

B11 NATIONAL SAFE CHURCH UNIT

1. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In the spirit of reconciliation, the National Safe Church Unit acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The National Safe Church Unit acknowledges both the Jagera people and Turrbul people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which the Unit is located and we pay our respects to them and their Elders past, present and emerging.

2. ABOUT THE NATIONAL SAFE CHURCH UNIT

The National Safe Church Unit (NSCU) was established in April 2019 as part of the UCA's response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It is an expression of the whole of Church commitment to ensuring that all parts of the UCA are places where all people can feel safe. This commitment spans ministry and mission contexts, including congregations, agencies, hospitals and schools.

In its first year of operation, 2019, much of the NSCU's work focused on putting the necessary structures in place to enable it to become fully functional. This included establishing the organisational structure, agreeing parameters of work and scope of delivery, recruiting staff, agreeing delegations, confirming the operating budget and addressing operational issues such as securing physical office space and the provision of back of house support services.

In its second year of operation, 2020, the NSCU increased its delivery across the life of the Church, providing a suite of resources to strengthen our culture of safety.

The work of the NSCU includes:

- Developing national policy frameworks and guidance
- Delivery of nationally consistent child safe training across the UCA
- Leadership about issues and practices related to governance for vulnerable people
- Delivery of resources and tools to grow and strengthen the UCA's culture of safety
- Providing the necessary functions for the ongoing work of the NSCU within the UCA
- Project delivery: Professional Standards – Resourcing Ministry

The NSCU comprises a National Director and National Policy Adviser who are supported in their work by the Assembly Resourcing Unit and Assembly Services Unit. The NSCU contracts specialist services as required to deliver specific pieces of work.

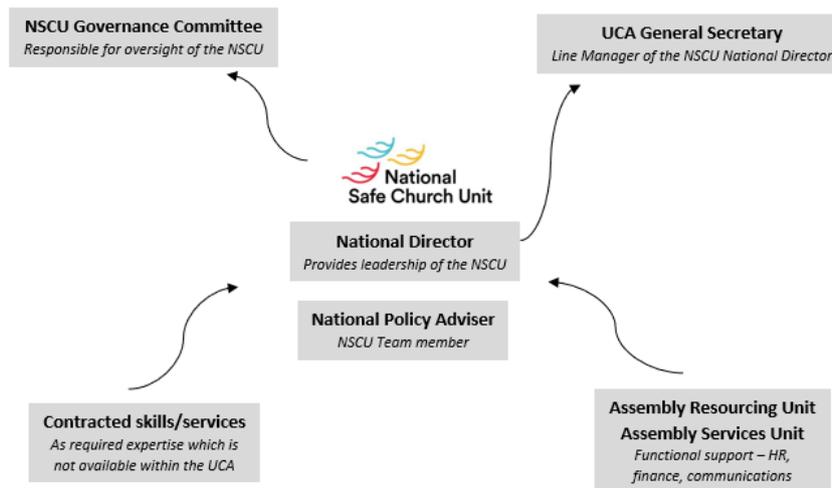


Fig.1 NSCU structure

The NSCU Governance Committee provides oversight and guidance to the National Director and the NSCU. Membership of the Committee is drawn from across the Assembly.

The NSCU is supported in its work by several advisory and support groups, the memberships of which include representatives from each of the Synods and the Assembly. This means that the NSCU’s work is informed by the experience, thinking and needs of each of the Synods. In working collaboratively with the Synods and other stakeholders across the UCA, the NSCU can ensure that the resources it develops help to provide for national consistency and have the necessary flexibility to meet local circumstances. As an example, the NSCU is ensuring that resources produced can be locally branded to signal local ownership of policies, processes and information that is nationally consistent across the whole of the UCA, and that national policy frameworks include provision for state/territory specific requirements and legislation.



Fig 2: NSCU advisory and support groups

3. THE NATIONAL CHILD SAFE POLICY FRAMEWORK AND THE PRINCIPLES OF A CHILD SAFE UCA

The [National Child Safe Policy Framework](#) and the [Principles of a Child Safe Uniting Church in Australia](#) are the foundation of the UCA's culture of safety and the NSCU's work. They provide for a nationally consistent approach to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people across the life of the Church. Having a common language and understanding about what it looks and feels like to be a safe church for children and young people means that we can identify and develop the resources the UCA needs to achieve and sustain this.

Both the framework and the principles are consistent with the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Principles for a Child Safe UCA align with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations which have been developed by the Australian Human Rights Commission. Being able to talk about and report on our work to be a safe church for children and young people within the context of the recommendations of the Royal Commission, continues to be an important factor in how the Church is viewed both internally and externally.

The Principles of a Child Safe UCA are available in Chinese, English, Fijian, Indonesian, Korean, Niuean, Portuguese, Samoan, Spanish and Tongan. The NSCU has made posters and presentations available to Synods in formats that allow for local or Synod branding (see Appendix 1).

4. STRENGTHENING OUR CULTURE OF SAFETY

The NSCU has regularly delivered communication resources to promote child safety and wellbeing across the different communication platforms used by the Church and its entities.

The aim of this work is to keep safe church matters on the agenda across the life of the Church and to continue to raise awareness, access to and use of the growing suite of resources available to help strengthen our culture of safety. This is helping to increase the collective capacity of our people to identify potential risks to children and young people in our UCA environments and to have the ability to take action to mitigate these risks.

The NSCU provides information and statements to mark key days and events each year which focus on child safety. This includes:

- National Child Safety Week
- National Children's Week
- Anniversary of the Apology to survivors of institutional child sexual abuse
- NAIDOC Week
- Universal/World Children's Day

The NSCU works to make child safety and wellbeing an everyday consideration and conversation across the life of the Church. A new [NSCU website](#) was launched in 2020 to provide 24/7 access to the tools, resources and information developed by the NSCU.

The way in which the UCA delivers services, worship and offered supports changed rapidly in early 2020 as movement and activities were restricted by measures introduced by Federal, State and Territory governments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The NSCU acted quickly to provide guidance and advice about being a safe church online. This included information and statements delivered through existing Assembly and Synod communication channels and the NSCU website.

The NSCU also hosted a webinar which featured representatives from each of the Synods and the Assembly discussing the practical and operational issues associated with being a safe church online. It was published on the Assembly Facebook page and the NSCU team provided a live Q&A session during the broadcast. The broadcast was seen by over 1000 individual users and shared by a number of UCA congregations.

The NSCU has developed and is delivering an online conversation series with key leaders inside and outside the church about issues of child safety and wellbeing. The first episode was a conversation with the Rev. Mark Kickett, Interim National Chairperson of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, which was published to mark NAIDOC Week 2020. The conversation considered how being a culturally safe and accessible church strengthens our collective ability to keep people safe. The intended benefit of this series of online conversations is to help people across the Church increase their own ability to contribute to keeping their UCA environments safe for children and young people.

The NSCU engages with external stakeholders to both promote the UCA's culture of safety and to ensure that what we do aligns with contemporary best practice and thinking. These engagements include with:

- The National Office for Child Safety
- The National Council of Churches in Australia
- The Queensland Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Taskforce, an activity of the Queensland Government
- The Queensland Joint Churches Child Safety Group
- The Salvation Army
- Scripture Union
- The Child Safeguarding Podcast

The NSCU also regularly meets people across the UCA including Assembly leaders, Associate General Secretaries, UCA National Conference Chairs, Uniting agencies and schools.

5. KEY DELIVERABLES

The NSCU has organised its work under three pillars – Strategy and policy, Education and training, and Quality assurance. Since establishment in April 2019, the NSCU has delivered the following under each of those pillars:

5.1 Strategy and policy

The NSCU's work under this pillar provides safe church policy leadership. It provides the tools and resources that are enabling the UCA to become nationally consistent in its policy and operational approaches towards being a safe church, whilst retaining the necessary flexibility to enable Synods to best meet local needs and requirements. Under this pillar, the NSCU has:

- Delivered annual NSCU strategies in consultation with stakeholders to ensure the NSCU's work delivers against agreed targets
- Developed and guided implementation of the UCA's National Child Safe Policy Framework to ensure the Church acts on the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, including mapping and securing the necessary resources for implementation
- Developed a (growing) suite of national policy frameworks to provide guidance to Synods which include:
 - Persons of Concern
 - Persons of Concern – Additional Measures in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic
 - Child Safe Collaboration
 - Child Safe Screening: pre-appointment screening for staff and volunteers
- Connected with people with lived experience of child sexual abuse to enable their insights to inform the work of the NSCU to help the UCA better meet the diverse safety needs of children and young people
- Supported the UCA's endorsement of the [Voluntary Principles to Counter Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#) which have been developed by the national governments of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States to help organisations combat the sexual abuse of children online

- Developed and delivered a (growing) suite of communications resources to promote child safety across the life of the Church, including webinars, presentations, media ready statements and editorials, posters and artwork.

5.2 Education and training

The NSCU's work under this pillar is about the delivery of tools and resources to enable a nationally consistent approach to child safety education and training for the UCA. Once available this training will be accessible online to people across the life of the Church enabling them to undertake the training in their own time in their chosen setting. This is a priority area of work and a significant share of NSCU resources are devoted to this pillar of work. Under this pillar the NSCU has:

- Developed the [National Principles for Education and Training](#) which have been adopted by each of the Synods to guide the development, delivery and review of education and training resources
- Facilitated the development of a UCA National Child Safe Curriculum in consultation with curriculum and training experts and representatives from each of the Synods and the Assembly, to provide a framework for the development of child safe training that is best practice and fit for purpose
- Managed the development of multi-modal training in order to provide online training to people across the life of the Church to enable the launch of the UCA National Child Safe Curriculum in 2021.

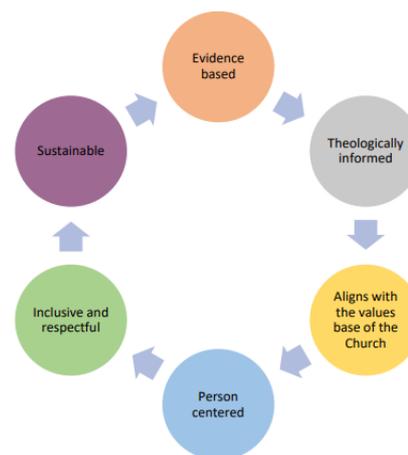


Fig 3: National Principles for Education and Training

5.3 Quality assurance

Under this pillar the NSCU has worked to enhance Church governance for vulnerable people, and to meet internal and external reporting and compliance requirements. To date the NSCU has:

- Created a risk register which identifies child safety risks for the whole of UCA. This register is shared widely with stakeholders who are encouraged to include these risks in their own local risk registers. The NSCU also provides support to develop locally appropriate mitigation/management strategies
- Created and used a new reporting template, using the Principles of a Child Safe UCA, to support Synod reporting on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people across the life of the Church
- Reported annually to the National Office of Child Safety about the Church's progress in implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission
- Reported annually to the UCA.

5.4 Projects

The NSCU has undertaken projects which complement and supports its work:

- Created a website www.safechurch.uca.org.au to provide a one-stop place for the tools, resources and information developed by the NSCU

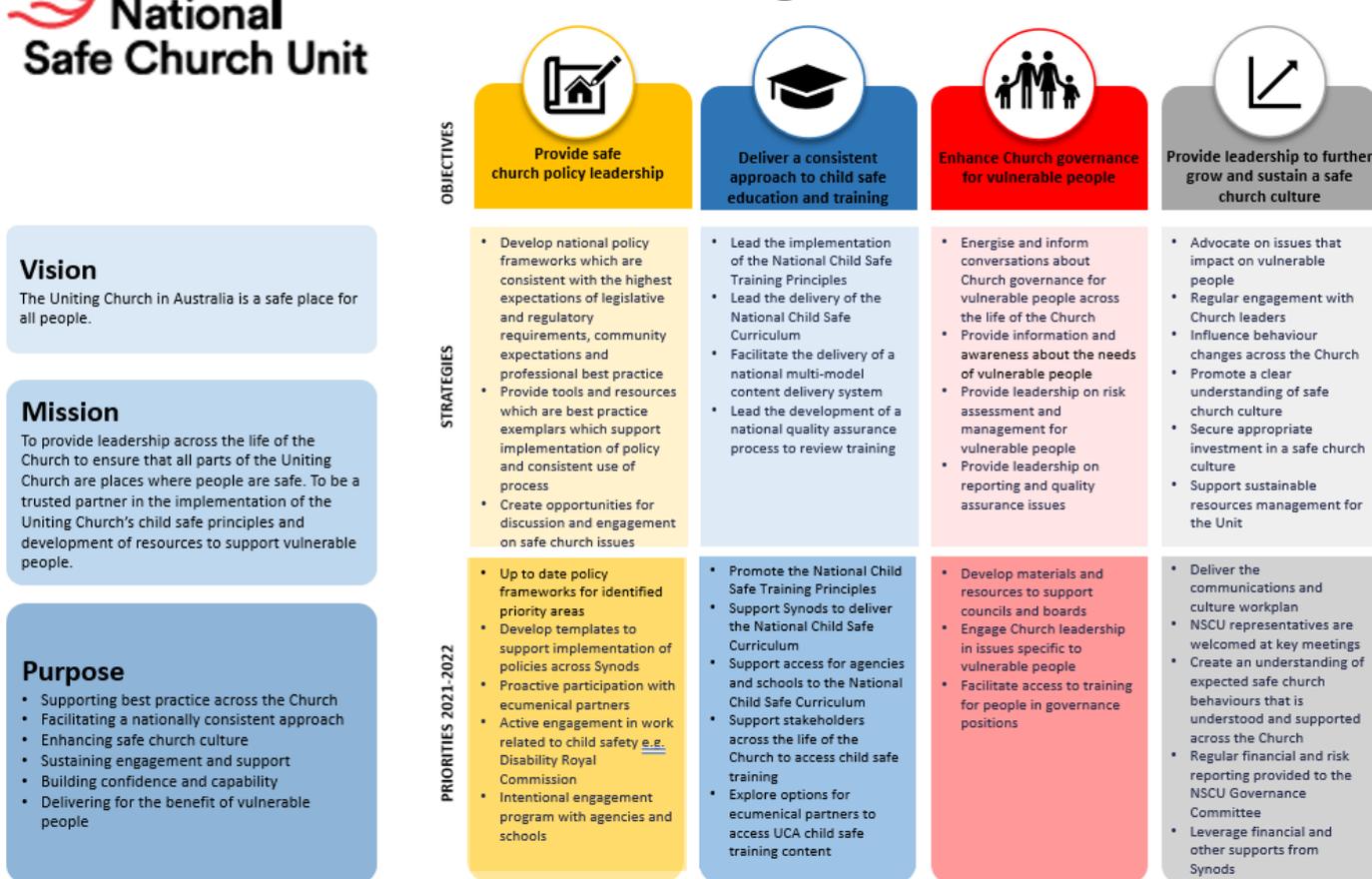
- Created new branding for the NSCU to help people more easily recognise UCA child safety resources
- Continued to facilitate and coordinate the Resourcing Ministry Project – Professional Standards Project, which is delivering a suite of guidance and information tools for Ministry Agents to enable them to better meet the standards and expectations required in their roles.

6. 2021 STRATEGY

The NSCU Strategy has been reframed to include exploration of the safety needs of other vulnerable people across the life of the Church in addition to children and young people. Delivery of the 2021 Strategy is likely to occur against ongoing restrictions on domestic travel and a continued reliance on remote networking and online engagement.



Strategic Plan 2021-22



7. CONCLUSION

The NSCU in collaboration with stakeholders across the Church is ensuring that the Church continues to deliver on its commitment to be a safe church for all people.

The tools and resources delivered by the NSCU are guiding practical action on the ground in local UCA contexts to keep children and young people safe. The NSCU particularly acknowledges the energy and expertise of the Safe Church Leads in each of the Synods and members of the NSCU's Governance Committee, Consultation Advisory Group, National Education and Training Project Group and the Safe Church Framework Implementation Network in supporting, guiding and informing this work.

The NSCU is unwavering in its sustained efforts to ensure the Church's commitment to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and to keep children and young people safe, is fully realised and does not diminish over time. Being a safe church for all people requires us to take continuous action beyond reporting and compliance to lift our collective capability to prevent harm occurring.

Members of the Assembly play an important role in ensuring the tools and resources developed by the NSCU are implemented, understood and used in their areas of the Church. The NSCU is grateful for the support of the whole Church.

Principles of a Child Safe Uniting Church in Australia



1 Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture



2 Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously



3 Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing



4 Diversity is respected and equity is promoted



5 Our people are suitable for work with children and committed to the values of child safety and wellbeing



6 Child focused complaints processes



7 Our people are provided with ongoing education and training on child safety



8 Physical and online environments promote safety



9 Policies and procedures document child safety



10 Review and continuous improvement of policy, procedure and practice