

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA
PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS COMMISSION
MODEL SYSTEM FOR THE SELECTION AND ACCREDITATION OF LAY
PARISH CHURCH WORKERS

1 INTRODUCTION

The General Synod in October 2004 by resolution 34/04(c)(iv) referred to the Professional Standards Commission the consideration of a model system for the selection of all church workers. The Professional Standards Commission consulted with The Venerable Sarah Macneil (Canberra and Goulburn), Mr Rod McLary (Brisbane), The Reverend Helen Phillips (Tasmania), The Venerable Graeme Sells (Melbourne), The Venerable Peter Stuart (Adelaide) and Mrs Didamain Uibo (Northern Territory) on 25 January 2006 to discuss a model system for the selection of all church workers.

This report deals with the selection of lay parish church workers including volunteers. While many features will be the same, selection of church workers by Church organisations raises additional issues which are outside the scope of this report. The essential elements of the system set out in this report will need to be adapted to local circumstances. Omission of any one of these elements without a suitable substitute may constitute a breach of the duty to exercise reasonable care in the selection of church workers by the appointing person or body.

Implementation of this system will involve a change of culture for many dioceses and parishes. The manner of its implementation is important to its success. This is discussed more fully in section 4.

2 STEPS PRIOR TO APPOINTMENT

The following ten steps should be undertaken in the selection process prior to the appointment of a church worker. It is desirable that a group of persons be involved to assist the appointing person or body to undertake the selection process.

(a) Identification of ministry positions

A list of all ministry positions in the parish (both paid church workers and volunteers) should be compiled. **Appendix A** contains a sample list of ministry positions, which can be used as a check list and modified to suit any parish.

(b) Ministry position descriptions

A ministry description for each position should be prepared. This description should identify all parts of the duties, responsibilities and expectations of the ministry position. **Appendix B** contains a ministry position template, which can be modified to suit any parish.

(c) Assessment of risk of potential harm

Assessment of risk of potential harm for each ministry position involves consideration of three aspects:

- the risk that harm could be committed by abuse and child abuse as defined in *Faithfulness in Service*;
- the power, authority and control of those who minister;
- the level of vulnerability of those being administered to.

Risk of potential harm can be assessed according to the following scale:

- **Low Risk Ministries:** Ministry duties and responsibilities that do not permit a person to be alone with a child or vulnerable adult, or do not permit access to financial resources or sensitive and confidential information. Such ministries do not require a significant level of authority or trust.
- **High Risk Ministries:** Ministry duties and responsibilities that permit opportunities for a person to be alone with a child or vulnerable adult or permit access to financial resources, or sensitive or confidential information. These ministries are positions of actual or perceived authority or the positions that allows a person to establish long-term relationships of trust. All residential or off-site ministries with children or vulnerable adults are always ranked high risk.

In some dioceses low and high risk ministries are specified. In other dioceses there is no specification of low and high risk ministries.

The following questions should be considered to determine the appropriate risk category:

- does the position permit a person to be alone with a child or vulnerable adult?
- does the position permit a person to have access to financial resources or sensitive and confidential information?
- what is the level of authority or trust of the position?
- what is the actual or perceived authority of the position?

If in doubt as to the appropriate risk category, consult with the Director of Professional Standards

Individuals who hold more than one position within a parish are to be selected in a manner consistent with the position that holds the highest level of risk and has the most stringent screening requirements.

Some dioceses require persons elected to a position within a parish to be subject to the applicable parts of the selection process (for example, safe ministry training). All dioceses should consider adapting this system to persons elected to a position within a parish.

(d) Safe ministry training

All high risk ministry positions should satisfactorily complete diocesan safe ministry training, preferably prior to selection, or within a short time after selection.

Diocesan safe ministry training should be repeated at regular intervals of at least every three years.

(e) Application form

Each person applying, or approached, for appointment to a ministry position should be given a copy of the ministry description and complete an application form. For paid church workers suitable application forms are the *Safe Ministry Checks* which are **Appendices C and D**. For a voluntary church worker for a high risk ministry position a suitable application form is *Safe Ministry Check* which is **Appendix E**.

(f) Interview

Each applicant for, and current church worker in, a high risk ministry position should be interviewed. It is desirable that a person seeking appointment to a high risk ministry position should be interviewed by a panel of persons (two or three persons with a gender balance).

(g) Referees

It is important that referees be contacted before a person is selected for a high risk ministry position. The information supplied by each referee should be recorded. **Appendix F** contains a suggested introduction to, and a list of sample questions for, a referee for a voluntary church worker.

(h) Working with children check or declaration or criminal history check

It will be necessary to comply with State or Territory requirements for working with children which are commonly referred as to a Working with

Children check or declaration. Where there is no such statutory requirement a criminal history check should be obtained. In New South Wales it is a criminal offence to appoint particular types of sex offenders to work with children.

The Director of Professional Standards must be consulted before appointing to a high risk ministry position any person, whether convicted of a criminal offence or not, who was engaged in any sexual activity with children, no matter how minor or long ago. The greatest care will need to be taken before making any such appointment.

(i) Assessment

If any information is obtained, such as a “yes” answer in *Safe Ministry Check*, or answer to a question during the interview, or a referee’s comment as to whether the applicant might constitute a risk of harm to children or vulnerable adults, then advice must be obtained from the Director of Professional Standards. Care will need to be taken where the applicant has been in the parish less than 12 months. If it is decided to refuse an application to a high risk ministry position, then the Director of Professional Standards must be notified.

(j) Accreditation

Only applicants who have completed the selection process and have been found suitable for appointment to a high risk ministry position should be accredited as being suitable for appointment. The accreditation process should include the person or body making the appointment completing, assigning and dating the selection check list for high risk ministry positions. **Appendix G** is a sample selection check list which can be modified to suit any parish.

3 STEPS AFTER APPOINTMENT

The selection process does not stop when a person is appointed to a ministry position – ongoing training and supervision are required.

(a) Orientation and training

Orientation to a ministry position and, where appropriate, training on a continuing basis should be made available to church workers. It should be remembered that training will encourage church workers that the parish values them and considers that their ministry is important.

(b) Supervision and evaluation

It is important that all church workers who are appointed to a ministry position are appropriately supervised. It is not always necessary that the person or body making the appointment provides the supervision.

Performance of the ministry undertaken by church workers in high risk ministry positions should be evaluated from time to time. Regular positive feedback will be an encouragement to church workers. Sensitive feedback suggesting areas and strategies for improvement will assist church workers to develop their ministry skills.

(c) Struggling church workers and unsuccessful applicants

Particular care should be provided to church workers who may be struggling in their ministry positions or applicants who were unsuccessful in the selection process.

(d) Re-accreditation

The selection and accreditation process should be repeated for persons in high risk ministry positions at three yearly intervals. Remember that events may have occurred in a person's life over the previous three years, which are unknown to anyone in the parish, which may make the person unsuitable to work with children and vulnerable adults.

(e) Change in Ministry Positions

It is not necessary to repeat the selection and accreditation process for persons who change from a high risk ministry position to another high risk ministry position, or from a high risk ministry position to a low risk ministry position, within three years after accreditation. However, whenever a person changes from a low risk ministry position to a high risk ministry position, then the selection and accreditation process will need to be undertaken unless it has been already undertaken within the previous three years.

4 IMPLEMENTATION OF A SELECTION PROCESS

Dioceses should introduce a diocesan wide policy for the selection and accreditation of lay parish church workers including appropriate training and storage of records.

The acceptance and effectiveness of a selection process for church workers in a parish can be affected by the manner in which it is implemented. It will be critical that the clergy and parish council "own" the process by their support for its introduction. Care will need to be taken to ensure that they are fully informed as to the various elements of the process.

It is important that those involved in the implementation of the selection process:

- lead by having been through the process themselves;
- take time and do not rush the process in a perfunctory or bureaucratic way;
- respond to, and not ignore, anxieties and resistance;
- are careful to identify all high risk positions;
- are willing to make hard decisions in the assessment of applicants;
- acknowledge the variety of communication styles, teaching and learning styles and personalities to ensure that differences in personality don't become issues in the selection process but that only genuine risk factors are considered.

5 STORAGE OF RECORDS

It is important that all selection documents, including those relating to persons who are unsuccessful in their application for a high risk ministry position, be kept indefinitely in a secure location. As documents obtained as part of the selection process will contain personal information, access should be restricted to those who are authorised to see them.

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PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS COMMISSION