



Criminal Vetting Policy

1. Policy Statement

'As part of the ethos of safeguarding all who come in contact with our mission and ministries, it is mandatory that all relevant volunteers and employees of the individual congregations and Presbyteries are checked, prior to commencing roles and regularly thereafter.'

This policy applies to all volunteers, leaders, officers and employees in congregations and associated ministries in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Legal & Policy Context

- AccessNI Criminal Record Checks, Part V of the Police Act 1997
- Schedule 1 National Vetting Bureau (Children & Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016
- Presbyterian Church in Ireland Child Safeguarding (NI) Policy / Child Safeguarding (ROI) Policy / Adult Safeguarding (NI) Policy / Adult Safeguarding (ROI) Policy

Core principles

Criminal vetting checks are a critical part of safe recruitment procedures for all roles that will give access to children, young people and /or adults at risk of harm.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland identifies the scope of mission and ministry across the denomination is wide, and there are a variety of relevant roles that are applicable under this policy.

For example, this could include;

Ministers (student ministers / active / retired if continuing to engage in a pastoral role)/ Elders / Deaconesses / Leaders / helpers / volunteers / Youth / family workers

This is not an exhaustive list of applicable roles; the denomination uses a wide range of designations and job titles. Each role can be individually assessed if applicable for a criminal vetting check against the relevant criteria.

No one may commence a relevant role until the check process is completed and a Presbytery cannot install a minister/elder until the check process is completed.

"Decisions on the suitability for recruitment rest at all times with the recruiting organisation and the result of vetting should form only one part of the recruitment decision." (Chapter 4, National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, Children First 2015).

Therefore, PCI understands that a proper appointment procedure is one of the most effective ways of assessing a person's suitability to work with children and young people, or adults at risk of harm, and may act as a deterrent to potential abusers.

We must do all that we can to ensure that anyone who may be unsuitable for working with children, young people or adults is not given the opportunity to become a leader. **The criminal vetting procedure is only one aspect of this full process.**

Review

This Policy will be reviewed annually. Changes will be reported to the General Assembly, with the Assembly being asked to approve any significant policy changes. If there is a legislative change that requires the Policy to be updated or reviewed within that time period, Waringstown Presbyterian will continue to take advice and direction from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Vetting Process

- It is essential to have a recruitment and appointment procedure in place to select leaders in order to provide a safe environment and culture for children and young people in our congregations.
- This recruitment process applies to all leaders aged 16 and over.
- Do not commence anyone in a role until the full process has been completed.
- The decision to appoint someone into a leadership role should never rest on a clear AccessNI vetting and criminal records check alone.

The Process

- Application form and verifying identity
- An application form must be completed by everyone applying to work with children and young people. This should cover past employment and volunteering history/experience.
- The application form includes the AccessNI vetting process. Applicants are asked to declare any past criminal convictions or police investigations as part of this form. Identity checks for candidates should be carried out with official documentation, e.g. sight of driving licence, passport, proof of address.
- All application forms must be signed by either the Minister or a member of Kirk Session to say that as far as they are aware, the applicant is suitable for the role for which they are applying.
- Application forms and processes are available on the [PCI website](#).
- The organisational leader, along with either the Minister, Designated Person or an Elder, should meet the person and ensure that they have the ability and ethos required for the role. This is best established through interview questions.

References

- The names of two referees should be given by the applicant.
- The referees should NOT be family members, the Minister, Designated Person or either of the interviewers.
- References should be from people who have had first-hand knowledge of the individual's work with children/young people and have known the applicant for at least two years.
- The supporting admin staff will request reference from the referees given.
- A reference request form is available on the [PCI website](#).
- These do not need to be sent to the central PCI Safeguarding Office with the application form but should be kept for the congregation's own records.

AccessNI and Criminal Records Check

- All leaders taking up a regulated position to work with children and young people must be vetted.
- New people joining the congregation should not be considered for a leadership role until they have attended the church regularly for at least 12 months.
- The process of vetting leaders involves an AccessNI check, which will show if an applicant has any criminal convictions and any other relevant policing information.
- AccessNI checks in Northern Ireland are not currently portable between roles and organisations.
- A person who does have a criminal conviction will not necessarily be barred from working with children and young people within a church setting. Only convictions considered relevant will be taken into consideration when an appointment is made.
- Guidance should, however, be sought from the Safeguarding Office about the nature of any convictions.
- Please be assured that all certificates, forms and conviction information are treated sensitively and confidentially by the central PCI Safeguarding Office.

Management of disclosure certificates

Leaders/volunteers/helpers

A disclosure certificate will be issued to the applicant.

PCI Safeguarding Office will be advised of either a clear disclosure or that a disclosure of a criminal record (known as a 'trace') has been identified.

The Safeguarding Office will not be advised of the nature or detail of the trace – that remains confidential to the individual.

If a trace is flagged it is important that the Kirk Session satisfies itself that it is of no nature that would suggest a risk to children, young people or adults at risk. The individual will be given the opportunity to request a 'Subject Access Request' to provide context around the trace.

Therefore, PCI Safeguarding Office will advise the representative of Kirk Session to speak with the representative or Minister about the issue. This will be done in writing / minuted. The safeguarding team will be involved in this process.

The member of Kirk Session or minister should have sight of the digital certificate that has been issued to the person by AccessNI, which may contain criminal record information, relevant policing information or details of Barred List inclusion. It is the applicants choice if they share this information however if they don't then the vetting process will conclude and they will not be suitable for volunteering.

While the decision to share the certificate remains with the individual, failure to share the certificate or details surrounding the offence if required would absolutely preclude involvement with any regulated activity.

Kirk Session cannot overlook any trace that would contravene public protection.

It is a criminal offence for someone barred from working with children or vulnerable adults to apply for Regulated Activity and it is an offence for anyone to knowingly employ or use them in a Regulated Activity.

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- PCI Safeguarding Office will be advised of either a clear disclosure or that a disclosure of a criminal record (known as a 'trace') has been identified.
- The Safeguarding Office will not be advised of the nature or detail of the trace – that remains confidential to the individual.
- If a trace is flagged it is important that the Kirk Session satisfies itself that it is of no nature that would suggest a risk to children, young people or adults at risk.
- Therefore, PCI Safeguarding Office will both advise the representative of Kirk Session who has signed the form, and advise the individual to speak with the representative or Minister about the issue. This will be done in writing.
- They should have sight of the digital certificate that has been issued to the person by AccessNI, which may contain criminal record information, relevant policing information or details of Barred List inclusion.
- Kirk Session representatives should discuss the disclosure with the PCI Safeguarding Lead or Safeguarding Officer and ensure that it has recorded its decision-making when considering any trace.
- Kirk Session cannot overlook any trace that would contravene public protection.
- It is a criminal offence for someone barred from working with children or vulnerable adults to apply for Regulated Activity and it is an offence for anyone to knowingly employ or use them in a Regulated Activity.

This policy is to be implemented under the authority of Holy Scripture and in accordance with the Confessional Standards of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Policy Approved By: Kirk Session of Waringstown Presbyterian Church

Date of Approval: June 2026

Next Review Date: June 2027 (if not before)