

Creating a Culture of Care

Safeguarding Policy for the Venerable English College

Introduction

The Venerable English College (VEC) is committed to ensuring that a safe and supportive environment exists for all its students, staff and visitors.

The College complies with the policies and practice guidance developed by the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) and adopted by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. These policies can be found at the CSSA website under "National Safeguarding Policy" (www.catholicsafeguarding.org.uk/national-safeguarding-standards/national-safeguarding-policy/)

The VEC acknowledges the great damage done by crimes of sexual abuse within the Church and recognises that "a continuous and profound conversion of hearts is needed, attested by concrete and effective actions that involve everyone in the Church, so that personal sanctity and moral commitment can contribute to promoting the full credibility of the Gospel message and the effectiveness of the Church's mission" (Pope Francis, *Vos estis lux mundi*).

General points

The VEC is a seminary for the formation of priests, located in Rome. Most of the seminarians are destined to serve in the dioceses of England and Wales after ordination, although some will serve in other countries.

Normally there are five resident priests on the formation staff, usually from dioceses in England and Wales.

The resident community also includes a certain number of priests who come to Rome for further studies, after ordination. Many but not all are from England and Wales.

Anglican ordinands come from time to time for a six-month period at the College, as part of their preparation for ordination in the Church of England.

The VEC shares in the commitment of the Catholic Church throughout England and Wales to do all in its power to promote a safe environment for children and adults at risk. It is committed to the "One Church" approach to this matter through the promotion of a sustained culture of care and constant vigilance. All who live or work at the College and all who visit are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect and to be protected from harm.

Like the other four seminaries serving the dioceses of England and Wales, the VEC is committed to providing regular safeguarding training for its seminarians and priests, including the formation staff.

Specialist safeguarding trainers visit the College each year. The Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency (CSSA) must approve these trainers. They teach the "Seminaries Safeguarding Curriculum", which is drawn up by the CSSA, and they provide regular updates for the whole community.

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- Neither children nor adults at risk are present in the College on a day-to-day basis. Nevertheless, from time to time they may be present, for example:
- Members of the public sometimes attend Mass in the College Church.
- There are many visitors to the College, and some short-term resident guests. These can include

young children, accompanied by parents or teachers.

- Employees sometimes bring their children into the building.
- Groups from schools often come for tours of the building.
- Members of the College often come into contact with children and adults at risk in other parts of the city of Rome (e.g. for sacramental catechesis or home visits to the sick), or indeed other parts of Italy (e.g. on summer pastoral placements or language courses).
- The VEC has a summer residence, *Convento di Palazzola* in the Alban Hills outside Rome. For much of the year, Palazzola functions as a holiday home and receives guests of all ages. Palazzola has its own safeguarding policy.

Recruitment

- The VEC requires all dioceses sending seminarians to the College to ensure that the seminarians have undergone thorough assessment and vetting procedures (including a psychological assessment) before arrival. To ensure transparency and consistency in the formation process, copies of reports and references are to be made available in the appropriate format. Before they can be accepted at the VEC, all seminarians and priests, including the formation staff, must have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate (or equivalent from a jurisdiction outside England and Wales). CSSA guidelines determine the level of disclosure needed. The document must be kept up to date and the seminarian or priest must be able to produce it when asked to do so.
- The Rector is appointed by the Holy See, on the recommendation of the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales.
- Recruitment of formation staff is the responsibility of the Rector, in consultation with the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales. The priests who serve as formators, including the Rector, must be in good standing with their home diocese and with the Safeguarding authorities.

Best Practice in Maintaining a Safe Environment

- When children or adults at risk enter the VEC, care should be taken to ensure that they are always accompanied by two adults, whenever possible including a parent/carer or someone to whom responsibility for care has been delegated, e.g. a teacher.
- As far as possible, no seminarian or priest should ever be out of sight or sound of another adult when in company with a child or adult at risk on College premises.
- When a conversation of a more sensitive nature (e.g. a sacramental confession) is sought by the child or adult at risk (and never by the VEC resident), this should take place in a public space where another adult can ensure (from a distance) the safety of both the child/adult at risk and the VEC resident.
- Should a seminarian or priest find himself unavoidably alone with a child or adult at risk, he should document the fact, the circumstances and the reasons why this happened and inform the Safeguarding Lead accordingly, so that a record can be kept.
- In the case of catechesis sessions where no parents or teachers are present, two VEC residents should accompany the children at all times.

- In accordance with §90 of the Charter for Priestly Formation for England and Wales, “if there is credible evidence that a candidate is sexually attracted to minors, he must immediately be dismissed from the seminary”. The same holds true for the priests in the community.
- We strive to maintain a culture of safeguarding where all members of the community seek to protect children, adults at risk and one another, and we are constantly on the lookout for ways to develop best practice.

Reporting Procedures

The VEC receives safeguarding support and training from the CSSA under a formal agreement

- There is a designated Safeguarding Lead resident at the VEC, appointed by the Rector. The safeguarding lead is currently Fr David King, who can be contacted via email pastoraldirector@vecrome.org or telephone +39 06 6868 546.
- If a safeguarding allegation is made that concerns any child or adult at risk, either on the VEC premises or involving any member of the VEC community, then the Safeguarding Lead must be informed.
- The Safeguarding Lead in turn is to communicate the allegation to CSSA, and take whatever action is recommended.
- If the allegation concerns the Safeguarding Lead personally, then the Safeguarding Lead of the Pontifical Beda College should be informed.
- If the Safeguarding Lead is not available, the matter must be reported to the Safeguarding Lead of the Pontifical Beda College, Fr John Breen (j.breen@bedacollege.com or +39 0697991252) or, if he is not available, directly to CSSA (advice line: 0207 901 1920 or admin@catholicsafeguarding.org.uk).
- It is for the Catholic Safeguarding Standards Agency to recommend when concerns are to be communicated to civil authorities in Italy or the UK, and this will be in accordance with national safeguarding policy for the Catholic Church in England and Wales.
- If an allegation is made against a seminarian or priest residing at the VEC, the CSSA will advise whether the alleged perpetrator should or should not remain in residence at the VEC during the period of the investigation.
- Although it is not within the normal bounds of safeguarding, it is recognised that specific issues could arise for female staff who may feel they are subject to harassment in this predominantly male institution. To overcome any difficulty or embarrassment that female employees may feel, a designated person has been appointed to be available to them and to cover this area of possible risk. She will take issues or potential concerns to the Safeguarding Lead or to the Rector.

E-safety

- In order to access the internet, every resident or guest must first sign a copy of the Computer Guidelines, which explicitly prohibit browsing illegal sites.

- Every resident or guest also signs a document about the protection of personal data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (2016/679) (GDPR). This document includes a clause stating that the Computer Guidelines must be respected.
- Navigation of the internet of every user is monitored in accordance with surveillance laws and GDPR.

Definitions

- a. A child is a person under the age of 18 years.
- b. Adults at risk are persons over the age of 18 years who have a need for care and support or who are experiencing or are at risk of neglect or abuse.
- c. Abuse can take many forms. It may be current, recent or something which happened in the past that the affected person is speaking about only now. Abuse may be physical, emotional, sexual, or financial and it may include neglect or bullying. Inappropriate use of power is frequently involved.
- d. Safeguarding refers to the actions taken to promote the welfare of children and adults in vulnerable circumstances and to protect them from harm.

Addenda

It is important to note that arrangements for safeguarding in Italy are not identical to those in England and Wales. An important point of reference for questions arising in this area is the *Institute of Anthropology: Interdisciplinary Studies on Dignity and Human Care (IADC)* at the Pontifical Gregorian University.

It is acknowledged that, in certain circumstances, seminarians may be considered “adults at risk” vis-à-vis their formators, in view of the power differential that exists between them. Similarly, priests in the seminary are “at risk” in the sense that they are vulnerable to unfounded accusations. It is of the nature of seminary formation that many one-to-one meetings take place between seminarians and formators. Should any concerns arise, these should immediately be reported to the Safeguarding Lead.

This Safeguarding policy is issued by the Venerable English College, having been approved by the CSSA and by the three bishop visitors on behalf of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales. It is subject to review whenever there are any changes in law, policy, IICSA (Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse) recommendations, training or evolving best practice.

Fr Stephen Wang, Rector

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The most recent review was ratified by: Colette Limbrick (on behalf of the CSSA) and Archbishop Bernard Longley, Archbishop John Wilson and Archbishop Mark O’Toole (on behalf of the Overseas Seminary Committee of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales)