

“A Right to Protection”

Who is the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People and what does he do?

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People is Nigel Williams. It is his job to promote and safeguard the rights and best interests of children and young people. As part of that job Nigel carried out a review of vetting in Northern Ireland.



Nigel with Youth Panel Members at the launch of the Shout Priorities, one of which was Child Protection

What is vetting?

Vetting is the way that adults are checked to make sure they are suitable to work with children. This means a number of different lists are checked to make sure there is nothing in the adults past that shows they shouldn't work with children. These lists are available from organisations like the police and the health service. Adults who work voluntarily (that means they are not paid) should also be vetted.



Why did the Commissioner decide to review vetting in Northern Ireland?

In June 2002 two young girls were killed in England by a man who was a school caretaker. After that man was tried and found guilty and put in prison it was found that he shouldn't have been allowed to work with children. The Government asked why this happened and how it could be stopped in England and Wales. Nigel asked the Government in Northern Ireland to do the same thing here.

The head of the Government in Northern Ireland, the Secretary of State, asked the Commissioner to do the review.

How did the Commissioner carry out his review of vetting?

Nigel asked his own staff to start researching how vetting was done in Northern Ireland. Once they started the research they then asked an independent person – that is somebody not working at the commissioner's office – to lead this research. That person was Ruth Lavery. She is a barrister, which is a type of lawyer. Ms Lavery then completed the research.



Nigel with Ruth
the writer of the
Vetting Report



This research included asking young people what they knew about vetting and what way it could be improved. It also involved asking Government and Local District Councils what they did. Other organisations were also asked, like sports clubs and churches.

What did the research find?

The research found that there needed to be improvements in how adults were checked to make sure they were suitable to work or volunteer to work with children and young people.

But it also found that everyone involved in working with children (including children and young people) wanted to make it better.

What's the Commissioner doing about it?

After reading Ms Lavery's report the Commissioner made 15 recommendations. The recommendations are ways the Commissioner thinks vetting can be improved.

What are the Commissioner's recommendations?

15 recommendations
which the government should
act upon by June 2006

1. The Secretary of State should lead the Government's efforts to make sure the improvements suggested by the Commissioner and Ruth Lavery take place.
2. Different parts of Government should work together in a group to make improvements
3. All the different parts of Government and services the Government pay for (sometimes called public bodies) should have a person whose job is to make sure child protection policies are as good as possible.
4. All public bodies should say in their annual report that they have a person doing the job in recommendation 3, and that they have done everything possible to protect children and check adults who apply for to work with children.



5. Government also pays many other organisations to do their work. If Government pays they should also do everything possible to protect children by making sure that these organisations check adults who apply for jobs. Someone from Government should check that this happens
6. One Government department should tell all the other departments the best way to check adults. This should be the Department of Finance and Personnel.
7. All adults who work or volunteer to work with children should be checked.
8. Where there is information about how vetting works that isn't clear the group set up in recommendation 2 should try to make sure it is clear.
9. All parts of Government must make sure that if they fund (that is pay for) other organisations, those organisations should also check adults who want to work with children. There should be one set of rules for this.
10. There should be enough money and resources for new laws about how the police check adults to make sure that any relevant information and what is called intelligence on people who might be a risk to children is shared when it is necessary.
11. There should be a guide for employers on how to carry out employment checks. This should be easy-to-read.
12. There should be a guide for parents who want to check when using tutors or instructors who work privately with children. This should be easy to read.
13. Government should make sure that all relevant recommendations of the Bichard Inquiry – the inquiry into two tragic deaths in England - are put in place in Northern Ireland.

Adults working with children should be checked.

There should be easy to read guides for vetting.



14. The Government should work with the government in the Republic of Ireland to make sure that vetting is the same North and South of the border.

15. Government should work with other countries in the European Union (EU) to make sure that all countries in the EU work together to improve child protection through vetting.

Where can I find out more?

You can find the Commissioner's comments and the full recommendations at www.niccy.org/helpful/vetting.aspx together with a full copy of Ms Lavery's report – 'A Right to Protection'

