

Safeguarding Team

Safeguarding Strategy

November 2024

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Background

Since 2018, the focus on the protection of vulnerable groups has expanded to include both adults and children under a broader safeguarding remit, changing from the previous emphasis on child protection. This strategy articulates our safeguarding objectives and provides a clear roadmap for achieving our desired goals. It serves as the cornerstone of our safeguarding framework, in conjunction with our Safeguarding Policy, outlining how safeguarding should be implemented at the British Council.

Introduction

The British Council supports peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide.

Our Safeguarding Strategy helps to ensure that all we do, wherever this takes place, promotes the safety, security and well-being of children and adults who are involved with us and protects them from abuse and harm.

Every child we work with matters and their needs are paramount. Children can be extremely vulnerable for socio-economic, geo-political and other reasons, including the increasing use of technology as a vehicle for abuse and exploitation. Adults can also be at risk for these and other reasons that may be temporary and circumstantial or may be permanent. These factors and challenges, as well as greater awareness and encouragement to speak up and speak out, practice improvements and demands for accountability inform our Safeguarding Strategy.

The strategy builds on our child protection work spanning over a decade. It is aligned with the British Council strategic plan and reinforces our code of conduct, organisational values, broader policies and the fully inclusive organisational culture we aspire to.

Mission

Our mission is to integrate safeguarding in all that we do at the British Council by prioritising a proactive and preventative safeguarding culture. This is vital for building trust with our customers, beneficiaries and the communities we work with. Effective safeguarding is an essential component for fulfilling our cultural relations work globally and supports the organisation's vision of a peaceful and prosperous world built on trust.

Vision

The British Council seeks to create a safe environment where no child or adult, consistent with human rights principles and irrespective of any aspect of their identity, including but not limited to age, disability status, economic background, ethnicity, gender, religion or belief, or sexual orientation, will experience harm or exploitation during the course of their contact with us.

Our safeguarding commitments and practices will become deeply embedded and contribute to any children and adults that we work with feeling safe and able to maximise the opportunities our cultural relations work provides access to.

Our staff will have the capability, confidence and competence to realise our vision and our leadership will nurture and drive it. Everyone who works for and with the British Council, in whatever capacity, will understand, embrace and support this vision.

We will draw upon best practice models and what we share about our safeguarding approach with other international organisations, and our cooperation and collaboration with them will help prevent harm and support potential and actual victims and survivors of abuse worldwide.

We will contribute to the development and revision of international safeguarding standards and protocols and promote them through our networks and partnerships.

Our reputation and the positive difference we aim to make to people's lives will be enhanced by the collective safeguarding actions we take.

Approach

We will adopt a mainstreaming ethos to safeguard children, adults, victims and survivors underpinned by respect, care and concern. All business areas and regions will therefore work to shared approaches and standards, but with local adaptation where relevant and necessary. They will carry responsibility for implementation and hold localised accountability.

Our focus will be on protection and prevention from harm and abuse, be this physical, sexual, arising from exploitation or modern-day slavery, or for reasons of fixed or acquired identity, institutional abuse, or unjustified discrimination, or any other reason that is unacceptable and inhumane and inconsistent with our organisational values.

The Global Safeguarding team will set our safeguarding standards and approaches and support implementation, quality assurance, compliance and management of risk. They will champion prevention, lead organisation wide reporting and review the meeting of external standards and benchmarks.

Strategic Priorities

The safeguarding strategy is based on three overarching priorities which we believe are realistic, understandable, achievable and measurable:

- A workforce that understands violence and abuse against children and adults in all its forms, and is equipped to respond in a timely, sensitive, and appropriate manner.
- The British Council develops strong international alliances and networks to share information and strategic developments that support and seek to implement the safeguarding standards.
- The voices and experiences of children and adults is central to the work we do through advocacy, positive influencing and third-party relationships. The British Council will further enhance its current systems, processes and arrangements to ensure we promote, hear

and learn from these individuals and communities which in turn will inform our responses and policies.

Objectives

The objectives set out below support the delivery of our safeguarding vision and strategy:

Policies, standards and procedures

The Safeguarding Policy will be aligned with the strategy and will complement and reinforce other British Council policies and procedures, relevant to safeguarding.

Safeguarding standards and procedures will continue to be informed by and respond to legal and other external requirements, best practice benchmarks, business needs and feedback. These will include, for example, pre-employment checks, and cover programming, project development and delivery, teaching and exams activities and raising concerns. Any revisions or new standards and procedures will be based on consultation, and what we learn will respond to gaps identified. At the heart of all our standards and procedures will be our commitment to providing a safe environment for the children and adults we work with.

Dissemination and implementation will involve awareness and capability interventions, line management actions and oversight and accountabilities.

Third party suppliers and relevant others will be made aware of our standards and procedures and be required to comply with them, including through legally binding contracts and agreements.

Governance

Our priority to keep children and adults safe will continue to be supported by the safeguarding Accountability and Responsibility Framework which outlines the following:

- Overall accountability for the management of safeguarding risks rests with the Board of Trustees but responsibilities can be delegated through the management structure.
- The role of the Risk Committee to help ensure Board level oversight and necessary knowledge of the management of safeguarding risks.
- The role of the Safeguarding Assurance Group which supports the Global Safeguarding team in ensuring proactive risk management and implementation across the organisation and provides assurance that the wider organisation adheres to policies and procedures.
- Specific safeguarding roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for all regions and business areas to help implement relevant policies, standards and procedures, supported by the Global Safeguarding team.
- Working within and upholding the safeguarding policies and principles outlined is the responsibility of everyone working for or with the British Council, irrespective of country base, role or contract type. The progress we have made towards keeping children and adults safe, can only continue, strengthen and deepen if this responsibility is fully embraced and is aligned to what we have set out in this strategy.

Accountability and responsibility for safeguarding is supported by the above and includes:

- Internal transparency and openness about our actions and decisions to the children and their families, and the adults we have a responsibility to protect and keep safe. This includes a timely response to concerns, questions and queries aligned to our Complaints Policy and Customer Service standards; a defined point of contact; access to documents and records consistent with Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation, underpinned by confidentiality principles.
- Accountability for safeguarding through the line of business and close to delivery set out in regional and business plans.
- Quarterly risk reporting information to the Speak Up Committee with a focus on review, prioritisation, mitigation, accountability and recording.
- Safeguarding audits to provide feedback and assurance, and/or highlight issues and problems.
- As required, accountability and reporting to the UK's Charity Commission and the FCDO.
- Awareness raising and building capability.

This will be achieved through:

- An annual plan of awareness and capability interventions that continues to build a preventative and protective global organisation wide safeguarding culture.
- Extending and deepening awareness and capability through a mixed learning and development, engagement and delivery model. The emphasis will be on face to face but will include online delivery and will highlight and support implementation of all relevant policies, standards and procedures.
- Monitoring take-up of development activities and acting on findings, including targeting groups, business areas and third-party suppliers and responding to specific issues, needs and requirements.

Review

The Global Safeguarding Team are responsible for reviewing and updating the strategy. This will be reviewed every three years, with the next review in November 2027.