

Safeguarding Committee 2023 Annual Report

Prepared by the Director of Safeguarding

1. Overview

This report provides a summary of actions and initiatives undertaken by members of the Safeguarding Committee in the last year. It reports on progress for the priorities that were identified in the 2022 Annual Report with the planned areas of focus for 2024.

2. The Safeguarding Committee

The formation of the Safeguarding Committee in 2018, as an advisory committee to the Director of Safeguarding, reflects the wide scope of activities involving children across Imperial College including public engagement, outreach and commercial events, work experience and enrolled students under the age of 18. The Committee also includes membership from roles dealing with vulnerable adults at risk and safeguarding in research considerations. There are now more than 50 members of staff who attend the Committee representing the wide spread of activity across the University.

The Committee's terms of reference are to:

1. Agree protocols and procedures that reflect a best practice approach to safeguarding
2. Ensure clear accountability and training for those with responsibility for safeguarding
3. Share learning and casework developments to improve awareness and compliance

The Safeguarding Committee's focus is on Imperial's statutory responsibilities for those under age 18 and adults at risk. However, the Safeguarding Policy, Code of Practice and safeguarding webpages also include information on the wider support available for staff and students' health, safety, and wellbeing.

3. Policies, Procedures, Information

[Imperial College safeguarding webpages](#) are reviewed and updated regularly to ensure clear signposting to information and support. New content has improved the information on the internal and external referral routes, [further guidance on risk assessments for under 18s](#) and the importance of raising low level safeguarding concerns as part of good professional practice.

The [Safer Recruitment](#) guidance has been updated to incorporate statutory guidance that online searches may be carried out for shortlisted candidates to identify any incidents or issues related to suitability to work with children. This may include, as examples, drug or alcohol misuse, inappropriate images, discriminatory or abusive behaviour or language. Searches will be confined to information freely available to the public. Any information noted that gives cause for concern will be reviewed and discussed with the applicant at interview and will not be a barrier to interview.

The Committee have undertaken their annual review of the [safeguarding policy](#) and [code of practice](#). Minor changes have been made to update language in line with Imperial's new branding and to reflect statutory guidance updates from Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 and Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023. This includes referencing an integrated, multi-agency approach to safeguarding (this has been the basis for two referrals for reports of domestic violence in households with children) and the duty to make

reasonable adjustments to enable access of services for those with disabilities. The documents now also incorporate the safer recruitment update and confirms that the safeguarding protocols and DBS requirements apply to all roles, including casual workers, honorary and unpaid/volunteer positions.

In 2024 there will be a review of the format and style of the policy and procedure alongside the statutory and casework updates.

4. Disclosure and Barring Checks

The Staff Compliance team continues to handle a high volume of DBS applications and follow up checks (951 in total, 494 new/renewal applications and 457 update service checks) and to provide guidance on eligibility and requirements for checks. The team also support Heads of Departments with risk assessment where disclosures are flagged on an individual's returned DBS check.

During the past 12 months, several procedural improvements have been made to streamline the DBS processes to enhance the customer experience and reduce manual interventions. Examples include a revised approach to encourage use of the Government DBS update service which reduces the need to reapply at frequent intervals and the implementation of Digital ID verification has resulted in less team involvement in ID checks and quicker turnaround times for checks and submission of applications

The Warden's process has been reassessed and improved and the Casual Worker Team has now taken on responsibility for issuing contracts. An in-depth review of DBS eligibility and compliance within the Faculty of Medicine departments has commenced.

Priorities for the next 12 months include continuing to improve processes by reviewing email and website content, including guidance on the processes for managing DBS disclosures and responsibilities for carrying out DBS checks and completing research passport requests for student, staff, and atypical workers. The main focus will be on completing the University wide review for Faculty of Medicine departments as well as reviewing the threshold criteria being applied for DBS checks across the University.

5. Training

An annual Safeguarding training forum was held in November 2023. This in-person event was open to members of the Safeguarding Committee and staff in their departments. The theme, Creating a Proactive Safeguarding Culture, commenced with a presentation from the safeguarding unit at Farrer and Co followed by a session exploring the barriers to open discussion with techniques to improve staff confidence in the sharing of information. There were c40 attendees and the event prompted escalation of safeguarding cases which had not previously been referred for support

The Safeguarding e-learning course is part of the Essentials suite of mandatory courses. 3,506 people completed the training in 2023. The training covers:

- Legal requirements and the University's approach to safeguarding our community.
- Recognising abuse
- Dealing with disclosure
- Reporting concerns
- The Students at Risk Procedure

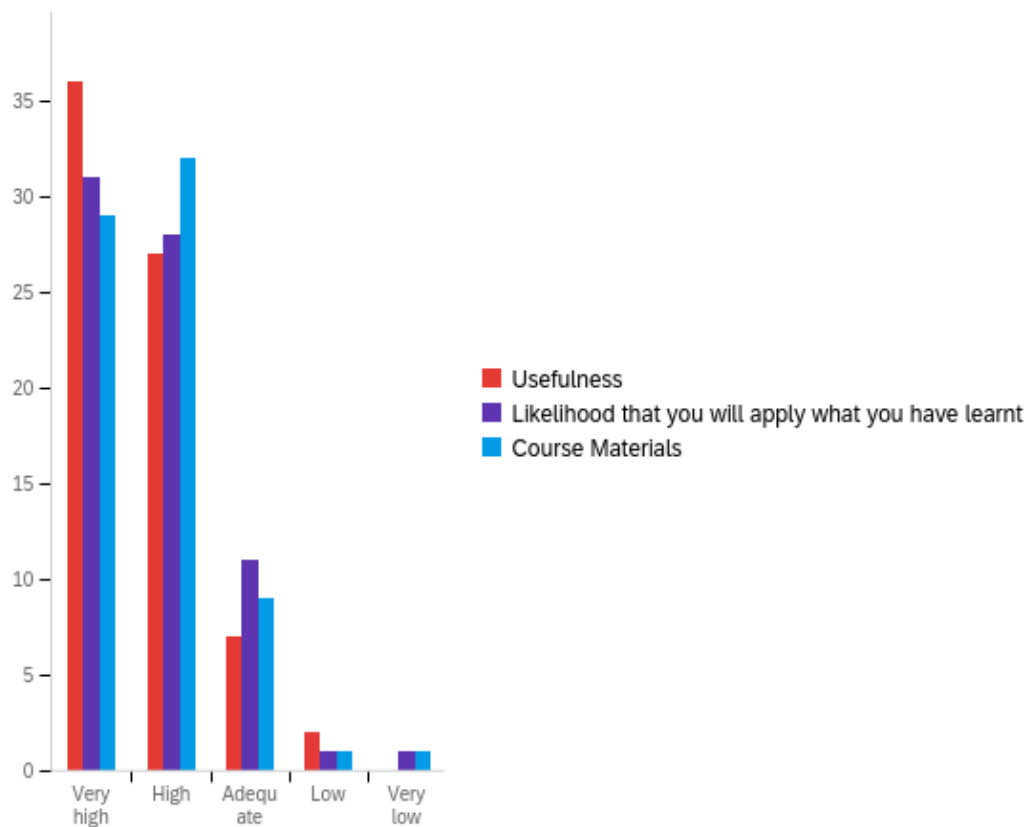
- The Prevent responsibilities

In 2023 the course was revised to reduce the estimated completion time from 90 minutes to 45 minutes. A process has also been implemented to enable exemption of the course for those who have completed equivalent safeguarding training within the NHS Trust.

Feedback on the course has been positive – of the 72 respondents who provided detailed feedback after completing the course during 2023, most rated the course highly or very highly.

SAFEGUARDING e-Learning Course feedback

Number of responses – 1st January to 31st December 2023



In 2024 a further review will be undertaken to look for additional opportunities to simplify content to reflect essential nature of the course within a University context and to reduce the time commitment for those who are undertaking a refresher review.

Safeguarding Committee – subgroups

Sub-committee meetings focus on areas of interest or concern with shared learning outcomes are reported back to the Safeguarding Committee. The sub-committee groups are Outreach, Public Engagement, External Partnerships, Education, Early Years, Imperial College Union and Research.

From sub-committee discussions this year we have reviewed learning from casework and opportunities to update guidance and procedures, for example, on unaccompanied children or serious incident referral protocols and to flag shared risk concerns, for example, with the

crossing of Exhibition Road. The Director of Safeguarding has supported with referrals to the local authorities as required and, with the Director of Student Services, responded to enquiries from the police or social services where safeguarding concerns with an individual associated with the University have been identified.

Within the research context, there have been an increasing number of requests for support with grant funding application forms requiring evidence of University safeguarding practice and risk assessments. There have been no case issues raised centrally and so, in 2024, more awareness raising of safeguarding referrals in a research context will take place. The approach will be informed by a national framework 'safeguarding in research action plan' based on raising awareness, prevention, reporting and response.

Within the Imperial College Union, there have been no issues for safeguarding u18s to report this year. The Union has been an active participant in the institution's Detering Terrorist Activity committee and the bronze group in response to ongoing situation in the middle east. The Union undertook a Health and Safety Audit which resulted in an action plan including updated training for Clubs and Societies, alterations to Risk Assessment forms and better follow up of reported incidents and near misses. In 2024 the Union will be undertaking their periodic review of policies which will include safeguarding and related documents.

8. Case management

The KPMG audit of 2020 noted that the University should have a process in place for the monitoring of referrals or concerns raised relating to safeguarding. This process is required to verify that issues have been appropriately reviewed, closed and any required lessons learned. Imperial is investing in case management systems. During 2024, the oversight and management of student casework, such as academic misconduct, discipline and complaints, will be developed utilising case management products. Admissions has already been developed using this capability and work will continue with the lifecycle where an applicant becomes a student, and will incorporate the declaration of criminal records. Product development to develop further support for student wellbeing services more widely has also been timetabled within the case management timeline for the end of 2024/beginning of 2025. The Committee will need to discuss further the approach to managing safeguarding case records for those who are not students.

Conclusion:

The purpose of this annual report has been to provide the Risk, Compliance and Ethics Committee with a summary of the range of safeguarding issues under consideration by the Safeguarding Committee and the priorities for the coming year:

- Further refinements to the safeguarding mandatory training course
- Raising awareness of safeguarding in research risk and mitigations;
- Progress the development of a student case management system and review arrangements for recording case files for other areas;
- Continue the roll out of improvements to DBS processes and practice and associated risk assessments.

The Committee is requested to note the information provided in this annual report and invited to comment on the reflections and proposed priorities for 2023.

Louise Lindsay

Director of Safeguarding

Submitted to the Risk, Compliance and Ethics Committee [April 2024]