



**Uniting Church in Australia**  
**ASSEMBLY**  
Assembly Standing Committee

12 – 14 November 2021

**DOCUMENT 11**

Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	Information	
Title	National Safe Church Unit	
Assembly or ASC Minute		
Consultation	NSCU Governance Committee	
Purpose	To provide an overview and update of the work of the National Safe Church Unit.	
Rationale & Findings Summary	The attached report highlights the strategy and operation of the NSCU.	
Attachments	1. NSCU Report to ASC October 2021	
Recommendations	That the ASC Receive the report of the NSCU	
Submitted by	John Cox – Director, NSCU 0439 828 728 johnc@safechurch.uca.org.au	Peter Andrews – Chair, NSCU Governance Committee

# Report to Assembly Standing Committee

## October 2021



## Acknowledgement

We pay our respects to the First Nations people of the country on which we live and work, and acknowledge Elders past, present and emerging.

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## Background

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was sobering for the Uniting Church in Australia. It identified that children and young people in the care of the Church had not always received the care they deserved, including that some experienced abuse at the hands of people engaged in the life of the Church and abuse has occurred in Church settings.

The Church publicly pledged to implement the learnings and recommendations of the Royal Commission and committed to be a safe church for all people. The National Safe Church Unit (NSCU) was established in 2019 by the Assembly Standing Committee to lead work to deliver on this commitment.

The NSCU manages the development and delivery to the Synods of national safe church policy, frameworks, training and resources to ensure that people across the life of the Church can confidently say:

- I have a role to play in ensuring my church is a safe church for all people
- I have access to the information and training I need to fulfill that role
- I can identify environments and behaviours that risk the safety of children and vulnerable people
- I will speak out when I see or hear unsafe practices or behaviours
- I know who to speak to and I know that I will be heard
- I feel safe in all my engagements with and within the Church

## Scope and structure

The NSCU was established by agreement between all Synods and the Assembly. This agreement included that the NSCU would be funded jointly by each of the Synods and the Assembly, and a Charter was developed to define the NSCU's original scope and purpose as being:

### *Scope*

A national collaborative approach by the Assembly and the Synods of the UCA to embed a consistent and robust safe church culture and safe church practices across the Church and its agencies. Initially, the work of the National Safe Church Unit will be limited to Child Safety in the life of the Church. However, this is only a subset of having a safe church and future aspects of providing a safe church may be identified and tasked to this unit.

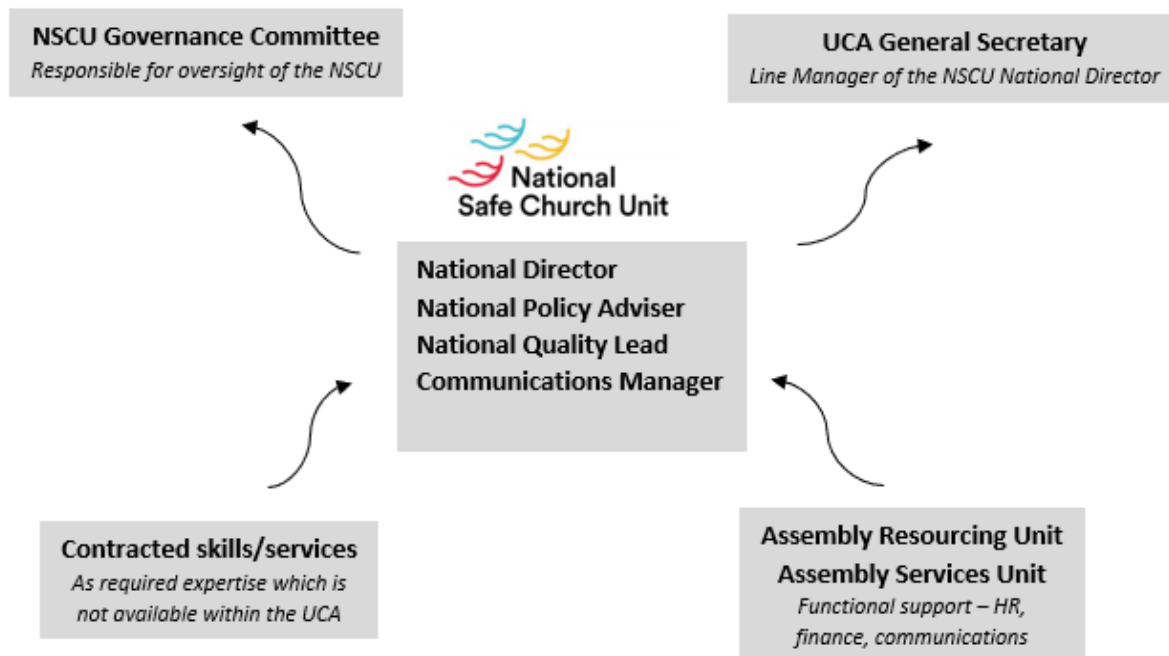
### *Functions*

- Better administration of a uniform and nationally consistent approach
- Consistent policy and process
- Consistent messaging
- Attraction of appropriate skills and experiences to its governance in a dedicated way

- Consistent collection of data and reporting

The work of the NSCU spans ministry and mission, including the Church's congregations, agencies, hospitals, and schools, to lead the development of a nationally consistent approach to growing and sustaining our culture and practice of child safety across the life of the Church.

The NSCU is a small team of four, with oversight provided by the Governance Committee and back of house functions provided by the Assembly. The NSCU contracts in expertise as required if it is not available within the UCA. For example, in 2020 a Child Safety Education Expert was engaged to support the development of the UCA's National Child Safe Curriculum, and a Synod Safe Church Training and Development Officer is currently seconded to the NSCU one day per week to support the creation of training content.



**Fig1. Structure of the NSCU**

In its first three years of operation, the NSCU has primarily focused on growing a safe church culture across the congregational life of the Church which has traditionally not had access to the resources that are made available to agencies and schools (which must comply with mandatory child safety provisions as a requirement of funding and/or licensing).

The NSCU does not usually work directly with ministers or congregations. It works collaboratively with child safe/safe church leads in Synods and agencies to ensure that national resources are informed by best practice and evidence, and are fit for purpose and use across the whole of the UCA to meet identified need.

The NSCU has, together with its stakeholders, agreed principles for collaboration and a framework to guide collaborative work and provide transparency in decision making. It has also established several stakeholder groups to inform specific work and projects. These include:

<b>Consultation Advisory Group (CAG)</b>	Membership comprises Safe Church Leads from each of the Synods and representatives of the Assembly. CAG provides support and information to the NSCU; supporting the NSCU to connect with individuals and entities across the life of the Church.
<b>Safeguarding Policy and Practice Network (SPPN)</b>	Membership includes UCA agency and Synod representatives who deliver child safe policy and/or practice. The Network has created new opportunities for collaboration between the Synods and agencies focused on the safety of vulnerable people.
<b>National Education and Training Project Stakeholder Group</b>	Representatives from each of the Synods and the Assembly inform and support the development of national child safe training.
<b>Safe Church Framework Implementation Network</b>	Membership includes each of the Synods and the Assembly to support the implementation of the National Child Safe Policy Framework and other national policy frameworks and processes.
<b>Communities of Practice</b>	Groups of practitioners from across the life of the Church focused on key areas of operation.

## Strategic plan 2021-22

	Strategic plan 2021-22			
	OBJECTIVES			
STRATEGIES	 <p><b>Provide safe church policy leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop national policy frameworks which are consistent with the highest expectations of legislative and regulatory requirements, community expectations and professional best practice</li> <li>• Provide tools and resources which are best practice exemplars which support implementation of policy and consistent use of process</li> <li>• Create opportunities for discussion and engagement on safe church issues</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Deliver a consistent approach to child safe education and training</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead the implementation of the National Child Safe Training Principles</li> <li>• Lead the delivery of the National Child Safe Curriculum</li> <li>• Facilitate the delivery of a national multi-model content delivery system</li> <li>• Lead the development of a national quality assurance process to review training</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Enhance Church governance for vulnerable people</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energise and inform conversations about Church governance for vulnerable people across the life of the Church</li> <li>• Provide information and awareness about the needs of vulnerable people</li> <li>• Provide leadership on risk assessment and management for vulnerable people</li> <li>• Provide leadership on reporting and quality assurance issues</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Provide leadership to further grow and sustain a safe church culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate on issues that impact on vulnerable people</li> <li>• Regular engagement with Church leaders</li> <li>• Influence behaviour changes across the Church</li> <li>• Promote a clear understanding of safe church culture</li> <li>• Secure appropriate investment in a safe church culture</li> <li>• Support sustainable resources management for the Unit</li> </ul>
	<p><b>PRIORITIES 2021-2022</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up to date policy frameworks for identified priority areas</li> <li>• Develop templates to support implementation of policies across Synods</li> <li>• Proactive participation with ecumenical partners</li> <li>• Active engagement in work related to child safety e.g. Disability Royal Commission</li> <li>• Intentional engagement program with agencies and schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the National Child Safe Training Principles</li> <li>• Support Synods to deliver the National Child Safe Curriculum</li> <li>• Support access for agencies and schools to the National Child Safe Curriculum</li> <li>• Support stakeholders across the life of the Church to access child safe training</li> <li>• Explore options for ecumenical partners to access UCA child safe training content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop materials and resources to support councils and boards</li> <li>• Engage Church leadership in issues specific to vulnerable people</li> <li>• Facilitate access to training for people in governance positions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver the communications and culture workplan</li> <li>• NSCU representatives are welcomed at key meetings</li> <li>• Create an understanding of expected safe church behaviours that is understood and supported across the Church</li> <li>• Regular financial and risk reporting provided to the NSCU Governance Committee</li> <li>• Leverage financial and other supports from Synods</li> </ul>

## Future opportunities and challenges

### ***Year 3 Review***

An internal review against the original scope, function, and responsibility settings of the NSCU (p.3) was agreed to be undertaken in its third year of operation. The review includes:

- Identification of work and activities delivered in the first three years of operation (what has been done)
- Value-add and cost benefit analysis (how has this improved the safety of children and young people across the life of the Church and what additional value has been created)
- Gap analysis (what hasn't the NSCU done that Synods would like it to do)
- Exploration of next steps (what can the NSCU do in the next two years to leverage work done and respond to identified gaps)
- Analysis of the responses of other ecumenical organisations to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

The review is being undertaken by the NSCU Governance Committee and will be reported to the Assembly Standing Committee and Synod Standing Committees. The report will provide the findings of the review and include recommendations about the future work of the NSCU, including how the work and experience of the NSCU can inform other activities that require a nationally consistent response from the UCA.

### ***National consistency***

The recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse identified that the lack of national consistency in decision making, oversight, policy, practice, and training in faith-based organisations had created child safety risks and opportunities for abuse to occur. This informed the establishment of a national response by the UCA in creating the NSCU.

Although the UCA works across the life of the Church and with stakeholder groups to develop nationally consistent resources, these resources are implemented within systems that are not national and are sometimes incongruent with each other.

### ***Safeguarding assurance project***

Through implementation of the resources developed by the NSCU and in collaboration with Synods, the UCA's approach to child safe has matured. Initially the focus was about keeping children and young people safe in all their interactions with the Church. We are now moving to a safeguarding approach, which is about providing resources and actions that uphold the wellbeing of children and supports them to flourish in all areas of their lives and to thrive as the people God calls them to be.

A national safeguarding framework and model has been created to capture safeguarding data from across the UCA. A pilot data capture will be undertaken with Synods in November. Analysis of this data will first help to establish a national data set as we seek to identify assurance as to what is working, what is not working and to examine gaps in resources and action. The purpose of this project is to provide certainty as to the Church's ongoing development as a "safe place for all people".

### ***Legislative landscape***

Australia's federation of states and territories poses the challenge of legislative difference for all organisations that work nationally. The NSCU works to map differences and inform stakeholders about likely legislative developments at state/territory and national levels that will impact on child safety for the UCA.

With regard to child safety, legislation sets thresholds for different elements such as what should and should not be reported. In seeking to strengthen our safe church culture, the NSCU continues to advocate for best practice responses and actions before thresholds are reached; that child safety is everyone's business and our people are empowered, informed and able to speak out if they see, hear or feel anything of concern.

### ***Ecumenical Landscape***

The NSCU maintains active connection with ecumenical partners and seeks to engage with them regularly with respect of ongoing development of Safe Church responsibilities. This extends to both bi-lateral engagement, and through the NCCA Safe Churches network. This collaborative engagement provides insight and feedback to the work the UCA is doing.

## Appendix 1: Key deliverables since establishment

2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Royal Commission engagement</li> <li>• UCA's commitment to implement learnings and recommendations</li> </ul>
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NSCU established April</li> <li>• Appointment of National Director and official launch August</li> <li>• Appointment of Governance Committee, Consultation Advisory Group and Safe Church Framework Implementation Group</li> <li>• Appointment of National Policy Adviser</li> <li>• <a href="#">UCA National Child Safe Policy Framework</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Principles of a Child Safe UCA</a></li> <li>• NSCU 2020-2022 Strategy</li> <li>• <a href="#">National Child Safe Collaboration Framework</a></li> </ul>
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources to support the governance of vulnerable people</li> <li>• UCA National Child Safe Curriculum</li> <li>• Establishment of the National Child Safe Education and Training Project Group</li> <li>• National policy frameworks to guide <a href="#">child safe recruitment of staff volunteers</a>, to <a href="#">manage persons of concern</a>, for safe engagement with children online</li> <li>• Re-branding of the NSCU and <a href="#">website launch</a></li> <li>• Communications strategy and resources</li> <li>• New resources to communicate the Principles of a Child Safe UCA in <a href="#">different languages</a></li> <li>• Establishment of an <a href="#">annual reporting framework</a> against the Principles of a Child Safe UCA</li> </ul>
2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unit 1 of the National Child Safe Training – Introduction to Child Safety in the UCA</li> <li>• Appointment of Communications Manager</li> <li>• Appointment of National Quality Lead</li> <li>• UCA Safeguarding Framework</li> <li>• UCA National Child Safe Week</li> <li>• Refreshed website</li> <li>• Launched Facebook page</li> </ul>