

Large Increase in Workload Due To COVID Pandemic National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland, Annual Report 2020

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2020 saw a large increase in requests for advice request dealt with by the National Board for Safeguarding of Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (National Board). This took place despite the fact that the National Board had to reduce both staffing salaries and working time.

“The increase in requests for assistance within the Church was not unexpected,” said Teresa Devlin, CEO, National Board, “Many local safeguarding teams shrank during the pandemic so the dioceses and congregations turned to the National Board for advice and support.”

The overall increase from 260 advice requests in 2019/20 to 392 in 2020/21 represents an increase of 51 per cent, with an interesting escalation of demand from ‘independents’. Independents can be complainants, statutory personnel, international safeguarding personnel or members of the public. Most often advice to independents relates to procedural or guidance matters

“We are acutely aware that children are much more technologically ‘savvy’ than adults, and increasingly children communicate more confidently online,” said Devlin. “Therefore, wanting to support those Church personnel who took the opportunity to communicate with children online, we developed our ‘Online Ministry with Children’ training programme.”

The goal of this training programme is to ensure that Church bodies are aware of all the necessary safeguards to be put in place, as well as how to assess and manage the additional risks of using this form of communication. The demand for it has been very solid, from both dioceses and religious congregations.

The National Board received, during the period under review, 134 complaints of abuse (42 relating to diocesan priests; 92 relating to members of religious orders). This demonstrates an increase in the number of allegations (116) reported to the National Board in the previous year. It is appreciated that the value of this information is extremely limited and additionally, it cannot be determined how historic the abuse allegations are.

“When a diocese or religious order notifies the National Board of an allegation against a cleric or non-ordained religious, no name or other identifying information is provided,” said Devlin. “This means that there is no way for the National Board to establish whether there is more than one allegation against any particular notified individual, or whether a complainant has alleged that more than one person has abused them. Because of the legal restrictions imposed by data protection legislation compliance, severe limitations exist in analysing and interpreting such information. What is presented here is simply the raw data that the National Board has received in the twelve months being reported on.”

“Last December our Sponsoring Bodies confirmed to the National Board their intention to proceed early this year with a strategic review of all aspects of safeguarding and outreach to

survivors of abuse in the Catholic Church in Ireland. The review will address the issue of vulnerable persons in addition to minors,” said John Morgan, Chairperson of the National Board. “It is hoped that the opportunity will be grasped to fully evaluate the resources, both in terms of personnel and finance needed, to address the new horizons which reality will present to further the culture of care surrounding safeguarding ministry and its outreach in building up the Church throughout Ireland. We must not put at risk any dilution in the strength and extent of our service within the community of the Church.”

The Annual Report can be downloaded at

https://www.safeguarding.ie/images/Pdfs/Annual_Reports/NBSCCCI%20Annual%20Report%202020.pdf

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