

# Armagh Observatory and Planetarium

## Safeguarding Policy

Policy Reference	CS1803	Version Control	V 2.0
Date Created	June 2018	First Review	June 2020
First Reviewers	L Brown L O'Neill		
Consultation Period	N/A		
Final Revisions		Last Update	August 2025
Date Approved	September 2025 (SPRC/Management Committee)	Next Review	September 2027

## **1 Introduction**

The policy describes the procedures in place in the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium (AOP) to ensure that vulnerable groups visiting enjoy the learning experiences as well as being safe and protected from harm.

**For the purposes of this Safeguarding policy the terms ‘child’ or ‘children’ include young people under 18 years of age, including those with disabilities, special needs or other vulnerabilities, as well as adults with disabilities, special needs or other vulnerabilities and others with identified special needs or potential greater exposure to risk of harm.**

This policy applies to all AOP staff. For the purposes of this policy, this includes staff employed by the organisation, senior management and members of committees, students, volunteers, and visiting academic staff, as well as students whose work at AOP is likely to involve working with vulnerable groups. The policy is reviewed periodically and is approved and endorsed by the senior management team and the Management Committee.

## **2 Policy**

AOP recognises that the welfare of a child or adult at risk is the paramount consideration in any decision made about them and that all participants without exception have the right to protection from abuse and bullying regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexuality or beliefs. AOP is committed to promoting an atmosphere of inclusion, transparency and openness, and will not tolerate any form of abuse wherever it occurs or whoever is responsible. In order to achieve this, AOP will:

1. ensure that staff are aware of the Safeguarding policy;
2. provide a code of behaviour for staff on their conduct towards children;
3. provide clear step-by-step guidance on what to do should an allegation of abuse be made and clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Designated Officers and staff for recording and reporting any such allegations;
4. provide Safeguarding training within six months of appointment and to all relevant staff every two years;
5. ensure that safe recruitment, selection and vetting procedures are in place;
6. provide parents, group leaders and any other interested parties with information on the Safeguarding policy when visiting the premises and/or when children are undertaking guided tours of AOP and
7. review the Safeguarding policy at regular intervals, at least once every two years to ensure that it remains effective and modify the provisions where necessary.

## **3 Definition of Abuse and Bullying**

Abuse has been defined in ‘Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland 2017 as:

1. physical abuse - deliberate physical injury to a child or the wilful or neglected failure to prevent physical injury or suffering;
2. emotional abuse - where children are persistently or severely neglected or rejected;
3. sexual abuse - where children are encouraged or forced to observe or take part in any form of sexual activity;
4. neglect - where children’s physical and/or psychological needs are persistently or severely neglected or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger.
5. Exploitation - the intentional ill-treatment, manipulation or abuse of power and control over a child or young person; to take selfish or unfair advantage of a child or young person or situation, for personal gain.

Forms of adult abuse are:

1. physical abuse - including hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, burning, misuse of medication, inappropriate restraint or disciplining a person in an inappropriate way;
2. psychological abuse - including emotional abuse, verbal abuse, humiliation, bullying, or the use of threats;
3. financial or material abuse - including theft, fraud, exploitation, pressure in connection with wills, property or inheritance or financial transactions, or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits;
4. sexual abuse - direct or indirect sexual activity where the vulnerable adult cannot or does not give his or her consent;
5. neglect or acts of omission - withdrawing or not giving the help that a vulnerable adult needs, so causing them to suffer;
6. discriminatory abuse - abusing a person because of their ethnic origin, religion, language, age, sexuality, gender or disability;
7. institutional abuse - abuse or mistreatment by a regime or by any individual within any building where care is provided.

Bullying is “the repeated use of power by one or more persons intentionally to harm, hurt or adversely affect the rights and needs of another or others”. Whilst not defined as abuse, in its more extreme form it would be regarded as a form of abuse. Kidscape ([www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)) identifies the main types as:

1. Emotional: e.g. excluding, being unfriendly;
2. Physical: e.g. hitting, kicking, theft;
3. Racist: e.g. racial taunts, graffiti, gestures;
4. Sexual: e.g. unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive comments;
5. Homophobic: e.g. focusing on the issue of sexuality;
6. Verbal: e.g. name calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, teasing;
7. Cyber: e.g. text messages, picture/video and phone calls, e-mail, websites.

#### **4 Code of Behaviour**

This Code of Behaviour has been drafted to provide staff with confidence to carry out their role and develop positive working relationships with vulnerable groups. It is impossible to lay down hard and fast rules to cover all circumstances in which staff interrelate with children or where opportunities for their conduct to be misconstrued might occur. In all circumstances, the professional judgement of staff has to be exercised.

All actions concerning children must uphold the best interest of the child as a primary consideration. Staff must always be mindful of the fact that they hold a position of trust and that their behaviour towards children in their charge must be above reproach. The Code of Behaviour and advice to staff in this policy are not intended to detract from the enriching experiences that children gain from a positive interaction with staff, but rather to assist staff in respect of the complex issue of child abuse by drawing attention to the areas of risk for staff and providing guidance on prudent conduct.

**Physical Contact with Children** - Staff are advised not to make unnecessary physical contact with children. This may be misconstrued. The following general principles should be considered:

1. Physical contact or touch should always be in response to the child’s need.
2. Touch should always be appropriate to the age and stage of development of the child.
3. Staff should not physically restrain a child unless in exceptional circumstances, and

in all such cases any physical constraint must be appropriate and reasonable, otherwise your action could be defined as assault. Examples where physical constraint is appropriate would include:

- the prevention of physical injury to the child, other children, visitors or staff;
  - the prevention of damage to any property; and
  - the prevention or stopping of the commission of an offence.
4. Staff who administer first-aid to a child should ensure wherever possible that this is done in the presence of other children or another adult. However, no member of staff should hesitate to provide first-aid in an emergency simply because another person is not present.
  5. Staff should not engage in rough, physical games including horseplay with children, make sexually suggestive comments to or within earshot of a child, or do things of a personal nature for children that they can do for themselves or that their parent or group leader can do for them.

**Relationships and Attitudes** - Staff should ensure that their relationships with children are appropriate to the age, maturity and gender of the children, taking care that their conduct does not give rise to comment or speculation. Attitudes, demeanour and language all require care and thought.

**Time Alone with Children** - Staff should seek to avoid the following situations:

1. Spending time alone with children unless he or she can be clearly seen by others.
2. Having children on their own in a vehicle unless in an emergency. In such circumstances you should ensure that another member of staff or other adult is aware of the circumstances and knows where you are going.
3. Going into a toilet with children unless another adult is present or gives permission.

**Work-Experience and Other Educational Programs** - In certain circumstances young people between 15 and 18 years of age attend AOP to engage in work experience and other educational programs. This will usually entail the use of a computer, with an internet connection, which is located in a public area. Some staff will be required to work on a one-to-one basis with the young people. Staff should always ensure that:

1. The young person is given the appropriate level of supervision and does not undertake activities that are contrary to the Young Persons Health and Safety Risk Assessment.
2. Parents and the young person's school are aware of the activities being undertaken and have given their permission;
3. Application forms are completed by the young person and a copy of the Safeguarding Policy is sent to their parent; and
4. Wherever possible, the young person works in an open area freely accessible and in the view of others.

## **E-Safety**

'E-safety' is defined as the safe and responsible use of technology. This includes the use of the internet and other means of communication using electronic media (e.g. text messages, gaming devices, email etc). It is mainly concerned with the safeguarding of children and young people in the digital world and educating them, so they feel safe when accessing e-technologies.

## **Online risks - the '4 C's'**

While there are many benefits of children and young people going online e.g. learning new things,

getting help with homework or connecting with friends and family, they also face many risks. These risks fall into four categories commonly known as the '4 C's':

1. Content - the child/young person is exposed to harmful material e.g. aggressive material, sexualised material, or websites which advocate unhealthy or dangerous behaviour.
2. Contact - the child/young person participates in adult initiated online activity e.g. accepting friends who may not be who they say they are or the child/young person experiencing grooming, sexual abuse or exploitation by an adult.
3. Conduct - the child/young person is a perpetrator or victim in peer-to-peer exchange e.g. bullying or harassment from one young person to another, sexting, or providing misleading information or advice to peers.
4. Commercial - the child/young person is exposed to inappropriate commercial advertising, marketing schemes or hidden costs e.g. financial scams or online gambling.

Appropriate social media use and e-safety is addressed within the AOP Social Media Policy.

### **Bailey House**

Rooms in the Bailey House are reserved for adult students and visitors. Children and young people under the age of 18 are not allowed to stay in the Bailey House.

### **Review**

It is prudent for all staff to reappraise their working styles, relationships with children and their manner and approach to individual children to ensure that they give no grounds for doubt about their intentions, in the minds of their colleagues, children, parents or educational supervisors.

### **Allegations**

Where an allegation against a member of staff over their conduct has occurred, an investigation will be carried out in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Staff and Students. AOP also has a Whistleblowing Policy. If the investigation finds that the member of staff has acted inappropriately, or not acted in the best interests of the child, the Disciplinary Policy will be invoked.

## **5 Reporting Procedures**

The procedures in place for reporting suspected or alleged abuse are included in Section 12.

## **6 Selection, Training and Supervision**

**Selection** - Armagh Observatory and Planetarium has developed clearly defined recruitment and selection procedures for staff and students employed by the organisation. The procedures contain the following main elements:

1. the roles, duties, key skills and experience of any new staff member are clearly defined and set out in job information sheets supplied with application forms;
2. posts are advertised as widely as possible;
3. application forms must be completed by all applicants for posts. The application form is designed to allow applicants to provide all relevant details including personal information, education, work experience, suitability for the post and referees. All applicants are required to declare any past criminal convictions, as well as declaring if they have ever been the subject of an adult or child abuse investigation;
4. a selection committee, comprising of at least three members and selected from different community backgrounds and genders, wherever practicable, is appointed to short-list and interview candidates for posts. Short-listing and interview criteria are

- drawn up and candidates ranked accordingly;
5. forms of identification are obtained;
  6. all new staff undergo the induction process, which includes initial training in Safeguarding and receiving a copy of the Safeguarding Policy;
  7. all successful candidates for 'regulated' posts will initially have to undergo an enhanced disclosure check through Access NI as a condition of their employment.

Regulated posts for the purposes of this policy are the posts of Director, Head of Education and Outreach, Operations Manager, Education Officers and Museums Officer.

**Training** - Armagh Observatory and Planetarium will provide a copy of this policy to all members of staff when they first join the organisation and new staff will undergo training on Safeguarding issues during induction.

Training to enable effective implementation of the policy and to ensure awareness of the issues will be provided to staff every two years. A record of those who have attended the training is kept on file. Training will also be provided for members of the AOP Management Committee.

**Supervision** - The Director is responsible for ensuring that their staff are aware of and adhere to the provisions of this policy and that sufficient supervision is provided for children.

## **7 Lost and Found Children**

A complete written record, including the actions taken must be made, whenever a child, as defined in this policy, is lost or found. The report should be submitted as soon as possible to the Designated Officer.

### **Lost**

1. Obtain as full details as possible of the child's name, age, name of parent or person responsible for the child, name and address of school, or other contact address, contact telephone number and physical description of the child.
2. On receipt of this information ask another member of staff to conduct a search of the premises and grounds. Ask the Planetarium staff to announce over the Planetarium's public address system that a child appears to be missing.
3. Reassure the person who reported the missing child that action is being taken to locate the child.
4. Where the search does not locate the child inform the person who reported the matter and contact the local police at 101.

### **Found**

1. Reassure the child.
2. If anyone else is with the child, ask them to remain with you or ask another member of staff to stay with you. If this is not practicable ensure that you are in a public area where you can be seen or heard.
3. Obtain all relevant details of the child.
4. Ask another member of staff to conduct a search of the premises and grounds for the parents or other adult in charge. Ask the Planetarium staff to announce over the Planetarium's public address system that a missing person has been found.
5. If you cannot contact the parents or person in charge, telephone the home or school or other contact address.
6. In the event that the parent or person in charge of the child cannot be contacted telephone the local police at 101.

## 8 Health and Safety

As part of the overall duty to protect children from all harm, staff must be fully aware of the procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency evacuation, outbreak of fire or an accident. These procedures are included in the AOP Health and Safety Policy.

In addition, the following arrangements are in place to ensure the health and safety of young people working in the AOP:

**Arrival** - The supervisor will ensure that, on arrival, a copy of the Health and Safety Policy and Procedures is provided. As well as demonstrating the main health and safety procedures, the relevant Officer will draw particular attention to the obligations of staff towards health and safety in the workplace.

**Supervision** - The supervisor will ensure that the appropriate level of supervision is provided, taking into account the young person's lack of experience in the working environment.

**General** - Children must only undertake activities that involve negligible risk of harm to the individual or where adequate safety supervision is in place to ensure that the child is not exposed to an unacceptable risk. In some cases the activity must not occur at all, for example children are not permitted under any circumstances to operate power tools or to assist in electrical work requiring technical knowledge and experience.

**Responsibilities of Parents/Leaders in Charge of Children** - Whilst AOP will make every effort to ensure that children visiting the premises and grounds are protected from harm, the primary responsibility for the welfare of children rests with parents/group leaders in charge.

In particular parents and group leaders should ensure:

1. They have adequate supervision in accordance with recommended requirements, namely:
  - 0–2 Years, 1 adult to 3 children;
  - 2–3 Years, 1 adult to 4 children;
  - 4–8 years, 1 adult to 6 children;
  - 9–12 years – 1 adult to 8 children
  - 13–18 years – 1 adult to 10 children
2. They supervise children at all times.
3. In case of an accident, contact a member of staff who will follow accident procedures.
4. They refrain from possessing or consuming alcoholic beverages, smoking or using proscribed drugs on the premises and grounds.
5. They refrain from verbally or physically abusing a child or another adult.
6. There is no vandalism of AOP property.
7. They only access public areas.
8. There is adequate insurance cover for a group and its leaders.
9. They carry any necessary medicine for children.
10. They do not use threatening, abusive or violent behaviour.
11. They inform their group of the standards of behaviour expected of all visitors to AOP.

In the event that any of the above are not followed, AOP reserves the right to refuse admission and/or ask the persons or groups to leave.

## 9. Policy Dissemination

The Safeguarding Policy will be placed on the AOP website. Every effort will be made to ensure that groups are advised of the policy prior to their visit. In the case of visitors or volunteers, the host member of staff is required to exercise judgement in drawing the Safeguarding Policy to the attention of the visitor or volunteer. If in doubt whether this is necessary, the member of staff should seek advice in advance of the visit from a Designated Officer (see Section 13). A copy

of the policy will be retained on Sharepoint/Staff resources/approved policies.

## 10. Monitoring and Evaluation

The Safeguarding Policy will be reviewed at least once every 2 years to ensure that it remains effective and to modify the provisions where necessary. Feedback will be obtained from staff following training sessions and following periodic e-mail requests to remind staff to review the Safeguarding Policy and to be aware continually to reappraise their working styles and relationships with children. Actions taken in response to this feedback will be recorded.

## 11. Legal Context

The legislative framework for Northern Ireland's child protection system is set out in The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. This sets out parental responsibilities and rights and the duties and powers public authorities have to support children. The Order redefined previous parental rights over children as parental responsibility. It has widened the scope of being able to acquire parental responsibility to other carers such as grandparents and aunts or uncles, or local social services. The Order provides the legal context for the State to intervene to protect children from significant harm.

The creation of the regional Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) was set out in law in the Safeguarding Board Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. This also established five Safeguarding Panels to support the SBNI's work at a Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) level.

The Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 requires public authorities to co-operate in contributing to the wellbeing of children and young people, in the areas of:

- physical and mental health
- enjoyment of play and leisure
- learning and achievement
- living conditions, rights, and economic wellbeing.

Under Section 5 of the Criminal Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1967, it is an offence not to report a 'relevant offence' to the police. This includes offences against children.

The Sexual Offences (NI) Order 2008 brought NI in line with legislation in England and Wales and introduced some new offences and increased tariffs for those who harm children. The Order also established the age of sexual consent for NI as 16, to bring NI into line with the rest of the UK.

In Northern Ireland, the Department of Health has published [Co-operating to safeguard children and young people in Northern Ireland](#) (Department of Health, 2017). Section 3.8 sets out how voluntary, charitable, faith and community-based organisations should contribute to keep children safe.

The [regional core child protection policies and procedures for Northern Ireland](#) explain what actions people who work with children should take if they have concerns about a child or young person's welfare (Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, 2021).

As a registered charity, AOP also follows the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance - [Safeguarding legislation and guidance for charities](#).

**Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007 (as amended by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012)** - The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007

makes provision for checking persons seeking to work with children or vulnerable adults, and for barring those considered to be unsuitable for such posts, whether in paid employment or voluntary work. Similar legislation, the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, is in place for England and Wales.

**Protection of Freedoms Act 2012** - From September 2012, there have been changes to safeguarding arrangements in relation to vetting in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, arising from the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, which amends the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order. This includes a new and more limited definition of regulated activity. This new definition is intended to reduce the number and scope of positions which are eligible for a criminal record check with Barred List information. The DBS decides whether it is appropriate for a person to be placed on or removed from a barred list and maintains the DBS children's barred list and the DBS adults' barred list for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

## **12. Reporting Procedures**

All concerns and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously by management and staff and responded to in accordance with this policy. Suspected or alleged abuse is a serious matter which should always be followed up with immediate action. The sooner the action is taken, the more likely it is that the abuse will stop, and the child will recover from their experiences.

1. record a disclosure of abuse made by a child to a member of staff or the suspicions a member of staff has about a child being abused;
2. seek advice from and report incidents to the relevant statutory agencies and the Management Committee as appropriate;
3. record all actions taken;
4. ensure that all written records in relation to safeguarding children issues are securely and confidentially filed;
5. keep up to date with relevant legislation and best practice; and
6. coordinate training and awareness of staff in safeguarding issues.

An incident log containing the reporting procedures and forms, advice on how to deal with a report of abuse and relevant contact details is kept in Sharepoint/Staff resources/useful info.

## **Direct Disclosure**

### **If a direct disclosure is made, staff should always**

- stay calm;
- record what has been said in the incident log as soon as possible;
- remain sensitive and calm;
- reassure the child that they are safe, right to tell, are not to blame, and are being taken seriously;
- let the child talk — this is not an interview — this will be carried out by specially trained persons;
- listen and give the person time to say what they want;
- ensure a positive experience;
- explain that the disclosure must be reported to the Designated Officer, but confidentiality will be maintained;
- tell the child what will happen next in a supportive manner; and
- involve and report to the Designated Officers as soon as possible.

### **Staff should never**

- question unless for clarification;
- make promises you cannot keep;
- rush into actions that may be inappropriate;
- make/pass a judgement on the person disclosing or on the alleged abuser; and
- take sole responsibility for action. Consult the Designated Officers so you can begin to protect the child and gain support for yourself.

### **Initial Actions**

Staff have a responsibility to report any suspected abuse to a Designated Officer:

- Head of Corporate Services
- Head of Education and Outreach
- Operations Manager
- Senior Education Officers

Try to have the following important information recorded on the incident form:

1. the name and address of any child you are concerned about;
2. the nature of any abuse;
3. the need for medical attention (if any);
4. the reason for suspicion of abuse;
5. what has already been done;
6. any practical information you may have, such as the name of the child's doctor or General Practitioner, school etc. and
7. information as to whether or not the person against whom a suspicion, complaint or allegation exists, has any children of his or her own.

**It is mandatory that the Department for Communities (DfC) should be kept informed of any Safeguarding incidents. The DfC Safeguarding Champion is Mr John McCord (Contact Tel: 028-9051 2779; E-mail: john.mccord@communities-ni.gov.uk). Correspondence should also be copied to Mr Damien Brady, DfC Equality Officer (Contact Tel: 028-9082-3440; E-mail: damien.brady@communities-ni.gov.uk).**

### **Confidentiality**

Staff must ensure that every effort is made to keep any information received confidential and to communicate information only on a need-to-know basis. Staff should:

1. not make promises to keep secrets to anyone passing on information, the general legal principle being that the welfare of the child is paramount and that considerations of confidentiality should not be allowed to override the right of children to be protected from harm;
2. pass any information to the Designated Officers, and leave it to them to take any further action;
3. not discuss the information reported with other members of staff who are not directly involved; and
4. not make direct contact with the family of a child whom the relevant statutory agencies have deemed to have been abused.

### 13. Further Information

The table provides some relevant initial contact points so far as Safeguarding is concerned.

Contact Point	Telephone Number
<p><b>AOP Designated Officers</b> - Members of staff who have been designated as having responsibility for supporting staff in issues of child protection and safeguarding adults at risk.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sinead Mackle (Head of Education &amp; Outreach)</li> <li>• Jessica Moon (Operations Manager)</li> <li>• Heather Alexander (Senior Education Officer)</li> <li>• Ria McDonnell (Senior Education Officer)</li> </ul>	028 37523689
<p><b>DfC Safeguarding Champion</b> - Mr John McCord</p>	028 90823463
<p><b>DfC Safeguarding Officer</b> – Damian Brady/Neil Warren</p>	
<p><b>DfC Equality Officer</b> - Damien Brady/Neill Warren</p>	028 90829401
<p><b>Health and Social Care Trust Gateway Teams</b></p> <p>Belfast HSC Trust Gateway Team</p> <p>Northern HSC Trust Gateway Team</p> <p>South-Eastern Trust Gateway Team</p> <p>Southern HSC Trust Gateway Team</p> <p>Western HSC Trust Gateway Team</p>	<p>028 90507000</p> <p>028 70325462</p> <p>030 01000300</p> <p>080 07837745</p> <p>028 1314090</p>
<p><b>Out of Hours Contact</b></p> <p>There will be a recorded message at each of the above numbers which will provide Emergency Out of Hours numbers</p>	028 95049999
<p><b>Adult Safeguarding Contacts — Health and Social Care Trusts</b></p> <p>Belfast HSC Trust</p> <p>Northern HSC Trust</p> <p>South-Eastern Trust</p> <p>Southern HSC Trust</p> <p>Western HSC Trust</p>	<p>028 95041744</p> <p>028 25635512</p> <p>028 92665181</p> <p>028 37412334</p> <p>028 82835980</p>
<p><b>Social Services</b></p> <p>Out of Hours Emergency Contact for all HSC Trusts</p>	028 95049999
<p><b>NI Anti-Bullying Forum</b></p>	<a href="http://ncb.org.uk">ncb.org.uk</a>
<p><b>NI Commissioner for Children &amp; Young People</b></p>	<a href="mailto:info@niccy.org">info@niccy.org</a>
<p><b>NSPCC Child Protection Helpline</b></p>	0808 800 5000
<p><b>Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)</b></p> <p>Emergency</p> <p>Non-Emergency and General Enquiries</p>	<p>999</p> <p>101</p>
<p><b>Volunteer Now</b></p>	028 90232020