

volunteering

ireland



VOLT network

VOLT WORKING GROUP

REPORT ON

VOLUNTEER VETTING

AND

VOLUNTEER SCREENING

JUNE 2004

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1. INTRODUCTION

VOLT (Volunteer Organisers Linking Together) is the Irish network of managers, both voluntary and paid, who spend the majority of their time co-ordinating the work of volunteers. The network aims to provide mutual support, share knowledge and experience about good practice in volunteer management, and is the voice of the volunteer coordinator in Ireland. VOLT has a national steering committee with representatives from across Ireland. It organises national events, regional meetings, and promotes other ways of networking. VOLT is administered and facilitated by Volunteering Ireland in partnership with National Irish Bank.

The first national VOLT conference was held on 20 May 2003 in Dublin, and provided a unique forum for networking, information sharing and learning. The conference included a master session entitled **Risk Proof Your Volunteer Programme** delivered by Linda Graff, a well known Canadian author and trainer in the field of volunteer management. The master session was followed by four discussion groups on different volunteer management topics, including a workshop on volunteer screening.

In response to this workshop and the concerns expressed by volunteer coordinators in relation to Garda vetting and volunteer screening, a working group was set up to explore the issue of Garda vetting. The terms of reference were as follows:

- To establish what is the current situation regarding volunteer screening/vetting in Ireland.
- To examine how this compares with the situation in other EU/EEA countries.
- To clarify confusion about the appropriate use of Garda clearance, including what constitutes low-risk and high-risk volunteer situations.

The working group met on a number of occasions and this document is a report on their work (see Appendix 1 for list of working group members).

2. VETTING

Vetting is one of a range of tools that can be used by an organisation to screen volunteers as well as employees, and ensure that the right person is matched to the right job.

The dictionary definition of vetting is 'the practice of subjecting to thorough examination or evaluation' (www.dictionary.com). In the context of volunteers and of this report, vetting means carrying out a Garda criminal records check on a potential volunteer.

The advantage of vetting is that it may reduce the recruitment of volunteers who are unsuitable to work with children and other vulnerable adults. The availability of vetting can also act as a deterrent to those with criminal convictions. With the recent high profile cases such as the tragic Soham murders, organisations are anxious to ensure that they do everything in their power to ensure that they have taken every reasonable precaution to protect vulnerable service users from harm.

Duty of care requires that you do everything 'reasonable' within your power to protect others from harm. Thus, if an organisation involves volunteers working with vulnerable people, part of their duty of care is to vet volunteers. Organisations need to look carefully at their client group and volunteer roles to decide whether vetting is necessary, and a risk assessment needs to be done to decide whether clients may be at risk if volunteers are not vetted (Volunteering England 2004).

In exercising their *duty of care* to their clients, volunteer-involving organisations examine risks involved in their service provision. Part of the risk management process is to ensure that all employees and volunteers are suitable to work with their client groups. Whether criminal records checks would be considered necessary depends on the vulnerability of the client group, and the level of contact the employee or volunteer has with them.

However, vetting is only one element of an effective volunteer recruitment and selection process. The issue of child protection is very much to the fore when it comes to discussing the necessity of Garda vetting; however there are other groups which volunteer involving organisations work with that are deemed to be vulnerable, such as the elderly or people with disabilities.

Despite the recommendations listed in the White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity (2002), there is a clear discrepancy in the provision of Garda vetting for paid staff, and the unavailability of the same vetting to volunteers working in the same settings and with the same client groups. This is a major barrier to volunteer involvement.

The absence of a system of volunteer vetting where it is necessary and appropriate, is a major stumbling block to the further development of volunteering and restricts the scope of volunteer involvement.

3. POLICE CLEARANCE: WHEN IS IT NECESSARY?

The group addressed the issue of when volunteer vetting is considered necessary. While the working group advocates the availability of vetting for volunteers, it is essential that a common sense approach to this is undertaken. Volunteer-involving organisations are advised to undertake a risk assessment of each volunteer role, and on the basis of this risk assessment, determine if Garda vetting is appropriate and necessary.

The working group advocated that a vetting procedure should be available for all volunteers working in the following high risk situations:

High risk volunteer situations:

- Volunteers whose role involves direct contact with children or vulnerable adults* and whose activities include regularly training, supervising or being in sole charge of children and/or vulnerable individuals or groups.
- Volunteers whose role involves a substantial element of trust.
- Volunteers whose role puts them in a position of power with vulnerable clients (e.g. could include help line volunteers dealing with emotionally vulnerable service users).
- Volunteers whose role involves access to highly valuable property/money (e.g. valuable museum artefacts, organisational finances).

*Vulnerable adults:

Adults with a learning or physical disability, a sensory impairment, or who are deemed vulnerable by virtue of :

- The need to avail of the volunteer service
- Reliance on others for personal care
- Volunteer having a position of power and trust
- Inability to communicate concerns

The working group have recommended that each organisation develop clear role descriptions outlining the tasks involved in the volunteer role. This will assist in determining whether the volunteer role will involve high risk situations.

Vetting is not considered a priority in low-risk volunteer situations.

Low risk volunteer situations:

- No contact with clients/vulnerable groups
- No access to finances/valuables

- No access to confidential information

4. THE CURRENT SITUATION ON VETTING IN IRELAND

4.1 CRIMINAL RECORDS CHECKS, REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Garda Vetting: In the Republic of Ireland, Garda vetting is carried out by the Garda Síochána, through the Central Vetting Unit based in Garda Headquarters, Dublin. The service runs a criminal records check based on the applicant's details, and informs the requesting agency if there are any convictions recorded against the applicant in Ireland or in the UK.

To date, Garda clearances are only issued for prospective full-time healthcare employees who are employed directly by the health boards, and who have substantial access to children or vulnerable adults.

The procedure for Garda vetting in the Republic of Ireland:

Step 1: The organisation applies to the Central Vetting Unit to become a registered agency.

Step 2: Potential employees complete a Garda enquiry form, which bears the logo and contact details of the registered agency. The Garda enquiry form requests details of the applicants name, any previous names they have been known by, date of birth, current address and any previous addresses. It is signed and dated by the applicant.

Step 3: The Garda enquiry form is signed by an authorised signatory of the registered agency and is submitted with a stamped addressed envelope to the Central Vetting Unit for processing. The Central Vetting Unit maintains a list of authorised signatories and copies of the signatures. Enquiries will only be processed on applicants who have disclosed previous addresses within the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Step 4: After enquiry by the Central Vetting Unit, the form will be returned to the agency stating whether there are convictions. (For full details of possible responses see An Garda Síochána Central Vetting Unit, Disclosure of Criminal Convictions; guidelines for non-police agencies are available from CVU, Garda HQ Phoenix Park, Dublin. Phone: 01 666 0000, Website www.garda.ie).

There is no provision for the above Garda checks for volunteers, students or part-time staff in the Republic of Ireland.

4.2 PRE EMPLOYMENT CONSULTANCY SERVICE (PECS) CHECK, NORTHERN IRELAND

Organisations in the Republic of Ireland can register with the Northern Ireland Pre Employment Consultancy Service (PECS), which is available to any statutory, voluntary, community or private sector organisation which meets the following criteria:

- Positions, paid or unpaid, which involve substantial access to children or adults with a learning disability
- The organisation has demonstrated that it is not possible to eliminate substantial access, e.g. changes in management and supervision arrangements.
- The organisation has demonstrated that its protection policy for children and adults with a learning disability, and its recruitment and selection procedures, comply as far as possible with the principles set out in the recommended Volunteer Development Agency publication on child protection, *Our Duty to Care* (Volunteer Development Agency, 2000).

Exclusions: the PECS check is not available for vetting employees or volunteers for positions involving contact with any other vulnerable groups, e.g. people with a mental illness, a physical disability or the elderly. In addition, PECS is only made available for applicants to whom a conditional offer has been made, and not for short-listed applicants.

Information provided by PECS

Criminal Records: details of all convictions, cautions and bind-overs (bind over: to hold on bail for trial or for further inquiry) which have occurred within the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

PECS register: This contains the names of people who have been reported to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (N. Ireland) by their employers because their behaviour at work put children or adults with a learning disability at risk of harm, and indicated that they would not be suitable for such work in the future. People may be reported for all types of abuse including sexual abuse, violence and drug-related matters.

The Department of Health register and List 99 are also available in Northern Ireland as a resource for vetting potential employees / volunteers.

Department of Health register (UK): This register is similar to the PECS register and supplies details of the reported person and the name of the reporting organisation; it is up to the organisation to follow this up for further information. However, neither the PECS register nor this register will give you details of *why* the person is on the register.

List 99: A UK-wide list drawn up by the Department of Education and Employment (UK) of people who are legally debarred from working in schools.

As stated above, the PECS check can be employed as a vetting tool by organisations in the case of volunteers applying for a volunteer position in the Republic of Ireland, but who have previously lived in Northern Ireland. The application must be accompanied by a volunteer role description clearly outlining the access the potential volunteer will have to children or to adults with a learning disability.

While it is encouraging to note that the PECS facility recognises that it is equally valid to run checks on volunteers with the same access as employees to children or adults with a learning disability, the service is limited in the Republic of Ireland as it only applies to applicants who have previously lived in Northern Ireland.

4.3 DATA PROTECTION ACT 2003

When going through the screening and vetting process, organisations should be aware that personal data supplied to any organisation is for the specified purpose only (i.e. vetting of potential applicants). It must not be disclosed to any unauthorised person. The onus is on the organisation to ensure that the information is appropriately used and stored.

Information on criminal convictions/proceedings is considered sensitive personal data under the Data Protection Act 2003. For fair processing of this information, a legitimising purpose must be established.

4.4 CRIMINAL RECORDS: A BARRIER TO VOLUNTEERING?

The United Nations Declaration on Volunteering affirms that volunteering is not an exclusive activity; that all people are entitled to volunteer (UN 2001).

Accordingly, the existence of a criminal record should not necessarily prevent a person from engaging in voluntary activity.

It is the responsibility of each volunteer-involving organisation to decide, on a case-by-case basis, the criminal records that would prevent the recruitment of a potential volunteer in different roles within the organisation. Issues to consider are:

- The nature and seriousness of the offence
- How recently the offence was committed
- The possibility of its re-occurrence
- The element of risk
- The type of volunteer role and the person specification

‘There is a major concern that organisations may shy away from taking on individuals with any kind of criminal record at all. This could result in a huge amount of wasted potential’ (Volunteering England 2004).

5. VETTING OF VOLUNTEERS OUTSIDE THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

The following information was gathered by the working group through contacting national embassies and volunteer centres in other countries. It is evident that the availability of police checks for volunteers varies greatly between countries.

In some **European countries** volunteer vetting is mandatory for many positions, and support measures are in place to assist volunteers or organisations to access a vetting service. This is principally the case in the countries of the North of Europe where volunteering has a long tradition, and investment in the volunteering infrastructure by Government is also well-established (e.g. the UK, Netherlands and Norway). In other countries, the law states that in theory, volunteer vetting for certain positions must take place. However, in practice, observance of the law is limited because there is no statutory accompanying support measures to help organisations and volunteers meet the costs of police vetting. CEV (European Volunteer Centre) and AVSO (Association of Voluntary Service Organisations) recently carried out a detailed research study into the legal position of volunteers in twenty countries of the current and future European Union. Ireland compares poorly to our European neighbours in relation to government structures and mechanisms that support volunteering, (www.cev.be/legal_status.htm).

In the **USA** there is no legal requirement to conduct criminal history record checks for most nonprofit organizations offering services to children, dependent elderly or people with disabilities. However, there are exceptions where criminal history record checks are required, such as contractual requirements, licensed services and insurance requirements. Most States permit access to their criminal history records for nonprofit organisations to vet employees and volunteers. The laws and regulations of each State governs access to this type of information. However, State record checks usually are limited to offences committed within that State.

In **Canada**, volunteer vetting is easily accessed through fingerprinting, and in **Australia**, as in the USA, the system varies between States.

(See Appendix 2 for a full list of vetting available in countries outside of Ireland.)

6. GOOD PRACTICE: TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Despite the fact that volunteering is a well-established tradition in Ireland which makes an unquestionably significant contribution to society and the economy, Ireland currently lags behind its Northern European neighbours in terms of legislation and statutory commitment to the voluntary sector. There is currently no national policy on volunteering. The need for regulation of voluntary activity and the need to put in place a national volunteer policy were highlighted by both the White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity (DSCFA, 2000) and the Tipping the Balance Report to Government (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002).

Volunteer-involving organisations look to agencies such as Volunteering Ireland, based in Dublin and the Volunteer Development Agency in Belfast for advice and training with regard to all volunteer management issues and best practice.

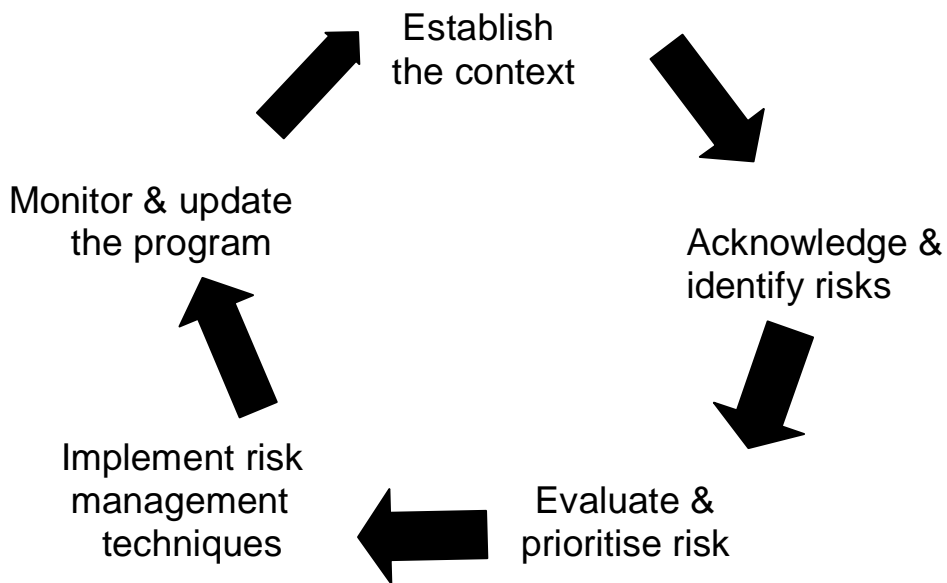
In relation to the legal status of volunteers in Ireland, there are currently no specific pieces of legislation that apply to volunteers.

As Garda vetting for volunteers in Ireland is not facilitated, the highest standards in terms of other recruitment and selection practices must be applied. The following are tools that can be used by volunteer involving organisations:

6.1 RISK ASSESSMENT

Risk assessment is at the heart of effective volunteer screening. It's about identifying potential risks in the involvement of volunteers and consequently developing strategies that will prevent or eliminate the risk.

Risk Management Process



The Risk Management Process is a series of five steps:

1. Establish the context
2. Acknowledge and identify the risks
3. Evaluate and prioritise risk
4. Implement risk management techniques
5. Monitor and update the program

The process enables you to systematically identify and prioritise risks facing the organisation and take action to prevent or reduce the risks facing people, property, finances and goodwill.

(www.nonprofitrisk.org)

6.2 ROLE DESCRIPTIONS AND ORGANISATIONAL INFORMATION

This is the first stage in any screening and selection procedure. By providing accurate information about your organisation and the tasks to be done, you enable potential volunteers to undertake a process of self-selection to see if they would be interested in, and suitable for, working with your organisation.

A role description is beneficial as it provides clarity about roles and boundaries within the organisation. Using a role description creates fairness when recruiting volunteers. It helps the organisation plan for the new volunteer's arrival (induction, training, resources etc). Additionally, it can be used as a basis for ongoing supervision and evaluation of volunteers.

(See Appendix 3 for sample of designing a role description worksheet)

6.3 APPLICATION FORMS AND CVS

These allow the organisation to gain administrative details (name, address etc) as well as asking questions about people's experience and their reasons for wanting to volunteer. Application forms, unlike CVs, ensure that everyone is treated the same way and that the same information is gathered from all. Forms can be completed before, during or after an interview. Remember that written forms can be off-putting for people with literacy problems or for those with poor English.

(See Appendix 4 for sample application form)

6.4 SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

It is considered good practice to use documentation that will assist in ensuring that both the volunteer and the organisation have a clear understanding of roles, expectations, commitment, boundaries and what is appropriate conduct in terms of confidentiality. Forms that address confidentiality and provide an opportunity for self disclosure should be used.

The three main issues of concern that ought be included in any such form are an agreement, a declaration and the issue of confidentiality. Each will need to be taken, expanded and adapted to the explicit needs of the individual

organisation. Caution also must be taken with putting into an agreement too many commitments regarding the obligations of the organisation. Too general and blanket a statement along the lines of “we will provide adequate training and resources to the volunteer” are difficult to quantify and thus hard to defend if a volunteer claims that the training received was not adequate to their particular need.

(See Appendix 5 for sample).

6.5 INTERVIEWS

The purpose of a screening interview is to learn more about the potential volunteer’s skills, abilities, interests and experience. Interviews, which can be individual or group sessions, should always be regarded as a two-way process, in which the organisation and the volunteer can find out about each other’s suitability. Make interviews as informal as possible; putting people at ease will ensure you get the best out of them.

‘The interview is one of the most efficient ways of giving and getting relevant information, especially when the information involves ‘soft’ skills or qualities rather than factual issues. An interview accommodates the two-way nature of volunteer selection, allowing the volunteer to ask questions and form opinions about the organisation and the work as well as vice versa’ (Volunteer Development Agency, 2001).

Volunteer synchronicity offers the following suggestions when interviewing potential volunteers.

1. Prepare for the interview, ensure you have allocated enough time for the interview and that there are no interruptions during the interview.
2. Utilize open-ended questions as this encourages individuals to provide more elaborate details and avoid leading questions (where the interviewee is provided with the ‘expected response’).
3. Avoid the ‘halo effect’ where you allow one factor to overshadow other factors of your objectivity. For example, a volunteer may have unlimited availability but may not have the required skills or experience for the position. The fact that the volunteer is willing and available is worthy, perhaps they can be trained or there may be other roles in the organisation that the volunteer may be suitable for.

4. Be aware of cultural differences. The aim is to choose the right volunteer for your organisation even if they are different to you.

(See Appendix 6 for a sample list of interview questions)

6.6 REFERENCES

Usually, an organisation requests two character references from non-relatives. References can be given over the telephone or in writing. A simple reference form or telephone reference checklist ensures consistency, is easy to complete, and also guarantees that difficult issues are not avoided deliberately.

References can add to the picture of a volunteer, helping identify their strengths and weaknesses, and occasionally highlighting serious problems. They also help to confirm that the volunteer is who they say they are.

'It must however also be recognized that there is some debate over how useful references can be. Some volunteer managers' experience is that referees rarely bother to return references and if they do they tend to keep their comments neutral. Also, the taking up of references takes time, experience and resources and this can pose a problem for some organisations' (Volunteer Development Agency, 2001).

Referees might include close friends, a relative (no more than one), or a current or former employer. Good referees would be familiar with the applicants' involvement in similar roles with other organisations or related employment. A volunteer's choice of referee should not be limited to professional people. A long-standing family friend or relative may be more appropriate than the volunteer's doctor. If references are taken up, this should be done consistently for all volunteers and it is recommended that all referees given are followed up.

For a written reference, a standard reference request letter and standard reference form should be used. For a telephone reference, a telephone reference checklist ensures consistency, is easy to complete, and also guarantees that difficult issues are not avoided deliberately. Ensure you notify the caller that you are using a form.

Reference checks should give an insight into the applicant's attitudes, personality and compatibility with the organisation's aims and objectives.

(See Appendix 7 for a sample of Reference Checking Questions)

6.7 TRIAL PERIOD

Some organisations use the processes of induction, training and probation as forms of selection. For example, some organisations require people to undergo a training course before taking them on as volunteers. Others have an observation period where the volunteer is closely supervised and supported while they undertake their assignment.

Whilst there are various tools of screening and selection it is important for any volunteer-involving organisation to have effective operating procedures in place to ensure that it does not provide any opportunity for inappropriate behaviour.

7. VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION TOOLS USED IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND - SURVEY RESULTS

The groups contacted other volunteer involving organisations through the VOLT network to examine what methods organisations were using to screen and select their volunteers. This is not a comprehensive list, but it does outline the general picture. The responses included:

7.1 VOLUNTEER APPLICATION AND VOLUNTEER REGISTRATION FORMS:

The group received copies of 26 volunteer application forms from organisations in the VOLT network. The following table summarises the information requested by these volunteer-involving organisations on their volunteer application/registration forms. (Full list of organisations that contributed to this survey are listed in Appendix 8).

Information requested on volunteer application/registration forms	Number of responding organisations which matched requests
Personal details	All 26
Emergency contact	4
Medical details	8
Background information	
- Education & qualifications	7
- Employment	8
- Voluntary experience	19
- Motivation to volunteer	17
- Personal skills	13
- Hobbies & interests	10
Availability	17
Driving / car ownership	3
How did you hear about organisation?	10
Volunteer activities	4
Referees	20
Declaration (regarding criminal records)	3
Confidentiality	3
Garda vetting	6

7.2 VOLUNTEER INTERVIEWS

The interview process for volunteers varies greatly. The variations include:

- No interview
- Informal interview (chat with member of organisation)
- Structured interview with interview questions and marking system
- Individual or group interview
- Interview with questions based on the information in the application form
- Interview with one to three member panels
- Webcam interview

The type of volunteer interview depends on:

- The type of volunteer role
- Duration of the volunteer role
- The organisation's client group
- The level of risk involved in the work both for the service user and the volunteer.
- The existence of a volunteer policy and standard procedures for volunteer recruitment and selection
- The organisation's culture of volunteerism
- The availability of resources

Larger organisations with more resources and large numbers of volunteers tend to have some volunteer policies around recruitment which might be difficult for smaller community based projects, although there is a wide variation.

7.3 REFERENCES

Most organisations take up references for their volunteers. The number of references taken up varies, but the standard number is generally two. Small organisations rely on community references from local Gardaí.

7.4 SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION - AGREEMENT FORMS, CONFIDENTIALITY FORMS, DECLARATIONS

Selecting volunteers must be carefully managed to protect both the service users and the organisation. With the present situation in Ireland where Garda vetting is not available for volunteers, supporting documentation is a necessary

and important part of the application process. Some organisations ask people to declare on the application form or on a separate form that they do not have any criminal convictions. However due to the absence of Garda vetting, these declarations are taken on trust. Nevertheless they may be a deterrent to potential volunteers with a criminal conviction. They are also a way for organisations to show that they have made an effort to ensure that they screen volunteers and can produce a 'paper trail' to demonstrate this.

Regarding volunteer agreements, some organisations do use them. The group had a query surrounding the issue of agreements being interpreted as a contract, should a volunteer decide to take legal action against an organisation for whatever reasons. The group sought the advice of IBEC (Irish Business and Employers Confederation) regarding the legal implications, if any, of having volunteer agreements or contracts. IBEC states that in legal terms, volunteers are not employees, thus employment law does not apply, and there is no recourse to employment law in such a voluntary situation. There is no contract either implicit or explicit unless payment is received for services rendered. Expenses in this situation do not constitute direct payment for work done.

Volunteering Ireland recommends that that it is good practice to have a volunteer agreement in place as this will assist in ensuring that both the organisation and the volunteer are very clear about their roles, responsibilities, boundaries and expectations.

Supporting this, McCurley and Lynch (1998) emphasise that it is important not to use employee-related terms when designing forms for the application process. That way there can be no ambiguity regarding the status of the volunteer and no recourse to employment law in the event of disputes (McCurley and Lynch 1998).

The working group recommends that some kind of document outlining the expectation of the volunteer and responsibility of the organisation is useful in helping to define roles and boundaries. Asking people to sign a commitment or declaration can act as an added protection for the organisation in that it underlines the seriousness of the undertaking and may deter those who have allegations or convictions held against them.

Currently among the twenty six organisations researched regarding documentation used in the application process, three use a declaration and three use a confidentiality agreement.

The issue was also raised that the good name and reputation of the organisation must also be protected, and that volunteers cannot act on behalf of the

organisation without the prior knowledge and consent of the organisation. It is good practice to ensure that volunteers sign a declaration, commitment or confidentiality clause in the application process. It is also part of the increasingly necessary paper trail required to demonstrate adequate risk management of the volunteer programme.

Voluntary organisations in Ireland have been very active in campaigning as well as lobbying the government to extend the vetting process to volunteers whose work will involve contact with children and/or vulnerable adults.

One such example is ISPCC (Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) who last August, in conjunction with Barretstown Gang Camp, IPPA (the early childhood organisation), and The Chernobyl Children's Project ran a public awareness campaign on vetting and were successful in collecting over 100,000 signatures in support of an adequate Garda vetting procedure for volunteers.

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform established a working group with representatives from The Department of Education and Science, The Garda, The Department of Health and Children and the Attorney General's Office to examine the current Garda vetting system and to consider amongst other things, access for voluntary and community organisations. It is understood that a report has been produced by this working group but there has been no further progress to date. Due to the urgency and the need to address the vetting situation for volunteers who work with our vulnerable population we make the following recommendations:

8. RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENT BY THE WORKING GROUP

1. The urgent expansion of the current Central Vetting Unit to include the availability of police checks for potential volunteers whose role would involve direct contact with children and/or vulnerable adults.
2. The establishment of criteria for which Garda vetting would be made available.
3. The development of a national policy on volunteering which would assist in the development of standards for volunteer involving organisations in the recruitment and selection of volunteers.
4. Support the development of a standardised risk assessment vetting tool to assist organisations with appropriate vetting.
5. Support the promotion of the data protection guidelines as outlined in the Data Protection Act 2003.
6. Support in developing an up-to-date best practice manual on volunteer management including recruitment and selection procedures relevant to the Irish volunteering context which would be readily available to small organisations who cannot access training.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Working Group Members

Angela Walsh, (Chairperson) Volunteer Coordinator, Barnardos

Brenda Farrelly, Coordinator of Volunteer Services, St Francis Hospice

Mairead Mallon, Volunteer Coordinator, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

Breda McMahon, Project Development Officer, The Children's Sunshine Home

Mary Rose McCarthy, Coordinator of Volunteers, St Patrick's Marymount Hospice, Cork

Richard Morrissey, Youth Information Officer, Foroige, Castlebar

Noeleen O'Callahan, Volunteer Coordinator, Simon Community of Ireland

Margo O'Connor, Training Manager & Volunteer Coordinator, National Council for The Blind of Ireland

Teresa Ryan, Head of Quality in Client Services, Brothers of Charity Services, Limerick

Appendix 2: Volunteer vetting in the Republic of Ireland and in other countries

Republic of Ireland

No police checks available for volunteers.

An Garda Siochana Central Vetting Unit carries out police checks. It is responsible for disclosure of criminal convictions and related information to authorised agencies.

United Kingdom

Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) will do checks on volunteers called disclosures. There are three levels of checks:

1. **Enhanced disclosure:** For positions involving substantial contact with children or vulnerable adults regularly training, supervising or being in sole charge of individuals or groups. Would include details of current and spent convictions as well as details of cautions, reprimands or warnings. Also details of inclusion on lists held by the Department for Education and Employment and the Department of Health, of individuals unsuitable to work with children. Cost : Free for volunteers.
2. **Standard Disclosure:** For positions involving regular contact with vulnerable people and people entering positions of trust such as accountancy and veterinary practice. Same as the enhanced disclosure but without the addition of extra information held by the police. Cost : Free for volunteers
3. **Basic Disclosure:** Available for anyone. Contain details of convictions that are unspent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. Not available as yet and unlikely to be widely used in the voluntary as they are of limited use.

To register with the CRB, an organisation must :

- Pay a £300 fee
- Satisfy the CRB that they are entitled to ask for the information under the Exceptions Order of The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act.
- Show that it has a code of practice vis-à-vis employing ex offenders.
- Confidentiality policy must be clear about who will need the information, how it will be stored and when it will be destroyed.

Northern Ireland

Pre Employment Consultancy Service (PECS) available to any statutory, voluntary, community or private sector organisation that meets the following criteria:

- Positions, paid or unpaid, which have substantial access to children or adults with a learning disability
- The organisation has demonstrated that it is not possible to eliminate substantial access, e.g. changes in management and supervision arrangements.
- The organisation has demonstrated that its protection policy for children and adults with a learning disability and its recruitment and selection procedures comply as far as possible with the principles set out in Our Duty To Care.

You may not use PECS for positions involving contact with any other vulnerable groups i.e. people with a mental illness, a physical disability or the elderly. Check must only be done for someone you have made a conditional offer to, not short listed applicants.

Information provided by PECS

Criminal Records: details of all convictions, cautions and bind overs which occurred within the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

PECS register: This contains the names of people who have been reported to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety by their employers because their behaviour at work put children or adults with a learning disability at risk of harm, and indicated that they would not be suitable for such work in the future. People may be reported for all types of abuse including sexual abuse, violence and drug related matters.

Department of Health Register: This register is similar to the above. Neither register will give you details of why the person is on the register. You will be given the name of the reporting organisation and it is up to the Organisation to follow this up for further information.

List 99: A U.K. wide list drawn up by the Department of Education and Employment of people who are legally debarred from working in schools.

Canada

Canadian Criminal Records Information Service; Provides certified criminal records check to civilians by fingerprinting. It is available to citizens for voluntary work. However the applicant must specify the job title or position they are applying for when they request the check. The applicant must give their full name, date of Birth, sex, mailing address and phone number /fax/or email address. There is no fee for applications for the check for volunteers but they must provide written confirmation from a bona fide registered not for profit organisation.

USA

Even when there is no legal requirement, there are many other situations where criminal history record checks must be conducted. For example, childcare services licensed by the state or contractual requirements such as insurer condition of coverage. The two basic sources for criminal history checks are official criminal history record repositories located in each State and private vendors.

State repositories are also the gateway into the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) criminal history records. The scope of the record check is determined by the method used. Checks performed by State criminal history record repositories usually are limited to offences committed within that State. The FBI national record check included offences committed throughout the nation. Private vendors access public records – most often courthouse records – and create their own proprietary databases. Private vendor checks are considered consumer reports and the 'Fair Credit Reporting Act' applies i.e. employers have specific responsibilities and applicants have specific rights.

Australia

Police checks are available for all volunteers and organisations.

In New South Wales they are compulsory. In Western Australia they are not compulsory and in Victoria legislation is currently going through which will make them compulsory. Each state and territory has a different law surrounding police checks for volunteers.

Volunteering Australia actively encourage all volunteer involving organisations who are working with children or vulnerable members of the community to do police checks on volunteers before they start.

Switzerland

<p>The usual procedure prior to the engagement of volunteers is to seek a certificate of good standing from the Central Police Records Bureau. The organisation of the police is handled by each canton and is not a federal matter. Each Canton makes a decision on whether to grant a police check for volunteers.</p>
<p><u>Germany</u></p>
<p>Police checks available for volunteers. Volunteer can apply for this through the Citizens Advice Centre. They must bring along a their passport with photo when applying for the certificate. This is passed on the Central Court which issues a certificate stating whether there are any court convictions.</p>
<p><u>Spain</u></p>
<p>Criminal records certificate is issued in Spain by the Department of Justice for a small fee. It can only be given to the applicant and no one can request a certificate for another person unless they are given written authority by the applicant to do so. The criminal records certificate would be requested by many institutions working with minors or disabled people. It is not mandatory and depends on the particular entry conditions of the voluntary organisation or association.</p>
<p><u>France</u></p>
<p>Police checks available for volunteers. Volunteer can apply for this through their own police station and they are issued by the Ministry of Justice, Direction des Affaires Criminelles et Des Graces.</p>
<p><u>Sweden</u></p>
<p>Police checks are available. They are only mandatory for people working in pre schools, schools and child care.</p>

Czech Republic

The police in the Czech Republic do not issue special certificates to volunteers. The organisations focus their attention on the previous work experience of the volunteer and the accompanying references. Those employed in childcare organisations on a permanent basis are required to have an unblemished criminal record and this is supplied by the police authority.

Philippines

The Philippine National Volunteer Service Co-ordinating Agency (PNVSCA) secures background checks for foreign volunteers coming in to the country for voluntary organisations who are registered with them. They secure the checks from the National Intelligence Co-ordinating Agency prior to the endorsement of a request for visa issuance. The results of the NICA check is limited to the information gathered by their local agents and that of their international network. The service is provided free.

Section 10 of the Executive Order 635 of the PNVSCA states that “All volunteer service organisations and workers shall, before performing any volunteer service in the country, register with the PNVSCA”

Appendix 3: Sample volunteer role description worksheet

Position Title: _____
(Remember the word “volunteer” is a pay category, not a title!)

Description of Project/Purpose of Assignment:

Outline of Volunteer’s Responsibilities or List of Tasks:
(Give potential and limits.)

Outcomes/Goals:
How will you and the volunteer know that the job is being done well or that the project is successful?

Training and Support Plan
How will the volunteer be prepared for the work and oriented to the agency?
Who will supervise/be the contact point?

Reporting:
What reports will be expected, in what form and how often?

Time Commitment:
Minimum hours per week/month? On any special schedule? For what duration of time?

Qualifications Needed (if any):

Benefits:
What will the volunteer get in exchange for service? (tangibles and intangibles)

Source: THE VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT BOOK/ELLIS, 1996

Appendix 4: Sample volunteer application form

Volunteer Application Form

Contact Details

Name: _____

Address: _____

Work Phone: _____ Home Phone:

Mobile: _____

Email: _____

Education and Employment

Educational Background: _____

Current Occupation: _____

Skills, Interests and Hobbies _____

Volunteering

Have you had any previous experience in volunteer work?

Why do you want to volunteer? (What do you want to gain from your volunteering experience?)

Appendix 4 *continued*: sample volunteer application form

What experiences have you had that may prepare you to work as a volunteer in the field of (description of field e.g. domestic violence, youth work, fundraising etc)?

What is your time availability for volunteer work?

References

Please provide contact details of two people we may contact for references.

1. _____

2. _____

Signature _____ Date: _____

Adapted from:

- Volunteer Management, McCurley & Lynch 1998
- www.nonprofit.com

Appendix 5: Suggested Format for Agreement, Confidentiality, Declaration

Volunteer

1. I..... agree to give a regular and free commitment of week toorganisation.
2. I will not at any time or for any purpose act in the name of the organisation without prior consent.
3. I will at all times uphold confidentiality regarding the service and service users and will not disclose any information pertaining to the service users or their families.
4. There is / is not a conviction held against me

Organisation

..... accepts the services ofand commits to providing in as far as is possible the following:

Support – arranged support and supervision sessions every 4 weeks.

Training – one day training and induction session before the start of volunteer work and a minimum of two training sessions a year thereafter.

Resources – information pack about the organisation, which contains volunteer policy and handbook and relevant training materials.

These are provided to enable the volunteer to be effective in carrying out their volunteer role.

Appendix 6: Sample interview questions

Questions to put people at ease

- What voluntary work have you done before?
- How did you hear about our organisation?
- What caught your attention about volunteering with us?
- What do you enjoy doing in your leisure time?

Questions to determine motivation/attitudes/values

- What caught your attention about volunteering with us?
- What have you done that has given you the greatest satisfaction?
- Why are you interested in doing volunteer work?
- What do you hope to learn/gain from working with us?
- What is important to you in a volunteer role?
- What would you consider to be the ideal volunteer role for you? Why?
- What are your long-term objectives for volunteering?
- What kind of supervision/support do you prefer?
- What have you enjoyed most in your past volunteer activities?
- What have you enjoyed least?
- What are your personal and work goals that would be important in choosing a volunteer role?

Questions to determine interpersonal skills and relations

- What kind of people do you work with best as co-workers?
- Are there people with whom you'd feel unable to work?
- How do you deal with situations that are difficult for you?
- How would you describe the way that you communicate with others?

Appendix 7: Sample Reference Check Questions

1. How long and in what capacity have you known the applicant?
2. What were the job functions and did s/he perform them effectively?
3. Would you consider this person eligible for rehire? (If not, why?)
4. Would you highly recommend this person for the position they are seeking? (Again, if not, why?)
5. How would you describe his/her personality - in your opinion what are his/her main strengths?
6. What is his/her main weakness?
7. How does s/he relate to others?
8. How well does s/he work in a team?
9. Did this individual get along well with management and peers?
10. Can s/he work unsupervised?
11. Do you feel s/he is suitable for this type of work?
12. Was this individual a team player?
13. Was this individual a motivated self-starter?
14. Do you think this individual will perform well as a [role title]?
15. What kind of job is best suited for this individual's abilities?
16. How would you describe the individual's overall performance?
17. Did the individual demonstrate honesty and integrity?
18. How well did the individual manage crisis, pressure or stress?
19. How would you describe the individual's leadership, managerial or supervisory skills?
20. Does the individual communicate well orally and in writing?
21. How do you rate the individual's ability to plan short-term / long-term?
22. Did the individual make sound and timely decisions?
23. Is there anything of significance you'd like to add?

Appendix 8: Organisations that responded to working group screening survey

The following organisations responded when contacted by the working group:

Age Action Ireland
Amnesty International
Aware
Barnardos
Barretstown Gang
Big Brothers Big Sisters International
Central Remedial Clinic
Children in Hospital Ireland
Concern
DePaul Trust Ireland
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
Focus Ireland
Friends of the Elderly
Galway Simon Community
Make A Wish
National Council for the Blind of Ireland (Registration form only)
Open Heart House
Royal Hospital Donnybrook
Ruhama Women's Project
Safe Home Programme, Co Mayo
Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary Services
St Francis Hospice
The Chester Beatty Library
The Children's Sunshine Home
The Galway Association
Vincentian Refugee Centre
Lucan Volunteer Network
West Cork Women Against Violence Project