.2: The nature and characteristics of child sexual abuse

5. In addition to the accounts recorded in Victims and Survivors' Voices, the Inquiry heard evidence of the sickening, painful and degrading sexual abuse of children.⁵⁶⁶ Each of these acts is a crime. Chief Constable Simon Bailey, at that time the National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Child Protection and Abuse Investigations and now retired, told the Inquiry that the police were encountering:

“levels of depravity that are – if they could get worse, are getting worse. We are seeing babies being subjects of sexual abuse.”⁵⁶⁷

6. Some victims were forced to repeatedly perform sex acts, including acts of mutual and group masturbation, or were sexually assaulted and

⁵⁶⁶ *Interim Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse*, Chapter 3.1, p4; see Annex 4; *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Pen Portraits (CS-A12, CS-A371, CS-A372, CS-A435 and Daisy); *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports*, IICSA, June 2020, pp3–4, 54

⁵⁶⁷ *Simon Bailey 20 May 2019 113/20-23*

raped as forms of humiliation. Sexual abuse was often accompanied by extreme violence and acts of sadistic nature.⁵⁶⁸

7. As the UK government's April 2019 *Online Harms White Paper* observed, "*The sheer scale of CSEA [child sexual exploitation and abuse] online is horrifying*".⁵⁶⁹ Some child sexual abuse is live streamed. The sums paid to watch and, in some cases, to direct live streamed sexual abuse of children can often be trivial, facilitating the engagement of would-be offenders in child sexual abuse on a significant scale. One seven-year-old victim in the Philippines was paid US\$6 to perform online sexual acts on a webcam for foreigners

⁵⁶⁸ *Child Migration Programmes Investigation Report*, Pen Portraits (Michael O'Donoghue), Part B.2 para 4; *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Pen Portraits (Peter Robson, CI-A17, CI-A30); *Ealing Abbey and St Benedict's School Investigation Report*, Pen Portraits (RC-A8), Part C.3 para 81

⁵⁶⁹ [INQ004232_016](#)

three times a day.⁵⁷⁰ The Inquiry is also aware of a case where a perpetrator paid just 93 pence to watch a girl being sexually abused.⁵⁷¹

The impact of sexual abuse

8. Some children experience acute physical injuries, often, but not exclusively, as a result of penetrative abuse.⁵⁷² Sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy are an additional risk to an abused child's health.⁵⁷³

9. Victims and survivors also experience emotional distress, including fear, anger, sadness and self-blame, manifesting itself in panic attacks, flashbacks, anxiety and signs of post-traumatic stress disorder.⁵⁷⁴ Some engage in self-harming behaviours, such as cutting, hitting and burning

⁵⁷⁰ *Children Outside the United Kingdom Investigation Report*, Pen Portrait (Lorna); *The Internet Investigation Report*, Part E.1 para 4

⁵⁷¹ *The Internet Investigation Report*, Part E.1 para 4

⁵⁷² *The impacts of child sexual abuse: A rapid evidence assessment*, IICSA, July 2017, Chapter 4 para 4.2

⁵⁷³ *The impacts of child sexual abuse: A rapid evidence assessment*, IICSA, July 2017, p42

⁵⁷⁴ *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Pen portraits (RS-A299), Part G.2

their bodies.⁵⁷⁵ Some children were so distressed that they tried to take their own lives.⁵⁷⁶ Longer-term physical and mental health problems were also common, impacting upon an individual's quality of life. Depression and anxiety disorders were particularly prevalent.⁵⁷⁷ There are often difficulties developmentally (including educational

⁵⁷⁵ *The impacts of child sexual abuse: A rapid evidence assessment*, IICSA, July 2017, p66; *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Part E.4 para 45; *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports*, IICSA, June 2020, p54; *The Roman Catholic Church Investigation Report*, Part B.1 para 3.6

⁵⁷⁶ *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Pen Portraits (CS-A12, CS-A371, CS-A372, CS-A435 and Daisy); *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports*, IICSA, June 2020, p54; *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of religious institutions*, IICSA, May 2019, pp49–50; *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in healthcare contexts*, IICSA, December 2020, p50; *“People don’t talk about it”: Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities*, IICSA, June 2020, p78

⁵⁷⁷ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of children’s homes and residential care*, IICSA, November 2019, pp70–71

achievement and prospects on the labour market) and in relationships (both familial and later in life).⁵⁷⁸ Some victims and survivors adopted coping mechanisms as a way of dealing with the impacts of the abuse, some of which were disruptive or harmful.⁵⁷⁹

Key characteristics

10. While there is no stereotypical victim of child sexual abuse, there are a number of characteristics that may make some children more vulnerable to sexual abuse. These include age, sex and ethnicity, which are examined further below.

11. There are also a number of other characteristics that may make some children more vulnerable to sexual abuse.

⁵⁷⁸ *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, IICSA, February 2022, pp30–31; *The impacts of child sexual abuse: A rapid evidence assessment*, IICSA, July 2017, p82; *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in sports*, IICSA, June 2020, pp55–57; *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in custodial institutions*, IICSA, April 2020, pp7, 53–55

⁵⁷⁹ *The impacts of child sexual abuse: A rapid evidence assessment*, IICSA, July 2017, pp69–81; *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Pen Portraits (CS-A12, CS-A371, CS-A372, CS-A435 and Daisy)

11.1. Those who had experienced childhood neglect were nearly five times as likely to have experienced child sexual abuse as those who had not.⁵⁸⁰

11.2. Surveys also suggest that children who lived in a care home were nearly four times as likely to have experienced child sexual abuse. As at March 2021, there were 80,850 children in care in England and 7,263 children in care in Wales.⁵⁸¹ Children in care are some of the most vulnerable children in society, due to both the experiences and situations that led to them being placed in care and certain factors associated with being in care, such as going missing from care and being placed a long way from home. As set out in the *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, in England in the year to March 2018, child sexual exploitation was identified in 3,160 assessments for children in care. This equated to 16 percent of all the assessments which identified child sexual exploitation.⁵⁸²

⁵⁸⁰ [INQ006938_006](#)

⁵⁸¹ [INQ006961_003](#); [INQ006962_001](#)

⁵⁸² [Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report, Part D.2](#)

11.3. In surveys, disabled participants were twice as likely to describe experiencing child sexual abuse as non-disabled participants.⁵⁸³ Of those who participated in the Truth Project, a higher proportion of individuals who reported other forms of abuse and neglect were disabled.⁵⁸⁴ As noted in the Inquiry's *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, research indicated that children with disabilities were at an increased risk of being sexually exploited.⁵⁸⁵

11.4. Research indicates that children who are lonely or socially isolated may be more likely to be targeted, whether online or offline, by perpetrators. In relation to online offending, children who are exploring their sexuality, particularly LGBTQ+ children, may also be more vulnerable to abuse.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸³ [INQ006938_006](#)

⁵⁸⁴ [Victims and Survivors' Voices, Part C.1](#)

⁵⁸⁵ [Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report, Part D.4](#)

⁵⁸⁶ [Rapid Evidence Assessment: Characteristics and vulnerabilities of victims of online-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation, IICSA, January 2018, pp17, 48–49](#)

Sex

12. Both girls and boys can be victims of child sexual abuse. The data show that a greater proportion of victims are girls, but there is evidence to suggest that boys may be less likely than girls to report sexual abuse in childhood.⁵⁸⁷ In the year ending March 2021, of those children on child protection plans in England under the primary category of sexual abuse, 59 percent were girls and 41 percent were boys.⁵⁸⁸ Police recorded crimes for the same period showed that the number of rapes and sexual assault offences of under 13s recorded on girls far exceeded the same offences against boys.⁵⁸⁹ The Truth Project data recorded that 70 percent of victims and survivors were females.⁵⁹⁰ In relation to reported online-facilitated child sexual abuse, girls are more likely to be the victims.⁵⁹¹

13. The overwhelming majority of evidence heard by the Inquiry related to male perpetrators of child sexual abuse. Male perpetrators featured in 89

⁵⁸⁷ [INQ006448_020](#)

⁵⁸⁸ [INQ006871_016](#)

⁵⁸⁹ [INQ006871_024](#)

⁵⁹⁰ See [data compendium](#) to this report.

⁵⁹¹ [Rapid Evidence Assessment: Characteristics and vulnerabilities of victims of online-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation](#), IICSA, January 2018, p9

percent of accounts given to the Truth Project and studies examined by the Inquiry's Rapid Evidence Assessment found that perpetrators of online-facilitated child sexual abuse are "*mostly men*".⁵⁹² This accords with official data showing that, where the sex of the alleged perpetrator was recorded, most individuals convicted of child sexual abuse (98 percent) were males.⁵⁹³

14. In its 2021 annual report, the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) noted that where an offender is visible in child sexual abuse material "*they are most often a man*". However, over the course of a two-month study in 2021, the IWF analysed the prevalence of female perpetrators in child sexual abuse material seen by the IWF. It encountered images showing a female abuser "*on average 13 times per working day. In half of the images and videos (49%) showing a female abuser, she was abusing a boy*".⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹² See data compendium to this report; *Rapid Evidence Assessment: Characteristics and vulnerabilities of victims of online-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation*, IICSA, January 2018, pp9–10

⁵⁹³ [INQ006871_033](#)

⁵⁹⁴ [INQ006950_002](#)

Age

15. Children of all ages are at risk of abuse but younger children are at greater risk, as shown below.

15.1. For participants in the Truth Project, 79 percent of the victims and survivors were aged 11 or under at the time the abuse began.

Table B.1: *Truth Project data – age of the victim and survivor when sexual abuse began*

0–3 years old	12%	686
4–7 years old	35%	1,936
8–11 years old	32%	1,745
12–15 years old	18%	1,006
16–17 years old	2%	116
Total		5,489

Source: See [data compendium to this report](#)

15.2. This is also reflected in the age ranges of those children in England in the year ending 31 March 2021 who were placed on child protection plans because they were judged to be at significant risk of sexual harm. A child protection plan is a written record for parents, carers and professionals which sets out how the child’s welfare will be checked, what changes are needed to reduce the risk to the child and what support will be offered to the family.

Table B.2: *Department for Education data – age of children on child protection plans at significant risk of sexual harm, in the year ending 31 March 2021*

0–4 years old	26%	510
5–9 years old	27%	520
10–15 years old	39%	750
16–17 years old	8%	150
Total		1,930

Source: See [data compendium to this report](#)

16. Online-facilitated abuse involves ever younger victims. Some online sexual abuse forums require the perpetrator to prove that they have access to or can produce newly created child sexual abuse material. One site on the dark web required its subscribers to upload 20 newly created images of child sexual abuse or a two-minute video of infant or toddler abuse, each month.⁵⁹⁵

17. In relation to other forms of child sexual abuse, some child sexual abuse offences specifically refer to a ‘child under 16’ or a ‘child under 13’ and so it is possible to ascertain the number of police-recorded offences involving children under those ages, as discussed below. However, the data do not provide the age of the victims at the time of the sexual abuse.

⁵⁹⁵ *The Internet Investigation Report, Part B.1 para 5*

18. Statistics recording the age of perpetrators are primarily based on criminal justice agency data which record the age of defendants proceeded against for child sexual abuse offences (Figure B.1). As demonstrated, the number of adult defendants in each age bracket has remained consistently stable. However, the data do not identify the age of the defendant at the time of the commission of the offence, which is a key consideration when analysing trends in cases of both recent and non-recent child sexual abuse. The data also suggest that a relatively low proportion of those defendants were aged under 18.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁶ [INQ006871_032](#)

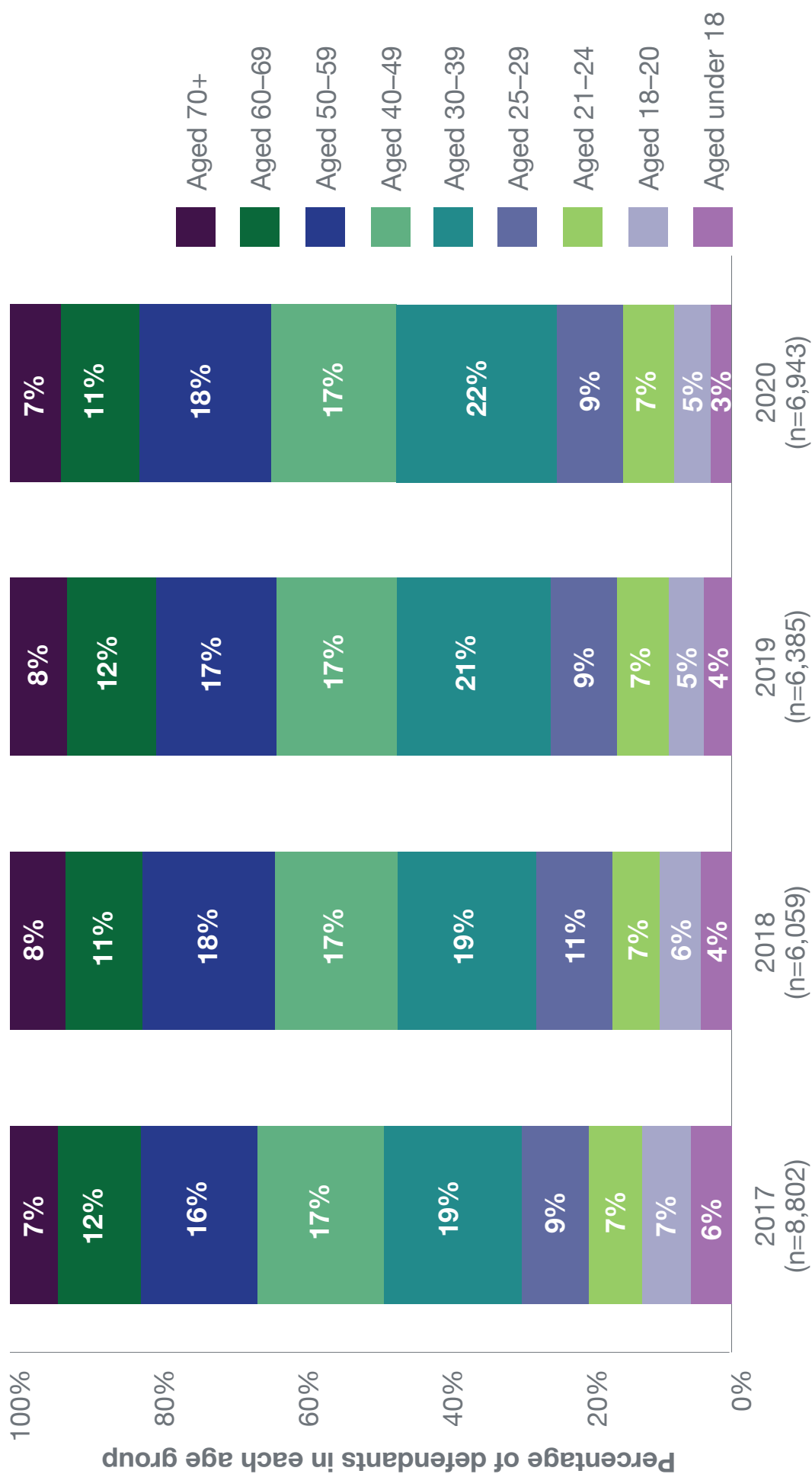


Figure B.1: Defendants proceeded against for child sexual abuse offences, by age, 2017–2020, England and Wales

Source: Child sexual abuse in 2020/21: Trends in official data, Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, p32

Ethnicity

19. Accurate data on the ethnicity of victims and perpetrators play an important part in enhancing understanding of child sexual abuse and the context in which such abuse occurs. The data assist the relevant statutory agencies to target resources appropriately, including, for example, enabling the police to engage with communities where child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation occur. Victims and survivors may require culturally sensitive support from the statutory authorities.

20. However, data recording the ethnicity of victims and survivors are not easily available. As set out in the Inquiry's *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, there were "widespread failures" to record data about the ethnicity of victims in six case study areas, resulting in the police and other agencies being "unable to identify local patterns and trends of child

sexual exploitation in respect of ethnicity".⁵⁹⁷ The CSA Centre notes that *"it is common for children's ethnicity not to be recorded in agency data"*.⁵⁹⁸

21. Data relating to the ethnicity of perpetrators are also lacking. In the Inquiry's *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, the six case study areas also failed to properly record the ethnicity of perpetrators:

*"Many of the high-profile child sexual exploitation prosecutions have involved groups of men from minority ethnic communities. This has led to polarised debate about whether there is any link between ethnicity and child sexual exploitation networks. Poor or non-existent data collection makes it impossible to know whether any particular ethnic group is over-represented as perpetrators of child sexual exploitation by networks."*⁵⁹⁹

22. Analysing any pattern or trends in respect of the ethnicity of victims and survivors or perpetrators is difficult due to the paucity of this

⁵⁹⁷ *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Part H.4

⁵⁹⁸ *INQ006938_009*

⁵⁹⁹ *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Executive summary, p6

data. As considered further below, the government recognises that current methods of data collection are “*inadequate*” and that:

*“More robust data collection on characteristics, as well as further analysis of this data, is therefore needed to better understand offenders and victims because community, cultural, and other factors are clearly relevant to understanding and tackling offending.”*⁶⁰⁰

B.3: The scale of child sexual abuse

23. As the UK government has acknowledged in its *Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy* (2021):

*“it is difficult to truly understand the scale of offending and how many victims and survivors remain unidentified because of under-reporting, under-identification of victims and survivors by agencies, and a lack of robust survey data.”*⁶⁰¹

For these reasons, the Inquiry agrees that it is difficult to measure accurately the scale of child sexual abuse in England and Wales. The Inquiry is in no doubt, however, that the scale of abuse and exploitation is considerably greater than is currently

⁶⁰⁰ [INQ006448_040](#)

⁶⁰¹ [INQ006448_020](#) para 48

recorded by the statutory agencies. This was a conclusion in nearly every investigation conducted by the Inquiry.

Data in relation to physical or contact sexual abuse

24. One recent estimate – described as “*conservative*” – has suggested that around 500,000 children are abused in a single year.⁶⁰²

25. There is no consistent approach to the recording of data, including, at its most basic, the use of different reporting periods. Some data refer to the financial year, other data to the calendar year or a different timeframe.

25.1. In the year ending September 2021, police forces recorded a total of 67,675 sexual offences against children.⁶⁰³ This figure is based on analysing police recorded crime figures where offences include reference to the victim’s age, including some specific child sexual abuse offences where the child is under 13 or under 16 years old. However, this may not record all child sexual abuse offences. For example, there is no specific offence code for sexual assault where the victim is aged over 13 but is under 16 years old.

⁶⁰² [INQ006871__010](#)

⁶⁰³ See [data compendium](#) to this report.

25.2. In the year ending December 2020, there were nearly 950 prosecutions for raping a child aged under 13 or under 16 years old, just under 1,000 prosecutions for sexual assaults on a child under 13 years old and more than 1,470 prosecutions for sexual activity with a child under 13 or under 16 years old.⁶⁰⁴

25.3. Local authority data for England record the primary reason why children are made the subject of a child protection plan. In 2019/20, 2,600 children in England were placed on child protection plans under the primary category of sexual abuse.⁶⁰⁵

25.4. These figures for children subject to child protection plans are comparatively low when compared with the assessments conducted by children's services which show an increase in identification of child sexual abuse and exploitation as a risk factor. In the year ending March 2020, child sexual abuse was identified as a risk factor in 29,640 assessments and child sexual exploitation in 16,830 assessments.⁶⁰⁶

26. As a result of the lack of a coherent set of data, it is difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of the scale of child sexual abuse

⁶⁰⁴ See [data compendium](#) to this report.

⁶⁰⁵ [INQ006938_015-016](#)

⁶⁰⁶ See [data compendium](#) to this report.

in circumstances where, as demonstrated by the Inquiry's work, sexual abuse and the estimated number of perpetrators continue to rise.

Data relating to online-facilitated child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse material online

27. The proliferation in online child sexual abuse material is of significant concern. In the calendar year ending 2020, the IWF processed over 153,000 reports containing child sexual abuse imagery or UK-hosted non-photographic child sexual abuse imagery. The figures rose again in the year ending 2021, with more than 250,000 URLs (Uniform Resource Locators) confirmed to contain images or videos of child sexual abuse.⁶⁰⁷ A URL is the specific location where a file is saved online. Some URLs can contain thousands of images and videos.

⁶⁰⁷ [INQ006684_002](#)

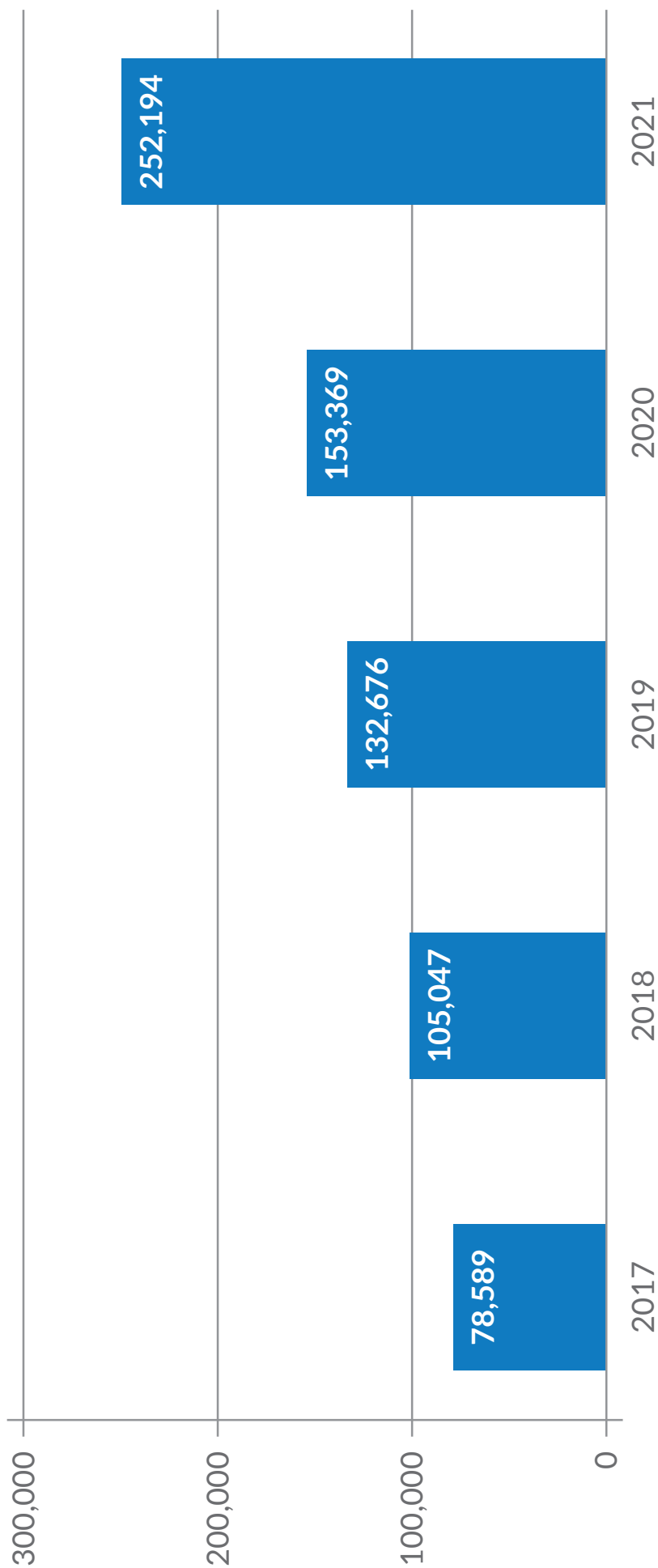


Figure B.2: Number of reports of webpages assessed as containing child sexual abuse images, from 2017 to 2021

Source: See data compendium to this report

28. The IWF noted year-on-year increases in reports of webpages that were found to contain child sexual abuse imagery between 2017 and 2021.⁶⁰⁸ In particular, the number of reports of webpages containing self-generated imagery (a naked or partially naked image of a child taken by that child) increased almost 13-fold from nearly 13,700 in 2017 to over 182,000 in 2021 (Figure B.3).

⁶⁰⁸ [INQ006648_002; IWF000024](#)

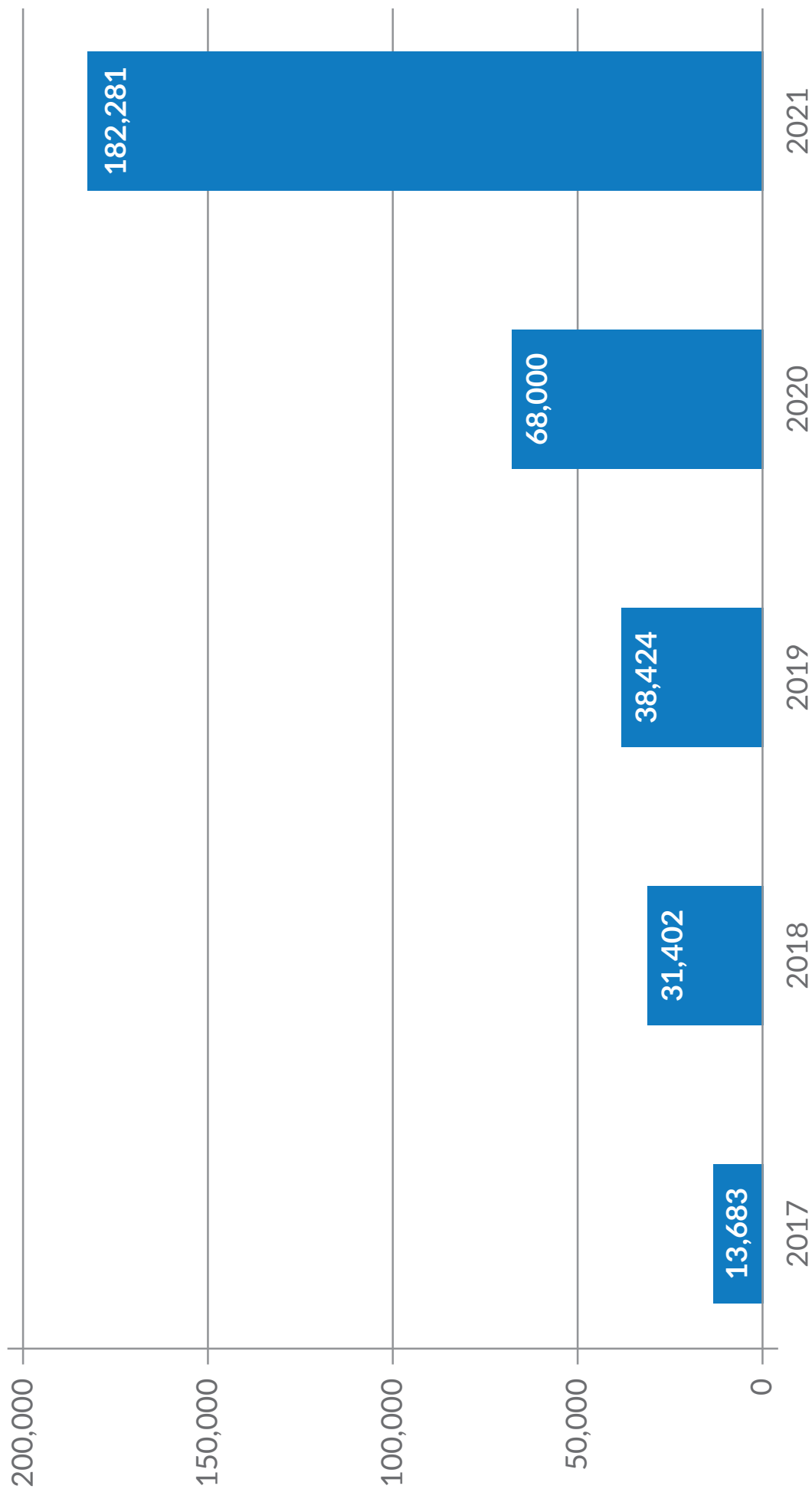


Figure B.3: Number of webpages containing self-generated child sexual abuse images, from 2017 to 2021

Source: See [data compendium to this report](#)

29. There were sharp increases in self-generated images depicting 7 to 10-year-olds and in particular 11 to 13-year-olds (Figure B.4, in which ‘other’ relates to children for whom the specific age range could not be identified). Some self-generated imagery involved perpetrators encouraging children to involve their brother or sister in the abuse.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁹ [INQ006684_002](#); [INQ006651](#); [INQ006652_002](#)

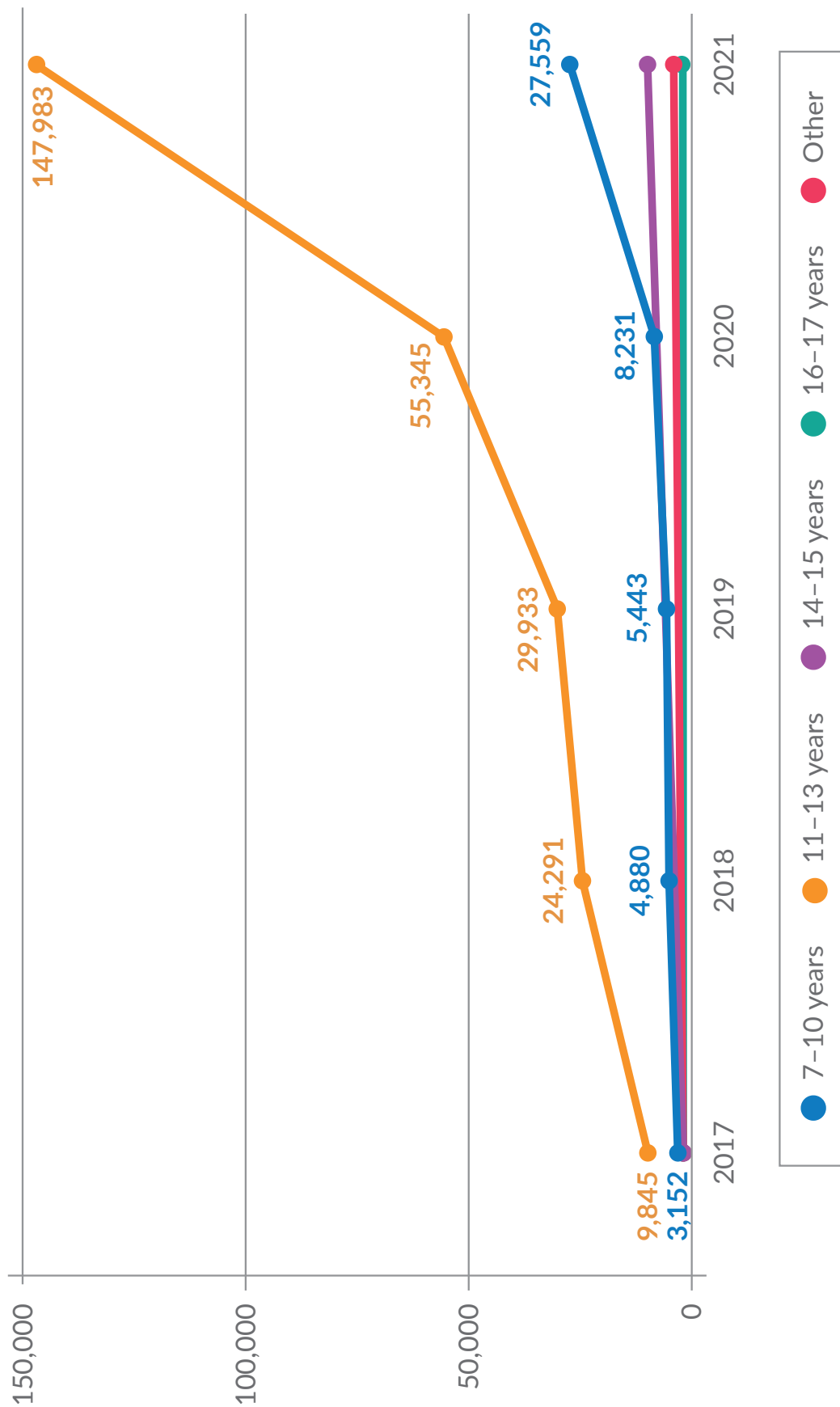


Figure B.4: Reports assessed as self-generated child sexual abuse images, from 2017 to 2021, by age of victim

Source: See [data compendium to this report](#)

Data relating to perpetrators

30. It is also difficult to establish the number of perpetrators who sexually abuse children.

31. Official data state that in the year ending December 2020, 4,649 individuals were convicted of child sexual abuse offences (Figure B.5).⁶¹⁰ This figure also shows a decline in the number of prosecutions since 2016 (the criminal justice response is examined in further detail in Part G).

⁶¹⁰ *See [data compendium to this report](#).*

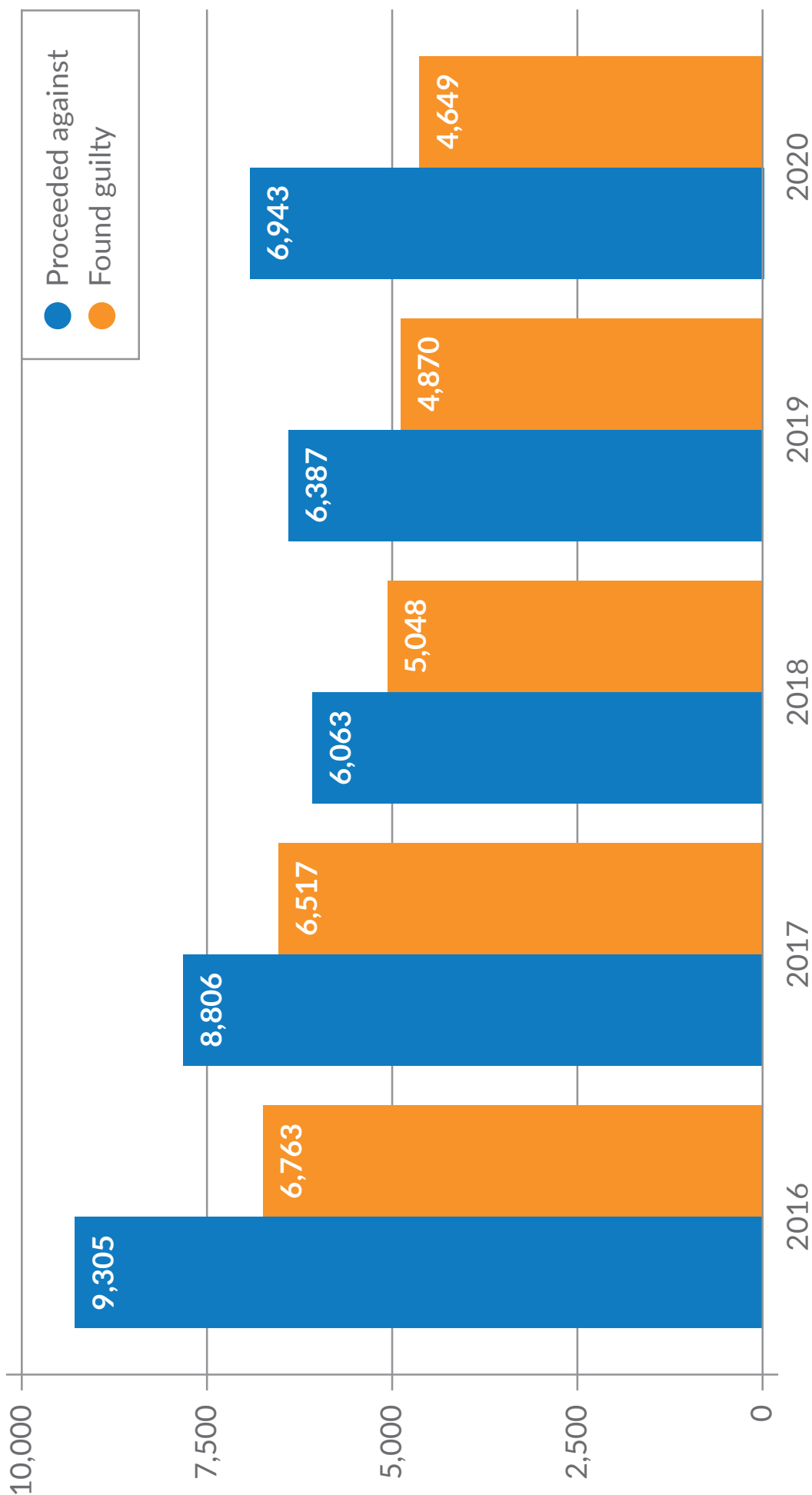


Figure B.5: Number of defendants prosecuted and convicted for child sexual abuse offences from 2016 to 2020

Source: Ministry of Justice, Criminal Justice Statistics Quarterly, year to December 2020

32. This number of convicted individuals is in stark contrast with the National Crime Agency's 2021 estimate that there were between 550,000 and 850,000 individuals in the UK identified by law enforcement as posing varying degrees of sexual risk to children.⁶¹¹ These figures did not, however, include non-UK offenders or children who sexually abuse other children and were therefore likely to be an underestimate. The gap between these two figures is a matter of concern as it suggests there are far more children being abused or at risk of being abused than are being identified by local authority and local police crime-recording data.

33. In the UK in 2019, the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, which provides advice and preventive resources for those with concerns about their own or another's abusive sexual behaviour, was contacted 94,342 times by people seeking help through its website and helpline.⁶¹² Between March–May and September–December 2020, the average number of weekly users of *Stop It Now! Get Help* (the offender-focussed website maintained by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation) increased by 128 percent.⁶¹³ In 2020/21, there

⁶¹¹ [INQ006649_011](#) para 46

⁶¹² [INQ006448_048](#) para 142

⁶¹³ [INQ006448_034](#)

was a significant increase in the number of young people contacting the Lucy Faithfull Foundation for advice and support, including 155 calls, chats or emails from under 18-year-olds who had committed a sexual offence online – this was a 177 percent increase compared with 2019/20.⁶¹⁴

Global scale

34. The pattern identified in England and Wales is also consistent with the global trend of rising levels of child sexual abuse. In its *Global Threat Assessment 2021*, the WeProtect Global Alliance provided a snapshot of the wider scale of the problem.

⁶¹⁴ [INQ006738_019](#)

The scale of the challenge

In 2020, **1,038,268** individual media files were exchanged via INHOPE's child sexual abuse material collection and classification platform.

In May 2021, Europol took down a child sexual abuse site on the dark web with more than **400,000** registered users.

More than **3,000,000** accounts are registered across the 10 most harmful child sexual abuse sites on the dark web.

On average, 30 analysts at the US National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) process **60,000** Cyber Tipline reports of child sexual abuse online every day.

Figure B.6: *The scale of the challenge*

Source: [INQ006749_004](#)

35. The internet and social media platforms have created new and increased opportunities to offend, with no foreseeable end to the growing demand for child sexual abuse imagery and no realistic prospect that perpetrators will stop in their pursuit of sexual gratification at the expense of harm to children. It is a national and global crisis.

36. It is this horrifying picture that underpins the Inquiry’s recommendations in this report and the need for urgent action by both State and non-State institutions. Protecting children from sexual abuse and exploitation, and its often lifelong harmful consequences, is of fundamental importance to future generations.

B.4: Improving the understanding of the scale of child sexual abuse

Under-reporting of child sexual abuse

37. Data recording the number of child sexual abuse offences will inevitably present only a partial picture of the scale of child sexual abuse.

37.1. Not all children, for example, will be able to understand that what is being done to them amounts to child sexual abuse and some may not be able to tell someone about it.

37.2. The 2020 Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated that 76 percent of adults who experienced rape or assault by penetration did not tell anyone about their experience at the time.⁶¹⁵ People were even less likely to tell the police – only an estimated 7 percent of victims

⁶¹⁵ [Crime in England and Wales dataset, year ending March 2020, tab A4](#)

and survivors informed the police at the time of the offence and only 18 percent told the police at any point.⁶¹⁶

37.3. Research has shown that disclosure of abuse is a complex and lifelong process. It often takes place for the first time in adulthood.⁶¹⁷ For example, analysis of data on allegations of child sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church between 1970 and 2015 indicate the abuse was alleged to have occurred or begun an average of 26 years previously.⁶¹⁸

38. Police data from 2004/5 to 2019/20, published in the UK government’s *Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy* (2021), show relatively stable levels of recording of child sexual abuse offences in the mid-2000s.⁶¹⁹ However, the data will not capture all child sexual offences, such as sexual assault, because they are based only on offences where a child is specified in the offence itself.

39. The data show a sharp increase in recorded offences from 2012 onwards.⁶²⁰ In its 2021 *Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy*, the UK government considered that this increase was linked to “an

⁶¹⁶ [INQ006448_019](#)

⁶¹⁷ [INQ006850_002](#)

⁶¹⁸ [CHC001938_018](#) para 2.3

⁶¹⁹ [INQ06448_019](#) (Figure 5)

⁶²⁰ [INQ06448_019](#) (Figure 5)

*increase in victims’ willingness to report” following police investigation Operation Yewtree, which was established in the aftermath of widespread media coverage about child sexual abuse perpetrated by Jimmy Savile.*⁶²¹

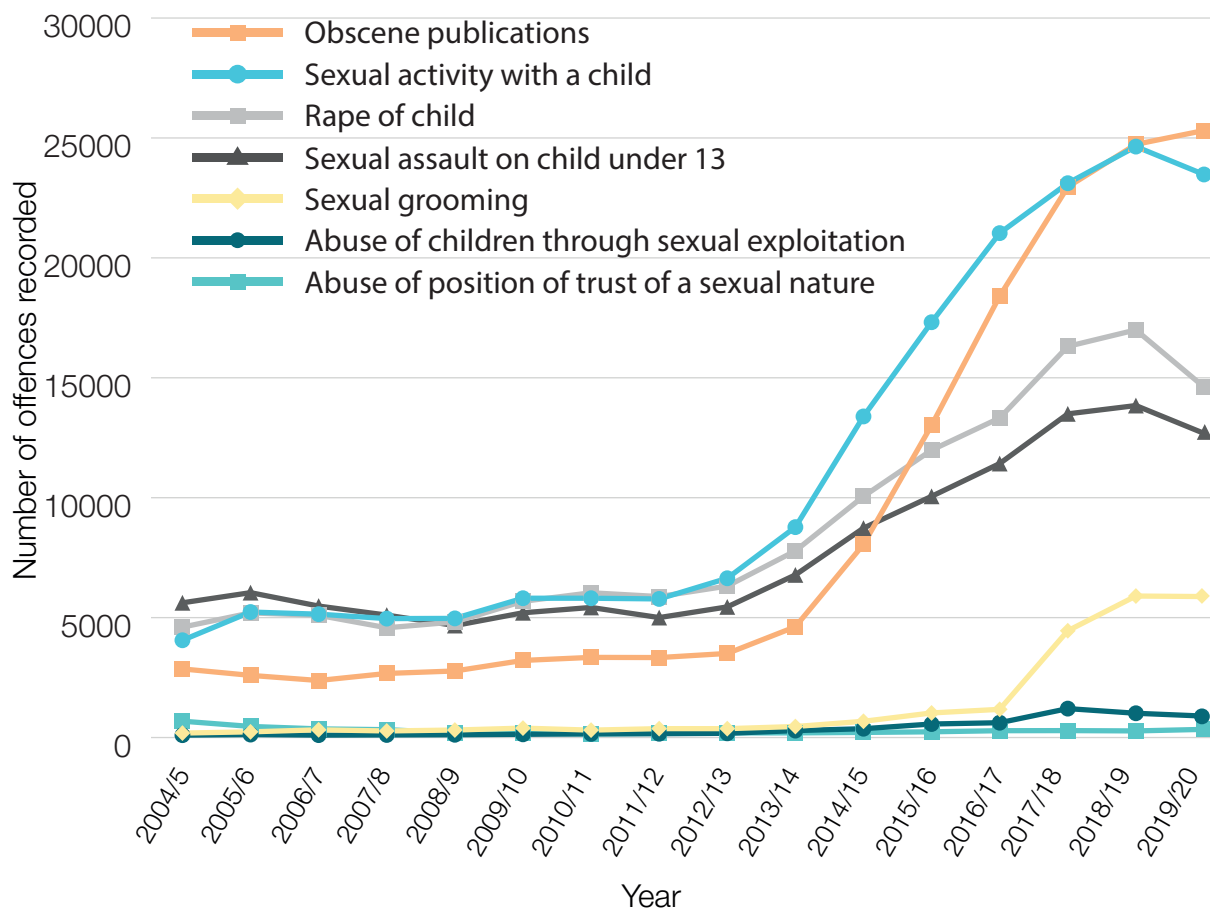


Figure B.7: *Police recorded child sexual abuse offences in England and Wales, 2004/05 to 2019/20*

Source: [INQ006448](#)

40. The numbers in the graph for 2018/19 onwards appear to suggest a more recent fall in offending in relation to some child sexual abuse offences,

⁶²¹ [INQ06448_019](#)

including sexual assault on a child under 13 and rape. However, nearly a decade on from Operation Yewtree, it is not surprising that the initial explosion in reporting has abated. Nonetheless, as Figure B.7 depicts, tens of thousands of child sexual abuse offences have been recorded during the lifetime of the Inquiry. In particular, there has been a rapid increase in indecent image offences (referred to in the graph as falling within ‘obscene publications’ offences).⁶²²

41. The recent Crime Survey for England and Wales for the year ending December 2021 recognised that:

“High levels of non-reporting combined with changes in reporting trends can have a significant impact on sexual offences recorded

⁶²² As the notes accompanying Figure B.7 make clear, *“the majority of obscene publications offences have been recorded against codes that cover indecent images of children offences. These offences will, however, also include lesser offences specifically the sending of explicit images between consenting minors. Following the implementation of a new IT system in July 2019, Greater Manchester Police have been unable to supply data for the period July 2019 to March 2020. Figures for Greater Manchester are not included in the National and Regional totals for the years ending March 2019 and 2020”* [INQ006448](#)

by the police. Prior to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the number of police recorded sexual offences was well below the number of victims estimated by the crime survey, with fewer than one in six victims of rape or assault by penetration reporting the crime to the police.”⁶²³

Limitations with available data

42. Even where abuse is reported and recorded, the data may not reveal the complete scale of abuse. In respect of understanding patterns and trends in child sexual abuse over time, the Inquiry has not been helped by the inadequacies of the existing data collection systems. Different organisations have developed their own approaches to categorising and recording data. As a result, operational data from different organisations cannot be brought together and consolidated in a way which aids an overall understanding of the problem and the institutional response.

43. The prevalence survey data and the operational data do not distinguish between child sexual abuse within the family setting and that which is committed by perpetrators outside the family. They also do not distinguish between child sexual abuse committed outside the family

⁶²³ [INQ006691_030](#)

in institutional settings as opposed to child sexual exploitation, meaning there are no official estimates of the serious criminal activity taking place in these two key areas.

44. Local authority data relating to child protection plans present only a partial picture of the scale of child sexual abuse. For the purposes of data collection, children are generally only placed on a plan under one of the four ‘primary’ categories (sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect), although sexual abuse may be a secondary risk. Research by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England suggests that:

*“among children who had been sexually abused according to police data, more were recorded by children’s services under the categories of neglect (32%) or emotional abuse (29%) than under sexual abuse (20%)”.*⁶²⁴

45. The Inquiry has already identified particular problems with data relating to child sexual exploitation where, as noted in the *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, no specific criminal offence of child sexual

⁶²⁴ [INQ006871_012](#)

exploitation is recorded and measured.⁶²⁵ As a result, police forces manually apply a ‘flag’ to offences which fit the definition of child sexual exploitation. In many parts of the country, child sexual exploitation has been recorded within the broader category of child criminal exploitation.⁶²⁶ Variations in the way offending is recorded may also contribute to differences in the available statistics. For example, police may record an offence of rape that also involves child sexual exploitation as a rape offence, thereby failing to capture the most serious child sexual exploitation crimes. As a result, in February 2022 in its *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, the Inquiry recommended that the UK government and the Welsh Government should take steps to ensure that data about child sexual exploitation are being collected and disaggregated in a consistent and accurate way by police forces and local authorities.⁶²⁷ In June 2022, the UK government provided the Inquiry with its provisional response to this recommendation and stated that its final response

⁶²⁵ *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Part B.4

⁶²⁶ *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Part B.4 paras 27–28

⁶²⁷ *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Part L.2

to this recommendation would be provided by 1 August 2022. The final response is available on the Inquiry's website.

46. Public agencies rely on accurate and detailed data to make the best strategic and operational responses for the protection of children. This is not possible if the nature of the abuse and changing patterns are not well understood. For example, the institutional response to familial child sexual abuse is categorically different from the response to sexual abuse committed by a child.

47. The lack of reliable data which measure the current prevalence of child sexual abuse in England and Wales (and across the UK) impedes the ability of statutory agencies and society more generally to prevent and respond appropriately to such abuse. The ONS assessed the feasibility of a survey measuring the prevalence of child sexual abuse in the UK (that is, the proportion of children in the population who are sexually abused) and, in April 2022, it concluded that there was “*no fundamental reason not to conduct a survey*” of children aged 11 to 15 years administered in a school environment or equivalent educational establishment, notwithstanding some challenges.⁶²⁸ Such a survey is likely to provide valuable information for those working to protect children from sexual abuse in the future.

⁶²⁸ [INQ006904_002](#)

48. The UK government’s *Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy* (2021) recognised that:

*“the quality and extent of data that is collected on offender and victim characteristics, including, but not limited to, age, gender and ethnicity, is inadequate”.*⁶²⁹

It identified a “*need to improve the quality and extent of data collected in relation to the modus operandi of offending*”. It indicated the Home Office would “*engage with criminal justice partners, academics, think tanks, charities and frontline professionals on improving the range of data currently collected, the quality of data collected, and drawing out insights from the data to help protect children by preventing and detecting offending*”.⁶³⁰ As at June 2022, no further information has been published, although the government has published – in line with its 2021 *End-to-End Rape Review Report on Findings and Actions* – “*performance scorecards*” to monitor progress against key metrics, including timeliness, quality and victim engagement in relation to adult rape offences.⁶³¹

⁶²⁹ [INQ006448_039](#)

⁶³⁰ [INQ006448_039-040](#)

⁶³¹ [INQ006641_033](#) para 41

49. Urgent steps should be taken – led by the UK government and the Welsh Government – to improve the data on child sexual abuse. This should include recording when sexual crimes against children take place outside the family setting, both in prevalence surveys and data collected by the criminal justice agencies and local authorities. These agencies have operational intelligence or risk assessment information about the circumstances in which child sexual abuse has reportedly taken place. That information should be recorded and reported in a way that allows abuse of children outside the family setting to be measured. The Inquiry therefore recommends improvements to the data collected about child sexual abuse and the regular publication of that improved data.

Recommendation 1: A single core data set

The Inquiry recommends that the UK government and the Welsh Government improve data collected by children's social care and criminal justice agencies concerning child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation by the introduction of one single core data set covering both England and Wales.

In order to facilitate this, these agencies should produce consistent and compatible data about child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation which includes:

- the characteristics of victims and alleged perpetrators of child sexual abuse, including age, sex and ethnicity;
- factors that make victims more vulnerable to child sexual abuse or exploitation; and
- the settings and contexts in which child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation occur.

Data concerning child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation should be compiled and published on a regular basis. This should be capable of being collated nationally as well as at regional or local levels.

Part C

Prioritising the protection of children

Prioritising the protection of children

C.1: Introduction

1. The vast majority of adults throughout the UK view the effective protection of children from harm as an essential component of a civilised society. Public opprobrium is rightly directed at not only those who deliberately set out to abuse children but also those who fail to protect children when they should do so. Institutions which bear statutory responsibility are required to ensure as far as possible that the right action is taken if children are at risk of harm. Scrutiny arrangements are in place to maintain good governance and accountability in respect of the institutions themselves and for the professionals and employees, as well as volunteers, who work in an institutional context.

2. While key professionals such as social workers and police officers have particular responsibility for protecting children from harm, all adults who work with, care for or look after children have a responsibility to keep children safe. Child sexual abuse occurs in many contexts and settings. The Inquiry's work revealed physical violence as well as neglect and emotional harm that individually, or in combination, created an environment in which

sexual abuse could take place.⁶³² It is virtually impossible to separate out the various forms of harm as if they occurred in isolation. The Inquiry has considered child protection throughout its investigations, where relevant.

3. Where institutions had child protection arrangements, in many instances there was often a lack of compliance with existing systems.⁶³³ In order to make the further improvements necessary to protect children better in the future, a well-articulated and relentless focus on child protection is required. The economic and social costs of sexual abuse are significant. A recent study published by the Home Office estimated that, in the year ending March 2019, contact child sexual abuse alone cost society over £10 billion.⁶³⁴ The challenges are therefore considerable and growing and, as set out in Part J, are likely to

⁶³² *Victims and Survivors' Voices, Parts C.2–C.4; Nottinghamshire Councils Investigation Report, Pen Portraits (D6, L35); Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report, Pen Portraits (CS-A372, CS-A435)*

⁶³³ *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report, Executive Summary, Part D.1 para 2, Part D.2, Part G.2 para 17, Part H.1 para 9; Residential Schools Investigation Report, Part E.3 paras 42–52*

⁶³⁴ [INQ006659_003](#)

last well into the future, particularly as the UK recovers from the devastating consequences of a worldwide pandemic.

4. It is therefore important that child protection is given the priority it deserves. It should not be subsumed into other areas of practice within institutions or be permitted to drift into institutional obscurity. To address and respond to the complex challenges of child sexual abuse, the Inquiry recommends the establishment of independent Child Protection Authorities for England and for Wales. Their remit should cover sexual, physical and emotional abuse, as well as neglect of children. To signify the importance attached to child protection, the Inquiry also recommends the establishment of a Minister for Children with cabinet status covering a wide range of responsibilities for children's welfare. It should include child protection, so that children's safety and well-being receive the attention they deserve.

5. Raising the profile of child protection and ensuring that members of the public are better able to identify concerns about child sexual abuse will also maximise society's ability to protect children from harm. In order to do so, wider cultural and societal changes are required. To encourage discussion about child sexual abuse and to achieve the necessary cultural shift, the Inquiry recommends that there should be a wide-

ranging programme to increase public awareness about child sexual abuse and the action to take if suspicions and concerns arise.

C.2: The current system for safeguarding and child protection

6. At the outset, it is important to distinguish child protection from safeguarding children. The latter covers a much broader range of activity and extends beyond protection of the individual child to the wider responsibilities across society to ensure that children are safe. Both are important and sometimes overlap.

6.1. Safeguarding is used to describe measures to protect the health, well-being and rights of people to live free from abuse, harm and neglect, particularly children, young people and vulnerable adults. In social work practice it generally refers to all of the actions, support and services that promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm. At its broadest, it means enabling all children and young people to have the best possible outcomes, for example in terms of their mental and physical health, education and family lives.⁶³⁵

6.2. Child protection is part of the safeguarding process. It focusses on protecting individual children identified as suffering, or at risk of, significant harm. Child protection procedures set out how to respond to concerns about a child and should follow government guidance. Child protection policy and practice guidance anticipate the abuse and harm that individual children might experience.⁶³⁶

7. Although the statutory agencies have well-rehearsed responsibilities, other institutions do not. During its work, the Inquiry examined the statutory and regulatory frameworks that apply in respect of religious organisations and settings, educational settings, custodial institutions, children in the care of local authorities, political parties and institutions, and current proposals for regulation of the

internet.⁶³⁷ The Inquiry also considered analyses of similar issues conducted by others, including Clive Sheldon KC's 2021 review of the Football Association and Dame Janet Smith's 2016 review of historic practices at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).⁶³⁸

8. In England, individuals working with children are expected to comply with the key statutory guidance for child protection, *Working Together to Safeguard Children*.⁶³⁹ This guidance – updated most recently in 2018 – provides that every individual who works with children has a responsibility for keeping them safe, and every individual who comes into contact with children and families has a role to play in

⁶³⁷ *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report*, Executive Summary, Parts D.2, F.3, F.5, G.2; *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Executive Summary, Part H.2, Annexes 3–4; *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Executive Summary, Parts B.4, E.10, E.13–E.14; *Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, Parts I.2–I.4; *Nottinghamshire Councils Investigation Report*, Parts B.4–B.5, E.4–E.5; *Westminster Investigation Report*, Executive Summary, Parts J.2, K.1; *The Internet Investigation Report*, Executive Summary, Parts C.2, C.5, F.2

⁶³⁸ INQ006777; INQ006660

⁶³⁹ INQ006608_011 paras 16–17

sharing information and identifying concerns. It emphasises the importance of early help to promote the welfare of children. Local agencies must identify, assess and provide help for children and families who would benefit from interventions.

9. In Wales, the key guidance is *Working Together to Safeguard People* and is based on the requirements set out in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, supported by the *Wales Safeguarding Procedures*.⁶⁴⁰ It is primarily for practitioners working with children, including those working in early years, social care, education, health, the police, youth offending and youth, community and family support services (including the third sector) and foster care and residential care. Taken together, this framework sets out detailed practice guidance and sets expectations about how individuals and organisations should work together to safeguard children.

10. The legal and policy requirements for child protection and safeguarding are often complex. This complexity can lead to assumptions that every aspect of child protection and safeguarding is covered by existing frameworks. That is not the case.

⁶⁴⁰ [INQ006791](#); [WGT000470](#); [INQ006455](#)

Scrutiny and inspection

11. Scrutiny and inspection arrangements in respect of child protection and safeguarding are important features of the current system. Whether, how and by whom an institution is inspected depends on its activities. A number of organisations play an important role in the oversight of child protection and regulation.

11.1. In England, education, children’s social care and early years are broadly overseen by the Department for Education, which also sponsors the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) in England as well as the Independent Schools Inspectorate. In Wales, Estyn inspects education and training.

11.2. The Charity Commission is responsible for registering charities in England and Wales, including many religious and voluntary organisations and settings. Each charity is responsible for ensuring that “*the charity has proper systems in place to mitigate the risk of child sexual abuse and deal with it properly if a report is made to them of such abuse*”.⁶⁴¹ Although serious child protection issues are matters of concern to the Charity Commission, it is not able to act as a routine inspector of

⁶⁴¹ Michelle Russell 1 November 2019 127/1-6

child protection systems in respect of the many thousands of registered charities in England and Wales.

11.3. In the criminal justice system, child protection and safeguarding practice within the police, youth custody and probation are respectively inspected by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation.

11.4. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) and the Healthcare Inspectorate regulate children's (and adult) health services in England and in Wales, respectively. Both organisations have wide-ranging responsibilities and powers of inspection. In England, the CQC participates in joint inspections of child protection arrangements with Ofsted, HMICFRS, HM Inspectorate of Probation and, where relevant, HM Inspectorate of Prisons. In Wales, the Healthcare Inspectorate works with Estyn, Care Inspectorate Wales and Audit Wales.

11.5. The Children's Commissioners for England and in Wales were both established by statute. The aim of the Welsh Children's Commissioner is to "*safeguard and promote the*

rights” of children in Wales.⁶⁴² In England, the Children’s Commissioner’s “*primary function is promoting and protecting the rights of children in England*”.⁶⁴³ Both Commissioners have wide responsibilities and powers, including ensuring that children’s views and interests are taken into account by public bodies.

11.6. There are additional workforce regulators, such as Social Care England, the General Medical Council and the Teaching Regulation Agency. These organisations are responsible for regulating the practice of individual practitioners. In the most serious circumstances, the regulator has a disciplinary function which may prevent a member of a particular profession from practising if their conduct merits such a sanction.

12. Inspectorates may join together to conduct joint inspections of various sectors.⁶⁴⁴ In England, joint targeted area inspections bring together several inspectorates, led by Ofsted, to conduct thematic inspections of multi-agency child

⁶⁴² [Children’s Commissioner for Wales Act 2001, section 2](#)

⁶⁴³ [Children Act 2004, section 2; CCE000011_001 paras 2–3](#)

⁶⁴⁴ [Children Act 2004, section 20](#)

protection arrangements.⁶⁴⁵ In Wales, a similar role is undertaken by the Joint Inspectorate Review of Child Protection Arrangements.⁶⁴⁶

13. Statutory inspection activity does not always identify poor practice, particularly when conducting inspections that necessarily cover a wide range of topics. Some institutions such as supplementary schools or out of school settings receive little, if any, independent assessment of their child protection practices. There is no power to compel them to have child protection policies and no power for existing inspectorates to inspect the quality of the services provided.⁶⁴⁷ For example, the Inquiry's *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report* noted Ofsted's "serious concerns" about its inability to inspect and evaluate out-of-school settings and unregistered schools.⁶⁴⁸ Greater powers for Ofsted, including

⁶⁴⁵ [INQ006663_003 para 1](#)

⁶⁴⁶ [INQ006858](#); [INQ006779](#); [INQ006778](#)

⁶⁴⁷ [Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report, Part F.1, Part F.3 paras 9–16, Part F.4, Part F.5 paras 50–51, Part G.2; DFE003469](#)

⁶⁴⁸ [Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report, Part F.3 para 12](#)

to take action in relation to unregistered schools, were proposed in new legislation announced by the UK government in May 2022.⁶⁴⁹

14. There is also a duty to conduct serious case reviews, where appropriate, and identify learning. In England, safeguarding partnerships report to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, which is responsible for identifying and overseeing serious child safeguarding cases that, in its view, raise issues which are complex or of national importance.⁶⁵⁰ In Wales, regional safeguarding boards perform a similar function with support and advice from the National Independent Safeguarding Board, which also reports on the adequacy of safeguarding arrangements and makes representations to Welsh ministers about improvements.⁶⁵¹ Safeguarding partnerships have an important role to play in bringing the statutory agencies together to work on all aspects of safeguarding strategy in local areas.

15. Inspections, serious case reviews and other regulatory activities are not a substitute for an institution's responsibility for its own quality assurance of its safeguarding and child protection. This could include internal and external audits and reviews of child protection practice.

⁶⁴⁹ [INQ006845_002](#); [INQ006949](#)

⁶⁵⁰ [INQ006608_086-090](#)

⁶⁵¹ [INQ006666_005](#)

Multi-agency working

16. As children and families often access a range of services, statutory agencies (particularly local authorities, the police and the healthcare sector) must work together to understand fully a child's circumstances and to coordinate their interventions and support. This multi-agency work is coordinated and overseen by safeguarding partnerships in England and safeguarding boards in Wales. Specified statutory agencies must be represented in these arrangements; in Wales this also includes probation services. Other organisations, such as schools and youth services, must be involved in safeguarding arrangements if required by the statutory agencies.⁶⁵²

17. When child protection concerns arise, the relevant local authority has a statutory duty to make enquiries and decide whether to take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare.⁶⁵³ If a child is in immediate danger, the local authority may seek emergency protective orders from the family courts, and the police have the power to remove the child to a place of safety for a limited period of time. Where there is no risk of immediate harm to a child, there is likely to be an assessment of the child's needs and protective

⁶⁵² [INQ006608_075_076](#); [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#), section 134

⁶⁵³ [Children Act 1989](#), section 47

steps may be taken. The local authority is required to work with the child's family and professionals to ascertain what steps are in the child's best interests. Early intervention and protection in children's social care must be undertaken in tandem with improved child protection practice so that, if a threshold of significant harm is crossed, the local authority may invite a court to make a care order or a supervision order.

18. The police are responsible for investigating allegations amounting to criminal offences of child sexual abuse, although joint investigations with local children's services are encouraged, in order to bring a multidisciplinary approach to the investigation process. If there is sufficient evidence and it is in the public interest to proceed, the Crown Prosecution Service will authorise a prosecution.

19. The effectiveness of multi-agency working is the critical element of child protection and safeguarding practice. This is the cornerstone of the system and, although there have been changes to organisational structures over the years, the basic concept of good multi-agency working has remained a consistent feature. Despite successive policy initiatives to work better together, the statutory agencies have not always collaborated

efficiently or effectively.⁶⁵⁴ On occasions, this has been marked by an absence of collective leadership by statutory agencies.

C.3: Reform

20. Throughout the Inquiry's public hearings, criticisms were directed at failures of institutions to respond effectively, or at all, to child sexual abuse. Many cases presented in evidence did not involve finely balanced decisions by those in positions of authority but were obvious examples of where action was necessary and often urgent, but was not taken.⁶⁵⁵ Institutions frequently valued reputation, including personal and professional

⁶⁵⁴ *Residential schools Investigation Report*, Part H.2, paras 36–37; *Cambridge House, Knowl View and Rochdale Investigation Report*, Part C (Section 3) paras 3, 112

⁶⁵⁵ *Ampleforth and Downside Investigation Report*, Part C paras 76–92; *Diocese of Chichester/Peter Ball Investigation Report*, Part D para 4; *Ealing Abbey and St Benedict's School Investigation Report*, Part D.3 paras 24–40; *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report*, Pen Portraits (PR-A16)

reputations, above the interests of children.⁶⁵⁶

As a result, whether by design or carelessness, allegations of child sexual abuse were often marginalised.

21. As the Inquiry's analysis revealed, the issue of child sexual abuse was concealed from public view for decades. Poor attitudes towards children compromised the ability of institutions to expose and act on allegations of child sexual abuse. There was no real understanding of the scale and depravity of that abuse until national scandals were exposed, such as the posthumous revelations made about Jimmy Savile in 2012 and the conviction in 2015 of Bishop Peter Ball. Even then, some forms of child sexual exploitation remained hidden from view. Many children and young people were groomed through attention and protestations of affection or violence to submit to sexual activity with groups of men. Rather than deal with the perpetrators, the statutory agencies, particularly

⁶⁵⁶ *The Roman Catholic Church Investigation Report, Executive Summary; Residential Schools Investigation Report, Executive Summary, Part B.2 para 17; Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report, Part C.8; Westminster Investigation Report, Part K.1 para 3*

the police, assigned blame to those who were being abused.⁶⁵⁷ They were apparently not worthy of protection.

22. There were a number of examples of where a particular institution kept allegations of child sexual abuse ‘in-house’ and did not report the circumstances to the local authority or the police.⁶⁵⁸ On occasions, efforts to expose child sexual abuse in internal reports were simply ignored because other priorities dominated the institutional agenda. As an extreme example, political turmoil and corruption within Lambeth Council meant that those who spoke out against child sexual abuse were simply drowned out by the noise of a toxic political debate.⁶⁵⁹

23. Many people within the institutions examined by the Inquiry knew, or should have known, that serious allegations of child sexual abuse had been made in circumstances where the institution bore some responsibility for the child’s welfare. They

⁶⁵⁷ *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Pen Portraits (CS-A12, CS-A317); *Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, Part J.3 para 22

⁶⁵⁸ *The Roman Catholic Church Investigation Report*, Part I.1 para 1; *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part E.3 paras 47, 51–52

⁶⁵⁹ *Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, Executive Summary, Part K.1 para 25

were responsible for ‘battening down the hatches’ in the hope and expectation that the so-called ‘problem’ would go away. Those who complained often met a wall of resistance and antipathy.

The Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England demonstrated a persistent reluctance to report complaints of child sexual abuse to external agencies.⁶⁶⁰

24. It is more difficult to suppress allegations when the circumstances are shared with other agencies. The exposure sets in motion a series of processes designed to protect the child and investigate what happened. While there is always a risk that an allegation is mishandled, that risk is reduced if each institution complies with the guidance in *Working Together* and shares information and concerns so that the appropriate action is taken in a timely way. The problem was often not the policies and procedures themselves but failure to share intelligence, and to implement and comply with the child protection arrangements that were in place.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ealing Abbey and St Benedict’s School Investigation Report*, Part D.3 paras 69–71, Part F.7 para 52; *Diocese of Chichester/Peter Ball Investigation Report*, Executive Summary, Part B.2 para 133, Part B.4 para 265

25. While a number of high-profile prosecutions in the mid-2010s brought child sexual abuse to greater attention, as other priorities have emerged, the focus on child sexual abuse has diminished. In some police forces, child sexual exploitation has been subsumed into child criminal exploitation, creating limitations on the understanding of this type of offending.⁶⁶¹ Statutory agencies have not yet demonstrated a comprehensive ability to understand the scale and nature of child sexual abuse in their areas. For example, some statutory agencies have conflated the concepts of actual harm and risk of harm.⁶⁶² This conflation manifests itself in a failure to identify children who have been sexually abused and those who may be at risk of being sexually abused. Making these distinctions effectively enables resources to be targeted where there is an urgent need to remove a child from danger of sexual abuse or introduce a range of protective measures to manage a risk to the child where the harm has not yet occurred. The failure to do so magnifies the risk of further abuse.

26. The challenges faced by the authorities in dealing with child sexual offences facilitated by the internet is a significant and growing problem. The

⁶⁶¹ *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report, Executive Summary*

⁶⁶² *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report, Part F.3; INQ006555__006*

worldwide trade in indecent images of children is worth vast sums of money. The dark web offers sanctuary to would-be perpetrators who can remain undetectable. Encryption may prevent law enforcement agencies from tracing and ultimately prosecuting perpetrators because they cannot access relevant communications.

27. Institutions have been responsible for failing to protect children from harm when it was their responsibility to do so.⁶⁶³ This state of affairs lasted for decades and persists in some quarters today. There is a very real risk that, despite improvements, institutions may revert to poor practice and, worse still, actively downplay child sexual abuse, unless there is long-lasting and focussed vigilance. Child protection must be given the profile and continuous attention it deserves. The temptation to exclude the statutory authorities from investigating thoroughly, or for the seriousness of child sexual abuse to be minimised by institutions and authorities, is too great merely to make recommendations that urge them to do better.

⁶⁶³ *Residential Schools Investigation Report, Executive Summary; Ampleforth and Downside Investigation Report, Executive Summary; Ealing Abbey and St Benedict's School Investigation Report, Executive Summary; Lambeth Council Investigation Report, Executive Summary*

28. As set out further in this report, the Inquiry recommends the introduction of mandatory reporting for relevant individuals and the establishment of Child Protection Authorities (CPAs) for England and for Wales. These are complementary recommendations intended to tackle failures in the institutional response and to improve and promote effective child protection practice in tandem with enhanced personal responsibility that arises from the implementation of the mandatory reporting recommendation.

C.4: Child Protection Authorities for England and for Wales

29. In order to meet the rapidly changing environment and the sheer scale of child sexual abuse in England and Wales, the Inquiry recommends legislative reform to create a CPA for each country to provide a much-needed and enhanced focus and consistency of approach to the issue of child protection. The role of the CPAs should be to:

- improve practice in child protection by institutions, including statutory agencies;
- provide advice to government in relation to policy and reform to improve child protection, including through the publication of regular reports to Parliament and making recommendations; and

- inspect institutions as it considers necessary.

30. The CPAs should be independent, constituted as a non-departmental public body in England and an arm's length body in Wales, dedicated to child protection in relation to sexual and physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. As indicated earlier, it is impossible to isolate these harms given they are so interlinked: one of them so often is a warning sign of another. In addition to these functions, the CPAs would take on the substantial role of monitoring the implementation of the recommendations of this Inquiry.

Recommendation 2: Child Protection Authorities for England and for Wales

The Inquiry recommends that the UK government establishes a Child Protection Authority for England and the Welsh Government establishes a Child Protection Authority for Wales.

Each Authority's purpose should be to:

- improve practice in child protection;
- provide advice and make recommendations to government in relation to child protection policy and reform to improve child protection; and
- inspect institutions and settings as it considers necessary and proportionate.

The Child Protection Authorities in England and in Wales should also monitor the implementation of the Inquiry's recommendations.

The improvement and advice role of the Child Protection Authority

31. Responsibility for monitoring and implementing institutional child protection lies with several statutory agencies and services, sector-specific inspectorates and government departments. In law enforcement, the National Crime Agency leads on

online-facilitated child sexual abuse, but much of the operational work is carried out by the 43 police forces in England and Wales, each of which has objectives set by locally elected police and crime commissioners.⁶⁶⁴ At a local level, in accordance with the Children and Social Work Act 2017, local authorities, health providers (clinical commissioning groups in England, and the local health boards and the NHS trusts in Wales) and the police are responsible for child protection policy, procedure and guidance.⁶⁶⁵ Local authorities, as the corporate parent for children in care, also have a number of critical responsibilities for those children and for children in need.⁶⁶⁶

32. There are a range of potential responses when child sexual abuse is alleged or identified. Action may be taken against the perpetrator through the criminal justice system, disciplinary or regulatory sanction, local authority investigations and the family courts. Irrespective of criminal proceedings, an assessment of the risk of harm that a suspect might pose is a key part of the institutional response. In responding to a victim of child sexual abuse, the local authority, health services and

⁶⁶⁴ *The Internet Investigation Report*, Part B.3 paras 17–28

⁶⁶⁵ Children and Social Work Act 2017, sections 12–21; INQ006608_075–076

⁶⁶⁶ Children and Social Work Act 2017, section 1

family courts may become involved. Throughout its work, the Inquiry identified a lack of focus and rigour in the responses of a wide range of settings and institutions.

33. In order to drive improvement in child protection practices, many institutions require support and advice about appropriate responses where abuse is known or suspected. Although there is much that organisations can do themselves to improve those responses, there are measures that the government should take to assist, encourage and support them in doing so.

34. Current structures and practices often subsume child protection into the broader work of safeguarding. It is unhelpful that much of the formal literature and guidance about institutions' responsibilities towards children conflates the two, as this detracts from a distinct focus on child protection. Ensuring good quality child protection across a diverse range of settings requires specialist knowledge, targeted intervention and constant vigilance. This work cannot be incidental to other objectives, and it cannot be sporadic or purely responsive.

35. As a result, the Inquiry considers that the CPAs should have a wide-ranging remit to enhance, extend and improve child protection in institutions and other contexts. Its activities should include:

- promoting multi-agency working by statutory agencies;
- providing high-quality advice to institutions on new and emerging forms of harm and how best they can be tackled in a multi-agency environment;
- supporting local child protection arrangements by developing high-quality resources for practitioners;
- providing regular reports of good practice to share at international and local levels;
- providing advice to government policy development and proposed legislative reform on child protection; and
- publishing reports, including to Parliament about the state of child protection, and the making of any recommendations for improvement.

36. The CPAs should serve as an authoritative repository of information. This should include information about regulation, guidance and best practice. The CPAs should also signpost other organisations which provide direct support on issues such as workforce regulation and training. For example, an individual who wished to establish an after-school group delivering religious education for young people might contact the CPA and receive advice about appropriate child

protection policies. A designated safeguarding lead at a school might wish to seek advice about organisations that offer training.

37. The routine delivery of authoritative information and advice by an expert body would support improvement and increase consistency in child protection across diverse settings and institutions.

38. The CPAs will also be uniquely placed to help shape national child protection policy and strategy, and to advise the government. Where, as a result of its work, the CPA considers that there are legislative and regulatory changes that would strengthen institutional child protection, it should make recommendations directly to the Minister for Children or any other relevant minister and to Parliament or Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament.

The inspection powers of the Child Protection Authority

39. The primary responsibility for quality control and improvement in child protection lies with the organisation itself. Internal audits and reviews, whether provided by third parties or not, provided an accurate picture of child protection practice in some institutions but criticisms and recommendations were not always heeded. Lambeth Council, for example, produced many reports about child protection, including on child

sexual abuse, but important recommendations were never implemented, leading to further reviews and audits which met with a similar fate.⁶⁶⁷

40. A principal purpose of external and independent inspection is to verify the quality of these organisations' assessments of their own protection measures. As set out above, the inspection framework is complex. In several respects, it fails to provide an adequate model for the external scrutiny of child protection in institutions. First, it emphasises the wider remit of safeguarding rather than child protection, which requires a more targeted focus. Second, it does not have the necessary powers to inspect the broad range of organisations and settings in which children can be abused. Third, it does not scrutinise sufficiently regularly the multi-agency nature of child protection work.

Inspection and regulation

41. The different regimes in respect of inspection, regulation and workforce controls are often confused. It is easy to assume that where individuals who work in an institution or setting are 'vetted', this means that an institution is also

⁶⁶⁷ *Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, Executive Summary, Part C.3 paras 13–16, Part C.4 paras 17–21

‘regulated’ and that its child protection practices are therefore subject to some form of external scrutiny or inspection. This is not always the case.

42. Children frequently spend time in less formal settings not subject to inspection. Examples include sports, drama or dance classes, after-school activities and religious education groups. Although individuals may be eligible for criminal background checks at their employer’s behest, that is not the same as the organisation being subject to checks of its child protection policies and practices through inspection. Almost every child in the country will spend time in one or more of these less formal settings. For some, it is a daily occurrence.

43. It would not be desirable or reasonable for the State to inspect every small and informal gathering of children. However, where concerns arise about an organisation or setting, there must be a mechanism for the procedures and policies in place to be scrutinised. Currently, there is not. Child sexual abuse has occurred in settings that were not subject to any inspections at all, making children vulnerable as a result. This is a failure that must be addressed.

Not sufficiently targeted at child protection

44. Inspection activity is not routinely targeted at child protection. In the context of schools there are limitations on an inspectorate's ability to judge the adequacy of an institution's approaches to child protection. For example, the Inquiry found instances where education inspectorates considered that an institution met or exceeded expectations of safeguarding only for it subsequently to come to light that children were being sexually abused at school or otherwise experiencing harm because of poor practice.⁶⁶⁸

The current system of inspection may lead to false assurances about children's safety. Where reports include positive comments about safeguarding or children's feelings of safety, readers could be left with a false impression that the institution's child protection practices have been rigorously examined. A 'good' or 'outstanding' rating from Ofsted may lead to less oversight.⁶⁶⁹

45. Inspection activity covering a range of topics did not necessarily identify poor child protection practice. General inspections did not have the

⁶⁶⁸ *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part H.2 para 21; *Ampleforth and Downside Investigation Report*, Part B paras 259–294

⁶⁶⁹ Sheila Smith 23 November 2020 16/17-23

focus required to undertake detailed analysis. As the Inquiry identified, child abuse – particularly of a sexual nature – is often hidden from view, whether deliberately masked by other activity or through inertia.

Multi-agency focus

46. Statutory inspectorates are required to concentrate on specific sectors that make up the child protection and safeguarding system, targeting particular areas of interest or concern (for example, child sexual exploitation) and resulting in a narrative report about the work of local partnerships and agencies. Poor cooperation between frontline services has been a long-standing and frequent focus of criticism – for example in serious case reviews – and is an issue that often attracts recommendations for improvement.⁶⁷⁰ It is important that these arrangements are subject to external scrutiny, including by the CPAs. Although there are arrangements in England and in Wales for joint thematic assessments of child protection, there is no standing ‘joint inspectorate’, despite the importance placed on multi-agency working in child protection.

⁶⁷⁰ [INQ006933_020, 089-099](#)

47. Multi-agency inspections are important but do not take place with the regularity of single-agency inspections and do not receive the profile associated with single-agency inspections. Most schools, for example, will advertise a ‘good’ Ofsted inspection. However, little is known about the findings of multi-agency inspections of child protection, which do not attract the same profile in the public domain, despite their importance.

Inspection powers

48. The Inquiry therefore recommends that an expert inspectorate department is established within the CPAs in England and in Wales. The CPA should have powers to inspect multi-agency arrangements and individual institutions and settings. Expertise from other agencies might be seconded to assist when necessary.

49. Multi-agency inspection activity should be limited in the first instance to those areas most in need of independent scrutiny. It is important, however, that the CPAs hold leaders to account for multi-agency child protection practice. As the CPAs become more established, a regular and systematic inspection programme of multi-agency performance should become normal practice.

50. Institutions and settings which regularly come into contact with children but are not independently inspected should be subject to

statutory inspection by a CPA when appropriate. Religious organisations are a good example of a sector where, had there been statutory inspections in the past, failings identified by the Inquiry might have been exposed.⁶⁷¹ The power to inspect such institutions should be used sparingly as the CPAs should be encouraging and supporting good practice. Nevertheless, in circumstances where the public interest demands intervention, the CPAs should have the power to conduct an independent, in-depth inspection, following up on any recommendations it makes with further inspection activity, if necessary.

51. The CPAs should have the power to inspect institutions and settings that are already inspected by statutory inspectorates. This power would be deployed on the rare occasions when the institution in question has persistently failed to respond effectively to previous inspection reports or the state of child protection was so poor that the public interest and concern demanded further scrutiny by an inspectorate unconnected to a particular sector.

52. It is not intended that the CPAs will have powers to regulate an institution by, for example, imposing a sanction for failure to implement improvements, though other bodies with appropriate powers could take action. This would

⁶⁷¹ *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report, Executive Summary*

not preclude the CPAs referring an institution to other bodies with appropriate regulatory functions. The public exposure of failings in any report is envisaged to be sufficient to bring about the necessary changes. In line with other statutory inspectorates, the CPAs should have the power to inspect documentation from any relevant institution and to enter premises.

53. The annual reports of the CPAs should be laid before Parliament. Other reports will be published and may be laid before Parliament. The CPAs will also make recommendations as appropriate.

C.5: A cabinet Minister for Children

54. The introduction of the Child Protection Authority should be coupled with the introduction of a cabinet Minister for Children. This post would provide a sharper focus within government on critical issues which affect children and would provide the necessary leadership, profile and influence on matters of child protection.

England

55. In order to maintain the profile of child protection and deal with the challenges of reform, a Minister for Children should be created with cabinet

status. The Minister for Children would be required to work across government departments to enable the welfare of children to remain a high priority.

56. At ministerial level, there are areas of overlap in responsibilities within government between issues of child protection and the protection of vulnerable adults, and the portfolios of ministers are necessarily complex. For example, the Minister for Safeguarding sits in the Home Office with responsibility for the policy area of violence against women and girls. The Children and Families Minister sits in the Department for Education and deals with subjects as diverse as school food and children's social care. Both ministers have wide-ranging responsibilities and hold the title of Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, the most junior ministerial position.

57. A Minister with cabinet responsibility for children would bring the diverse strands of policy development together by giving a voice to the child's perspective. The creation of such a post would signal the priority and importance attached to this role and importantly provide strong, single leadership for child protection at the highest level. Additionally, the Minister for Children would be able to sponsor the CPA and, when necessary, commission inspections from the CPA.

58. The appointment would inevitably mean working across government to improve outcomes for children. It may, of course, be possible to reallocate certain policy areas to facilitate greater cohesion across all aspects of children's welfare. That is a matter for the government. The essential point is that the role of children in society is given a different status than the one that has existed in reality in institutions over many decades. The government should lead the way in signalling the leadership required.

Wales

59. The Welsh Government comprises 14 ministers, of which nine are cabinet members. Safeguarding of both adults and children is the responsibility of the Minister for Health and Social Services, and safeguarding in schools is the responsibility of the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language. There are no formal departmental divisions within the Welsh Government, instead it is divided into four groups: the Office of the First Minister Group, the Health and Social Services Group, the Education and Public Services Group and the Economy, Skills and Natural Resources Group.

60. The creation of a further cabinet post may be more difficult in Wales, given the number of ministerial arrangements, and so the Inquiry's recommendation is couched slightly differently

to provide the Welsh Government with an appropriate degree of flexibility to implement this recommendation. However, the principled consideration that children's welfare should be given greater priority and status with single leadership at high office remains the same.

Recommendation 3: A cabinet Minister for Children

The UK government

The Inquiry recommends that the UK government creates a cabinet-level ministerial position for children.

The Welsh Government

The Inquiry recommends that the Welsh Government ensures that there is cabinet-level ministerial responsibility for children.

C.6: Attitudes to child sexual abuse

61. Alongside elevating the status of children in the political sphere, there remains a need to raise public awareness about child sexual abuse. Myths and stereotypes about child sexual abuse are still held by many. Outdated attitudes that perpetuate myths, for example that children lie about being abused, need to be dispelled, and

although society's attitudes to child sexual abuse have changed, more work is needed to ensure that members of the public are better informed.

Historical attitudes

62. Sexual abuse of children has long been recognised as morally wrong. It was recognised as legally wrong in 1885, when the age at which individuals could consent to sex was raised from 13 to 16 years old to protect the “*virtue*” of young girls and punish their “*violators*”.⁶⁷² Archaic language was used to describe child sexual abuse and, in the early part of the 20th century, included phrases such as “*immoral relations*”, “*indiscreet fondling*”, “*fooling*” and “*philandering conduct*”.⁶⁷³ This language served to minimise abuse and frame it as a contravention of social mores around marriage and relationships.

63. Between the 1940s and the 1960s, child sexual abuse was not believed to be widespread and was thought only to affect certain groups across society (such as the “*lower social classes*”).

⁶⁷² *Child Migration Programmes Investigation Report*, Part B.3 para 11

⁶⁷³ *Child Migration Programmes Investigation Report*, Part B.3 para 9

Beliefs that there was such a thing as a “*seductive child*” and that child sexual abuse was “*not harmful*” persisted into the 1990s.⁶⁷⁴

64. In the 1960s and 1970s, some malign influences advocated to reposition child sexual abuse within broader societal debate about sexual liberation. The Paedophile Information Exchange (PIE) was one group that sought to garner support for the idea that paedophilia was a legitimate type of sexual attraction. Organisations such as the Albany Trust and the National Council for Civil Liberties (now known as Liberty) and prominent public figures gave support to PIE.⁶⁷⁵ PIE was able to gain a platform for its agenda to lower the age of consent, and argued that sexual activity with a four-year-old should be ‘allowed’ within the family setting, with the age of 10 being applicable in other contexts. In part as a result of the support it received, some of PIE’s suggestions appeared to gain traction.

⁶⁷⁴ *Deflection, denial and disbelief: social and political discourses about child sexual abuse and their influence on institutional responses: A rapid evidence assessment*, IICSA, February 2018, pp11–14

⁶⁷⁵ *Westminster Investigation Report*, Part K.1 para 14

65. In the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, the idea that child sexual abuse could be attributed to problems within individuals' families became prominent. In the late 1980s, those involved in political, legal and social-work spheres mooted that some responses to child sexual abuse were “*over-zealous*”, or constituted a “*moral panic*” or a “*witch hunt*”. Such narratives minimised the scale of the problem.⁶⁷⁶ Harmful sexual behaviour between children was described as “*sexual malpractice*” and those who raised concerns were belittled as being “*prissy and middle class*”.⁶⁷⁷ Some placed emphasis on the needs of perpetrators of harmful sexual behaviour as vulnerable and requiring support.⁶⁷⁸

66. Between the 2000s and the 2010s, understanding about and attitudes towards child sexual abuse became more sensitive and victim-focussed. Some individuals deflected blame from

⁶⁷⁶ *Deflection, denial and disbelief: social and political discourses about child sexual abuse and their influence on institutional responses: A rapid evidence assessment*, IICSA, February 2018, p15

⁶⁷⁷ *Cambridge House, Knowl View and Rochdale Investigation Report*, Part C (Section 1) para 36, Part C (Section 2) para 38

⁶⁷⁸ *Deflection, denial and disbelief: social and political discourses about child sexual abuse and their influence on institutional responses: A rapid evidence assessment*, IICSA, February 2018, p12

perpetrators and institutions, or rationalised it by proposing that abuse was perpetrated by a small group of perverse individuals who had “*something wrong with them*” or occurred in particularly corrupt or wayward institutions.⁶⁷⁹ Others challenged this perspective and increasingly held institutions to account.⁶⁸⁰

67. In the 2000s, there was a growing awareness of the problem of child sexual exploitation. In October 2013, the then Director of Public Prosecutions revised the Crown Prosecution Service guidance on child sexual exploitation, providing a list of stereotypes about young victims of child sexual exploitation that should no longer undermine a willingness to prosecute. Those included the way that a victim dressed or acted, whether they had used alcohol or drugs, whether

⁶⁷⁹ *Deflection, denial and disbelief: social and political discourses about child sexual abuse and their influence on institutional responses: A rapid evidence assessment*, IICSA, February 2018, pp12–13, 49

⁶⁸⁰ *Deflection, denial and disbelief: social and political discourses about child sexual abuse and their influence on institutional responses: A rapid evidence assessment*, IICSA, February 2018, pp16–17

they were in a relationship with the alleged offender or whether they screamed, fought or immediately complained about their sexual abuse.

68. Such developments were held back by a persistent characterisation of exploitation as being the result of children’s ‘lifestyle choices’, or deliberate behaviour aimed at payment or reward. Terms such as ‘child prostitution’ and ‘slags’ continued to be used through the 2010s to describe some children, including by statutory agencies.⁶⁸¹ This gave some children and young people the impression that they were not believed to be worthy of protection.

69. More recently, this has created and perpetuated notions of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ victims of child sexual abuse.⁶⁸² This was a wholly inappropriate and unethical way of treating serious criminality against children.

70. The Inquiry’s research found that, from the 1940s onwards, “*tendencies to disbelieve allegations of child sexual abuse remained a*

⁶⁸¹ *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Pen Portraits (CS-A12, CS-A371), Part E.3 paras 16, 20.2

⁶⁸² *Social and Political Narratives about Child Sexual Abuse Seminar: An update report*, IICSA, August 2018, para 17

constant thread".⁶⁸³ This led to a fear among child victims that they would not be believed or taken seriously when they disclosed their abuse, a fear that persists today.⁶⁸⁴ Similarly, discussions about consent and 'lifestyle choices' continue to detract from an understanding of abuse, exploitation and power dynamics.⁶⁸⁵

Changing dynamics

71. In recent years child sexual abuse has been given greater priority on the public agenda. The establishment of this Inquiry in 2015 and its work have given the issue of child sexual abuse greater visibility in society.

72. In January 2021, the UK government published its *Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy* and in July 2021 its strategy for *Tackling Violence Against*

⁶⁸³ *Deflection, denial and disbelief: social and political discourses about child sexual abuse and their influence on institutional responses: A rapid evidence assessment*, IICSA, February 2018, pp9–10, 16, 44, 92, 102

⁶⁸⁴ *Engagement with children and young people*, IICSA, June 2021, p25

⁶⁸⁵ *Social and Political Narratives about Child Sexual Abuse Seminar: An update report*, IICSA, August 2018, para 28

Women and Girls.⁶⁸⁶ It stated that the government is “*determined to build on this awareness and momentum for change*”.⁶⁸⁷

73. The #MeToo campaign has highlighted the growing visibility and confidence of victims, survivors and whistleblowers. In its wake, the movement Everyone’s Invited brought the concept of ‘rape culture’ dramatically into the mainstream media and public consciousness.⁶⁸⁸ It provided an opportunity for many victims and survivors of child sexual abuse to share their stories anonymously.⁶⁸⁹ By June 2022, it had received more than 50,000 testimonies.⁶⁹⁰ It has been an effective platform for the engagement and empowerment of victims of child sexual abuse.

74. In April 2021, the UK government commissioned Ofsted to conduct a rapid thematic review of sexual abuse between children in schools and colleges. Estyn conducted a similar review in September and October 2021.⁶⁹¹ Both reviews identified the prevalence of sexual harassment and online sexual abuse. Ofsted noted that sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are

⁶⁸⁶ [INQ006448](#); [INQ006620](#)

⁶⁸⁷ [INQ006620_010](#)

⁶⁸⁸ [INQ006513_002](#)

⁶⁸⁹ [INQ006633_001](#)

⁶⁹⁰ [INQ006653](#)

⁶⁹¹ [INQ006760_005](#)

“much more prevalent than adults realise” and that the prevalence of online sexual abuse was *“consistently underestimated”* by professionals.⁶⁹² Estyn found that approximately half of all pupils reported that they had experienced peer-on-peer sexual harassment, some of which took place during school hours but most of which happened online and outside school.⁶⁹³

75. In response to the reviews, the Department for Education announced that schools and colleges will be encouraged to dedicate an in-service training day to help train staff on how to deal with sexual abuse and harassment among pupils.⁶⁹⁴ It stated that a ‘whole-school’ approach should be put in place to address this. Approaches might include classroom discussions on topics such as consent and the sending of explicit images, routine record-keeping and analysis of incidents of sexual harassment and violence, a culture of zero-tolerance for sexual harassment and online sexual abuse, and training for all staff and (where applicable) governors.⁶⁹⁵ It made a number of recommendations for schools and colleges, multi-agency partnerships, the government and inspectorates.

⁶⁹² [INQ006504_002](#)

⁶⁹³ [INQ006760_010](#) paras 1–3

⁶⁹⁴ [INQ006677_001](#)

⁶⁹⁵ [INQ006509_004-006](#)

76. These developments have encouraged a number of victims and survivors to discuss their experiences and disclose their abuse. It is important that the government, the media and the public have started to listen to them. This is a positive step towards improving child protection. However, more can be done to encourage and facilitate the engagement and empowerment of children and young people.

77. Storylines and literary portrayals involving child sexual abuse also have an important role to play in influencing public attitudes and understanding of such abuse.⁶⁹⁶ Children and young people told the Inquiry's engagement team that, although they thought some portrayals of child sexual abuse in drama had been dealt with "*in a sensitive and compelling way*", the topic needed to include a focus on the long-term impacts of abuse.⁶⁹⁷ They expressed the view that when sexual abuse is covered as a topic, it usually concerns abuse of adults and not of children.⁶⁹⁸ The Inquiry's Victims and Survivors Forum emphasised that both social and traditional media had an opportunity to make

⁶⁹⁶ [INQ006857](#); [INQ006934](#)

⁶⁹⁷ [Engagement with children and young people](#), IICSA, June 2021, p10

⁶⁹⁸ [Engagement with children and young people](#), IICSA, June 2021, p10

a positive impact by showing victims and survivors as courageous, rather than showing repetitive presentations of shame and injury.

78. Public attitudes to child sexual abuse may be both influenced by and reflected in the media. It is important that the experiences of victims and survivors are not undermined by the media, and that misleading or simplistic representations do not dominate debate. There have been instances in which the print and broadcast media have played a key role in exposing child sexual abuse and in increasing awareness of particular forms of abuse.⁶⁹⁹ In particular, investigative journalism has exposed some of the worst examples of child sexual exploitation.⁷⁰⁰ The Office for National Statistics suggested in its 2019 statistical analysis of child sexual abuse in England and Wales that high-profile media coverage of child sexual offences and the police response to reports of non-recent child sexual abuse may have played a part in an increase in police recording of such offences.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁹ *Social and Political Narratives about Child Sexual Abuse Seminar: An update report*, IICSA, August 2018, para 33

⁷⁰⁰ INQ006847; *Westminster Investigation Report*, Executive Summary; INQ000963_004; INQ000963_005-007

⁷⁰¹ INQ006621_007

Empowering conversation

79. Discussion about child sexual abuse remains an uncomfortable subject for many. Respondents to the Inquiry's 2020 survey indicated that they would feel more comfortable talking about any other topic than child sexual abuse.⁷⁰² Younger people were least likely to feel comfortable talking about abuse. It remains the least preferred subject for discussion, with only 37 percent of people feeling comfortable talking about child sexual abuse.⁷⁰³ Many of the Truth Project participants have emphasised the importance of bringing discussions about child sexual abuse into the public arena.⁷⁰⁴ Children and young people who participated with the Inquiry's Engagement Team also expressed the view that there needed to be a cultural shift at societal level so that talking about child sexual abuse ceases to be a taboo. Participants stated that conversations needed to be frank, without being sensationalist or 'titillating':

⁷⁰² [INQ006937_033-034](#)

⁷⁰³ [INQ006937_005](#)

⁷⁰⁴ [Victim and survivor voices from the Truth Project \(June 2016–June 2017\)](#), IICSA, October 2017, p135; Victims and Survivors' Voices, Part B.2 para 3

*“If they want to make a change, they have to tell it like it is, that’s the only way people will start taking notice of it”.*⁷⁰⁵

The Victims and Survivors Forum agreed that action should be taken to bring about cultural change, pointing out that people find it hard to talk openly about a subject that they fear.⁷⁰⁶

80. It is important that adults are able to have discussions with young people about subjects such as sex, sexuality, relationships, grooming and exploitation. Those conversations are part of society’s collective duty to ensure young people are well informed and can navigate the risks of abusive and exploitative sexual relationships. Some professionals, such as youth workers, are well equipped to do so and to understand young people’s perspectives in a way that can help to identify risks of child sexual abuse. But children and young people should feel able to broach these subjects in the more routine aspects of their lives should they wish to, such as with their teachers, parents and peers. Empowering children and

⁷⁰⁵ *Engagement with children and young people*, IICSA, June 2021, p12

⁷⁰⁶ *Victims and Survivors Forum Consultation on Culture: Summary Report*, IICSA, November 2019, pp3–4

young people to talk about this topic, and opening up discussions between them and a broad range of adults, is therefore essential.⁷⁰⁷

81. By June 2022, the UK government and the Welsh Government had undertaken a number of campaigns.⁷⁰⁸

81.1. ‘Stop Abuse Together’, for which the Cabinet Office has responsibility, is part of the UK government’s programme of work under the *Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy* and provides information to parents, carers and the wider public about child sexual abuse. The campaign ran on the radio, digital audio and social media channels, such as Instagram, Twitter and NextDoor, for three months between January 2022 and March 2022. Its aim was “to educate parents and the general public about

⁷⁰⁷ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of schools*, IICSA, December 2020, p86; *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of children’s homes and residential care*, IICSA, November 2019, p89; *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of religious institutions*, IICSA, May 2019, pp65–66

⁷⁰⁸ *HOM003410; WGT000487*

*child sexual abuse, including its prevalence, the signs to look for, and where to go to find further support”.*⁷⁰⁹

81.2. ‘Enough’, for which the Home Office takes responsibility, is a campaign in England and Wales which is part of the UK government’s *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy*. The campaign is proposed to run in stages, dealing initially with the nature of such crimes and aiming to make them less socially acceptable and to increase people’s confidence to safely challenge perpetrators. Paid advertising carrying these messages ran throughout March 2022. Subsequent phases of the campaign aim to educate young people about healthy relationships, including consent, and ensure victims can recognise abuse and non-contact sexual offending. These phases are proposed to run through the remainder of 2022 and early 2023.⁷¹⁰

81.3. In Wales, the campaign ‘This is Sexual Abuse’ was launched in February 2020 and is part of a broader programme designed to address domestic violence. It aimed to highlight the different types of sexual abuse (including sexual assault, rape, sexual or derogatory name-calling, child sexual abuse, harassment

⁷⁰⁹ [HOM003410_002](#) para 5

⁷¹⁰ [HOM003410_003](#) para 12

and female genital mutilation) and to help people to recognise the signs of sexual abuse and to seek help. It is conducted through a number of channels, including paid advertising and a social media campaign. The broader campaign programme, called 'Live Fear Free', is ongoing.

82. Of these campaigns, only 'Stop Abuse Together' dealt specifically with the issue of child sexual abuse and exploitation. It is unfortunate that it was scheduled to run for such a short period of time and is unlikely to have the sort of profound and prolonged impact that is required to displace the taboo that is still attached to this subject.

83. The Inquiry therefore recommends that the governments in England and in Wales initiate specific and long-term programmes to increase public awareness of child sexual abuse.

Recommendation 4: Public awareness

The Inquiry recommends that the UK government and the Welsh Government commission regular programmes of activity to increase public awareness about child sexual abuse and the action to take if child sexual abuse is happening or suspected in England and in Wales.

The programmes should:

- challenge myths and stereotypes about child sexual abuse;
- make maximum use of different approaches including, but not limited to, public information campaigns, the use of positive role models and creative media, such as television drama; and
- be supported by continuous evaluation to measure their impact.

Part D

Empowering children and young people

Empowering children and young people

D.1: Introduction

1. Society's response to child sexual abuse reflects its attitude towards children, who have long been in a position of comparative weakness and vulnerability. Their vulnerabilities have put them, in many cases, in the path of abuse, and in a position of disadvantage that has impeded their recourse to help or justice. At worst, children were treated as commodities at adults' disposal to do with as they wish. Adults thought children were not telling the truth when they tried to disclose abuse.

2. Children and young people have a central place in our society. In law and in practice, their views are increasingly sought and taken into account, and their rights and entitlements are taken more seriously than they were in the past. The technological literacy of children and young people has had a demonstrable impact on traditional power dynamics, as the Everyone's Invited movement illustrated. As a result, the views and experiences of children and young people are better recognised within society, and this in itself means that children today are more empowered than those of earlier generations.

3. Some children and young people remain more vulnerable to sexual abuse than their peers. This may be as a result of their presence in a particular setting, such as placement in an out-of-family setting by a local authority or in secure detention by the state, or economic circumstances.⁷¹¹ Some children may fall into a number of these groups.⁷¹²

4. While the measures by which the State protects vulnerable children from abuse have developed, engagement directly with children and young people has been slow. As set out in Part C of this report, the nature of discussions about child sexual abuse (whether online, in the media or in schools, for example) must change to help to address the stigma experienced by victims and survivors.

⁷¹¹ *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part K.1 paras 3–6; *Cambridge House, Knowl View and Rochdale Investigation Report*, Part A paras 9–10; *Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, Executive Summary; *Nottinghamshire Councils Investigation Report*, Executive Summary; *Child Migration Programmes Investigation Report*, Part B.2 para 24; *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Part E.1 paras 1, 4, 7; *Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, Part K.1 para 13

⁷¹² *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Part B.1 para 9

5. In the 21st century, the empowerment of young people can be a powerful tool in the battle to prevent abuse. Educating children and young people about the risk of abuse and the identification of those risks plays an important role in keeping them safe, but the responsibility for taking action to address these risks rests with adults and institutions.⁷¹³ In this Part, the Inquiry makes two specific recommendations to complement a number of the broader recommendations set out elsewhere in this report.

D.2: Children with additional needs

6. Children with complex needs may struggle to overcome communication difficulties, either because of the nature of a disability or because their carers may not understand their method of communication.⁷¹⁴ Some children's needs may also mean that the child does not always appreciate or

⁷¹³ *Learning about online sexual harm: Executive summary*, IICSA, November 2019, p12; INQ004237_005

⁷¹⁴ *Lambeth Council Investigation Report, Part C.5 paras 22–24; Residential Schools Investigation Report, Part D.2*

understand why abusive behaviour is inappropriate and might find it difficult to recognise and disclose concerns or sexual abuse.⁷¹⁵

7. Research shows that children with complex needs are at a significantly greater risk of sexual abuse.⁷¹⁶ Disabled children are almost three times more likely to experience sexual violence than non-disabled children.⁷¹⁷ The 2019 Office for National Statistics (ONS) Crime Survey recorded that adults with a disability were twice as likely to have experienced child sexual abuse (13.4 percent) as those without a disability (6.6 percent).⁷¹⁸

8. Some children who have emotional, educational or behavioural needs live in residential special schools.⁷¹⁹ In addition to living away from home, these needs can render them particularly

⁷¹⁵ *Residential Schools Investigation Report, Part B.3 para 96; Safeguarding children from sexual abuse in residential schools, IICSA, April 2020, p66*

⁷¹⁶ *Lambeth Council Investigation Report, Part C.5; INQ005640__002-003*

⁷¹⁷ *Residential Schools Investigation Report, Part D.2 para 9*

⁷¹⁸ *INQ006632__001*

⁷¹⁹ *Residential Schools Investigation Report, Part D.1 paras 1–3; Cambridge House, Knowl View and Rochdale Investigation Report, Part A para 19, Part C paras 6, 10*

vulnerable.⁷²⁰ In a 2007 study, 88 percent of special schools reported that they had encountered sexually inappropriate pupil behaviour.⁷²¹ Research by the Inquiry found that special schools recorded nearly 10 times the number of concerns per student than other residential schools.⁷²² This may suggest that special schools are identifying and reporting a higher proportion of incidents taking place or that more concerns of a sexual nature occur in these settings due to the additional needs of the pupils.

9. Specialist support may be necessary to help children with additional needs express themselves. Some valuable support is already available. Advocacy services have grown in number and expertise in recent years and if properly resourced may be able to assist children with disabilities in understanding grooming and reporting sexual abuse if it happens.

⁷²⁰ *Cambridge House, Knowl View and Rochdale Investigation Report, Part C para 10; Residential Schools Investigation Report, Part D.2 paras 9, 11, 12*

⁷²¹ *Residential Schools Investigation Report, Part D.4 para 31*

⁷²² *Safeguarding children from sexual abuse in residential schools, IICSA, April 2020, pp9, 66*

10. It also remains the case that there is a lack of knowledge, understanding and awareness about the sexual abuse of children with additional needs.⁷²³ For example, many professionals, carers and the wider community need a better understanding of sexual exploitation involving children with disabilities to ensure that the risks to those children are identified and appropriate action taken.⁷²⁴

11. As part of child protection, adults have a responsibility to pay attention to children and their individual needs and wishes. Specialist advice and signposting to relevant resources should be available from the Child Protection Authorities recommended in Part C.

D.3: Children in custody

12. The number of children and young people in custody in young offender institutions (YOIs), secure training centres (STCs) and secure children's homes (SCHs) has declined from a monthly average of more than 3,000 in 2003 to 560 in 2021.⁷²⁵ Those children in custody are

⁷²³ *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Part D.4 para 50

⁷²⁴ *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Part D.4 paras 73–76

⁷²⁵ *INQ006692_039; INQ006915_002, 036*

extremely vulnerable to abuse, particularly as they include a high proportion of “*highly complex, high-needs young people*”.⁷²⁶

13. Some children come from unstable family backgrounds, some have experienced sexual abuse prior to being in custody.⁷²⁷ Many have emotional, behavioural or educational problems. Some children have mental health difficulties which might manifest as extreme violence, sexualised behaviours or self-harming behaviours.⁷²⁸ An HM Inspectorate of Prisons report covering the period from 2019 to 2020 recorded that over one-third (36 percent) of children said that they had health problems (including mental health problems) and a quarter (25 percent) reported having a

⁷²⁶ *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Part B.1, para 7

⁷²⁷ *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in custodial institutions*, IICSA, April 2020, pp30–32; *Child sexual abuse in custodial institutions: A rapid evidence assessment*, IICSA, March 2018, pp42–46

⁷²⁸ *Child sexual abuse in custodial institutions: A rapid evidence assessment*, IICSA, March 2018, pp30, 81–83; *Safe inside? Child sexual abuse in the youth secure estate*, IICSA, February 2019, pp15–16, 32; *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Part C.2

disability.⁷²⁹ Both the 2018/19 and the 2019/20 HM Inspectorate of Prisons reports on children in custody indicated that more than half of children had been in the care of a local authority.⁷³⁰ HM Inspectorate of Probation’s 2021 annual inspection report recognised that children looked after by local authorities form a significant proportion of children in custody, and that they are a particularly vulnerable group.⁷³¹

14. This combination of challenging behaviour and vulnerability often presents difficulties in safely managing and caring for these children and young people, some of whom may be violent to staff and other children. As a result, there are occasions when staff in custodial institutions consider it necessary to physically restrain children.

The use of restraint

15. The 2012 *Minimising and Managing Physical Restraint* (MMPR) guidance for YOIs refers to a range of physical restraint techniques.

15.1. The guidance states that the use of force to restrain a child is permitted as “*the last available option*” when other methods not involving force have failed or are judged unlikely to succeed but action is required “*to prevent*

⁷²⁹ INQ006646__017 para 4.10

⁷³⁰ INQ006654__023; INQ006646__005, 057

⁷³¹ INQ006945__043

injury or serious damage” to the child, another person or property.⁷³² These restraint techniques are not intended to induce pain, although it may be a consequence of some, and so the MMPR guidance sets out when adjustments should be made in response to a child complaining of pain.

15.2. There are also three techniques which are deliberately designed to cause pain to the child – a mandibular angle technique (applying pressure directly under the ear lobe in the crease between the jaw and the neck), thumb flexion and wrist flexion (often misdescribed as ‘pain-inducing’ techniques or restraint, but also referred to as ‘pain distraction’ or ‘pain compliance’).⁷³³ The intention is that the infliction of brief, sharp pain will cause a child to desist and comply with instructions. The MMPR guidance states that use of these techniques may be “*justifiable*” in the case of “*immediate risk of serious physical harm*”.⁷³⁴

16. The deliberate infliction of pain is a form of child abuse and is likely to contribute to a culture of violence as well as to an environment where sexual abuse may be more likely to occur and

⁷³² [HOM002578_009](#); [HOM000322_003](#)

⁷³³ [INQ006848_006-007](#)

⁷³⁴ [HOM000322_043](#)

also less likely to be reported if it does occur.⁷³⁵

As a result, in its *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions: 2009–2017 Investigation Report* (published in February 2019), the Inquiry recommended that the government should prohibit these practices.⁷³⁶

17. A similar conclusion was reached by Parliament’s Joint Committee on Human Rights in April 2019, which stated that:

*“The deliberate infliction of pain in Young Offenders’ Institutions (YOIs) is unacceptable under any circumstances under rights legislation. The use of restraint for maintaining ‘good order and discipline’ must be prohibited in all but the most exceptional of circumstances.”*⁷³⁷

18. In July 2019, in response to the Inquiry’s recommendation and a legal challenge by the children’s rights group Article 39, the Ministry of Justice commissioned Mr Charlie Taylor (Chair of the Youth Justice Board) to review the use of pain-

⁷³⁵ *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Part E.7 paras 89, 92, 93

⁷³⁶ *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Part F (Recommendation 5)

⁷³⁷ INQ006883_007

inducing techniques in the youth secure estate. The Taylor Review, published in June 2020, made 15 recommendations. The review acknowledged that “*even in the most humane, well-run setting there will be occasions when direct, immediate physical force is required*”, and recommended that the MMPR syllabus be amended to remove the use of pain-inducing techniques.⁷³⁸ It recommended separately that in situations where “*there is a risk of serious harm to [staff] or others*”, staff may “*use a pain-inducing technique to prevent serious physical harm to child or adult*”, although it stated that this should not form part of the MMPR syllabus because it should never be routine or normal.⁷³⁹

19. The government’s response, published alongside the Taylor Review, stated that it would revise approved training modules so that “*the sections on pain-inducing techniques are removed and the syllabus is comprised only of behaviour management and restraint techniques*”.⁷⁴⁰ In December 2020, the Youth Custody Service established the Independent Restraint Review Panel to consider incidents when pain-inducing techniques have been used in YOIs and STCs.⁷⁴¹

⁷³⁸ [INQ006848_021](#)

⁷³⁹ [INQ006848_022](#)

⁷⁴⁰ [INQ006882_010](#); [INQ006909](#)

⁷⁴¹ [INQ006908](#); [INQ006909](#)

20. In the year ending March 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were nearly 7,800 use of force incidents (which include legitimate incidents of restraint but also techniques that deliberately inflict pain) in YOIs and STCs, of which 49 percent lasted for three minutes or more.⁷⁴² Use of force incidents reduced to almost 4,500 for the year ending March 2021, with 47 percent lasting for three minutes or more, although the Youth Justice Board itself noted that this should be viewed in the context of restrictions related to COVID-19, as a result of which “*occasions on which incidents of restrictive physical intervention may have been needed were also reduced*”.⁷⁴³ A review of, or reduction in, the use of techniques that deliberately cause pain to children is not an alternative to prohibition.

21. As set out in Table D.1, there remain a number of incidents in which a pain-inducing technique was used (and a higher number of times such a technique was used, as a technique might be used more than once during an incident). As noted above, incidents in 2021 were reduced as a result of restrictions related to COVID-19.

⁷⁴² [INQ006692_058-059](#)

⁷⁴³ [INQ006915_047-048, 052-053](#) sections 8.2, 8.6–8.7

Table D.1: *Number of times a pain-inducing technique was used, and total number of use of force incidents in which a pain-inducing technique was used, in young offender institutions (YOIs) and secure training centres (STCs) in England and in Wales*

Year ending March	Number of use of force incidents in which a pain-inducing technique was used	Total number of times a pain-inducing technique was used
2017	119	195
2018	181	260
2019	168	251
2020	110	136
2021	45	54

Source: See [data compendium](#) to this report

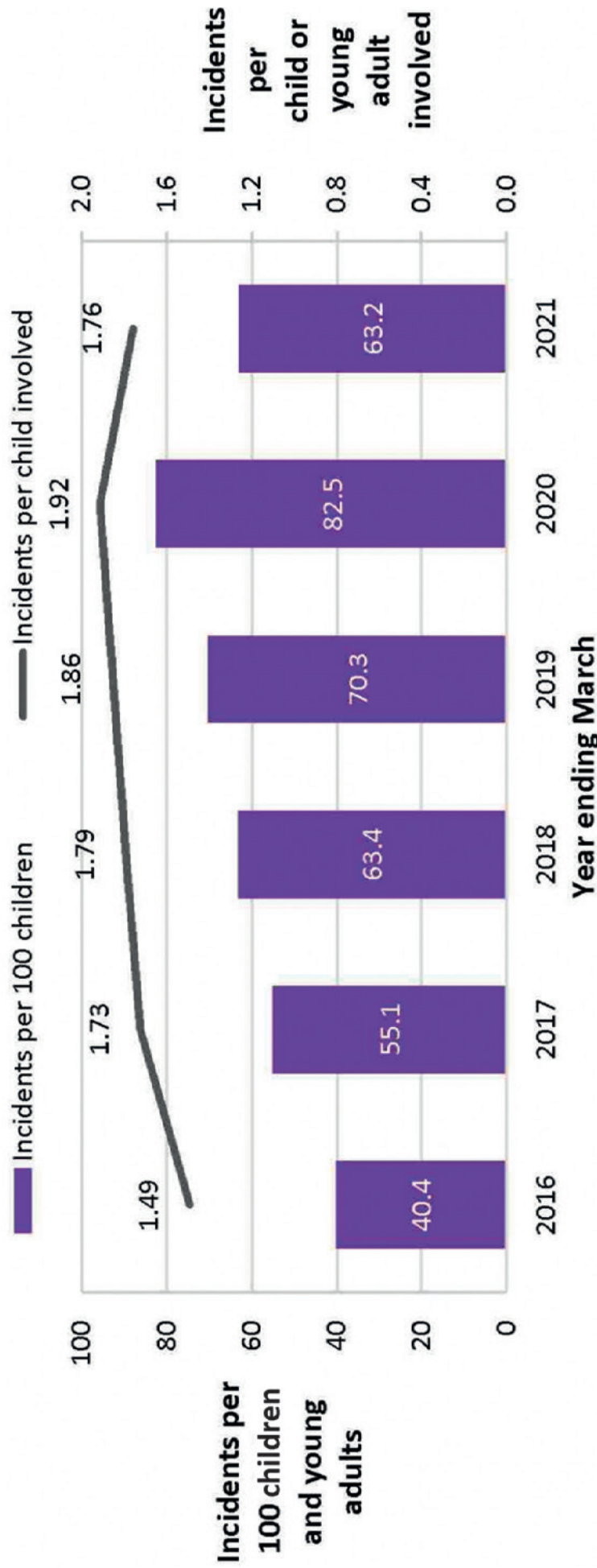


Figure D.1: Average monthly rate of use of force incidents per 100 children and young adults in the youth secure estate and per children or young adults involved, secure training centres (STCs) and young offender institutions (YOIs) only, in England and in Wales

Source: Youth Justice Statistics 2020/21, figure 8.9

22. The use of force against children contributes to a belief that an institution condones violence, which is likely to discourage reporting of sexual (and indeed other) abuse. Any review of the relevant guidance and related techniques should concentrate on restraint that does not inflict pain of any kind.

23. A review of or reduction in the use of techniques that deliberately cause pain to children is not an alternative to prohibition of what is a form of child abuse. The Inquiry therefore reiterates its previous recommendation regarding the prohibition of these practices.

Recommendation 5: Pain compliance

The Inquiry recommends (as originally stated in its *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions: 2009–2017 Investigation Report*, dated February 2019) that the UK government prohibits the use of any technique that deliberately induces pain (previously referred to by the Inquiry as ‘pain compliance techniques’) by withdrawing all policy permitting its use in custodial institutions in which children are detained, and setting out that this practice is prohibited by way of regulation.

24. The Inquiry also noted the high rates of use of force incidents for the year ending March 2021 for children aged 10 to 14 (an average monthly rate of 147.7 per 100 children compared with 62.6 for those aged 15 to 18) and for girls (229.8 per 100 girls compared with 59.9 for boys).⁷⁴⁴ Both groups of children are likely to be more vulnerable to abuse due to a physical as well as a power imbalance, which the Inquiry has frequently observed as contributing to opportunities for sexual abuse.

Respecting the interests of children in custody

25. Children in custody are not able to engage with the outside world in the same way as their peers. They have very little control over their lives and limited lines of communication.

26. The institutions in which children are detained should ensure that there is a child-centred focus, where children have access to their family, friends, peers or a trusted adult.⁷⁴⁵ Secure children's homes have better staff ratios and training requirements than young offender institutions or secure training centres, and are also subject to similar standards

⁷⁴⁴ [INQ006774_053](#)

⁷⁴⁵ [Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report](#), Part D.2 para 19, Part E.10 paras 108, 109

of care to those applied by Ofsted to children's homes. As set out in the *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report* (published in February 2019), the needs of children in custody would be better served by the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Education sharing policy responsibility for managing and safeguarding children in custodial institutions to ensure a focus on securing child welfare as well as discipline. In July 2019, the Ministry of Justice rejected this recommendation, noting that the government intended to “*replace all YOIs and STCs with secure schools, moving the estate towards one which consists of SCHs and secure schools only*”.⁷⁴⁶ It was expected that this would commence by 2022. The government now expects one secure school to open in late 2023.⁷⁴⁷ The Inquiry understands that the Ministry of Justice will have overall policy responsibility for safeguarding children in secure schools, and that this policy is aligned wherever possible with that of the Department for Education.

27. The Inquiry also recommended (in its February 2019 *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*) that the Ministry

⁷⁴⁶ *Ministry of Justice response to recommendation 7 of the Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report dated 23 July 2019, p5*

⁷⁴⁷ *INQ006955*

of Justice revise and publish updated guidance on the response by custodial institutions to allegations of child sexual abuse (Prison Service Instruction 08/2012).⁷⁴⁸ This recommendation has also not been implemented. In its response in July 2019, the Ministry of Justice indicated that work had begun to revise or replace Prison Service Instructions (PSIs) with ‘policy frameworks’ and that the Youth Custody Service would work with the Department for Education to produce guidance called ‘Keeping Children Safe in Custody’. The Inquiry understands that neither of these changes have been made in the intervening three years. Given PSI 08/2012 has expired, it is of concern that there is no up-to-date guidance for custodial institutions about how to maintain ‘a safe and secure environment’ for children in their care. New guidance, ‘Keeping Children Safe in Secure Settings’, is due to be published by the Youth Custody Service in early 2023.

D.4: Looked after children

28. Many people perceive the sexual abuse of children in care to have been a problem of the past. Abuse has occurred in many local authorities.⁷⁴⁹ The Inquiry’s investigations into the

⁷⁴⁸ *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report, Part F (Recommendation 6)*

⁷⁴⁹ INQ002472 paras 90–91, 100

sexual abuse of children in the care of Lambeth Council and of the Nottinghamshire Councils found abuse akin to that uncovered by inquiries of the 1990s, where systemic abuse was found to have taken place in children's residential homes and by some carers.⁷⁵⁰ In both investigations, the Inquiry concluded that the true number of victims of child sexual abuse was likely to be higher than the local authorities had been able to identify.⁷⁵¹

29. The contemporary approach to children who are in the care of a local authority (known as 'looked after children') is different in many respects. The Children Act 1989 (and its associated guidance and regulations) introduced fundamental changes to the regulation and inspection of institutions responsible for children in care.

30. There are also significantly fewer children in residential care today than there were in the past. In 1973, 59 percent of looked after children in England and in Wales were in residential placements.⁷⁵² In England at the end of March 2021, there were 11,550 looked after children in secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living accommodation, amounting

⁷⁵⁰ [INQ002923_001, 023, 095, 151, 317, 342](#)

⁷⁵¹ [Lambeth Council Investigation Report, Part K; Nottinghamshire Councils Investigation Report, Executive Summary](#)

⁷⁵² [INQ002472_060](#)

to 14 percent of the total. By comparison, 57,330 (71 percent) were living in foster placements.⁷⁵³ In Wales, at the end of March 2021, there were 535 looked after children in residential settings (7 percent) and 5,070 in foster placements (70 percent).⁷⁵⁴ Many children in care are placed in other settings by the local authority, including private and voluntary or third sector settings.

31. The number of looked after children has increased every year since 2010. Between 2018 and 2021, there was a 7 percent increase in the number of looked after children in England, from 75,370 to 80,850.⁷⁵⁵ Over the same period in Wales there was a 13 percent increase, from 6,406 to 7,263.⁷⁵⁶ In 2022, children accommodated in residential settings are likely to be those for whom foster care is not suitable, possibly as a result of the child's own heightened needs, which may in turn be a result of their early childhood experiences.⁷⁵⁷ As a group, children in residential homes tend to be older than the general population of children in care (with an average age of 14.6 in March 2015).⁷⁵⁸ Older children in care are

⁷⁵³ [INQ006927_007](#)

⁷⁵⁴ [INQ006963_001](#)

⁷⁵⁵ [INQ006927_004](#)

⁷⁵⁶ [INQ006962_003](#)

⁷⁵⁷ [INQ006756_002](#)

⁷⁵⁸ [INQ006769_006](#)

50 percent more likely to have an Education, Health and Care Plan or a Statement of Special Educational Needs, and are 10 times more likely to have been attending a pupil referral unit than those under 13.⁷⁵⁹ Generally speaking, and for a range of reasons, young people in residential care are more likely than their peers to have suffered hardship and to be disempowered by their circumstances. Experiences of trauma while living in the parental home are likely to have occurred.

32. This makes looked after children particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation.⁷⁶⁰ Around half of children whose cases were considered as part of the Inquiry's *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report* were children in care.⁷⁶¹ Prevailing prejudices concerning a person's vulnerability, such as social isolation and prior trauma, can be manifested as additional barriers for a looked after

⁷⁵⁹ [INQ006755_003](#); [INQ006566_006](#)

⁷⁶⁰ [INQ005182_015](#)

⁷⁶¹ [Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report, Part B.2 para 5](#)

child who discloses sexual abuse.⁷⁶² This makes it even more difficult for those children to get the help they need.

33. Young people in care are uniquely placed to identify what needs to change to keep them safe. They are often acutely aware that their vulnerability can be increased by problems such as ‘drift’ in their care planning, distance from their family and community, and living in inappropriate locations.⁷⁶³ Children in care are also in a different legal position – decisions are made on their behalf by local authorities, who act as their ‘corporate parent’ and organise their placement with alternative carers.

34. Young people living in residential care may feel that they have little control or say over aspects of their lives. Whereas a young person in a family home might have the opportunity and ability to challenge their parents about issues such as school choice, or rules about going out in the

⁷⁶² *Institutional Responses to Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse Involving the Late Lord Janner of Braunstone QC Investigation Report, Executive Summary; Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report, Part E.2 para 4, Part E.3 para 20*

⁷⁶³ *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report, Pen Portraits (CS-A372, CS-A373, CS-A1)*

evenings, who they can and cannot see and who they can have relationships with, young people in care may feel less able to test, discuss and bend rules.

35. A striking illustration of this is the well-recognised pattern of children going missing from care when they are unhappy with their circumstances. They may do so for many reasons (including, simply, a wish to return to their families). In some cases they do so because they are seeking to avoid situations where they are at risk of sexual abuse or exploitation at (or in the vicinity of) their placements.⁷⁶⁴ One victim described his desperate wish to escape sexual abuse by “*any means necessary*”, including by running away.⁷⁶⁵ A thematic assessment of Truth Project accounts of child sexual abuse in residential care found that 24 percent of children abused in residential contexts ran away:

*“Running away was reported to be a common response to the experience of sexual abuse at the time amongst other techniques to try to escape it”.*⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶⁴ [NO-A103 3 October 2018 81/1-11](#)

⁷⁶⁵ [NO-A103 3 October 2018 77/16-24](#)

⁷⁶⁶ [Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in the context of children’s homes and residential care](#), IICSA, November 2019, p7

Sections 8 and 9 of the Children Act 1989

36. There are several routes by which children and young people in care can express their views about their circumstances.

36.1. Section 22(4) of the Children Act 1989 states that before making any decision with respect to a looked after child, a local authority must, so far as reasonably practicable, ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child. Many local authorities in England have Children in Care Councils which provide opportunities for children in care to share their views.⁷⁶⁷ These were established *“to ensure that every child has the opportunity to air their views”* and so that *“children and young people should be able to put their experiences of the care system directly to those responsible for corporate parenting”*.⁷⁶⁸

36.2. Local authorities must also make arrangements for advocacy provision for children and young people in receipt of social care services who wish to make a representation under section 26A of the Children Act 1989. Local authorities must monitor the steps they

⁷⁶⁷ [INQ006910; INQ006885__008](#)

⁷⁶⁸ [OFS000268__023](#)

have taken, in particular by keeping a record of the advocate appointed to the child or young person.

36.3. Ofsted conducts an annual children's social care survey to seek the views of children in care.⁷⁶⁹

36.4. The Children's Commissioners for England and for Wales frequently conduct surveys and other research to establish the views of children in care.⁷⁷⁰

36.5. Several charities and third sector organisations that provide advocacy services conduct regular surveys, forums or focus groups with children in care and care leavers. For example, Become supports the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for children in care and care leavers, Barnardo's runs specialist advocacy services, as do the National Youth Advocacy Service, Action for Children, Article 39 and the Children's Society.⁷⁷¹ There are many more local advocacy organisations.

⁷⁶⁹ [INQ006838](#)

⁷⁷⁰ [Reports of the Children's Commissioner for England](#); [reports of the Children's Commissioner for Wales](#)

⁷⁷¹ [INQ006836](#); [INQ006835](#); [INQ006903](#); [INQ006841](#); [INQ006840](#); [INQ006837](#)

37. Children can also make a formal complaint about their care (for example, under the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, to Children’s Commissioners, or to the Local Government Ombudsman).⁷⁷²

38. These services and provisions do not, however, change the legal position of children in care. There are only limited routes by which children in care can compel a local authority to take a different approach to their care from one that it proposes. The legal position of children in care should be improved, so that they can be empowered to challenge aspects of local authority decision-making for themselves.

39. The Children Act 1989 (the 1989 Act) separates the powers of courts from those of local authorities. Courts can make orders under section 8 of the 1989 Act to limit or mandate an aspect of parents’ exercise of their parental responsibility. A court has no such ability in respect of a child in care. Where a court finds that parents’ actions have caused a child to experience, or be at risk of, significant harm, it may make a care order so that a local authority effectively has ‘overriding’ parental

⁷⁷² To an extent the Inquiry has examined circumstances in which children in care have tried and failed to change their circumstances by these routes; for example: *Nottinghamshire Councils Investigation Report*, Part C.3 para 17

responsibility over that child.⁷⁷³ The local authority then has day-to-day care of, and control over, the child as their ‘corporate parent’.⁷⁷⁴ Section 9 of the 1989 Act prevents section 8 orders being made against parents in respect of children who are the subject of a care order.⁷⁷⁵

40. The effect of this legal regime is to create a separation of powers between courts and local authorities. Courts can make decisions about children who are not in care, but only local authorities can make decisions about children who are in care.

41. In a number of cases, senior judges have observed that this ‘separation of powers’ gave rise to serious practical and legal problems for children.⁷⁷⁶ The government responded by introducing an Independent Reviewing Officer, who can refer a child’s case to court.⁷⁷⁷ However, that

⁷⁷³ Children Act 1989, section 31; *Re F: F v Lambeth London Borough Council* [2002] 1 FLR 217, para 52

⁷⁷⁴ Children and Social Work Act 2017, section 1; INQ006482_008 para 2.3

⁷⁷⁵ Children Act 1989, section 9

⁷⁷⁶ *Re S (Minors) (Care Order: Implementation of Care Plan)*; *Re W (Minors) (Care Order: Adequacy of Care Plan)* [2002] 1 FLR 815 paras 86, 106

⁷⁷⁷ Children Act 1989, section 25B

power is rarely used in practice⁷⁷⁸ and in a number of cases senior judges have commented on their limited utility.⁷⁷⁹

42. The other ways in which children in care can apply to the court for orders to control a local authority's actions are of limited use in practice.

42.1. A child can request that a court discharge a care order but this is likely to be unrealistic where a child has no alternative carer, and a court considering such an application has no power to control how the local authority exercises its parental responsibility.⁷⁸⁰

⁷⁷⁸ *Beckett et al., Independence and effectiveness: Messages from the role of Independent Reviewing Officers in England*, Children and Youth Services Review 71 (2016) 148–156; *Jelicic et al., The role of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in England*, NCB, March 2014; INQ006926

⁷⁷⁹ *S (A Child Acting by the Official Solicitor) v Rochdale MBC & the IRO* [2009] 1 FLR 1090; *Re A & S (Children) (Failed Freeing Order)* [2012] EWHC 1689 (Fam); *BT & GT (Children: twins – adoption)* [2018] EWFC 76; *Herefordshire Council v AB* [2018] EWFC 10

⁷⁸⁰ Children Act 1989, section 39; *Re A (Care: Discharge Application by Child)* [1995] 1 FLR 599

42.2. Children can, and sometimes do, bring applications under the Human Rights Act 1998 for injunctions, declaratory relief or damages.⁷⁸¹ In those cases, children are represented by an adult acting as their ‘litigation friend’ who can conduct proceedings on their behalf (often the Official Solicitor, who is an officer of the Supreme Court).⁷⁸² Children receive legal aid for such applications but rarely bring them themselves.⁷⁸³ They are not proceedings in which courts will place paramount importance on a child’s welfare, and instead courts are

⁷⁸¹ *H (a minor, by his litigation friend) v A Local Authority and Another* [2017] All ER (D) 181; *SW and TW (Human Rights Claim: Procedure) (No 1)* [2017] 2 FLR 1609; *P v Local Authority* [2016] All ER (D) 104; *S (A Child Acting by the Official Solicitor) v Rochdale MBC & the IRO* [2009] 1 FLR 1090

⁷⁸² To be formally appointed under Part 21 of the Civil Procedure Rules 1998, Rule 21.4(3), Rule 21.5(3) or Rule 21.6.

⁷⁸³ Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, sections 8–10, 15; Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, schedule 1.

required to balance the child's rights against the proportionality of the measure and whether or not it is targeted at a legitimate aim.⁷⁸⁴

42.3. Experience shows that judicial review is little-used by children. In order to succeed, a child applicant would need to show that a local authority had acted in a way that is illegal, irrational or procedurally improper. Those are high thresholds which are not often met in the course of challenging care decisions; such a decision might be contrary to a child's welfare, against their wishes and one of a range of options that the local authority had, without necessarily being 'illegal' or 'irrational'.

43. There needs to be a route by which children in care can apply to the family courts for orders to mandate or limit a local authority's exercise of its parental responsibility.

44. Children should be able to bring an application under the 1989 Act so that a court's paramount consideration is the child's welfare. The Inquiry therefore recommends an amendment to the 1989 Act.

⁷⁸⁴ See discussion in *Re B (Transfer of Foster Placement)* [2013] 1 FLR 633, para 30.

Recommendation 6: Children Act 1989

The Inquiry recommends that the UK government amends the Children Act 1989 so that, in any case where a court is satisfied that there is reasonable cause to believe that a child who is in the care of a local authority is experiencing or is at risk of experiencing significant harm, on an application by or for that child, the court may:

- prohibit a local authority from taking any act (or proposed act) which it otherwise would be entitled to take in exercising its parental responsibility for the child; or
- give directions for the purpose of determining a specific question which has arisen, or which may arise, in connection with any aspect of the local authority's exercise of parental responsibility for a child.

45. A court should make such orders only where it is satisfied that a child will otherwise experience significant harm that is attributable to the care of a local authority not being what it would be reasonable to expect a local authority to give him or her (thereby mirroring the language presently at section 31 of the 1989 Act). That harm need not be limited to harm caused to a child while physically in local authority care, but any harm that a child experiences while they are a looked

after child. This may apply, for example, to cases of children who have been, or become, victims of child sexual exploitation and are looked after by a local authority, and who through inappropriate placement or inadequate supervision experience further such abuse.

46. Courts must be careful to ensure that the operation of a threshold does not place an unduly high burden of proof on a child litigant during the preliminary stages of an application. It should be sufficient that there is reasonable cause to believe that a child might experience such harm on their own account and, once raised, the underlying facts should be explored on an inquisitorial rather than adversarial basis.

47. In exercising the powers envisaged, courts should be able to make a wide range of orders against a local authority similar to the range of powers they have against parents under section 8 of the 1989 Act. This would not enable the court to create alternative care plans for children, and courts should continue to have regard to local authorities' finite resources and competing statutory obligations. However, this change would ensure that vulnerable children at risk of harm had recourse to court about a range of aspects of their care and that their welfare would be the court's paramount consideration.

48. The court should also have powers akin to those under section 8 of the 1989 Act to prohibit a course of action, to prohibit the continuation of an ongoing set of circumstances and to make directions to ascertain the courses of action available to a local authority which are in the child's best interests. Those powers, together with the other powers available under the 1989 Act and in the Administrative Division of the High Court, would encourage (if not compel) alternative care decisions.

49. Necessary safeguards should be introduced at a preliminary stage of proceedings to ensure the maturity, independence and authenticity of the child's views, and to guard against any pressure being brought to bear on children.

50. The amendment should be accompanied by the introduction of procedural measures to ensure that applications are realistically accessible to children in care, including consideration of whether it is appropriate for those who hold parental responsibility to automatically be respondents to applications. There should also be provision for legal aid for prospective applicants to provide advice and assist with representation.

Part E

Creating a more protective environment for children

Creating a more protective environment for children

E.1: Introduction

- 1.** While no system can guarantee the eradication of child sexual abuse, there are measures that should be taken to help to create a protective environment for children.
- 2.** This begins with institutions, organisations and settings which work with or come into contact with children. It involves recruiting the right people, vetting applicants to prevent those who have demonstrated their unsuitability to work with children, putting effective child safeguarding policies and procedures in place, and providing appropriate training and monitoring to ensure those policies are understood and implemented.
- 3.** The Inquiry has previously made many recommendations to improve protective measures, both generally and for specific institutions. Its work has also revealed that there is patchy and incomplete regulation of occupations involving work with children in England and in Wales. Professional regulation of occupations which involve working with children can contribute to the protection of children and young people. Two

important elements of an effective regime of regulation are continuing professional development or training and the power to address issues of professional misconduct.

4. The Inquiry has also identified limitations on the disclosure and barring checks available for certain roles, as well as a marked disparity in the quality of child protection and safeguarding arrangements across different institutions and different sectors.

5. To enhance the measures currently available in the workforce and in the workplace which aim to prevent abuse occurring, the Inquiry makes four specific recommendations concerning workforce registration and the vetting and barring regime.

E.2: Regulation of the workforce

6. Certain institutions or settings (the workplace) and those working in them (the workforce) are regulated to ensure adherence to appropriate standards.

7. The criteria for workplace regulation depend on the type of setting involved and whether it is legally subject to regulation and inspection. Institutions with legal duties to safeguard children in their care – such as schools, nurseries, healthcare settings, children’s homes and some other social care services, the police and young offender institutions – are regulated and inspected against standards to ensure the welfare of children.

8. However, individuals working in those institutions are not necessarily subject to any form of workforce regulation, that is regulation based on their occupation. For example, children’s homes must be registered with and inspected by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) to ensure compliance with quality standards, but workers providing care for the children residing there are not regulated by an independent regulatory body.

9. As the Inquiry noted in the *Interim Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse* (the *Interim Report*), regulation of settings responsible for the care of children by an independent regulator complements effective professional regulation of staff – it does not replace it.⁷⁸⁵

The purpose of workforce regulation

10. Workforce regulation is intended to ensure that those in a specified occupation are suitably trained and held to appropriate standards of professional conduct. It is usually mandated in the interests of public safety and protection, such as where the occupation involves working with potentially hazardous materials or working with people in particularly vulnerable situations. It can provide public assurance that those who work with children

⁷⁸⁵ *Interim Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse*, Chapter 6.3

are held to professional standards of competence, ethics and integrity by an independent regulatory body defined in legislation. For example, doctors in the UK are regulated by the General Medical Council, a public body which sets standards, maintains a register of members, assures the quality of professional education and development, and investigates complaints.

11. The scope of a workforce regulator may be wide-ranging and extend to several occupations within that sector. It may be limited to a specific profession. A number of different regulators may operate to regulate different occupations within one sector. For example, there are eight regulatory bodies which regulate specific occupations in the health sector in England and in Wales.⁷⁸⁶

12. The powers and functions of a workforce regulator can vary. Some regulators are limited to dealing with allegations of misconduct. Others have some or all of the following roles:

- controlling admission to the profession;

⁷⁸⁶ General Medical Council, Nursing and Midwifery Council, General Dental Council, General Optical Council, General Chiropractic Council, General Osteopathic Council, General Pharmaceutical Council, Health and Care Professions Council: [INQ006887_008-010](#)

- maintaining a register and setting requirements for registration such as qualifications and background checks;
- prescribing a level of continuing professional education or training, to enhance knowledge and keep up to date with good practice; and
- maintaining professional standards by investigating and determining allegations of misconduct.

13. Where allegations of professional misconduct are made, whether or not this leads to referral to a regulatory body, employers may also use their own disciplinary process. The Inquiry encountered a number of instances where an employer’s internal disciplinary measures in response to allegations of misconduct were inadequate, lacking or poorly executed.⁷⁸⁷

14. Close or regular contact with children does not automatically result in legal regulation of a particular workforce. In the social care sector in England, for example, the only regulated occupation is that of qualified social workers, even

⁷⁸⁷ *Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, Part K.1 paras 4, 16; *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part E.3 para 59; *The Anglican Church Investigation Report*, Part B.3.3 paras 21–23; *The Roman Catholic Church Investigation Report*, Part G.3 para 8.2

though other individuals work closely with children and with vulnerable adults, such as care workers in children's homes and care homes.⁷⁸⁸ As set out below, there are several key areas in which greater workforce regulation would improve the protection of children.

The education workforce

15. Regulation of the education workforce varies considerably between England and Wales, but neither country has a comprehensive system of regulation.

16. The regulator in Wales is the Education Workforce Council (EWC), an independent body which drafts and maintains the code of professional conduct for education workers. It also accredits initial teacher training and keeps records of professional learning and development.⁷⁸⁹ All teachers and headteachers, teaching assistants and learning support workers who work in the state-funded sector in Wales must be registered with the EWC. Registration is not compulsory for those who work in the independent (fee-paying) education sector, although independent school teachers in Wales may choose to register or be required to do so by some independent schools. The EWC also investigates and

⁷⁸⁸ [INQ006802_002](#)

⁷⁸⁹ [EWC000001_002](#) para 7

determines allegations of professional misconduct or incompetence, and may apply a range of sanctions, including prohibition from teaching. This misconduct jurisdiction extends only to registered workers.

17. As a result of this critical gap in the registration scheme, the education workforce in the independent sector in Wales is effectively unregulated. The Welsh Government has committed to extending the regulatory regime of the EWC by 2023 so that the workforce in the independent education sector in Wales would also be required to register, although the Inquiry notes that this was originally proposed in 2017.⁷⁹⁰ In March 2022, in its *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, the Inquiry recommended that registration with the EWC be made compulsory for those working in independent schools in Wales.⁷⁹¹

18. In England, there is no longer a system of registration for the education workforce. While teachers in state schools must complete teacher training and gain qualified teacher status (QTS), those who teach in state-funded academies or in

⁷⁹⁰ *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part J.7 para 78; WGT000488__006 para 26; Sally Holland 26 November 2020 120/4-15

⁷⁹¹ *Residential Schools Investigation Report* (Recommendation 7)

independent schools are not required to register.⁷⁹² The Department for Education sets the standards of professional conduct for all individuals engaged in unsupervised “*teaching work*” in educational establishments, regardless of QTS status or whether they work in state-funded or private education.⁷⁹³ Serious breaches – which could merit prohibition from teaching, the only available sanction – are investigated and determined by the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA).⁷⁹⁴ Less serious misconduct as well as issues of competence are dealt with at a local level by schools.⁷⁹⁵ As set out in the UK government’s April 2022 White Paper, there are 270,000 teaching assistants and 230,000 other support staff in schools.⁷⁹⁶ However, the disciplinary regulations do not apply to most teaching assistants and learning support staff because they are “*subject to the direction and supervision of a qualified teacher or*

⁷⁹² [DFE002072_002](#) paras 4–8

⁷⁹³ [Teachers’ Disciplinary \(England\) Regulations 2012](#), regulations 2–3; [TRA000003_005](#) para 29

⁷⁹⁴ [INQ006803_014](#)

⁷⁹⁵ [TRA000003_001](#) paras 4–5

⁷⁹⁶ [INQ006940_005](#)

... *head teacher*".⁷⁹⁷ This is a serious deficiency in the regulatory regime for those working in teaching roles in England.

19. In February 2022, the Department for Education launched a consultation on broadening the scope of the TRA's misconduct provisions, but this did not include any proposal to widen its remit to include serious misconduct by teaching support staff working under the direction of teachers.⁷⁹⁸ In its response to the consultation dated April 2022, the UK government confirmed that it would extend the teacher misconduct regime to:

- include persons who commit misconduct when not employed as a teacher, but who have previously carried out teaching work;
- a wider range of education settings (specifically further education as well as post-16 and online providers); and
- make provision for the Secretary of State to consider referrals of serious teacher misconduct regardless of how the matter comes to their attention.⁷⁹⁹

⁷⁹⁷ Teachers' Disciplinary (England) Regulations 2012, regulation 3(3); *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part I.4 para 63

⁷⁹⁸ INQ006801_009-013

⁷⁹⁹ INQ006888

20. The timescale for legislation implementing these changes is currently unclear but they do not address the issues identified above. In particular, they do not address the Inquiry's recommendation in its *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, dated March 2022, that all teaching assistants, learning support staff and cover supervisors in England should be brought within the misconduct jurisdiction of the TRA.⁸⁰⁰

21. As at June 2022, responses are awaited from both the Department for Education and the Welsh Government regarding a number of recommendations concerning schools.⁸⁰¹ This includes a recommendation to introduce legislation to change the definition of full-time education to bring currently unregistered schools within the scope of registration if they are the principal place of education for the children who attend.⁸⁰² Registration means that the school must be inspected to ensure adherence to safeguarding standards and that those who teach in registered schools are regulated by the TRA or EWC.

⁸⁰⁰ *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part K.3 (Recommendations 6 and 7)

⁸⁰¹ See in particular *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part K.3

⁸⁰² *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report*, Part F, Part H.3 (Recommendation 2)

Care roles in children’s homes

22. In its investigations concerning the sexual abuse of children looked after by local authorities, the Inquiry concluded that there had been sexual abuse of children in residential care by staff.⁸⁰³ There were failures by staff to identify and act upon clear signs that children were being sexually abused and exploited by adults or other children,⁸⁰⁴ and failures to respond appropriately to allegations of abuse.⁸⁰⁵

23. From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, children’s residential care in England (whether provided directly by local authorities or by voluntary or private organisations) was often poorly resourced and managed, with residential care staff who were predominantly unqualified and received little, if any, training.⁸⁰⁶ There have been a number of issues, including the “*professional and*

⁸⁰³ *Nottinghamshire Councils Investigation Report*, Executive Summary, Part G.1; *Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, Executive Summary, Part K.1

⁸⁰⁴ *Cambridge House, Knowl View and Rochdale Investigation Report*, Part C.1 paras 79–82, 85–97

⁸⁰⁵ *Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, Part K.1 paras 4–21

⁸⁰⁶ *Nottinghamshire Councils Investigation Report*, Part G.1 para 15

social isolation” of residential care workers as well as a lack of development resulting in “*outdated, insensitive or harmful practices*”.⁸⁰⁷

24. In Wales, over a similar time period (1974 to 1990), the Waterhouse Inquiry into sexual and physical abuse of children in children’s homes in Clwyd and Gwynedd found similar issues with inadequate management and training of care staff. The 2000 report *Lost in Care* recommended that staff receive training to spot signs of abuse, senior staff should be trained social workers and post-qualification training in childcare should be made available to residential care staff.⁸⁰⁸

25. Since 2010, managers of children’s homes in England have been required to register with Ofsted and since 2015 have been required to obtain appropriate qualifications and undertake continuing professional development.⁸⁰⁹ While Ofsted will assess the fitness of a person to manage a children’s home, it is not a workforce regulator. It has the power to de-register a children’s home which fails to meet standards,

⁸⁰⁷ *Nottinghamshire Councils Investigation Report*, Part C.3 para 8

⁸⁰⁸ INQ002923_813-814

⁸⁰⁹ *The Care Standards Act 2000 (Registration) (England) Regulations 2010*, regulations 3, 7 and Schedule 3; *The Children’s Homes (England) Regulations 2015*, Part 3

but does not have any disciplinary function by which to regulate registered managers and hold them to professional standards of competence and conduct. Other workers in children’s homes and other social care settings are not regulated in any way. There is no system of registration for the approximately 35,000 workers “*mainly or solely providing care for children*” (that is, in a care role) in England.⁸¹⁰ In Wales (as well as in Scotland and Northern Ireland), children’s social care workers must register with a regulatory body.⁸¹¹ Social Care Wales sets requirements for and ensures sufficient provision of training, qualifications and continuing professional development, and also has disciplinary powers for dealing with misconduct, including de-registration.⁸¹²

26. In April 2018, the Inquiry’s *Interim Report* recommended that the Department for Education introduce arrangements for the registration of staff working in care roles in residential care settings, with an independent body to maintain standards of training, conduct and continuing professional development and having the power to

⁸¹⁰ The Children’s Homes (England) Regulations 2015, regulation 2; *Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, Part C.5 para 31

⁸¹¹ Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016, section 80

⁸¹² INQ006889

enforce such standards through fitness to practise procedures.⁸¹³ In July 2021, the UK government agreed in principle that professional regulation of staff in children's homes in England could provide an effective additional means of protecting children and stated that it would keep the recommendation under review.⁸¹⁴

27. This response is inadequate. Workforce regulation is necessary in order to better protect children in residential settings, including secure children's homes. In May 2022, the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, led by Josh MacAlister, published its final report and recommendations.⁸¹⁵ The review includes a recommendation requiring professional registration of the residential childcare workforce alongside professional standards, starting with the managers of children's homes. The UK government has not yet committed to implement this recommendation, but is due to respond in full to the review later in 2022.⁸¹⁶

⁸¹³ *Interim Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse*, Chapter 7 para 14

⁸¹⁴ *Department for Education response to recommendation 4 of the Interim Report dated 8 July 2021*

⁸¹⁵ [INQ006960](#)

⁸¹⁶ [INQ006959_002](#)

28. The Inquiry therefore reiterates its recommendation that all staff working in care roles in children’s residential care settings, including secure children’s homes, are subject to registration with an independent regulatory body.

Recommendation 7: Registration of care staff in children’s homes

The Inquiry recommends (as originally stated in its *Interim Report*, dated April 2018) that the UK government introduces arrangements for the registration of staff working in care roles in children’s homes, including secure children’s homes.

Registration should be with an independent body charged with setting and maintaining standards of training, conduct and continuing professional development, and with the power to enforce these through fitness to practise procedures.

Staff in custodial institutions

29. As highlighted in Part D, children in custodial institutions are “*very vulnerable children in a very dangerous place*”.⁸¹⁷ In England and in Wales, children in custody are detained in one of three types of institutions – young offender institutions

⁸¹⁷ *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Part D.2 para 4

(YOIs), secure training centres (STCs, currently only operating in England) or secure children's homes (SCHs). The Inquiry's work has shown that the number of reported incidents of sexual abuse of children in custody is much higher than was previously understood. Staff were alleged to have been the perpetrators in almost half of all reported incidents, with this rising to over 60 percent of incidents reported by children in YOIs and STCs.⁸¹⁸

30. In March 2019, the Inquiry's *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions: 2009–2017 Investigation Report* highlighted concerns that the workforce in custodial institutions is unregulated and that staff lacked specialist training, skills and qualifications.⁸¹⁹ Staff working in care roles (that is, mainly or solely providing care for children) in SCHs are legally required to have a qualification in residential childcare.⁸²⁰ By contrast, even though working with children in custody is a highly skilled and demanding job, there was no requirement for

⁸¹⁸ *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Part C.3 Table 2

⁸¹⁹ *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Part F paras 6, 15

⁸²⁰ The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015, regulations 32(3) and (4)

staff providing care to children on a day-to-day basis in STCs or YOIs (such as prison officers) to have any childcare qualifications.⁸²¹

31. There was particular concern in YOIs, where staff are drawn from the Prison Service and therefore may not have a specific motivation to work with children, or experience of doing so.⁸²² Prison officers who are untrained and inexperienced in working with children may lack both child safeguarding awareness and an understanding of the particular vulnerabilities of detained children.

32. The Youth Custody Service (YCS), responsible for the operational running of sites across the youth secure estate, told the Inquiry that there was a “*drive to professionalis(e) the workforce in YOIs, STCs and SCHs*”.⁸²³ The Inquiry recommended that the YCS takes steps to ensure that its training provides staff with an appropriate understanding of safeguarding in the context of the secure estate, and that this training should be regularly reviewed

⁸²¹ *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Part F para 6

⁸²² *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Part E.6 para 54

⁸²³ *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Part E.6 para 59

and updated.⁸²⁴ Following the publication of the Inquiry’s *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions: 2009–2017 Investigation Report*, a review by the YCS in October 2019 noted that “Currently no YCS site appears to be delivering training to a standard that meets the needs of the population in which it serves”.⁸²⁵

33. Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service introduced a requirement in March 2022 that all staff working with children in the secure estate must undertake specialist training to gain qualifications for working with young people and children.⁸²⁶ This is a welcome development. Continuing professional development and training must be firmly embedded into the role of custodial care officers.

34. The YCS October 2019 review proposed that the YCS should develop a code of conduct for all adults working in the youth custody sector, and that guidance and supervision should include professional conduct. It is unacceptable that there are still no sector-wide standards for those working with such a vulnerable cohort of children.⁸²⁷

⁸²⁴ *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report, Part F* (Recommendation 3)

⁸²⁵ INQ006676__040 para 3.2

⁸²⁶ INQ006804__007

⁸²⁷ INQ006676__029-030 para 2.9

35. The introduction of minimum qualifications for staff working with children in the secure estate falls far short of professionalising the workforce through registration with an independent body.

36. The Inquiry's 2018 *Interim Report* recommendation regarding the registration of staff working in care roles in residential care settings applied equally to staff working with children in SCHs. In February 2019, in its *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, the Inquiry recommended that the Ministry of Justice introduce arrangements for the professional registration of staff in YOIs and STCs in roles responsible for the care of children in these settings.⁸²⁸ In November 2021, the Ministry of Justice stated that it had reviewed evidence collected through a targeted consultation on professional registration and was considering the issue.⁸²⁹ In May 2022, more than three years after the Inquiry's recommendations regarding the children's secure estate were published, the Inquiry was informed that the Ministry of Justice was

⁸²⁸ *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report, Part F* (Recommendation 4)

⁸²⁹ *Ministry of Justice response to recommendation 4 in the Accountability and Reparations Investigation Report dated 5 November 2021*

considering the review and would subsequently publish a response to this recommendation. No timescale has been provided.

37. A requirement for all staff with responsibility for the care of children in the secure estate to register with a regulatory body would improve the quality of care and the protection of highly vulnerable children. The Inquiry reiterates its recommendation that the government introduces arrangements for the professional registration of staff in roles responsible for the care of children in young offender institutions and secure training centres.

Recommendation 8: Registration of staff in care roles in young offender institutions and secure training centres

The Inquiry recommends (as originally stated in its *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions: 2009–2017 Investigation Report*, dated February 2019) that the UK government introduces arrangements for the professional registration of staff in roles responsible for the care of children in young offender institutions and secure training centres.

E.3: Recruitment, vetting and barring

38. Another central aspect of keeping children safe is the use of safer recruitment procedures for those who come into contact with children, whether through paid or voluntary work. This should involve application processes which focus on safeguarding, interviews that probe an applicant's values, attitudes and approaches to safeguarding, as well as rigorous examination of references and employment history, together with criminal record checks.⁸³⁰

39. Throughout its investigations, the Inquiry encountered examples of poor recruitment practice, including failures to obtain the appropriate record checks, in schools, local authorities and religious organisations.⁸³¹ At times, people classed

⁸³⁰ Dan Knight 9 December 2020 117/14-122/16; Andrew Elvin 9 December 2020 84/14-86/10; Peter Wanless 10 December 2020 10/23-11/12

⁸³¹ *Ampleforth and Downside Investigation Report*, Part B para 305; *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part I.2 paras 24, 26, 27; *Nottinghamshire Councils Investigation Report*, Part B.2 para 5; *Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, Part K.1 paras 10, 12; *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report*, Part D.3 paras 53, 54

as volunteers were allowed open access to children without any vetting, as a result of which children were exposed to unnecessary risk.⁸³²

40. In February 2022, the Home Office announced that it had commissioned an independent review of the disclosure and barring regime to provide assurance on its effectiveness, to identify key issues of concern about the current regime, and to assess and advise on risks and opportunities. The review, which is expected to include recommendations for improvement, is due to be completed by summer 2022.⁸³³ While this review may lead to significant and wide-ranging changes to the existing regime of disclosure and barring, the Inquiry has identified important deficiencies relating to the current system.

The Disclosure and Barring Service scheme

41. The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) enables organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors to make safer employment decisions by identifying candidates who may

⁸³² *Institutional Responses to Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse Involving the Late Lord Janner of Braunstone QC Investigation Report, Part E para 4; Lambeth Council Investigation Report, Part K.1 paras 10, 12*

⁸³³ *INQ006817_002*

be unsuitable for certain work, especially that which involves children or vulnerable adults. It does so by:

- providing access to criminal records information through its disclosure service;
- maintaining lists of individuals barred from working in regulated activity with children or vulnerable adults; and
- making independent barring decisions about people who have harmed or are considered to pose a risk of harm to a child or vulnerable person within the workplace.

42. When engaging a person to work with children, the institution or setting is responsible for complying with safer recruitment measures.

43. Some settings may be required by specific statutory guidance to obtain DBS checks. For example, *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2021* places an obligation on schools to obtain the appropriate level of DBS check before making an offer of employment for any role.⁸³⁴ There is, however, no legal obligation to do so for many employers.

44. Applying for the appropriate level of DBS check – a disclosure certificate – is an essential part of safer recruitment because it contains details of an individual’s criminal record. It will include

⁸³⁴ [INQ006502_052-054 para 213](#)

convictions and cautions which may be spent or unspent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and subject to the DBS filtering rules which remove certain older convictions and cautions, albeit not those concerning specified offences (which include violent and sexual offences, and offences against children).⁸³⁵ It can therefore provide an employer with important information about an individual's criminal background and their suitability to work with children.

45. The disclosure regime is framed in terms of eligibility for a particular level of check. It is not generally compulsory for employers to obtain a DBS check on a prospective employee. The DBS issues four types of certificate, the extent of the check for each depending upon the role to be undertaken.⁸³⁶

⁸³⁵ [Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974](#);
[INQ006814](#); [INQ006812](#)

⁸³⁶ [DBS000024_005-007](#) paras 3.2–5.5;
[BRC000355](#); [BRC000354](#)

Type of check	Certificate contains	Roles eligible	Who can obtain a certificate	Number issued in 2020/21
Basic certificate	Details of convictions and cautions that are unspent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974	Any role (basic checks can be obtained at any time, not only for a job application)	The individual named on the certificate	2.2 million
Standard certificate	Details of unspent and spent convictions, cautions, formal police reprimands and warnings	Certain roles specified in legislation (such as solicitors, barristers, accountants and actuaries) which involve a degree of public trust	Employer (including agencies) registered with the DBS, with the individual's consent	343,000

Type of check	Certificate contains	Roles eligible	Who can obtain a certificate	Number issued in 2020/21
Enhanced certificate	The same information as standard certificates but also information that the senior officer of the local police force reasonably believes is relevant and ought to be disclosed	Roles working with children and vulnerable adults, and other positions involving a high degree of trust	Employer (including agencies) registered with the DBS, with the individual's consent	168,000
Enhanced certificate with barred list check	Barred list checks are only available with an enhanced certificate, and are not available as a standalone check	Regulated activity only	Regulated activity provider (employer, including agencies), registered with the DBS, with the individual's consent	3 million

Source: [DBS000024_006](#)

46. The DBS also offers an update service to enable employers to check for any changes to an individual's DBS certificate as frequently as they wish, but many employers do not avail themselves of this opportunity.⁸³⁷ If this service were widely advertised to employers, it might improve uptake.

Increasing access to the barred list

47. The DBS has the power to bar any person it considers to pose a risk of harm to children from undertaking 'regulated activity' with children in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This is the term used by the DBS to describe work which a barred person is prohibited from undertaking. In 2020/21, 73,675 individuals were on the children's barred list.⁸³⁸

48. It is an offence for a barred person to seek work in regulated activity, or for an employer to knowingly employ a barred person in regulated activity.⁸³⁹ Regulated activity does not mean, however, that the activity itself is regulated by any supervisory body, or that the worker engaged in such activity is regulated by a professional regulatory body. Many of those engaged in regulated activity with children are working in

⁸³⁷ [Suzanne Smith 25 November 2020 37/16-18](#)

⁸³⁸ [INQ006808_013](#)

⁸³⁹ [Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, sections 7 and 9](#)

occupations that are not subject to workforce regulation, and in settings that are not regulated by any statutory regulatory authority.

49. Regulated activity has a complex definition, set out in the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006.⁸⁴⁰ It includes the following activities, provided they are done frequently or for more than three days in a 30-day period or between 2:00am and 6:00am:

- teaching, training or instruction, care or supervision of children (unless the worker or volunteer is supervised on a day-to-day basis by someone in regulated activity);
- moderating a web service wholly or mainly for children;
- providing guidance or advice, other than legal advice, wholly or mainly to children; and
- driving a vehicle for children.

It also encompasses those who work (other than under a contract for temporary or occasional work) for the same specific frequency in roles where they have the opportunity to come into contact with children in specified establishments, such as educational establishments (including nurseries),

⁸⁴⁰ [Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, Schedule 4](#)

detention facilities for children and secure accommodation, children's homes, children's centres, and childcare premises.

50. Some activities (such as the provision of personal care or healthcare, and registering to be a foster carer or childcare provider) are also deemed to be regulated activity, regardless of where they take place or how frequently they are performed. For example, certain statutory functions such as the inspection of childminding provision, schools, education and training, religious education and the review of local authority children's services are also regulated activities where they give the person the opportunity to have contact with children.

51. There are three ways in which an individual may come to be barred by the DBS from engaging in regulated activity with children or vulnerable adults:

- A criminal conviction or caution for a relevant offence results in automatic inclusion on the barred list (an autobar), either with or without the right of the convicted person to make representations to the DBS. For example, rape of a child under 13 is an autobar offence without representations, whereas the offence of sexual activity with a child under 16 but over 13 is an autobar with representations.⁸⁴¹

⁸⁴¹ [Suzanne Smith 25 November 2020 5/7-19](#)

- A referral by an employer, or by a member of the public, who has information which indicates the individual may pose a risk of harm to children.
- As a result of an application for disclosure, where an individual applies for an enhanced certificate with a barred list check and the DBS considers whether their criminal history indicates they should be included on the barred list.⁸⁴²

52. Irrespective of the way in which an individual comes to its attention, the DBS must determine whether to bar the person from engaging in regulated activity with children. The person is either barred or not – there are no grades or levels of barring. There is also no interim barring order while the decision-making process is taking place. When the DBS includes an individual on the barred list, it will notify the individual of its decision.⁸⁴³

53. Roles which are within the statutory definition of regulated activity with children are eligible for an enhanced certificate with a barred list check. A barred list check can only be obtained by an employer in conjunction with an enhanced certificate – it is not available as a standalone check. If an individual applies for a role working

⁸⁴² [DBS000279_002](#) paras 3.3–3.6; [Suzanne Smith 25 November 2020 4/2-7/7](#)

⁸⁴³ [DBS000024_012](#) para 10.8

with children which does not fall within the definition of regulated activity, only an enhanced certificate (without a barred list check) is available.

54. The Inquiry heard that, increasingly, very little police intelligence is included on enhanced certificates.⁸⁴⁴ As it is the addition of this information which distinguishes the enhanced from a standard certificate, this diminishes considerably the value of enhanced certificates.

55. There are circumstances in which a barred list check would clearly be desirable in order to protect children but such a check is not undertaken.

55.1. It is the responsibility of the employer to determine whether a role falls within the definition of regulated activity and to apply for the appropriate level of check.⁸⁴⁵ The statutory definition of regulated activity is complex and often difficult for employers to understand.⁸⁴⁶ The Inquiry understands that the majority of queries received by the DBS from employers concern uncertainty about whether a role

⁸⁴⁴ [Haydn Llewellyn 24 November 2020 177/3-7](#)

⁸⁴⁵ [DBS000024_008 paras 7.4, 7.5](#)

⁸⁴⁶ [Residential Schools Investigation Report, Part I.2 para 10; Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report, Part D.3 para 40](#)

amounts to regulated activity.⁸⁴⁷ Although there is guidance around the definition of regulated activity, many of the examples draw on schools and other statutory settings with a full-time working environment, making it difficult to apply to other organisations (such as religious settings and charities) where there is a greater dependence on part-time and volunteer workers as well as different roles than are envisaged in the guidelines.⁸⁴⁸

55.2. In 2012, the definition of regulated activity was narrowed to exclude roles which are subject to “*day to day supervision*” by another person who is engaging in regulated activity.⁸⁴⁹ As a result, a role may involve a degree of close contact with children but may not fall within the statutory definition of regulated activity (such as volunteers supervised to a greater or lesser degree by a member of staff). The legislation states that a person does not engage in regulated activity if they are subject to “*such day to day supervision as is reasonable in all the circumstances for the purpose of protecting*

⁸⁴⁷ [Suzanne Smith 10 October 2019 207/16-208/9;](#)
[Suzanne Smith 25 November 2020 32/25-33/13](#)

⁸⁴⁸ [Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report, Part D.3 paras 40–50](#)

⁸⁴⁹ [Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, schedule 4 Part 1 para 1 \(2B\)](#)

any children concerned".⁸⁵⁰ Guidance states that the appropriate level of supervision is a matter for the employing organisation to decide.⁸⁵¹ This compounds the difficulty organisations face when trying to understand which roles are regulated activity.⁸⁵²

55.3. There is also a limitation on who has access to the children's barred list. Enhanced certificates together with barred list checks can only be requested by an organisation which is registered by the DBS as a regulated activity provider.⁸⁵³ Self-employed people – such as a private tutor providing academic or music tuition – can only obtain a basic certificate for themselves and cannot obtain a barred list check, regardless of the work they undertake. Neither can the individual engaging the services of the self-employed person obtain an enhanced certificate with a barred list check. As a result, those who engage self-employed people to work with children are denied access to important information regarding an individual's risk of harm

⁸⁵⁰ [Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, schedule 4 Part 1 para 1 \(2C\)](#)

⁸⁵¹ [DFE002056_001 para 3](#)

⁸⁵² [Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report, Part D.3 para 42](#)

⁸⁵³ [DBS000024_007-008 paras 7.1–7.8](#)

to children. In its 2021 *Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy*, the UK government noted the need for:

*“a cross-Government feasibility study looking at ways to create eligibility for criminal record checks for those who are self-employed, so that all those working with children and vulnerable people are subject to the same standard of Disclosure and Barring Service checks”.*⁸⁵⁴

56. Where the DBS has determined that an individual poses a risk of harm to children such that they should be barred from regulated activity, this information ought to be available to any organisation or individual considering whether to engage the person in any paid or unpaid role working with children, whether supervised or not. The current disclosure regime permits those who have been assessed as so dangerous that they have been barred from regulated activity to nevertheless come into contact with children in roles that do not meet the definition of regulated activity. This places children at risk.

57. The Inquiry considers that all employers of adults who work with children (whether paid or voluntary) should be able to check whether

⁸⁵⁴ [INQ006448_062](#) para 199

applicants have been included on the children's barred list, in order to ensure that children are kept safe from those who pose a risk of harm.

Recommendation 9: Greater use of the barred list

The Inquiry recommends that the UK government enables any person engaging an individual to work or volunteer with children on a frequent basis to check whether or not they have been barred by the Disclosure and Barring Service from working with children. These arrangements should also apply where the role is undertaken on a supervised basis.

Improving notifications to the Disclosure and Barring Service

58. There is a legal duty on employers to notify the DBS (known as making a referral) when they have dismissed or removed an individual from undertaking regulated activity or when an individual has resigned from such a role, where there is concern that the individual may pose a risk of harm to children.⁸⁵⁵

⁸⁵⁵ Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, section 35

59. The DBS indicated to the Inquiry in October 2019 that it did not receive the number of referrals it would expect from employers, but it has no means to discover when an institution fails to make a referral in circumstances where notification is legally required.⁸⁵⁶ Some inspectorates require organisations to demonstrate they comply with their statutory duties of making DBS referrals as part of their inspection framework. For example, Ofsted includes this in the inspection framework for schools and for early years settings, but not in the inspection framework for children’s homes.⁸⁵⁷ The Care Inspectorate Wales, which inspects regulated non-school settings for children up to the age of 12 in Wales, does not mention DBS referrals in its inspection framework.⁸⁵⁸

60. While supervisory authorities (workforce and workplace regulators and inspectorates) have the power to refer individuals to the DBS to consider for inclusion on the barred list, they do not have a legal duty to refer or to share information with the DBS unless in response to a specific request.⁸⁵⁹ The DBS has developed information-sharing

⁸⁵⁶ [Suzanne Smith 10 October 2019 214/1-3;](#)

[Suzanne Smith 25 November 2020 7/8-8/3](#)

⁸⁵⁷ [INQ006810__009; INQ006809__003; INQ006816](#)

⁸⁵⁸ [ETN000755](#)

⁸⁵⁹ [Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, sections 41–50](#)

protocols with some workforce regulators such as the TRA and the General Medical Council, which means that these bodies cross-refer any cases with a safeguarding element. However, the DBS told the Inquiry that not all inspectorates or regulators routinely share information with the DBS about resignations and dismissals in circumstances where child protection or safeguarding concerns have been raised.⁸⁶⁰

61. In its *Interim Report*, the Inquiry recommended that the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 be amended to place keepers of relevant registers under a duty to refer information about practitioners who had been removed from the register to the DBS. It also recommended that upon receiving the referral, the DBS should be under a duty to automatically bar the practitioner from working with children (subject to the opportunity to make representations).⁸⁶¹ In July 2019, the UK government responded that the Home Office had asked the DBS to continue its “*close engagement*” with professional bodies and regulators to ensure effective information-sharing takes place. It

⁸⁶⁰ Suzanne Smith 10 October 2019 214/1-18

⁸⁶¹ *Interim Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse*, Chapter 6.3, Chapter 7 para 15

also stated that the DBS had not identified any emerging issues, despite the evidence received by the Inquiry in October 2019.

62. The Inquiry remains concerned that individuals who have ceased working in a setting with children and who have acted in a manner which indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children are not always referred to the DBS. This could permit such individuals to move on to a different setting where they continue to work with children, without the DBS considering the potential risk of harm which they pose. As there have been no prosecutions to date for failures to refer, lax employers have little incentive to comply with their legal duties.⁸⁶²

63. Action is needed to improve regulated activity providers' compliance with their statutory duty to refer concerns about the suitability of individuals to work with children to the DBS. Regulators and inspectorates with responsibility for children's settings should share information with the DBS to ensure that the DBS is suitably informed regarding adults who may pose a risk of harm to children.

64. The Inquiry therefore recommends a number of steps to increase compliance with the statutory duty to refer concerns to the DBS.

⁸⁶² [Suzanne Smith 25 November 2020 7/8-18; Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, sections 35–38](#)

Recommendation 10: Improving compliance with the statutory duty to notify the Disclosure and Barring Service

The Inquiry recommends that the UK government takes steps to improve compliance by regulated activity providers with their statutory duty to refer concerns about the suitability of individuals to work with children to the Disclosure and Barring Service, including:

- all relevant regulators and inspectorates include compliance with the statutory duty to refer to the Disclosure and Barring Service in their assessment of safeguarding procedures during inspections;
- the National Police Chiefs' Council works with relevant regulators and inspectorates to ensure that there are clear arrangements in place to refer breaches of the duty to refer to the police for criminal investigation; and
- an information-sharing protocol is put in place between the Disclosure and Barring Service and relevant regulators and inspectorates.

Disclosure for those outside the UK

65. A DBS check may not provide a complete picture of an individual's criminal record if the individual has a criminal record outside the UK.⁸⁶³ DBS checks on citizens or residents of England and Wales also cannot be accessed by employers based overseas, such as British International Schools, unless the employment decision is being taken in England or Wales.⁸⁶⁴ The non-statutory International Child Protection Certificate (ICPC), introduced by the National Crime Agency which some overseas organisations choose to utilise, does not include access to the DBS children's barred list.⁸⁶⁵

66. These territorial limitations on the DBS disclosure regime facilitate predatory offenders from England and Wales to exploit the system by obtaining employment working with children overseas.⁸⁶⁶

⁸⁶³ *Children Outside the United Kingdom Investigation Report*, Part D.3 paras 18–20

⁸⁶⁴ *Children Outside the United Kingdom Investigation Report*, Part D.3 para 24–26

⁸⁶⁵ *Children Outside the United Kingdom Investigation Report*, Part D.3 para 29

⁸⁶⁶ *Children Outside the United Kingdom Investigation Report*, Part D.4 para 40

67. In its *Children Outside the United Kingdom Investigation Report*, the Inquiry recommended that the geographical reach of the DBS be extended to enable overseas employers to obtain DBS checks on UK nationals and residents of England and Wales whose role would be within the definition of regulated activity.⁸⁶⁷ In response, the Home Office stated that the information provided on an ICPC was broadly similar to that on an enhanced certificate and that the ICPC was simpler and easier for foreign employers to obtain.⁸⁶⁸

68. The absence of barred list information on the ICPC creates a significant risk to the safety of children in the UK and abroad. The Inquiry therefore reiterates its recommendation that the disclosure and barring regime should be extended to those working with children overseas.

⁸⁶⁷ *Children Outside the United Kingdom Investigation Report*, Part F.2 (Recommendation 3)

⁸⁶⁸ *Home Office response to recommendation 3 of the Children Outside the United Kingdom Investigation Report dated 21 January 2021*, paras 14–15

Recommendation 11: Extending disclosure regime to those working with children overseas

The Inquiry recommends (as originally stated in its *Children Outside the United Kingdom Phase 2 Investigation Report*, dated January 2020) that the UK government introduces legislation permitting the Disclosure and Barring Service to provide enhanced certificates with barred list checks to citizens and residents of England and Wales applying for:

- work or volunteering with UK-based organisations, where the recruitment decision is taken outside the UK; or
- work or volunteering with organisations based outside the UK, in each case where the work or volunteering would be a regulated activity if in England and Wales.

E.4: Safeguarding and child protection policies

69. Statutory guidance in England and in Wales makes clear that everyone who works with children has a responsibility for keeping them

safe.⁸⁶⁹ To achieve this, all organisations which work with children or whose members may come into contact with children should adhere to basic child protection standards and have suitable safeguarding policies and procedures in place. This will assist in protecting children from individuals in these settings who may seek to establish relationships of trust and authority with children in order to create opportunities for abuse.

70. Those who work with children, whether in the statutory, voluntary or private sectors, are in a position to identify signs of abuse or to receive disclosures or allegations of abuse from children. Policies and procedures should therefore set out the response to concerns about a child or allegations of abuse, including clear information about reporting and recording in order that allegations can be passed on to the police or children's social services for investigation.

71. While there is a requirement for institutions in certain sectors to set policies, others are under no legal obligation to do so, despite children visiting their facilities, attending their events or otherwise being involved in the organisation. For example, a child might go to school during the day, play football with a club in the afternoon, attend a prayer group in the evening and then spend time

⁸⁶⁹ [INQ006608__011 para 16](#); [CIW000012__033 para 116](#)

at night on a social media platform. Of the four settings or organisations providing these activities, only the school has a legal obligation to have child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures in place.

72. A number of the Inquiry’s investigation reports considered the safeguarding frameworks of particular institutions and sectors and made recommendations for specific improvements.⁸⁷⁰ The overarching principle, however, is that policies and procedures should be designed to optimise children’s safety and well-being, to recognise signs of abuse, to identify concerns such as inappropriate conduct of adults towards children, to respond to disclosures and to take appropriate action. They should enable adults who come into contact with children to understand their role and responsibilities. While policies or procedures cannot themselves prevent abuse, they play an important role in reducing the risk of it occurring.

⁸⁷⁰ *Westminster Investigation Report*, Part J.1, Part K.2; *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part K.3; *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Part F; *The Anglican Church Investigation Report*, Part D.3, Part D.4; *The Roman Catholic Church Investigation Report*, Part L.3; *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report*, Part H.3

Statutory obligations

73. The Inquiry encountered instances of institutions whose policies were incomplete or out of date. Some schools had policies which were not updated to reflect the latest guidance, or which did not include procedures for handling allegations of child sexual abuse by members of staff.⁸⁷¹ In custodial institutions for children, child protection policies were out of date and lacked clarity regarding procedures for reporting and responding to allegations against staff.⁸⁷² In some children's homes there was a lack of policies, procedures and training for staff.⁸⁷³

74. The Children Act 2004 places named statutory bodies in England and in Wales under a duty to ensure that their functions are discharged “*having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*”.⁸⁷⁴ These statutory bodies include local authorities, NHS organisations, the police, prisons and young offender institutions, the probation service and youth offending teams.

⁸⁷¹ [ISI001663_001-002; Residential Schools Investigation Report, Part E.3 paras 37–39](#)

⁸⁷² [Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report, Part E.12 paras 158, 160, 161](#)

⁸⁷³ [Nottinghamshire Councils Investigation Report, Part C.7](#)

⁸⁷⁴ [Children Act 2004, sections 11 and 28](#)

They must follow statutory guidance, published by the Department for Education (*Working Together to Safeguard Children* in England and *Working Together to Safeguard People* in Wales).

75. Under the Education Act 2002, schools and educational establishments have a similar duty to “safeguard and promote the welfare of children”.⁸⁷⁵ They must comply with the relevant statutory guidance, including *Working Together* guidance as well as *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (KCSIE) in England and *Keeping Learners Safe* in Wales.

76. *Working Together to Safeguard Children* and *Working Together to Safeguard People* place a legal obligation on statutory agencies and organisations in England and in Wales to have appropriate child safeguarding policies in place.⁸⁷⁶ This includes procedures for responding to allegations against people who work with children. The legal requirement also applies to private or voluntary organisations if they are providing services on behalf of statutory agencies.

Other organisations and settings

77. Many organisations in the private or voluntary sectors provide a wide range of activities for children – including sports, dance and drama,

⁸⁷⁵ Education Act 2002, sections 175 and 157

⁸⁷⁶ INQ006608_058-060; WGT000470_019 para 57

orchestras and musical tuition, religious teaching, and groups such as Scouts. A number of victims and survivors have detailed appalling sexual abuse at the hands of coaches and tutors providing such activities.

78. *Working Together to Safeguard Children* states that, in England, voluntary, charity, social enterprise, faith-based organisations and private sector organisations that work with or around children “*should*” have policies in place to safeguard and protect children from harm.⁸⁷⁷ In Wales, *The Wales Safeguarding Procedures* are intended to guide safeguarding practice for all those employed in the statutory, third (voluntary) and private sector in health, social care, education, the police, justice and other services.⁸⁷⁸ However, voluntary or private organisations in England and in Wales are not legally required to follow this statutory guidance, unless they are providing services on behalf of a statutory agency.

79. Many voluntary sector and faith-based organisations in England and in Wales are also charities. Under the Charities Act 2011, trustees must take reasonable steps to protect people who come into contact with the charity from harm.⁸⁷⁹ The Charity Commission has published

⁸⁷⁷ [INQ006608_073-074](#) paras 57–62

⁸⁷⁸ [INQ006964_001](#)

⁸⁷⁹ [CYC000440_001-002](#) paras 6–8

guidance called *Safeguarding and Protecting People for Charities and Trustees*.⁸⁸⁰ This guidance is seen as a “*starting point*”, rather than a legal obligation, although the expectation of the Charity Commission is that charities will follow it.⁸⁸¹

Charities are not required to report safeguarding incidents to the Charity Commission unless they amount to a serious incident which results in significant harm to people who come into contact with the charity through its work, or to the charity’s reputation.⁸⁸² Allegations of child sexual abuse are considered to fall within the definition of a serious incident, which requires the matter to be reported to the Charity Commission.⁸⁸³ Those that are registered with Ofsted would also be required to make a report to Ofsted.

80. Organisations which have high levels of confidence in the moral calibre of their members or leaders may find it difficult to contemplate that they may pose a risk to children. This was particularly the case with religious groups.⁸⁸⁴ The Inquiry’s *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report* found numerous

⁸⁸⁰ [CYC000405](#)

⁸⁸¹ [Harvey Grenville 14 August 2020 20/1-7](#)

⁸⁸² [CYC000518](#)

⁸⁸³ [CYC000505](#)

⁸⁸⁴ [Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report, Part C.5](#)

examples of smaller religious organisations that had no safeguarding or child protection policies in place.⁸⁸⁵

81. A number of recommendations have been made by the Inquiry to improve preventive measures in religious settings.⁸⁸⁶ This included, in May 2019, that the Anglican Church should disclose internal reviews or enquiries about individual safeguarding incidents to the national review body and the Church in Wales should adopt updated procedural guidance in relation to record-keeping.⁸⁸⁷ In November 2020, the Inquiry recommended that the Roman Catholic Church should publish its framework for dealing with cases of non-compliance with safeguarding policies

⁸⁸⁵ *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report*, Part D.2 paras 14–30

⁸⁸⁶ *Diocese of Chichester/Peter Ball Investigation Report*, Part D (Recommendations); *Westminster Investigation Report*, Part K.2; *The Anglican Church Investigation Report*, Part D.4; *The Roman Catholic Church Investigation Report*, Part L.3; *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report*, Part H.3

⁸⁸⁷ *Diocese of Chichester/Peter Ball Investigation Report*, Part D (Recommendation 5); *The Anglican Church Investigation Report*, Part D.4 (Recommendation 4)

and procedures.⁸⁸⁸ Both the Anglican and the Roman Catholic churches, as well as the Muslim Council of Great Britain, have introduced guidance, policies and procedures in response to these recommendations. It remains to be seen whether these are implemented in a manner which better protects children.

82. Similarly, in the Inquiry's investigation into allegations of child sexual abuse linked to Westminster, institutional responses to allegations of child sexual abuse involving the late Lord Janner of Braunstone QC, and also Cambridge House, Knowl View and Rochdale, members of political parties were alleged or known to have gained access to vulnerable children in care through their role in local or national politics. Current practice should now prevent this. Although lacking in the past, most political parties now have specific safeguarding policies in place. However, the Inquiry heard evidence in March 2019 that there remained significant gaps, including political parties that had no such policies, and considerable variation in approach among the policies and procedures currently in place, with some having important deficiencies.⁸⁸⁹

⁸⁸⁸ *The Roman Catholic Church Investigation Report, Part L.3 (Recommendation 3)*

⁸⁸⁹ *Westminster Investigation Report, Part J.1 para 3, Part J.2 paras 4–5.3*

Content of policies and procedures

83. It is critical that safeguarding and child protection policies should be clear and easy to follow and implement. They should set out how the organisation will:

- protect children from harm;
- ensure child protection concerns can be raised; and
- respond appropriately to allegations or incidents, including reporting to the relevant authorities.

They should also be subject to regular review to monitor their implementation and effectiveness at least every two years, although some settings, such as schools and the secure estate, are legally obliged to review their safeguarding policies annually.⁸⁹⁰

84. Some institutions lacked a clear understanding of the purpose and content of child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures. Even those institutions which are legally required to have such policies have admitted to having “*blind spots*” and inadequacies in relation to the scope

⁸⁹⁰ INQ006502__025 para 85; INQ006608__070 paras 46–47

of those policies.⁸⁹¹ The Church of England, for example, acknowledged that some of its policies were inadequate and has since taken steps to improve them.⁸⁹² Other religious organisations had policies and procedures that were rudimentary or incomplete, referred to obsolete statutory guidance or were heavily rooted in religious and theological texts and lacked practical information.⁸⁹³ Some paid ‘lip service’ to safeguarding by introducing policies and procedures without checking that these were effective, fully understood and followed.⁸⁹⁴ On occasion, the Inquiry encountered policies which appeared to be designed primarily to protect staff from false allegations rather than to protect children from harm and to respond appropriately to concerns.⁸⁹⁵

85. *Working Together to Safeguard Children* currently lacks sufficient detail regarding the content of safeguarding and child protection

⁸⁹¹ *Residential Schools Investigation Report, Part E.3 para 39*

⁸⁹² *ACE026392__011, 013, 016*

⁸⁹³ *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report, Part D.2 paras 15, 17–21*

⁸⁹⁴ *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report, Part D.1 para 2*

⁸⁹⁵ *Residential Schools Investigation Report, Part F.3 paras 19–20*

policies and procedures. While the guidance applies to a diverse range of institutions and needs to allow flexibility for those institutions to tailor their safeguarding arrangements to their own requirements, clearer guidance on the appropriate content of policy and procedures is needed.

86. There are, however, a number of sources of useful information. The UK government has recently published additional guidance on safeguarding to assist organisations in the voluntary sector, in furtherance of its *Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy*.⁸⁹⁶ Government agencies have also partnered with voluntary bodies to provide this advice. For example, the work of the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit – a partnership between the NSPCC, Sport England, Sport Northern Ireland and Sports Wales – seeks to promote safety for children in sport.⁸⁹⁷ Guidance on safeguarding children in the third sector is available from the NSPCC, as well as from many other training, advisory and consultancy

⁸⁹⁶ DFD000020_006-007 paras 23–24; DFD000023; DFE003469; INQ006448

⁸⁹⁷ *Rapid Evidence Assessment: What can be learnt from other jurisdictions about preventing and responding to child sexual abuse*, IICSA, April 2017, p76

organisations.⁸⁹⁸ The policies of other institutions may also provide a starting point for a new policy. For example, the Scouts Association has designed a ‘Young people first’ yellow card, designed to fold up and be carried in a pocket or bag for ease of reference.⁸⁹⁹ This sets out, briefly and clearly, the code of behaviour for all adults in the Scouts to follow, including what to do if there are concerns that a young person is at risk of harm.⁹⁰⁰

87. Variation between organisations is inevitable, given that the types of settings and institutions working with children vary widely. It would not be realistic or helpful to propose one single set of safeguarding and child protection policies for all institutions to apply, but this is a matter on which the Child Protection Authorities recommended by the Inquiry could assist institutions further in due course.

Implementation

88. Organisations may have appropriate policies and procedures in place but struggle to implement them in their everyday practice. Regular refresher training is key to effective implementation of safeguarding and child protection policies. It helps

⁸⁹⁸ [NSP000147_012](#); [THO000076_017](#); [THO000076_001-0012](#); [THO000029](#); [THO000018](#)

⁸⁹⁹ [Ross Maloney 10 December 2020 61/5-12](#)

⁹⁰⁰ [INQ006898](#)

to ensure that everyone within the institution is familiar with policies and procedures and knows how to respond to and report allegations or concerns about a child.

89. However, some witnesses were frank about the gap between policy-setting and implementation within their organisation.⁹⁰¹ For example, the leader of one religious community commented that “*honestly, hand on heart, it is probably put in an office file and kept in the office there to refer to*”.⁹⁰²

90. As noted in the Inquiry’s research regarding child sexual abuse in contemporary institutional contexts, staff often did not consistently apply safeguarding policies and had narrow understandings of safeguarding responsibilities.⁹⁰³ On occasion, allegations were not appropriately reported due to a lack of knowledge or understanding of individuals’ responsibilities under

⁹⁰¹ *Westminster Investigation Report, Part J.2 paras 9–12*

⁹⁰² *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report, Part D.2 para 17*

⁹⁰³ *Child sexual abuse in contemporary institutional contexts: An analysis of Disclosure and Barring Service discretionary case files, IICSA, July 2021, Executive Summary p5*

existing procedures.⁹⁰⁴ There were also failures to implement procedures when disclosures of sexual abuse were made by children.⁹⁰⁵

91. The Inquiry's investigations identified a number of failures by organisations and individuals within them to adhere to policies and procedures. Examples included failures to:

- follow vetting procedures in relation to staff members;⁹⁰⁶
- make relevant policies or procedures known to staff;⁹⁰⁷
- recognise clear signs of abuse or inappropriate staff conduct; and⁹⁰⁸

⁹⁰⁴ *Child sexual abuse in contemporary institutional contexts: An analysis of Disclosure and Barring Service discretionary case files*, IICSA, July 2021, Chapter 6, section 7

⁹⁰⁵ *Child sexual abuse in contemporary institutional contexts: An analysis of Disclosure and Barring Service discretionary case files*, IICSA, July 2021, Chapter 5, section 5.2.3

⁹⁰⁶ *Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, Part E.5

⁹⁰⁷ *Nottinghamshire Councils Investigation Report*, Part G.1 para 5

⁹⁰⁸ *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part E.3 paras 42–44, 52

- investigate allegations of sexual abuse by staff or report them appropriately.⁹⁰⁹

92. The safeguarding policies and procedures of institutions providing statutory services (such as schools, children’s homes and young offender institutions) are inspected and evaluated by the relevant regulators or inspectorates to assess compliance with current regulations and guidance. Whether or not an organisation is in the statutory sector and subject to mandatory inspection, auditing or reviewing safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that they are effective, well understood and properly implemented is the responsibility of the organisation itself. The Inquiry saw examples of institutions which undertook no internal review and relied solely on external inspections for quality assurance of their safeguarding arrangements, as well as institutions which conducted internal reviews of safeguarding but permitted no external scrutiny or independent review.⁹¹⁰

⁹⁰⁹ *Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, Part D.3; *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part E.3 paras 42–55

⁹¹⁰ *CFC000016_036; Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part F.4 paras 42–45; *The Roman Catholic Church Investigation Report*, Parts G.1, G.6

93. Policies and codes of conduct will not be effective unless they can be translated into changed behaviour and compliance monitored. Leaders retain overall responsibility for safeguarding and child protection within their institutions and must ensure that they have sufficient knowledge and awareness to exercise effective oversight. It is not acceptable, as the Inquiry saw in one school, to say that safeguarding and child protection was not within the headteacher's remit but primarily the responsibility of a designated staff member.⁹¹¹ All staff and volunteers must recognise the importance of safeguarding, know and follow policies and procedures, and understand their role within those procedures. It is important that leaders at all levels understand the context in which policies will be implemented, and have the competence and determination to convey the organisation's ethics and values to staff, so that safeguarding is seen as part of the culture of the institution.⁹¹²

94. In the Inquiry's hearings about effective leadership in child protection, leaders were asked how they ensure that policies and guidance are being implemented and understood by those delivering child protection on the front line. Witnesses spoke about the "*implementation*

⁹¹¹ Anthony Halford 19 November 2020 5/7-22

⁹¹² Stella Manzie 9 December 2020 10/11-11/7

gap”, explaining that legislation and guidance can just “*clutter the landscape*” for workforces and complicate things. Ensuring that attention is paid to the conditions and support that workforces require to enable legislation and guidance to be put into effective practice was considered to be of equal importance to training the workforce.⁹¹³ Both are essential for effective implementation of safeguarding arrangements.

⁹¹³ Claire Burns 7 December 2020 94/23-96/1

Part F

Identifying and reporting child sexual abuse

Identifying and reporting child sexual abuse

F.1: Introduction

1. Child sexual abuse may come to the attention of institutions in different ways and at different times:

- some victims disclose what has happened to them, either as a child or as an adult;
- some children show signs of abuse or engage in behaviour which properly trained individuals can identify;
- some perpetrators use certain behaviours, particularly grooming techniques, which can be indicators of abuse; and
- internet companies and law enforcement agencies increasingly use technology to identify abuse taking place online.

2. The ability of adults to identify children who are being abused or are at risk of abuse is therefore a fundamental feature of the institutional response and an integral precursor to the reporting process. The Inquiry encountered numerous examples of failures to identify child sexual abuse. Failure

to report abuse to the police or social services was an abdication of the responsibility to protect children.⁹¹⁴

3. A new law is therefore required to place certain individuals who work with children under a statutory duty to report child sexual abuse to the police or social services. In conjunction with recommendations to prioritise the response to sexual abuse, new reporting obligations will dispel any reluctance felt by some in receipt of disclosures from victims and survivors to inform the statutory authorities. This in turn may ensure the statutory authorities are better informed and victims and survivors better supported.

F.2: Identifying child sexual abuse

4. Many children who are sexually abused do not disclose what has happened to them for years, sometimes decades. Nine percent of participants

⁹¹⁴ *Westminster Investigation Report*, Executive Summary; *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Executive Summary; *Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, Executive Summary; *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report*, Part E.2 para 7; *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Executive Summary

reporting abuse to the Truth Project were doing so for the first time.⁹¹⁵ The oldest person who disclosed sexual abuse to the Inquiry for the first time was 87 years old. Some children never disclose that they have been sexually abused.

5. The reasons for not reporting abuse can be complex, deeply personal and contribute to the harm caused by the abuse itself. In particular, the fear of being disbelieved was repeatedly given as a reason for not telling someone about abuse. The Inquiry also heard how feelings of guilt, shame and embarrassment prevented disclosure. Other reasons were fear of the perpetrator and of the consequences of reporting abuse, concern for their families and even for the perpetrator, or simply not having anyone to tell.⁹¹⁶ As set out in the *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report*, religious and cultural factors have resulted in some victims and complainants facing additional barriers to reporting

⁹¹⁵ Victims and Survivors' Voices, Part B.1

⁹¹⁶ Victims and Survivors' Voices, Part E.3; *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in custodial institutions*, IICSA, April 2020, Chapter 7.1, pp46–47; *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in healthcare contexts*, IICSA, December 2020, Chapter 7.1, pp43–44

their abuse.⁹¹⁷ The stigma of talking about sex and healthy relationships in some communities also creates obstacles to discussing and disclosing child sexual abuse.

6. The introduction of mandatory reporting, as described below, is intended directly to address victims and survivors' concerns that they will not be believed if they report abuse.

Recognising indicators of child sexual abuse

7. Child sexual abuse almost invariably happens in private. The chance of the abuse being witnessed is therefore likely to be rare, as are obvious physical injuries resulting from the abuse. As set out in *Victims and Survivors Voices*, only 8 percent of Truth Project accounts reported that sexual abuse resulted directly in physical injury.⁹¹⁸

8. It is essential that institutions and organisations – and those working in them such as carers, social workers, doctors and teachers – receive regularly updated training on identifying potential indicators of sexual abuse as well as current and emerging threats of abuse. It is not the responsibility of the child to come forward. It is for the institution and

⁹¹⁷ *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report, Part C*

⁹¹⁸ *Victims and Survivors' Voices, Part G.6*

the adults working within it to ensure that they are able to identify child sexual abuse when it is possible to do so.

9. There are various potential indicators of abuse, which often overlap.

9.1. Statutory guidance, both in England and in Wales, provides some assistance so that individuals who work with children are able to identify the indicators of child sexual abuse. For example, the *All Wales Practice Guides* note that those who work with children need to be vigilant to the physical, emotional and behavioural indicators of child sexual exploitation. These could include the possession of money, clothing or technological items, including expensive mobile phones, where there is no reasonable explanation for having them.⁹¹⁹

9.2. The NHS website also provides non-exhaustive lists of indicators of child sexual abuse and of child sexual exploitation.⁹²⁰

⁹¹⁹ [INQ006466_011](#)

⁹²⁰ [INQ006747](#); [INQ006626](#)

Some of the following signs may be indicators of sexual abuse:

- Children who display knowledge or interest in sexual acts inappropriate to their age;
- Children who use sexual language or have sexual knowledge that you wouldn't expect them to have;
- Children who ask others to behave sexually or play sexual games; and
- Children with physical sexual health problems, including soreness in the genital and anal areas, sexually transmitted infections or underage pregnancy.

Some of the following signs may be indicators of sexual exploitation:

- Children who appear with unexplained gifts or new possessions;
- Children who associate with other young people involved in exploitation;
- Children who have older boyfriends or girlfriends;
- Children who suffer from sexually transmitted infections or become pregnant;
- Children who suffer from changes in emotional well-being;
- Children who misuse drugs and alcohol;
- Children who go missing for periods of time or regularly come home late; and
- Children who regularly miss school or education or don't take part in education.

9.3. Practical guidance can also be found in various toolkits, such as the template created by the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, which are available to help professionals identify behaviours indicating that a child is being sexually abused.⁹²¹ There is also a range of guidance available for the medical profession and for the police.⁹²²

9.4. In the case of young children, signs of distress, or behavioural signals such as self-harm, physical injury or personality and demeanour changes, or sexualised behaviour in a prepubertal child, may indicate child sexual abuse. Other children may disclose partially, attempting to convey that something is not right by, for example, writing notes or drawing pictures that indicate their abuse.⁹²³ As the Inquiry noted in its *Children in the Care of Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, small communication signs or changes in behaviour indicating sexual abuse can be both harder to identify in children with complex needs and more easily dismissed, particularly when the child is cared for by multiple carers.⁹²⁴

⁹²¹ [INQ006746](#)

⁹²² [INQ006742](#); [INQ006807](#)

⁹²³ [INQ006704_038](#)

⁹²⁴ [Lambeth Council Investigation Report, Part C.1 para 1](#); [INQ005640_004 para 1.11](#)

10. It is also incumbent on adults to think more broadly about behavioural indicators of child sexual abuse. For example, in a recent survey by the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse frontline survey respondents said that:

*“they commonly considered whether child sexual abuse might be taking place when responding to situations involving human trafficking, children going missing from home, female genital mutilation, county lines and child neglect – but were far less likely to do so when responding to drink driving/road traffic offences, serious acquisitive crime and antisocial behaviour, despite research showing links between child sexual abuse and these other types of offence”.*⁹²⁵

11. The Inquiry’s research report on child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities noted that *“Cultural stereotypes and racism can lead to failures on the part of institutions and professionals to identify and respond appropriately to child sexual abuse”.*⁹²⁶ One male focus group participant stated:

⁹²⁵ [INQ006745_008](#)

⁹²⁶ [“People don’t talk about it”: Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities](#), IICSA, June 2020, Executive Summary

“I did a lot of bad things; I was playing up, and I think it should have been picked up on that something’s wrong ... But I think if a child of colour or black kid or Asian kid maybe plays up and, you know, does things and gets violent or whatever, it’s sometimes seen as typical.”⁹²⁷

12. In its *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, the Inquiry identified “widespread failures” to record the ethnicity of perpetrators and victims of child sexual exploitation.⁹²⁸ As a consequence, statutory agencies may not target resources appropriately – including techniques aimed at detection and prevention – enabling the police, for example, to engage with communities where these crimes occur to take preventive action. Opportunities to identify those children most at risk of being sexually exploited may be lost.

13. Factors potentially indicative of child sexual abuse are equally applicable to child sexual exploitation (and vice versa). There are, however, additional features of child sexual exploitation that mean that exploitation can be identified in a number of further ways. For example, a child may

⁹²⁷ *“People don’t talk about it”: Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities*, IICSA, June 2020, Chapter 6.2 p67

⁹²⁸ *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Part H.4

request contraception or testing and treatment for a sexually transmitted disease from a GP surgery, contraceptive and sexual health service, hospital or clinic. Changes in the child's daily behaviour, such as deterioration in school work, or children who come into school in an exhausted state or show a lack of engagement, may suggest that further enquiries are required.⁹²⁹

14. In particular, a child going missing regularly may be an indicator of sexual abuse. In a number of the Inquiry's investigations, victims and complainants stated that they would abscond from the institution in order to escape abuse, only to be returned by the police.⁹³⁰

15. Statutory guidance in England provides that when a child is found, a return home interview (RHI) should be offered to the child (although there is no requirement that the child participates in it). This should be conducted within 72 hours of the child returning to their home or care setting.⁹³¹ RHIs are not a statutory requirement in Wales but there is an expectation on the part of the Welsh

⁹²⁹ *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Part F.2 para 3; INQ001608__009 para 18

⁹³⁰ *Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, Part J.3 para 24; *Nottinghamshire Councils Investigation Report*, Pen Portraits (L-29)

⁹³¹ INQ006447__014 para 32

Government that an interview will be offered after a child has three episodes of going missing.⁹³² As set out in the Inquiry's *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, RHIs were inadequate in most of the six case study areas examined.⁹³³

16. While not every incident of running away will be because a child is fleeing sexual abuse, regularly going missing and unexplained absences, whether from home or school, or staying out overnight should act as a trigger for adults to ascertain why a child is behaving in this way. In some cases, a child may not be running from abuse but towards it, making it all the more important that the right questions are asked. The information sought should include where the child has been, who they were with and what they were doing.

17. Identifying signs of child sexual abuse and exploitation is not the sole preserve of professionals in contact with children. There are positive initiatives that reinforce the need for all adults to be alert to indicators of abuse. For example, in 2014 South Yorkshire Police launched Operation Makesafe, which was designed to train

⁹³² *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Part G.5 para 25

⁹³³ *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Part G.5, paras 31–33

hotel staff to recognise the signs of child sexual exploitation.⁹³⁴ The initiative was extended to fast food restaurants, taxi companies and transport hubs and rolled out across a number of police force areas to educate workers in these sectors about how to identify and report concerns about child sexual exploitation. In January 2021, as a result of a concern about the impact of lockdowns and the need to stay indoors during the COVID-19 pandemic, Sussex Police offered free training to postal workers, delivery drivers and tradesmen to help them recognise the signs of abuse and to understand how to report concerns to the relevant authorities.⁹³⁵

Indicators of abuse related to the perpetrator

18. In addition to being alive to the signs of sexual abuse being demonstrated by children, there are ways in which perpetrators of child sexual abuse can be identified.

⁹³⁴ [INQ006752_002](#)

⁹³⁵ [INQ006748](#)

19. Research suggests that, despite beliefs to the contrary, there is no typical child abuser.⁹³⁶ Whether male or female, there are similarities in the way perpetrators behave, particularly in the methods used to groom children.⁹³⁷ For example, research on female and male perpetrators from educational institutions indicated that sexual abuse occurred at a higher rate outside the school, such as at the cinema or in the perpetrator's home or car, rather than inside the school.⁹³⁸ The giving of compliments and special attention, along with gifts, alcohol, drugs and cigarettes, were features of the grooming techniques to sexually abuse and exploit children.⁹³⁹ As set out in the *Residential Schools*

⁹³⁶ *Child sexual abuse in contemporary institutional contexts*, IICSA, July 2021, p14; *An explorative study on perpetrators of child sexual exploitation convicted alongside others*, IICSA, May 2020, p5

⁹³⁷ *Child sexual abuse in contemporary institutional contexts*, IICSA, July 2021, pp4, 17–18

⁹³⁸ *Child sexual abuse in contemporary institutional contexts*, IICSA, July 2021, p17

⁹³⁹ *Ampleforth and Downside Investigation Report*, Part B para 162; *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Pen Portraits (CS-A12 and CS-A372); *Westminster Investigation Report*, Part H.2 para 18; *Diocese of Chichester/Peter Ball Investigation Report*, Part B.2 para 24

Investigation Report, a serious case review referred to at least 30 incidents of “*inappropriate or unprofessional conduct*” by a teacher at one school which “*should have been viewed as suspicious*”.⁹⁴⁰ Only 11 of the 30 recorded incidents were reported to the school.⁹⁴¹ In particular, there were concerns that the teacher had female-only favourites and was over-familiar and “*frequently observed*” to be in “*inappropriately close physical contact*” with some pupils. The review noted that “*This behaviour is characteristic of grooming for sexual abuse and it is a further failure that it wasn’t recognised as such*”.⁹⁴²

20. Ensuring that institutions, and individuals working in them, understand warning signs and indicators of potential child sexual abuse exhibited by a perpetrator is an important preventive measure. This should be addressed by the policies and procedures of an institution, and through the provision of appropriate training. It may be aided further by the Inquiry’s recommendation for a public awareness campaign.

⁹⁴⁰ *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part B.4 para 138, Part E.3 para 42; [DFE002197_007](#)

⁹⁴¹ [DFE002197_008](#) para 27

⁹⁴² [DFE002197_011-012](#) para 39

F.3: Detecting online child sexual abuse

21. Much online-facilitated child sexual abuse, such as grooming, is similarly hard to detect. Online perpetrators frequently disguise their true age and identity – often masquerading as children in an attempt to gain the child’s trust. Some online messaging services are designed so that messages and images are automatically deleted, thereby enabling perpetrators to evade detection. For example, the Inquiry’s research found that Snapchat was often the social media platform “*of choice*” for perpetrators and that social media and technology such as this has exacerbated the prevalence of child sexual abuse because it offers perpetrators more opportunities to access children and offend while remaining undetected.⁹⁴³

22. Internet and social media companies, including Google, Meta (formerly Facebook, which owns WhatsApp and Instagram), Microsoft and Apple, have developed technology to detect online-facilitated child sexual abuse. The methods of detection vary depending on the type of abuse.

⁹⁴³ *Child sexual abuse in contemporary institutional contexts*, IICSA, July 2021, Chapter 6 p89

Child sexual abuse images

23. The number of people accessing child sexual abuse images continues to grow. During a one-month period during the first 2020 lockdown, the Internet Watch Foundation estimated there were 8.8 million attempts by UK internet users to access child sexual abuse imagery.⁹⁴⁴

24. Techniques for detecting child sexual abuse images vary, depending on whether the image has previously been identified by law enforcement or industry as a child sexual abuse image (referred to as a ‘known’ child sexual abuse image). PhotoDNA, web crawlers, Artificial Intelligence (AI), machine learning and classifiers are all used to detect imagery, with many companies making their technology available to other internet companies.⁹⁴⁵

⁹⁴⁴ [INQ006766_001](#)

⁹⁴⁵ PhotoDNA is technology developed by Microsoft which assists in the detection and removal of known images of child sexual abuse on the internet, creating a unique digital signature of an image (known as a hash) which is then compared against hashes of other photos to find copies of the same image. A web crawler is a computer programme that automatically searches the internet for, in this case, child sexual abuse images. AI, machine learning and classifiers are types of computer programme that learn from data given to it, to then identify similar data.

25. Where known child sexual abuse images are detected, US law requires Electronic Service Providers (ESPs) based in the US to report child sexual abuse material to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC). They must provide information about the suspected perpetrator, such as an email address or Internet Protocol (IP) address.⁹⁴⁶ In practice, all the major internet companies (including Meta, Google and Microsoft) are subject to this legal requirement. In 2018, this resulted in 18.4 million reports being made to NCMEC.⁹⁴⁷ In 2021, NCMEC received nearly 30 million reports.⁹⁴⁸

26. NCMEC sends reports relating to the UK to the National Crime Agency (NCA). The NCA responds to the most serious reports itself, and passes others on to local police forces for them to investigate and make any necessary arrests.⁹⁴⁹ This form of mandatory reporting has therefore had a significant positive impact on the way US institutions report child sexual abuse material and

⁹⁴⁶ An Internet Protocol (IP) address is a number assigned to a device connected to a computer network.

⁹⁴⁷ *The Internet Investigation Report*, Part C.2 para 35

⁹⁴⁸ INQ006856_003

⁹⁴⁹ *The Internet Investigation Report*, Part C.2 paras 36, 39

an equally positive impact in assisting UK law enforcement to identify perpetrators based in the UK. Once the Online Safety Bill is passed, UK companies will be under a duty to report any child sexual exploitation and abuse content that they encounter to the NCA.⁹⁵⁰

Pre-screening

27. Pre-screening enables internet companies to prevent child sexual abuse images from ever being uploaded to platforms and social media profiles. The images cannot therefore be viewed or shared, preventing access to the material.

28. In August 2021, Apple announced that it had developed technology to scan US-based user devices for known child sexual abuse images before an image is stored on its cloud storage service, iCloud. It was intended that the implementation of this feature would be kept under review before being rolled out worldwide. Subsequently, Apple announced that it was delaying these plans, pending “*improvements before releasing these critically important child safety features*”.⁹⁵¹ Where a match is found, the image will be reviewed by a human reviewer and, if

⁹⁵⁰ [INQ006896_064](#)

⁹⁵¹ [INQ006630_002](#)

the image contains child sexual abuse material, a report will be made to NCMEC.⁹⁵² This type of pre-screening for known indecent images is welcome.

29. In *The Internet Investigation Report*, published in March 2020, the Inquiry recommended that the government should require internet companies to pre-screen for known child sexual abuse images before material is uploaded.⁹⁵³ In its response, the government referred to the *Interim Code of Practice on Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse* (Interim Code) (see Part J) which sets out the government’s “*expectation that all companies will prevent access to known child sexual abuse material*”.⁹⁵⁴ The first principle in the Interim Code states that companies “*seek to prevent known child sexual abuse material from being made available to users or accessible on their platforms and services, take appropriate action under their terms of service, and report it to appropriate authorities*”.⁹⁵⁵ The government’s response went on to state that “*Pre-screening is one means of*

⁹⁵² [INQ006631_002](#)

⁹⁵³ [The Internet Investigation Report, Part G.3 \(Recommendation 1\)](#)

⁹⁵⁴ [Government response to recommendation 1 of the Internet Investigation Report dated 10 November 2020, para 10](#)

⁹⁵⁵ [INQ006672_003](#)

*preventing access, recognising that this threat and the response that it requires may vary depending on the type and nature of the service offered”.*⁹⁵⁶

30. The Interim Code sets out what is ‘expected’ of companies but this does not go far enough given that the technology to pre-screen exists and is effective in preventing known child sexual abuse material being made available to users. In due course, it will be for the Office of Communications (Ofcom) as the online safety regulator to issue the code of practice, but the Inquiry considers that it is imperative that pre-screening is utilised to its fullest extent and becomes a mandatory feature of the code of practice.

31. In March 2022, the Online Safety Bill was laid before Parliament. It is not known how long it will take for legislation to be enacted and come into force, what provisions will be enacted and in what precise form. However, ensuring that users do not encounter child sexual abuse material is imperative, irrespective of the type and nature of the service offered and irrespective of any possible amendments to the Bill. The Inquiry therefore recommends that pre-screening for known child sexual abuse images should be a mandatory feature of the code of practice.

⁹⁵⁶ *Government response to recommendation 1 of the Internet Investigation Report dated 10 November 2020, para 10*

Recommendation 12: Pre-screening

The Inquiry recommends that the UK government makes it mandatory for all regulated providers of search services and user-to-user services to pre-screen for known child sexual abuse material.

Online grooming

32. In the year ending September 2021, police forces in England and in Wales recorded 6,833 grooming offences, an approximate 53 percent rise from the 2017/18 recorded figures.⁹⁵⁷

33. In addition to police officers operating undercover in internet chatrooms and forums used by suspected offenders, many of the internet companies use human moderators to review content and take action where there is a breach of the company's online policies, not just those policies relating to child sexual abuse.⁹⁵⁸ Not every internet company provided the Inquiry with the numbers of moderators they employed and, even where those figures were provided, it was far from

⁹⁵⁷ [HOM003404](#)

⁹⁵⁸ Facebook, Microsoft, Apple and Google all have policies which prohibit the sharing/posting of child sexual abuse material.

clear that the numbers were sufficient to meet the increase in online-facilitated child sexual abuse.⁹⁵⁹ Given the escalation in grooming offences, internet companies will need more moderators to complement and add to their technological means of identifying abuse. In addition, the internet companies need to be alert to the difficult and traumatic material that moderators can be exposed to and be careful to pay attention to their welfare.

34. The internet companies also use classifiers to detect not just key words but patterns of behaviour that might indicate grooming is taking place. In 2018, the Home Secretary convened a Hackathon (a collaborative event for computer programmers) attended by all the major internet companies. In just 48 hours, engineers from those internet companies developed a prototype technology that could potentially be used to flag conversations that might be indicative of grooming. Following a second ‘mini’ Hackathon in 2019, the technology was launched in 2020.⁹⁶⁰ These collaborative conferences brought about significant technological developments within a very short time, and ought to be a regular and ongoing feature of the response to online child sexual abuse.

⁹⁵⁹ *The Internet Investigation Report*, Part D.5 paras 48–53

⁹⁶⁰ *The Internet Investigation Report*, Part D.5 paras 58–59

Live streaming

35. A large proportion of victims of live streaming come from poorer countries, often from Southeast Asia. However, in 2018, the Internet Watch Foundation published research which examined the distribution of captures of live streamed child sexual abuse and indicated that it more frequently encountered images “*involving white girls, apparently from relatively affluent Western backgrounds*”.⁹⁶¹ Live streaming is a problem affecting children in England and in Wales.

36. In addition, demand for live streamed sexual abuse is seemingly fuelled by individuals within the UK. The WeProtect *Global Threat Assessment 2021* notes that live streaming for payment has increased, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the ‘consumers’ of this material coming “*predominantly from Europe, North America and Australia*”.⁹⁶²

37. The speed and real-time nature of live streaming make it extremely difficult to police interactions between the live streamer and the recipient as they happen. The practical effect of this is that it is harder for industry to deploy technology to detect, moderate or prevent live

⁹⁶¹ *The Internet Investigation Report, Part E.1*
para 7

⁹⁶² *INQ006749_060*

streamed child sexual abuse material. The internet companies deploy some technology to detect potentially inappropriate comments that are often posted alongside a live stream, but it is clear that further investment is required to detect this form of online-facilitated abuse.

Detection in the future

38. There remain a number of notable impediments to the future detection of child sexual abuse material, including the increased use of the dark web (discussed in Part J). While the majority of websites that host indecent images of children are accessed via the open web, offending also takes place on the dark web. This is part of the world wide web that is only accessible by means of specialist web browsers, and cannot be accessed through well-known search engines. As set out in the *Internet Investigation Report*, at any one time, the dark web is home to approximately 30,000 live sites, just under half of which are considered to contain criminal content, including, but not limited to, child sexual abuse and exploitation content.⁹⁶³ It hosts some of the most depraved and sickening child sexual abuse imagery and material.

⁹⁶³ *The Internet Investigation Report*, Part A.2 para 16

39. One of the most significant impediments to detection is end-to-end encryption (E2EE). Encryption is the process of converting information or data into a code that makes it unreadable to unauthorised parties. Many means of communication, such as WhatsApp, iMessage and Facetime, are subject to end-to-end encryption, which means that the content of the communication can only be seen by the sender and the recipient. This means that law enforcement and the providers of the messaging platform cannot access the content (unless they are physically in possession of the handset or device). It also means many of the technological means of detecting online offending simply do not work.

40. The practical effect of the increased use of end-to-end encryption has significant implications.

40.1. In 2019, Facebook announced its intention to introduce end-to-end encryption on the Facebook Messenger and Instagram platforms. In 2020, Facebook provided 20.3 million child sexual abuse referrals to NCMEC. NCMEC's previous assessment is that 70 percent of Facebook's total referrals relate to Messenger (Facebook's instant messaging service that also allows images and videos to be shared), and so the number of referrals is likely to significantly diminish once that service is end-

to-end encrypted.⁹⁶⁴ As Mr Rob Jones, Director of Threat Leadership at the NCA commented, Facebook’s move to end-to-end encryption would “*take away*” the “*crown jewels from the online protection response*”.⁹⁶⁵

40.2. Since the start of 2019, Project Arachnid (a web crawler that searches for child sexual abuse material) has detected more than 5,500 pages on the dark web hosting child sexual abuse material.⁹⁶⁶ However, because the identity of the server is anonymised, notices requesting removal of the material cannot be sent. Project Arachnid has also detected a large volume of child sexual abuse material related to prepubescent children that is made available on dark web forums but actually sits on open

⁹⁶⁴ [INQ006645_002](#)

⁹⁶⁵ [INQ006733_004](#)

⁹⁶⁶ Project Arachnid is a web crawler that identifies child sexual abuse material on sites that have previously been reported to the Canadian authorities as hosting such material. Once child sexual abuse material has been detected, the crawler automatically sends a notice to the provider hosting the content requesting that the image be taken down. [*The Internet Investigation Report, Part C.2 para 23*](#)

web sources in encrypted archives. By virtue of encryption, scanning techniques cannot detect the imagery.

41. The government’s Interim Code states that there is:

“detailed guidance for companies to help them understand and respond to the breadth of CSEA [child sexual exploitation and abuse] threats, recognising that this threat and the response that it requires will vary depending on the type and nature of the service offered ... we encourage all companies to be proactive and ambitious in how they consider and implement the recommendations within this interim code of practice.”⁹⁶⁷

42. While the Interim Code acknowledges the threat posed by encryption and requires companies to consider the potential harm created by it (including how the risk of this harm might be mitigated), it falls short of proposing any solution to the problem. In addition, the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) recognises that the balance between addressing concerns about online safety and the need for keeping personal data secure and private (brought about by end-to-end encryption) is a difficult one. The ICO considers that *“positioning E2EE and online*

⁹⁶⁷ [INQ006672_005](#)

*safety as being in inevitable opposition is a false dichotomy” and that a more “nuanced and detailed understanding of the broader issues” is required.*⁹⁶⁸

To that end, it engaged with the government’s ‘Safety Tech Challenge Fund’, which aims to:

*“encourage the tech industry to find practical solutions to combat child sexual exploitation and abuse online, without impacting people’s rights to privacy and data protection in their communications”.*⁹⁶⁹

43. In November 2021, the government announced that £555,000 had been awarded to five projects as part of the Safety Tech Challenge Fund. One of the projects will develop a plug-in to be integrated within encrypted social platforms to detect known child sexual abuse material.⁹⁷⁰ This forms part of wider spending commitments by the Home Office which, in the financial year 2022/23, exceed £60 million.⁹⁷¹

44. Technological advances such as these projects are positive steps but more is required. The Online Safety Bill proposes giving Ofcom

⁹⁶⁸ [INQ006764_003, 006 paras 14, 21](#)

⁹⁶⁹ [INQ006634_002](#)

⁹⁷⁰ [INQ006634_002](#)

⁹⁷¹ [UK Government \(Home Office\) Funding Allocation for Tackling Child Sexual Abuse for the Financial Year 2022-2023](#)

the power to require providers to use “*accredited technology*” to identify child sexual exploitation and abuse content whether “*communicated publicly or privately*” and to take that content down.⁹⁷² In July 2022, the Home Office announced an amendment to the Bill to give Ofcom the power to issue a company with a Notice to use “*best endeavours*” to develop technology to prevent, identify and remove child sexual abuse material, including on services that are encrypted.⁹⁷³

45. If enacted, it may be that Ofcom will require specific technologies to be deployed on encrypted services but this is a measure of last resort. It does not detract from the reality that encryption represents a serious challenge to the detection of online-facilitated child sexual abuse, and is likely to result in child sexual abuse offences going undetected.

46. While there is an ever-increasing awareness of the need to protect personal data and online privacy, the emerging regulatory landscape must ensure that there is effective protection of children from online-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse. That must remain the priority.

⁹⁷² [INQ006896_098-099 section 103](#)

⁹⁷³ [Home Office update to the Inquiry in relation to the Online Safety Bill dated 6 July 2022](#)

F.4: Reporting child sexual abuse

Institutional reporting

47. The Inquiry's investigations have demonstrated that systemic change is needed to ensure allegations of child sexual abuse are reported. The Inquiry heard of many instances in which children who were being sexually abused made disclosures or presented information to someone within an institution, but no action was taken to inform the relevant authorities.⁹⁷⁴

⁹⁷⁴ *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Pen Portraits (CS-A317); *Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, Pen Portraits (LA-A307); *The Roman Catholic Church Investigation Report*, Pen Portraits (Ampleforth Abbey and School, Downside Abbey and School); *The Anglican Church Investigation Report*, Pen Portraits (AN-F15); *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Pen Portraits (Peter Smith, CI-A34)

47.1. In several cases, no steps were taken by senior leaders of institutions to report sexual abuse to the police and perpetrators continued to have unrestricted access to children.⁹⁷⁵

47.2. There were personal records of children in care and employment records of those who looked after them that contained references to behaviour amounting to sexual abuse of the child that were recorded but not reported or investigated.⁹⁷⁶

47.3. There were cases of known perpetrators who were allowed to resign, retire or transfer to similar institutions elsewhere, rather than taking appropriate action.⁹⁷⁷

47.4. In the educational field, there were instances where teachers were dismissed for sexual offending but referrals were not made

⁹⁷⁵ *Diocese of Chichester/Peter Ball Investigation Report*, Executive Summary, Part B.2 para 100; *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report*, Pen Portraits (PR-A16)

⁹⁷⁶ *Nottinghamshire Councils Investigation Report*, Part C.5 paras 42, 45, 48, 50, Part C.8 paras 117–118; *Lambeth Council Investigation Report*, Part E.3 paras 17–25

⁹⁷⁷ *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part B.2 para 12, Part F.3 para 21

for their inclusion on lists of those unsuitable to teach (despite such mechanisms having been in place since the 1920s).⁹⁷⁸ In some of those cases, other children were sexually abused who should have been protected by prompt and proper reporting by the adults whose job it was to keep them safe.

48. A prominent reason that individuals and institutions failed to report child sexual abuse to statutory authorities was a desire to protect an individual or institution from reputational damage.⁹⁷⁹ Protection of reputation was particularly prevalent within religious, educational and political institutions, and concerns to avoid embarrassment trumped concerns about risks

⁹⁷⁸ *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part B.2 para 13, Part I.3 para 28

⁹⁷⁹ *The Anglican Church Investigation Report*, Executive Summary; *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Executive Summary

to children.⁹⁸⁰ Leaders were sometimes more focussed on controlling what information about allegations of abuse became public rather than on ensuring authorities were properly notified so that allegations were investigated.⁹⁸¹ When concerns arose that were politically or professionally inconvenient for an individual to report, they sometimes did not do so.

49. Similar considerations applied where institutions comprised individuals with a shared moral code, or in institutions with cultures or leaders that emphasised deference within their ranks through strict hierarchies or moral and spiritual authority.⁹⁸² Not reporting an allegation

⁹⁸⁰ *The Anglican Church Investigation Report*, Part D.1 para 1; *The Roman Catholic Church Investigation Report*, Executive Summary; *Westminster Investigation Report*, Executive Summary; *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report*, Part C.8 para 48; SBS000001_023 para 73; *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part F.3 para 21

⁹⁸¹ *Diocese of Chichester/Peter Ball Investigation Report*, Part B.2 para 45

⁹⁸² *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report*, Part C.5 para 25; *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Part E.6 para 85

of child sexual abuse out of a misguided sense of wanting to ‘protect their own’, a shared sense of defensiveness or a fear that making a report would bring their community into disrepute also featured in the evidence received by the Inquiry.⁹⁸³

50. In other instances, factors such as confusing or nebulous procedures for handling reports of child sexual abuse led to reports not being made.⁹⁸⁴ In some cases, individuals decided not to make a report because they were applying a subjective filter of credibility or ‘seriousness’ to an allegation.⁹⁸⁵ Sometimes adults simply did not believe the allegation they heard, possibly because it was difficult for them to “*think the unthinkable*” about the alleged perpetrator, who may be a

⁹⁸³ *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report*, Part C.7 para 42, Part C.8 paras 48–49

⁹⁸⁴ *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Part E.12 paras 156–158; INQ001766_007 para 3.8

⁹⁸⁵ *Westminster Investigation Report*, Executive Summary (The case of Sir Peter Hayman)

respected colleague or friend.⁹⁸⁶ Prejudiced perceptions about child complainants also featured in reasons for non-reporting of complaints.⁹⁸⁷

51. Victims and survivors, some senior religious leaders and some organisations argued strongly in favour of mandatory reporting, particularly in the Inquiry’s investigations into child sexual abuse occurring in religious settings and organisations and in educational establishments.⁹⁸⁸ As noted in *Victims and Survivors’ Voices*, a survey by the Inquiry’s Victims and Survivors Forum found that

⁹⁸⁶ INQ001951_007, 047 paras 30, 227; *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part F.3 para 17

⁹⁸⁷ *Institutional Responses to Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse Involving the Late Lord Janner of Braunstone QC Investigation Report*, Part E para 9; *Sexual Abuse of Children in Custodial Institutions Investigation Report*, Part D.2; *Truth Project Thematic Report: Child sexual abuse in healthcare contexts*, IICSA Research Team, December 2020, Chapter 7.1

⁹⁸⁸ *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report*, Part G.4 paras 68–69; *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part E.5 paras 74–79; *Diocese of Chichester/Peter Ball Investigation Report*, Part B.12 paras 492–494, 497; *The Anglican Church Investigation Report*, Part B.5.4 paras 30–32

88.6 percent of respondents said that they would like to see mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse introduced in England and in Wales.⁹⁸⁹

Current requirements to report child sexual abuse

52. Many of the individuals who failed to report abuse to the police or social services in these and other examples that the Inquiry examined may have failed to meet their professional or moral obligations, but they did not break any laws in doing so. The legal requirements to report abuse differ between England and Wales. Neither system is an adequate model for ensuring that reports of child sexual abuse are made to the agencies that should receive them.

The legal position in Wales

53. In 2016, the Welsh Government enacted a duty for specified public bodies to report children at risk of harm. Under section 130 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, specified public bodies must inform the local authority if they have “*reasonable cause to suspect*” that a child within the local authority’s area is “*at risk of abuse, neglect or other kinds*

⁹⁸⁹ *Mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse: A survey of the Victims and Survivors Forum, IICSA, April 2019, para 13*

of harm".⁹⁹⁰ This duty applies to those defined as relevant partners in the Act.⁹⁹¹ This includes local authorities, the police, providers of probation services, local health boards, NHS trusts and youth offending teams.⁹⁹² There are no criminal sanctions for individuals who fail to comply with the duty to report a child at risk in Wales.

54. Statutory guidance *Working Together to Safeguard People: Volume 5* states that where a member of the public or a practitioner has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is at risk, a "*report must be made as soon as possible to the local authority*".⁹⁹³ The emergency services should be contacted in the case of immediate concerns about a child's safety or a criminal offence against a child. In addition, the *Wales Safeguarding Procedures* state that "*a report must be made*" by anyone working with children, including in unpaid positions, who has a concern that a child is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse, neglect or other harm.⁹⁹⁴ This applies broadly to individuals working with children, including in schools and

⁹⁹⁰ [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014, section 130](#)

⁹⁹¹ [DFE002830_006 para 4](#)

⁹⁹² [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014, section 162](#)

⁹⁹³ [WGT000470_024 para 89](#)

⁹⁹⁴ [INQ006788_001](#)

healthcare settings, the police, children’s social care services, youth offending teams, sports clubs and voluntary organisations. It emphasises the importance of individuals reporting concerns about a child’s welfare.

55. The *Working Together to Safeguard People: Code of Safeguarding Practice* sets out the Welsh Government’s expectation that all those offering activities or services to children in Wales will ensure that safeguarding arrangements are in place.⁹⁹⁵ This includes that organisations should have a safeguarding policy which contains information about how to report safeguarding concerns to the local authority or the police if necessary.⁹⁹⁶

56. The Welsh model leaves a number of gaps in terms of who is required to report, including all staff in independent schools and those involved with voluntary and religious organisations.⁹⁹⁷ There is also no sanction in the legislation for failure to report a child at risk. Any failure of a professional to report concerns is dealt with through agencies’ own internal disciplinary processes and referral to professional regulators. Further, whereas

⁹⁹⁵ [INQ006790_003](#)

⁹⁹⁶ [INQ006790_006](#)

⁹⁹⁷ [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014, sections 130, 162; Residential Schools Investigation Report, Part J.3 paras 17–20](#)

section 130 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 refers in the main to a list of organisations,⁹⁹⁸ the accompanying guidance set out in the *All Wales Procedures* implies a duty on individuals (referring to ‘practitioners’). It is unclear whether independent professionals, who might not be associated with the organisations listed, are covered by the obligation. This has the potential to lead to confusion. The Inquiry was informed that, by November 2020, the introduction of the referral-reporting duty in Wales had not led to “*a substantive change in practice*”.⁹⁹⁹

The legal position in England

57. In England, there is no statutory obligation requiring individuals or institutions to report child sexual abuse.

58. *Working Together to Safeguard Children* states that anyone who has concerns about a child’s welfare “*should make a referral to local authority children’s social care*”.¹⁰⁰⁰ This referral should be made immediately if there is a concern that the child is experiencing significant harm or is likely to do so. This statutory guidance does not impose a legislative requirement on those

⁹⁹⁸ ‘Relevant partners’ are listed at [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014, section 162\(4\)](#).

⁹⁹⁹ [Albert Heaney 26 November 2020 13/23-14/5](#)

¹⁰⁰⁰ [INQ006608__017 para 17](#)

working with children to report child sexual abuse. It only creates an expectation that individuals will comply with the guidance unless “*exceptional*” circumstances arise.¹⁰⁰¹

59. The government also sets out expectations for other organisations working with children in England to make safeguarding arrangements. Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 places a duty on a range of organisations and individuals to ensure that “*their functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*”.¹⁰⁰² This duty applies to, for example, local authorities, NHS organisations, the police, probation services, transport police, youth offending teams, and governors or directors of custodial institutions. Statutory guidance sets out the arrangements that these organisations should have in place to fulfil this duty, including the need for clear procedures to ensure that staff know how to respond to and escalate concerns about a child’s welfare.¹⁰⁰³

¹⁰⁰¹ [CIW000012__007](#) para 11; [INQ006608__007](#) para 6; for the position in Wales, see [CIW000012__007](#) para 11

¹⁰⁰² [Children Act 2004](#), section 11

¹⁰⁰³ [WGT000470__011](#) para 31; [INQ006608__060](#) para 4; for the position in Wales, see [WGT000470__011](#) para 31

60. *Working Together to Safeguard Children* also sets out expectations for safeguarding arrangements in organisations not subject to the section 11 Children Act 2004 duty. This includes that voluntary, faith-based, charitable and private sector organisations, sports clubs and social enterprises should ensure that those working with children, whether paid or volunteer, are “*aware of their responsibilities for safeguarding and protecting children from harm*”.¹⁰⁰⁴ This should include knowing how to respond to child protection concerns and how to make a referral to local authority children’s social care or the police if necessary.

Common approaches

61. Both jurisdictions issue specific statutory guidance for schools which set out the arrangements that schools should have in place to ensure child protection concerns are reported.¹⁰⁰⁵

62. The effect of this guidance is that institutions that work with children in England and in Wales are expected to have clear policies and procedures in place to ensure that staff report concerns about child sexual abuse. Individuals working within those institutions who fail to do so may

¹⁰⁰⁴ INQ006608_074 para 61

¹⁰⁰⁵ INQ006743_029-031 paras 3.31–3.48; INQ006502_017-018 paras 55–60

be subject to internal disciplinary proceedings. Those expectations, however, are not the same as legal obligations.

63. In addition to statutory guidance, some individuals are required to report concerns under standards or codes of conduct set by their professional regulatory body. This includes healthcare professionals, social workers, social care workers in Wales, the police and teachers. In the main, that requirement is part of professionals' obligations to ensure the safety and well-being of the members of the public with whom they work and to raise concerns about colleagues. A professional's fitness to practise may be brought into question if they fail to adhere to such standards. If a professional is found to be unfit to practise, they can be removed from the professional register and prevented from practising. The effect of this is that specific requirements to report children experiencing, or at risk of, abuse, neglect or other harm are generally set out in accompanying guidance.

64. In both jurisdictions, existing reporting frameworks within particular institutions or sectors can be unduly complicated and professionals are sometimes unclear about their own reporting responsibilities.

65. Although there are presently a range of non-statutory measures that aim to encourage individuals and institutions to report child sexual abuse, there is a marked absence of a cohesive set of laws and procedures in England and in Wales that require individuals working with children to report child sexual abuse. Children have suffered as a result.

F.5: The case for mandatory reporting

66. Commonly referred to as ‘mandatory reporting’, numerous countries have introduced legislation which places specified persons, or members of the public, under a statutory obligation to report child abuse or neglect to a designated agency.¹⁰⁰⁶ This includes the majority of countries in Europe and some parts of the US, Canada and Australia.

67. Although the detail and nature of mandatory reporting laws varies between jurisdictions, there are a number of common features.¹⁰⁰⁷

67.1. Most mandatory reporting laws identify designated mandated reporters, creating a group of people to whom the law applies. These individuals are generally those who come into

¹⁰⁰⁶ [INQ006771__007-008](#)

¹⁰⁰⁷ [INQ006134__007](#) para 4.1

contact with children in the course of their work or have managerial responsibility for others who work with children and are therefore assumed to be in a position to identify the signs of abuse.

67.2. Mandatory reporting laws also vary in what they require people to report. Some jurisdictions list categories of child abuse, such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse and neglect. It is also common for reporting laws to cover various forms of child abuse, including physical abuse, neglect and sexual abuse.

67.3. There is also variation in the level of awareness of the alleged abuse mandated reporters need to have before they are required to report.

67.4. All mandatory reporting laws specify the agency to whom the report must be made. This may be the police or, more commonly, social services or child protection services. In some jurisdictions, there is a dedicated agency whose remit is to receive reports (and sometimes also to monitor and produce statistics on the number of reports received) in addition to assessing and acting upon them as required.

67.5. Most, but not all, mandatory reporting laws also provide for a sanction for failure to report. Such sanctions may be criminal in nature, attracting a fine or custodial sentence.

68. The combination of these features gives a particular regime of mandatory reporting its character and scope, and the interrelationship between them is important. For example, it tends to be that criminal sanctions apply for the non-reporting of abuse that is known, rather than suspected, or applies to a narrow group of individuals who might be expected to have a heightened level of awareness or duty to children.

Debates about mandatory reporting

69. In recent years there has been significant debate about whether mandatory reporting should be introduced in England and in Wales.

70. Several organisations representing victims and survivors have called for its introduction.¹⁰⁰⁸ In 2014, Baroness Walmsley tabled an amendment to the Serious Crimes Bill which set out a legal duty for those working in regulated activity (see Part E) involving children or vulnerable adults to report suspected or known abuse.¹⁰⁰⁹ The amendment attracted both support and criticism.

71. In July 2016, the government launched a public consultation on reporting and acting on child abuse and neglect.¹⁰¹⁰ In its response (March 2018), the government concluded that the case for mandatory

¹⁰⁰⁸ [INQ006861](#); [INQ006860](#); [INQ006862](#)

¹⁰⁰⁹ [INQ006813_009-011](#)

¹⁰¹⁰ [ACE026759](#)

reporting had “*not currently been made*” and stated that it would not seek to introduce a mandatory reporting duty.¹⁰¹¹

72. The Inquiry has considered the government’s consultation response. However, the broad body of evidence examined by the Inquiry has led to the Inquiry reaching different conclusions on some of the government’s key concerns about mandatory reporting.

Referral figures

73. The introduction of mandatory reporting in other jurisdictions has led to an increase in the number of referrals made about child abuse to authorities and in the number of children subsequently identified as being in need of protection from sexual abuse. This gives rise to concerns about potentially unmanageable increases in the number of referrals made to children’s social care services.

73.1. In 1993, the Australian State of Victoria introduced mandatory reporting for incidents of suspected child sexual abuse and physical abuse. At the time of enactment, doctors, nurses and the police were subject to the duty, and in 1994 it was broadened to include teachers. Analysis of subsequent trends in reporting of

¹⁰¹¹ DFE003110__007 para 17

child sexual abuse found that between 1993 and 2012 there was a six-fold increase in the rate of children identified as in need of protection.¹⁰¹²

73.2. In 2009, the State of Western Australia introduced legislation giving doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers, the police and boarding supervisors a statutory duty to report any reasonable belief of child sexual abuse. Analysis of reporting trends in the three years prior and the four years following enactment found that, on average, following the introduction of mandatory reporting the number of children identified as in need of protection from sexual abuse doubled.¹⁰¹³ This means that the law enabled children's services to provide help to more of those children who needed it.

74. Similar long-term improvements have been observed in Canada in the identification of children who were in need of protection and received support, as a result of mandatory reporting. One study examined the contact that individuals who were sexually abused as children had with child protection services both before and after the introduction of mandatory reporting. The study found that those born after mandatory reporting was enacted in their province (1965 onwards) were

¹⁰¹² [INQ006954_008](#)

¹⁰¹³ [INQ006359_013](#)

three times more likely to have had contact with child protection services than those born before or in the same year as the legislation's enactment.¹⁰¹⁴

75. Research also indicates that the number of children identified as in need of protection from sexual abuse is higher in jurisdictions where mandatory reporting exists than in jurisdictions which do not have mandatory reporting. Over a 20-year period, the number of substantiated reports of child sexual abuse in Victoria, Australia, was 4.73 times as high as in the Republic of Ireland, a comparable jurisdiction which did not have mandatory reporting at the time.¹⁰¹⁵

76. Conversely, some have argued that there is no need for the introduction of this law as rates of referrals for child abuse and neglect in England and in Wales are “*comparable or already higher*” than in jurisdictions which have mandatory reporting.¹⁰¹⁶ During the Inquiry's seminar on mandatory reporting, Stuart Gallimore (then President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services) observed that “*there is no evidence in modern times ... of professionals routinely failing to report concerns about child sexual abuse*”.¹⁰¹⁷

¹⁰¹⁴ [INQ006675_007](#)

¹⁰¹⁵ [INQ006770_014](#)

¹⁰¹⁶ [DFE003110_007](#) para 19

¹⁰¹⁷ [Stuart Gallimore 27 September 2018 63/21-64/4](#)

77. However, throughout its investigations, the Inquiry repeatedly found that allegations and indicators of child sexual abuse were under-reported by adults who ought to have reported them.¹⁰¹⁸ Child sexual abuse is not sufficiently well reported at present. Reliance on bare statistics about rates of referrals risks a complacency about child sexual abuse. In 2021, the Inquiry asked the Department for Education and the Welsh Government for information on the number of referrals for child sexual abuse made to local authorities. Neither government could provide this information, because it was not collected.¹⁰¹⁹

78. The proportion of referrals to children’s services which result in them identifying factors of child sexual abuse or child sexual exploitation in particular – as opposed to rates of referral of child abuse or neglect in general – is relatively small.

78.1. In 2021, child sexual abuse was identified as a factor in 6 percent of assessments and child sexual exploitation as a factor in 3.4

¹⁰¹⁸ *Diocese of Chichester/Peter Ball Investigation Report*, Part B.2 para 100; *The Anglican Church Investigation Report*, Part B.6.2 para 4.4; *The Roman Catholic Church Investigation Report*, Part I.2 paras 4–7; *Westminster Investigation Report*, Part E.3 paras 122–123; *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part E.3 paras 42–52

¹⁰¹⁹ DFE003480; WGT000490

percent.¹⁰²⁰ By comparison, the proportion of assessments for which emotional abuse was identified as a factor was 21.6 percent, neglect was identified in 17.2 percent of assessments and physical abuse was identified in 11.9 percent of assessments.¹⁰²¹

78.2. Existing referrals for child sexual abuse are therefore likely to represent a small proportion of all referrals, and a proportion much smaller than the proportion of referrals represented by other types of abuse and neglect.

78.3. A potentially higher rate of referrals is therefore not the same thing as a high rate of referrals about child sexual abuse or exploitation.

79. Mandatory reporting laws have the capacity to improve significantly statutory services' ability to target help and support to child victims of sexual abuse. The international evidence supports the view that England and Wales ought to introduce mandatory reporting laws to enable the police and local authorities to better identify children in need of protection.

¹⁰²⁰ Proportion of assessments for which factor information was recorded: [INQ006832](#)

¹⁰²¹ Proportion of assessments for which factor information was recorded: [INQ006832](#)

Striking the balance in mandatory reporting

80. The requirement to make a formal report of child sexual abuse has led to concerns about a potential loss of privacy or confidentiality that a child may request when making a disclosure.

81. Children and young people told the Inquiry that mandatory reporting could discourage children from disclosing sexual abuse for fear of the potential consequences for them, for their families and potentially for their abuser.¹⁰²² The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has separately observed that children might be deterred from accessing support in respect of mental health or sexual or reproductive health if professionals were required to report abuse that they became aware of through such treatment.¹⁰²³

82. Some victims and complainants told the Inquiry that when they sought help they wanted the abuse to stop, without wanting there to be any legal consequences.¹⁰²⁴ Children and young people have commented that, once a report is made, they may feel a loss of control over this aspect of

¹⁰²² *Engagement with children and young people*, IICSA, June 2021, pp1, 25–26

¹⁰²³ *INQ006931_022, 027-028*

¹⁰²⁴ *Engagement with children and young people*, IICSA, June 2021, pp21, 25–26

their lives.¹⁰²⁵ They may not be able to decide for themselves whether to engage with the criminal justice system, particularly where the abuser is a peer who they do not necessarily want to see investigated by police and prosecuted in a criminal court. The distress that children and their families might feel at the prospect of a formal investigation into allegations must not be underestimated.

83. It is also possible mandatory reporting could deter families from seeking help and that families are more likely to self-refer where they believe their disclosure will be handled confidentially. Parents may be worried about the consequences of disclosing a concern about sexual abuse in their household if they believe it would lead to the criminal investigation of a family member. Social, familial and economic factors might also influence parents' decision-making.

84. The countervailing consideration is the significant public interest in reporting, investigating and prosecuting perpetrators of child sexual abuse, and protecting other children from harm. If abuse is not reported in this way, perpetrators may continue to abuse. Child sexual abuse is a crime that is known to be under-reported. The prevention of abuse in the future is of the utmost importance.

¹⁰²⁵ [INQ006488_019-020](#)

85. In the delicate balance between the need to provide an individual child with confidential advice and support (whether medical, psychological, legal or social) and ensuring child sexual abuse is prevented, it is essential to recognise that there are some circumstances where privacy ought to be protected and some where prevention is paramount. One important example is in the context of consensual, non-abusive relationships between young people. In other jurisdictions, mandatory reporting laws provide for exemptions to the duty to report where the child concerned is in a sexual relationship with a person who is near in age to them and where that relationship lacks features of exploitation or coercion. The Inquiry considers that it is desirable that such a measure is included in a new mandatory reporting law.

F.6: Mandatory reporting for England and for Wales

86. Mandatory reporting is a powerful weapon against child sexual abuse, but caution must be exercised to ensure that the legislation works for the people it is intended to protect. Having considered a range of views during its investigations and the various possible approaches to a scheme, the Inquiry has concluded that mandatory reporting is required so that those who work with children in certain roles report child sexual abuse to the police or social services.

Recommendation 13: Mandatory reporting

The Inquiry recommends that the UK government and Welsh Government introduce legislation which places certain individuals – ‘mandated reporters’ – under a statutory duty to report child sexual abuse where they:

- receive a disclosure of child sexual abuse from a child or perpetrator; or
- witness a child being sexually abused; or
- observe recognised indicators of child sexual abuse.

The following persons should be designated ‘mandated reporters’:

- any person working in regulated activity in relation to children (under the Safeguarding and Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, as amended);
- any person working in a position of trust (as defined by the Sexual Offences Act 2003, as amended); and
- police officers.

For the purposes of mandatory reporting, ‘child sexual abuse’ should be interpreted as any act that would be an offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 where the alleged victim is a child under the age of 18.

Where the child is aged between 13 and under 16 years old, a report need not be made where the mandated reporter reasonably believes that:

- the relationship between the parties is consensual and not intimidatory, exploitative or coercive; and
- the child has not been harmed and is not at risk of being harmed; and
- there is no material difference in capacity or maturity between the parties engaged in the sexual activity concerned, and there is a difference in age of no more than three years.

These exceptions should not, however, apply where the alleged perpetrator is in a position of trust within the meaning of the 2003 Act.

Where the child is under the age of 13, a report must always be made.

Reports should be made to either local authority children's social care or the police as soon as is practicable.

It should be a criminal offence for mandated reporters to fail to report child sexual abuse where they:

- are in receipt of a disclosure of child sexual abuse from a child or perpetrator; or
- witness a child being sexually abused.

What should be reported

87. Mandatory reporting laws are designed to facilitate the prompt and efficient reporting of child sexual abuse and to remove subjective filters of self-interest, fear, seriousness or credibility. They are not designed to encourage people to undertake their own investigations where they suspect abuse, or to conduct their own assessment about whether or not they believe an allegation to be true or false. Nor are they designed to interfere with the private enjoyment of sexual relationships between young people that are safe and consensual. The law must clearly define the level of ‘knowledge’ a person is required to have and the ‘abuse’ that triggers a report.

Level of knowledge

88. A mandatory reporting duty must define what individuals need to know before a report is required to be made. Some mandatory reporting laws relate to ‘known’ abuse, whereas others refer to ‘alleged’ or ‘suspected’ abuse. In the Republic of Ireland, for example, the Children First Act 2015 requires reports from a mandated person who “*knows, believes or has reasonable grounds to suspect ... that a child – (a) has been harmed, (b) is being harmed, or (c) is at risk of being harmed*”.¹⁰²⁶

¹⁰²⁶ Children First Act 2015, section 14(1)

89. A law requiring an individual to ‘know’ that a child has been sexually abused implies that the reporter would have to be satisfied of the truth of the allegation. In some cases this is uncomplicated; ‘knowledge’ might be based on the fact that a reporter has witnessed the abuse, has seen evidence of it (by, for example, having seen incriminating messages or images) or has heard a confession by the perpetrator.

90. However, ‘knowledge’ might be taken to imply a subjective test, which can lead to prejudice and bias, and may encourage individuals to conduct some level of investigation into an allegation themselves. All that should be required is that the individual knows – or ought to know – that the information they are presented with amounts to an allegation of sexual abuse.

91. A person should be required to report when they either receive a disclosure of child sexual abuse from a child or perpetrator, or witness a child being sexually abused. A failure to report in those circumstances should be a criminal offence, as discussed below.

92. In many circumstances an individual working with children may recognise indicators of child sexual abuse that give rise to a reasonable suspicion that the child has experienced, or is experiencing, sexual abuse. It was evident throughout the Inquiry’s investigations, and

supported by accounts provided in the Truth Project, that in a number of cases clear signs of child sexual abuse were missed or not acted upon. These included, for example, sexualised or sexually harmful behaviour, physical signs of abuse or consequences of sexual abuse such as pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases.¹⁰²⁷ There should also be an obligation to report abuse based on well-recognised indicators of child sexual abuse. Those indicators should be set out in detailed guidance that can be updated and amended as needed. However, the Inquiry acknowledges that identifying indicators of abuse is more complicated than witnessing or receiving a disclosure of child sexual abuse and so a failure in respect of this aspect of the duty should not attract a criminal sanction.

Nature of abuse

93. For the purposes of mandatory reporting as recommended by the Inquiry, a mandated reporter should report any act that would amount to an offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (the 2003 Act, or any subsequent relevant legislation) where the alleged victim is aged under 18.

¹⁰²⁷ *Residential Schools Investigation Report*, Part D.4; *Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation Report*, Part F.2

94. However, in some limited circumstances where the victim is aged between 13 and under the age of 16 a different approach may sometimes be necessary.

95. In England and in Wales, the legal age of consent is 16. The 2003 Act therefore criminalises a wide range of sexual abuse committed on children under the age of 16 including rape, penetrative and non-penetrative sexual assaults, sexual activity with a child, and grooming offences. In law, children under the age of 13 cannot consent to any sexual activity and so the 2003 Act also includes separate offences for children aged under 13.

96. It is not always the case that all sexual activity involving children under the age of consent is prosecuted. While there is no suggestion that acts of this nature be decriminalised, Crown Prosecution Service guidance states that consensual sexual activity between teenagers should not be prosecuted unless there are aggravating features such as an element of abuse or exploitation.¹⁰²⁸ Just as it is not in the public interest to prosecute children and young people in a consensual relationship, it is not in the public interest to criminalise mandated reporters for failure to report consensual teenage sexual activity that would not ordinarily be prosecuted.

¹⁰²⁸ [CPS003476_017](#)

97. An exception to the mandatory reporting regime is therefore essential. Without it, for example, a teenager (in a relationship with someone close in age) who seeks advice on contraception or sexual health may worry that a formal report will be made to the police or social services and that there may be an investigation into the circumstances of their relationship. This is likely to deter young people in non-abusive relationships from seeking advice.

98. Internationally, many mandatory reporting laws carry exemptions for particular forms of sexual relationships between children and young people. For example, in the Republic of Ireland there is an exemption in respect of sexual activity involving a child “*who is aged 15 years or more but less than 17 years*” where the other party is no more than two years older and there are no issues regarding capacity to consent or a relationship of power over the younger party.¹⁰²⁹ In Canada, there is a ‘close in age’ exception to the statutory age of consent which means that a child aged 14 or 15 can consent to sexual activity with another person who is less than five years older, and a child aged 12 or 13 can consent to sexual activity with another

¹⁰²⁹ Children First Act 2015, section 14(3)

person who is less than two years older, providing there is no position of trust and the activity is not exploitative.¹⁰³⁰

99. The Inquiry therefore recommends that where the sexual activity relates to a child:

- under the age of 13, a report must always be made;
- between 13 and under 16 years old, a mandated person should not be required to make a report when he or she knows or reasonably believes that all of the following to be true:
 - the relationship between the parties is consensual and not intimidatory, exploitative or coercive; and
 - the child has not been harmed and is not at risk of being harmed; and
 - there is no material difference in capacity or maturity between the parties engaged in the sexual activity concerned, and there is a difference in age of no more than three years.

100. There are also specific child sexual abuse offences designed to protect 16 and 17-year-olds from sexual relationships which would not be criminal but for the perpetrator's position of trust in relation to the child. In short, while the child ostensibly consents to the activity, the law

¹⁰³⁰ Criminal Code 1985, section 150.1(2)

considers that consent is not relevant because of their particular relationship with the abuser. Individuals within the scope of a position of trust offence include those who look after children under the age of 18 in local authority accommodation, in care homes, hospitals and educational institutions as well as those who regularly coach or teach in a sport or a religion. Evidence heard by the Inquiry into the scale of abuse in these settings makes it essential that these cases come within the mandatory reporting regime. Accordingly, irrespective of the age of the child, where the alleged perpetrator is in a position of trust as defined by the 2003 Act, a report must be made.

Who should be required to report

101. In international models of mandatory reporting, the individuals subject to a duty to report are most commonly those employed in education, health, the police and social care. In the Republic of Ireland, mandated professionals include those working in health and social care, organised sports, religion, teaching and law enforcement, and managers of language schools, domestic violence shelters and accommodation for asylum seekers and those who are homeless. Across Canada, mandated professionals include those who work in healthcare, education or childcare, religious officials, lawyers, government employees and police officers. Several jurisdictions have a

relatively lengthy list of mandated reporters that includes people employed in or associated with non-public bodies.¹⁰³¹

102. Typically, mandatory reporting duties apply to individuals. In a minority of jurisdictions, such as Australia's Northern Territory, mandatory reporting applies to all (adult) citizens.¹⁰³² In Ontario, Canada, both the public and professionals are mandated to report, but the sanction for failure to do so (a fine of up to the equivalent of £3,000) only applies to professionals.

103. The category of individuals who are to be required to report must be carefully identified. Individuals engaged in regulated activity (as set out in Part E) are among the individuals who are most likely to become aware of an allegation of sexual abuse from a child, or to observe indicators of child sexual abuse from a child's behaviour or physical presentation. They should therefore be subject to a law of mandatory reporting.

104. There are other professions to which a responsibility to report should also apply. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 (the 2003 Act) contains 'abuse of position of trust' offences, criminalising sexual abuse committed by adults who occupy

¹⁰³¹ For example, Australian Capital Territories, New South Wales, Pennsylvania

¹⁰³² INQ006134_008 para 4.2

a position of trust as defined in the 2003 Act. Currently, those in ‘positions of trust’ are persons who ‘look after’ (are regularly involved in caring for, training or supervising, or have unsupervised contact with) children who are:

- detained in an institution; or
- resident in a home provided by a local authority or voluntary organisation; or
- accommodated in a hospital, care home, children’s home or community home; or
- receiving education at an educational establishment.

105. Positions of trust in the 2003 Act also include adults who look after a child on an individual basis or have regular unsupervised contact with children because of a specified statutory or court-appointed duty, such as guardians or carers, and includes foster carers. This has recently been amended to extend the definition of positions of trust to include coaching, teaching, training, supervising or instructing in a sport or a religion, where this is done on a regular basis.¹⁰³³

106. There are several groups of individuals whose work may bring them into contact with children but who do not fall within the definition of positions of trust or regulated activity. Some

¹⁰³³ Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, section 47

of those may, because of the nature of their role, become aware of reports of child sexual abuse of the sort that ought to be subject to mandatory reporting. In particular, police officers in the course of their work might receive a disclosure or become aware of evidence of child sexual abuse whilst investigating an allegation of a non-sexual crime. A failure to formally report such disclosure should be covered by mandatory reporting laws.

107. In the absence of a statutory category that extends to all the groups of people who ought to be subject to a duty of mandatory reporting, the Inquiry recommends that mandatory reporting should apply to all individuals who fall into the existing statutory categories of regulated activity and positions of trust, and to police officers. It will be for the government to consider whether present statutory categorisations of individuals who work with children require review.

108. Institutions should make arrangements so that there are not multiple reports of the same incident. For example, where an organisation has procedures for reporting child protection concerns (such as an appointed designated safeguarding lead), reports could be escalated through those procedures and a report made on behalf of the organisation. Individuals should also be assured – by both their organisation and the mandatory

reporting scheme – that they will be afforded protection from repercussions when making a report in good faith in line with the duty to report.

109. Some core participants and witnesses argued that a mandatory reporting law ought to provide exemptions for some faith-based settings or personnel and, in particular, in the context of sacramental confession.¹⁰³⁴ As the Inquiry has already noted, the respect of a range of religions or beliefs is recognised as a hallmark of a liberal democracy.¹⁰³⁵ Nonetheless, neither the freedom of religion or belief nor the rights of parents with regard to the education of their children can ever justify the ill-treatment of children or prevent governmental authorities from taking measures necessary to protect children from harm. The Inquiry therefore considers that mandatory reporting as set out in this report should be an absolute obligation; it should not be subject to exceptions based on relationships of confidentiality, religious or otherwise.

¹⁰³⁴ *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report, Part G.4; The Roman Catholic Church Investigation Report, Part I.4; The Anglican Church Investigation Report, Part B.5*

¹⁰³⁵ *Child Protection in Religious Organisations and Settings Investigation Report, Part A.3*

To whom reports should be made

110. All mandatory reporting laws specify the agency to whom the report must be made, typically the police, social services or a dedicated agency. For example, in the Republic of Ireland, the Child and Family Agency receives reports.¹⁰³⁶ The Child and Family Agency also provides literature and online training to assist mandated professionals in their reporting duty, as well as designated points of contact in each jurisdiction to provide advice and clarification.¹⁰³⁷

111. In England and in Wales, existing practice (pursuant to statutory guidance) is that child safeguarding concerns should be reported to local authorities.¹⁰³⁸ If a child is in immediate danger, a report should be made to the police immediately. A mandatory reporting law should therefore provide that reports should be made to local authority children's social care or the police, to allow mandated reporters to direct their report to the most suitable agency depending on the circumstances. In the majority of circumstances, this will be local authority children's social care services, who can take action as appropriate to protect the child, including involving other agencies

¹⁰³⁶ [Children First Act 2015, section 14](#); [Child and Family Agency Act 2013, Part 2](#)

¹⁰³⁷ [INQ006907](#)

¹⁰³⁸ [INQ006608_017](#) para 17

such as the police. An individual social worker or police officer in receipt of information that would trigger the duty to report must make a report to the appropriate department defined by their institution.

112. To ensure the effectiveness of any mandatory reporting duty, the government must ensure that agencies receiving reports are sufficiently resourced to be able to respond to any increase in reports about child sexual abuse that mandatory reporting laws generate. The UK government and the Welsh Government should collect and publish data on the operation of the mandatory reporting scheme.

Sanctions for failure to report

113. Most, but not all, mandatory reporting laws also stipulate a sanction for failure to report. Some sanctions are criminal in nature (such as a fine or custodial sentence).

114. Criminal sanctions for failures to report vary in severity. For example, mandated reporters who fail to report child sexual abuse in line with their statutory duty in Western Australia face a \$6,000 fine.¹⁰³⁹ By contrast, Article 434-3 of the French Penal Code stipulates that a failure to report allegations of sexual abuse to the relevant authorities carries a three-year prison sentence

¹⁰³⁹ Children and Community Services Act 2004, section 124B

and a €45,000 fine, or five years' imprisonment and a €75,000 fine where the offence concerns a child aged under 15.¹⁰⁴⁰ Some jurisdictions have introduced mandatory reporting without a criminal penalty, such as the Republic of Ireland, and in New South Wales the criminal penalty for mandated reporters who fail to report was removed in 2010.

115. In England and Wales, criminal sanctions exist for failure to report safeguarding concerns to the appropriate authority. For example, regulated activity providers must make a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service where a person working in regulated activity has resigned or been dismissed, or moved to a different role, due to concerns that they may pose a risk of harm to children or vulnerable adults. Failure to comply with this duty is a criminal offence, punishable with a fine.¹⁰⁴¹

116. Where an individual to whom mandatory reporting laws apply has witnessed or received a disclosure of child sexual abuse, it should be a criminal offence to fail to report that to the relevant local authority or police force. Such a failure would amount to a deliberate decision not to pass on information about child sexual abuse to those

¹⁰⁴⁰ Penal Code, Article 434-3

¹⁰⁴¹ Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, section 38

authorities empowered to protect children from harm and to prevent future abuse by investigating and prosecuting it when it occurs. For those who work with children or are in a position of trust to fail to facilitate that is inexcusable, and the sanction for such an omission should be commensurate.

117. Where a mandated reporter recognises indicators of child sexual abuse (but has not directly witnessed abuse or received a disclosure of abuse from an alleged perpetrator or victim), it would not be appropriate to enforce the duty to report with criminal sanctions. Reports of this nature must be encouraged, and organisations must provide their staff with necessary and regular training to support recognition of indicators of child sexual abuse.

118. The introduction of this statutory duty is not intended to discourage an individual from reporting concerns about child sexual abuse which do not fall within the specific ambit of the mandatory reporting regime.

119. The current absence of mandatory reporting laws in England and in Wales marks these jurisdictions as outliers among internationally comparable jurisdictions. As regards reporting obligations, the current provisions are confusing, unfocussed and ineffective. The Inquiry's recommendation for mandatory reporting resonates with that found in many other

jurisdictions and will represent a fundamental change to the way institutions identify and report child sexual abuse.

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