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Safeguarding for organizations – Guide

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Summary of pages

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Foreword

Publishing information

This British Standard is published by BSI Standards Limited, under licence from The British Standards Institution, and came into effect on 30 June 2024. It was prepared by Subcommittee G/1/6, *Safeguarding*, under the authority of Technical Committee G/1, *Governance*. A list of organizations represented on these committees can be obtained on request to the committee manager.

Information about this document

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Presentational conventions

The guidance in this document is presented in roman (i.e. upright) type. Any recommendations are expressed in sentences in which the principal auxiliary verb is “should”.

Additional commentary, explanation and general informative material is presented in smaller italic type.

Where words have alternative spellings, the preferred spelling of the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* is used (e.g. “organization” rather than “organisation”).

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Introduction

Organizations are expected to safeguard everyone, both adults and children, who comes into contact with them. Whether publicly or privately owned, organizations that work with the public need to be aware of and clearly demonstrate their safeguarding responsibilities to prevent harm, respond to concerns and promote the wellbeing of adults and children. Some organizations also have statutory duties relating to safeguarding while operating both locally and overseas (e.g. UK registered charities) and are required to report serious incidents to the Charity Commission¹⁾, and any actual or alleged criminal activity has to be reported to the police and other relevant agencies.

This standard is applicable to any organization working in the UK in any of the three sectors: the statutory sector, the independent/private sector and the voluntary/not-for-profit sector.

1 Scope

This British Standard gives guidance for UK-based organizations on how to provide assurance that measures are in place to keep individuals safe from harm and respond effectively to safeguarding concerns. Individuals can include any adult or child who comes into contact with the organization.

The term “safeguarding” (see 3.16) is used throughout this document, although other terms might be used in different geographical jurisdictions.

This British Standard is applicable to all types and sizes of organizations, both in the real world and in the digital domain.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.²⁾

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

3.1 accountability

obligation to another for the fulfilment of a responsibility

NOTE 1 The obligation includes the duty to inform and to explain the manner in which the responsibility was fulfilled.

NOTE 2 The non-fulfilment of a responsibility has consequences that can be enforced on the accountable party.

3.2 adult

person 18 years old and over

3.3 adult at risk

adult with care and support needs who might be experiencing or at risk of abuse or neglect and, because of their care and support needs, might be unable to protect themselves

NOTE 1 In Scotland, the legal definition of an adult at risk is 16 years and older.

NOTE 2 Some adults who do not meet the definition of “adult at risk” might be vulnerable to harm because of specific circumstances, including in the context of power imbalances within the organization.

¹⁾ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission>

²⁾ Documents that are referred to solely in an informative manner are listed in the Bibliography.

3.4 barred person

someone who has harmed, or poses a risk of harm to children and/or vulnerable groups and is not legally allowed to undertake regulated activity with the relevant group(s)

NOTE It is the responsibility of an organization to ensure they do not employ a person in regulated activity that they are barred from doing.

3.5 child

person under the age of 18

NOTE This is in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child [1] which defines a child as everyone under 18 unless, "under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989). The UK has ratified this convention.

3.6 disclosure

information from an individual that they, or someone else, has been harmed, mistreated or neglected

3.7 employee

worker in a direct labour relationship with the organization

[SOURCE: BS 25700:2022, 3.10]

3.8 governing body

person or group of people who have ultimate accountability for the whole organization

NOTE A governing body can be explicitly established in a number of formats including, but not limited to, a board of directors, supervisory board, sole director, joint and several directors, or trustees.

[SOURCE: BS ISO 37000:2021, 3.3.4, modified – Notes 1 and 3 deleted]

3.9 organization

person or group of people that has its own functions with responsibilities, authorities and relationships to achieve its objective

NOTE The concept of organization includes, but is not limited to, sole-trader, company, corporation, firm, enterprise, authority, partnership, charity or institution, or part or combination thereof, whether incorporated or not, public or private.

3.10 regulated activity

work that is defined in legislation that a barred person is not permitted to do because the role includes a level of involvement with children or adults who might be vulnerable

NOTE This includes paid and unpaid work.

3.11 regulated activity provider

organization responsible for the management or control of regulated activity

3.12 responsibility

obligation to act and take decisions to achieve required outcomes

3.13 risk

likelihood that a person can be harmed

3.14 risk assessment

overall process of identification, analysis and evaluation of risk

3.15 risk management

coordinated activities to direct and control an organization (3.9) with regard to risk

[SOURCE: BS ISO 31000:2018, 3.2]

3.16 safeguarding

measures taken to protect a person's right to live in safety, free from abuse, harm and neglect

NOTE Safeguarding children encompasses a wider definition, including preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development, ensuring children grow up in the provision of safe and effective care, taking action to enable children to have the best outcomes, as well as preventing maltreatment.

3.17 safeguarding concern

knowledge, anxiety, worry, suspicion or feeling regarding safeguarding

NOTE Concerns might be any feelings or suspicions that an individual(s) has, or might experience, any kind of actual or potential harm, mistreatment or neglect.

3.18 safeguarding lead

person responsible for the management of safeguarding

3.19 stakeholder

person or organization that can affect, be affected by or perceive itself to be affected by the activities of the organization or a decision or activity

3.20 top management

person or group of people who directs and controls an organization at the highest level

NOTE Top management has the power to delegate authority and provide resources within the organization.

[SOURCE: BS ISO 45006:2023, 3.3, modified – note added]

3.21 volunteer

person who is engaged in any activity which involves spending time, unpaid (except for travel and other approved out-of-pocket expenses), doing something which aims to benefit some third party and not a close relative

3.22 wellbeing

sense of health and vitality that arises from physical, mental and emotional health

4 Context

4.1 Understanding the organization and its context

When developing policies and processes for safeguarding, the organization should examine and understand its external and internal context. This provides a sound basis for identifying and prioritizing the risks and threats that should be covered by the safeguarding policies and processes.

4.2 External

The organization should identify the external context in which it operates, including:

- a) the social, cultural and economic aspects that are applicable to its operation with respect to those it seeks to protect;
- b) the communities (in the real world and the digital domain) and geographical locations in which it operates;
- c) external stakeholders, such as safeguarding boards/partnerships/committees, charitable bodies, regulatory bodies, local government, the public and communities of interest (see [Clause 8](#) for more on support and partnership); and
- d) applicable statutory, regulatory, procedural, contractual and professional obligations and duties.

4.3 Internal

The organization should identify its internal context, such as:

- a) the statutory sector (for example, police services, health services, local authorities, prisons, armed forces, state education, national and devolved governments);
- b) the independent/private sector (for example, retail, restaurants, service providers, private health and social care providers, sports and activity organizations, child-care providers, independent education); or
- c) the voluntary/not-for-profit sector (for example, purpose-driven organizations, charities, faith settings, independent education and training providers, personal development and special interest organizations, such as youth or uniformed groups, sports/fitness/leisure clubs, housing associations).

4.4 Stakeholders

All organizations have stakeholders and people with whom they frequently come into contact, such as:

- a) customers, clients and service users;
- b) patients and inmates;
- c) staff, including employees, contractors and volunteers;
- d) pupils, students and participants;
- e) parents and carers;
- f) teachers, instructors, leaders and activity supervisors;
- g) suppliers; and
- h) members.

The organization's safeguarding responsibility extends to stakeholders, and its policies and processes should apply whenever interactions occur. [Clause 8](#) gives guidance on support and partnership.

5 Leadership

5.1 General

Safeguarding is everyone's concern. All organizations that work with the public should be aware of their legal safeguarding responsibilities. The organization's leaders should set the culture and uphold a standard of practice for the organization to follow. They should prioritize safeguarding throughout the organization through effective governance and management.

It is the responsibility of those who govern and manage the organization, whether paid or voluntary, to put in place effective safeguarding risk management to keep safe all individuals who come into contact with the organization.

In the UK, company and charity governing bodies are accountable for safeguarding in the organization. Where an organization has no formal corporate structure or is not a registered charity, the committee, leaders and senior members should be accountable for safeguarding.

Critical to safeguarding is developing and upholding a culture that embraces responsibility and accountability. Embedding a safeguarding culture should be integral to the organization and all employees, contractors and volunteers should be advised on what they can do to prevent, detect and respond to a safeguarding concern.

The organization should:

- a) treat everyone with dignity and respect;
- b) encourage openness, giving people the confidence to share ideas and challenge behaviours;
- c) listen to concerns with an open mind, no matter how small;
- d) respond to concerns with sensitivity;
- e) strive to make continual improvements; and
- f) encourage continual learning and reflection at all levels.

Organizational structures and job descriptions should define the safeguarding roles and responsibilities of all employees, contractors and volunteers. Accountability should be clearly linked to the purpose and values of the organization and be communicated throughout the organization, both in writing and in practice, e.g. through staff supervision.

This could include:

- 1) policies and procedures;
- 2) recruitment, induction and onboarding;
- 3) offboarding and exit interviews;
- 4) development, accreditation, validation and competency (see [7.1.2](#));
- 5) risk assessments;
- 6) active and regular listening and feedback; and
- 7) a matrix showing responsibility, accountability, who needs to be consulted and who needs to be informed.

Responsibilities for processes and documentation should be clear and visible.