



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR
CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

Briefing from NSPCC on Sports Issues

1 July 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Barry McElduff (Chairperson)
Mr Declan O'Loan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Billy Leonard
Mr Kieran McCarthy
Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr David McClarty
Miss Michelle McIlveen
Mr Ken Robinson

Witnesses:

Mr Colin Reid)
Mr Paul Stephenson) National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
Ms Kathleen Toner)

The Chairperson (Mr McElduff):

I invite Colin Reid, Paul Stephenson and Kathleen Toner of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) to brief the Committee on the Sexual Offences Order 2008. Good morning everyone. Thanks for coming along. Colin, will you introduce the team and outline their various areas of responsibility?

Mr Colin Reid (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children):

I thank the Committee for its invitation. This is the first time that we have appeared before you, though we are regular contributors to the Health Committee. We appreciate greatly the opportunity to speak to you today about this important issue. Paul Stephenson is our child protection and support officer; he will explain in a minute what he does. Kathleen Toner is the policy and public affairs manager for NSPCC.

Sport plays a hugely important role in children's lives, as you all know. Apart from the

Department of Education, the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) has more responsibility for children than any other Department. DCAL's research shows that 75% of children aged from 8 to 18 play sport. Therefore, DCAL is an important player when it comes to safeguarding children. We have developed a good relationship with DCAL and a partnership with Sport NI. I pay tribute to officers and officials from Sport NI and the Department. I especially want to commend the equality unit in DCAL, which has done much to promote safeguarding in a quiet way across DCAL's areas of responsibility.

We want to look at the abuse of trust in the wider context of safeguarding within sport. We will also address the issue of why sports coaches should be included in the definitions in the Department of Justice's legislation. Paul will speak first, Kathleen second and I will sum up with a few points at the end.

Mr Paul Stephenson (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children):

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Committee. I work for the NSPCC's child protection in sport unit and have done so for nine years. Our mission is to safeguard children in sport and through sport. As Colin has indicated, we see sport as a huge opportunity to communicate safeguarding messages to adults who work directly with young people and to encourage those adults to take safeguarding messages out to young people. Proportionately, sport is the second greatest area of contact with young people. It is second only to education and involves much more contact than faith-based organisations and other uniformed organisations.

My role is to support sports' governing bodies to implement best practice and, as the report indicates, to offer case advice as well as training courses for lead officers in sport. Most of those lead officers are genuine volunteers. They are not paid staff. They give up their time, including many evenings, to travel to events. Some of you may be involved in sporting organisations and know what that entails. They require a certain level of support and advice to ensure that they are comfortable taking decisions that can impact on volunteers' participation in sport.

We provide training to tutors. During the past year, Sport NI has trained almost 1,500 people on safeguarding issues. The Irish Football Association has trained almost 1,000 people, and the GAA will have trained more again. Therefore, there is a huge army of volunteers out there who deliver safeguarding messages, by taking them back to their communities and their specific sporting organisations.

We have worked closely with Sport NI during the past number of years to increase the level of auditing for organisations. Through its Investment in Performance Sport programme, Sport NI has embraced safeguarding, as well as financial auditing, governance and such matters. We support governing bodies to attain standards that have been agreed with the governing bodies and Sport NI, to ensure that organisations can work to a certain level to safeguard young people and to minimise what we would term as avoidable risks.

On the specific issue of abuse of trust, after the DCAL event in February, we put our discussion paper on the website. Shortly afterwards, I got a phone call from a mother whose 16-year-old daughter had been groomed by a sports coach. She found the discussion paper through Google, having been unable to find any other advice. The organisation in question was not a funded organisation or a well-run governing body. She was struggling to manage the situation. Her 16-year-old child had been groomed by a sports coach who had gone on to have sex with that young person. She asked why anyone would resist extension of those provisions. Some comments and concerns have been raised. Even in the sporting arena, people have expressed some reservations. However, we believe that we can overcome most of those reservations

through working with sports organisations and Sport NI. I certainly welcome your questions. That is, effectively, my role in a nutshell. We have provided a paper.

Ms Kathleen Toner (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children):

I will highlight what abuse of trust actually is, what NSPCC's position is on it and why we believe that extension of those provisions to include sports coaches would further help to safeguard children, particularly young people aged 16 and 17. During the two-year period between the date of their sixteenth birthday and the date of their eighteenth birthday, those young people are older than the age of consent but are not quite adults.

Articles 23, 24, 25 and 26 of the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 provide that it is an offence for a person over 18 years of age to intentionally behave in certain sexual ways towards a child who is under 18 years of age when the adult is in a position of trust in respect of the child. In effect, the offence criminalises sexual activity between adults and children when the adult holds a position of trust or authority over a young person through holding certain designated positions, such as guardians, teachers, court welfare officers and personal advisers, and also in establishments such as hospitals, residential homes, detention centres, schools and independent clinics. Therefore, it is very much a statutory-based provision. It does not apply to other voluntary activities, such as sport.

As I said, the Order provides protection to all young people who are under 18 years of age. However, it is principally designed to protect those who are aged 16 and 17 and are over the age of consent, which, in Northern Ireland, is 16 years of age. When the sexual offences legislation was enacted in Northern Ireland in 2008, it allowed for the possible extension of the abuse of trust provisions as they existed at that time by Order of the Secretary of State to include other groups of people. That is where the NSPCC's interest came about.

As the NSPCC is a UK-wide organisation, its policy position on abuse of trust applies to legislation in both the UK and Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, we believe that it is particularly important because, due to the way that the legislation was enacted in 2008, there is an opportunity for extension. We very much welcome the opportunity to consult on that.

Why should the extension apply to sporting organisations? Paul mentioned that during the past nine years since the NSPCC's child protection in sport unit has been established, we have gathered information from media and court reports on sexual abuse cases in sport. Some of you will be aware of some fairly high-profile cases during recent years. We find that when there is a high-profile conviction, Paul, who staffs the advice line in Northern Ireland, receives a flurry of calls on the abuse of trust in sport. However, as the abuse of trust in sport is not an offence, there is no legal remedy and people can only work with the disciplinary procedures within the particular sport. Furthermore, the fact that it is not an offence has made it difficult to collect data on the extent of the problem, and we have had to use evidence from our own practice base to inform our policy position.

As Colin mentioned earlier, approximately nine months ago we obtained figures from DCAL showing that 200,000 children and young people here regularly participate in sport. That is 75% of that demographic and indicates a very high level of involvement in sport at junior level, which is largely self-regulated. Such sport often relies on volunteer involvement. Only formal education settings involve more children and young people, and, consequently, the NSPCC feels that an extension of the abuse of trust provisions to sport would greatly improve protection for children and young people.

In 2009, 56% of all reported sexual offences in Northern Ireland were committed against children and young people, which amounted to 1,084 incidents. Of those, 21% were committed against those aged between 16 and 18, which is a significant percentage. From our own research, we know that reported offences are only ever the tip of the iceberg. Sexual abuse is greatly under-reported, with one third of victims reporting at the time, one third reporting at some point in the future — often when they are adults — and one third never reporting an offence that has been committed against them.

Through the child protection work carried out by NSPCC, and particularly through the child protection in sport unit, regular enquiries are dealt with on what is effectively an abuse of trust in a wide range of sports organisations. Such incidents are deeply traumatic for the children involved and their families. It is an issue of power and control, not an issue of sexual relationships. As members will see from the anonymous examples provided, some cases were very traumatic and difficult for the young people involved. As there is no legal remedy available for those cases, many have been dealt with by the sports body through their disciplinary procedures. However, unfortunately it has also been our experiences that in some cases the individuals involved have moved on to work in other sports.

As Colin said, the NSPCC seeks to protect and safeguard children and young people from all those with influence or power over them, by virtue of their employment, their position of trust or their authority, who would seek to use that position to sexually abuse children and young people. That is why we decided to work on the issue of abuse of trust in sport.

Mr Reid:

In summary, we are talking about a small but significant number of cases. It is important to put on the record that the vast majority of sports coaches do their job voluntarily, enhance the lives of children and would be supportive of this sensible measure. However, as in many other parts of society, there is a small number of people who seek to abuse their positions of trust.

The NSPCC feels that consideration should be given to the extension of the abuse of trust provisions to sports coaches in particular. The policy position of the NSPCC is that a number of other professions with positions of trusts should also be brought in, but at present we have an evidence base showing that those provisions are required in sport.

We hope that Sport NI and DCAL will consider appropriate measures to collate data on child protection concerns, because only by measuring and capturing data can you assist in developing policy. That issue was raised in the evidence that officials gave. We must ensure that proper statistics are collated by DCAL that include wider child protection issues such as the abuse of trust in different sports.

We suggest that Sport NI considers introducing a requirement for funded organisations to ensure mandatory training on child protection safeguarding for all sports coaches and that that should be part of a code of conduct in accredited sports coach training. Given that legislation on a safeguarding board is proceeding through the Assembly, DCAL should also consider what its role should be in relation to that board and whether it should seek membership.

Finally, although we have been focusing on sport, DCAL should consider the introduction of an auditing process for arm's-length bodies, to put safeguarding requirements across their entire spectrum of responsibility. There is no equivalent of Paul in other sections of DCAL.

Miss McIlveen:

Thank you for your presentation. One argument that has been used against broadening the abuse of trust provisions is that it would be a deterrent to people volunteering. Do you accept that?

Mr Reid:

No, we do not. We have heard that argument used about vetting and barring. We carried out a MORI opinion poll on vetting, which is quite a similar issue, and found that 97% of 1,000 representative adults in Northern Ireland were wholly supportive of the vetting arrangements that apply to children's participation in the community and voluntary sector. Paul can comment further on that. We have talked to many sporting organisations that support this. No bona fide organisation should be afraid of the legislation; it is not about capturing people or putting people off. In fact, it is about supporting them in their role.

Mr Stephenson:

If asked for their views in consultation, the governing bodies that are funded and supported by Sport NI would, overall, be supportive of the extension. The only deterrent is the deterrent to those in positions of authority from having sex with 16- to 18-year-olds with whom they have a coaching relationship. They are still deemed children and are still relatively vulnerable. That is the deterrent. We want a legal deterrent to be introduced.

Miss McIlveen:

You mentioned the consultation that DCAL undertook, as did the departmental officials when they met the Committee a number of weeks ago. Do you feel that the consultation event was sufficient and objective?

Mr Reid:

We welcomed the event. Indeed, we were allowed to participate as observers, which we were appreciative of.

Miss McIlveen:

Why were you observers?

Mr Stephenson:

We were invited as observers because the NSPCC is a campaigning organisation and has laid its cards on the table. We support an extension, whereas DCAL wanted the event to run as a neutral and factual event, whereas we would have been there to present our view. I suppose that, to be fair, I have had long-term working relationships with many of the audience, as I have provided them with case advice or training. Therefore, I may have been able to influence them. I would have liked the opportunity to address some issues with the audience, but we were asked not to.

Mr Reid:

We were puzzled. The consultation probably falls way short of Equality Commission requirements on consultation. It is quite a complex issue and should have undergone a proper consultation. It was quite focused on governing bodies and did not include parents, other children's organisations or young people who participate in sport. Given the complexity of the issue, we were surprised that a proper written consultation did not take place. It is not easy to communicate the nuances of the matter.

Miss McIlveen:

I am surprised that the consultation was not broader. It was quite exclusive in that it was one evening event only. Perhaps we could follow up on that.

Finally, has the introduction of safeguarding standards for governing bodies resulted in better protection for children?

Mr Stephenson:

The introduction of safeguarding standards, the linking of it to the release of public funds and tying it in to the Investment in Performance Sport programme has been a big motivator. Sports need to provide evidence that they govern their sport appropriately, manage their finances appropriately and have human resource arrangements in place. The introduction of safeguarding standards and the release of money on a drip feed depending on the level that organisation attain has certainly been a motivator for some sports that may not have been as proactive in the past.

Some sports have been proactive for the past number of years in trying to address issues and work to best practice. As is the case in any walk of life, other people are not as proactive, and the linking of access to public funds has been a strong motivator for some of those organisations. However, it has also empowered people who may be champions in their sport to take the matter back to the wider committee rather than just banging against a closed door. It has not been left to one person to take the lead individually; it has become a matter of collective responsibility for the executive committees of sports. That has been one of the biggest changes over the past number of years. Although the number of calls to us and our workload has increased, it should be welcomed.

Miss McIlveen:

I appreciate that the issue relates specifically to sport, and I am glad that you suggested broadening it. Having done music and drama as a young teenager, I am conscious of the fact that children have close relationships with tutors. I am glad that you mentioned that. Although it is not the time to develop that issue, the Committee could, perhaps, look at it in the future.

Mr McClarty:

Thank you, Kathleen, Colin and Paul, for your presentation. If sports coaches were included among the positions of trust, it would, presumably, become an offence for a 19-year-old sports coach to have a sexual relationship with a 17-year-old club member. Is that sensible?

Mr Reid:

Yes, technically that would be the case, under the legislation as it is framed. However, that also applies to residential workers in a children's home. A 21-year-old residential worker might look after a 17-year-old young person, and a sexual relationship between them would constitute an offence within that setting. It applies in a range of other statutory settings, such as hospitals. The law sets out various tests before prosecution can take place. You can never set an absolute on a criminal offence.

Sport has a peculiar nature. My daughter is an Irish and Ulster swimmer. I have some experience of how her coach runs our life. He makes a very positive contribution, but coaches play a very significant role in children's lives. It is that nature of the relationship that we want to capture. With respect to influence, it is no different to a residential worker looking after a young person. That is why we want the law to protect those vulnerable children. Also, there is an evidence base: a small number of cases have come through, which have had huge consequences for the young people involved.

Mr McClarty:

What is the difference between that scenario and a 19-year-old departmental manager having a

relationship with a new 17-year-old employee? He or she is not committing an offence.

Ms Toner:

The difference is that, under the legislation as it exists, abuse of trust is an offence. That means that a 21-year-old teacher, just out of college, who has a relationship with an 18-year-old upper sixth pupil is causing an offence. The offence was created to protect young people from a grooming situation. A child is in school from year one to year eight, so may be involved in sport from the age of four or five. Such a child may be with the same coach for a long period of time, and may get to elite level at the age of 15. This is to protect children in that situation. It is about abuse of power and trust. Criminalising normal sexual relationships is not the intention of the extension of the legislation; it is to protect children aged 16 and 17, who are over the age of consent but are in situations where adults have a position of power and responsibility over them.

Swedish research has found that at elite level, just before a young person becomes able to compete at Commonwealth or Olympic level, they are at their most vulnerable. That is because they are so dependent upon their coaches for the work that they are doing. It has shown that as many as 28% of female athletes have been sexually harassed by their coaches at some point. The extension of the legislation is not intended to criminalise normal sexual relationships, but to deal with a small number of people who will abuse their position of trust.

Sport is largely unregulated and done on a voluntary basis, and you find that there are protocols within sport whereby a disciplinary process can be taken. However, we know from experience that those who have been disciplined move on to a different sport. Paul and his colleagues have dealt with difficult cases where that has happened. This is not about criminalising normal relationships, but about dealing with abuse of trust within designated positions of responsibility.

Mr McClarty:

Do you not find it more difficult to get a conviction where there is that very small gap in age between the alleged offender and victim?

Mr Reid:

That is why the Public Prosecution Service applies public interest and evidential tests. As you know, not all cases end in prosecution. We are trying to capture serious cases of abuse of trust.

Mr Stephenson:

Of the inquiries that I have dealt with, none has been about 19 year olds; they have been about men in their 40s and 50s, most of whom are married. They are the sorts of calls that come to our unit.

Mr K Robinson:

Thank you for your detailed response. As a former teacher deemed, in the eyes of the law, to be a wise and prudent parent, I was particularly interested in the case that you made about the role of the schoolteacher and how the lines are firmly drawn in that respect. Following its research, the Department for Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) was of the view that there would be problems in defining what a sports coach is. Can that issue be overcome? How would you move towards a solution for that?

Mr Stephenson:

In our briefing paper, we introduced the idea of a level 1 coach as a starting point for consideration, because coaches in most sports come in at level 1. However, during DCAL's

event, a number of governing bodies said that that did not encompass the number of other authority figures within their sports. Therefore, that can only be established through a written consultation asking organisations what definition should be used to capture the role of a sports coach, because there are so many different definitions. In swimming, for instance, we are talking about people who are selectors.

Since this has been linked to the safeguarding of vulnerable groups, a definition of what is a regulated activity has been established. If the government can define who is to be required to be vetted for working with vulnerable young people, we should be able to transfer that definition over. If individuals are in a position where they are required to be vetted, or it is good practice for them to be vetted and they meet the criteria for an Access NI check because they work with certain groups, that should also be the threshold that decides that such individuals should not be having sexual relationships with people in those groups aged under 18.

Mr K Robinson:

You seem to be catching a more formalised coach. What about the unregulated coach? What about the guy or the lady who has a particular talent and wants to share that talent with a group of children in a more informal setting, which, subsequently, leads to the sort of activity that you described earlier? How do you deal with that sort of person?

Mr Stephenson:

We started with a level 1 coach because DCMS was asking how to capture who in the UK is a coach. However, at the DCAL event, the governing bodies all said that there were many people, such as parents who volunteer, who are not even level 1. We are saying that it could be linked to regulated activity, so that those individuals should still be required, through good practice, to be vetted through Access NI. If they meet the regulated activity threshold, they should meet the threshold for abuse of trust as well.

That is not relevant only in the sport sector. We have targeted the sport sector, because that is where we are getting the calls from. However, it is also relevant in faith-based organisations and scouting organisations, as there has been a number of such cases in the media over the past number of years.

Mr K Robinson:

That is the difficulty, or the counterpoint of the argument. A person who wants to volunteer to put something positive into the community may be deterred by the fear of being suspected of wanting to go off on a more deviant tangent.

Mr Reid:

We are not sure that that is the case. There is a parallel around Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checking and Access NI checking. A lot of research has been done by CRB into the impact of CRB checks. It found that they did not have a deterrent effect on volunteers. We do not think that any bona fide coach would have any difficulty with this legislation.

Mr K Robinson:

The public perception is that a lot of people are being deterred from stepping forward.

Mr Reid:

That is not held up by research. A lot of myths and misunderstands around these issues are perpetuated in the media. When DCAL disseminated information for the consultation event, we were concerned about the paper that was produced by DCMS and the Home Office in response to

their consultation after 2003. We thought that it was quite an odd paper. We have done some counter-arguments in the annex to our paper, and you can see those. Some of the arguments used do not stand up to any rational analysis. We believe that the definitional issue is a red herring. It can be sorted out. We are never going to set absolute boundaries on it, but if it can be sorted in a particular way, we will send an important message and change practice in a lot of ways.

Mr K Robinson:

I said that I was judged to be a wise and prudent parent in certain circumstances. In your submission, the term “intention to” is used. Presumably, it is for a court to decide whether someone intended to proceed along a deviant path or whether an opportunity presented itself, and, in the spur of the moment, something happened. That is very much back into the hands of the court.

Mr Reid:

In all criminal cases, people will be found guilty or acquitted. That is fine; that is the judicial process working. However, we do not have a particular judicial process around this segment at the moment.

Mr Stephenson:

One of the struggles for the voluntary sector is that they deal with some of these cases but do not see a legal outcome. Therefore, coaches may come back saying that they want to continue coaching, because they have been found not guilty or the police have not pressed charges. To be fair to the governing bodies, they take a much more robust stance and say that anyone who breaches their internal code of conduct is out. However, they have sometimes incurred legal costs in standing over such decisions. Therefore, we see the extension of the Order as supporting the voluntary sports sector, and we think that it will be welcomed.

Mr McCartney:

Who is responsible for extending the definition?

Mr Reid:

The Department of Justice.

Mr McCarthy:

I wish to follow on from what Paul and Colin have said about Access NI. I would have thought that its checks were originally brought in to ensure that these things do not happen. Are you saying that there are loopholes or gaps and that someone who had qualified could still pose a risk?

Mr Reid:

You are quite correct: Access Northern Ireland checks and the vetting and barring system that has been phased in are other parts of the good practice to protect children. An Access Northern Ireland check can produce someone’s criminal background information today. It will produce what is called soft intelligence or non-conviction data on an individual that may make that person unsuitable. However, that tells you the situation today. It does not predict what will happen tomorrow, and it does not necessarily stop people doing things. The regulations are all part of a protective environment around children and young people, and each plays its part. For example, a sports coach could do something and be barred from working with children, under the new vetting and barring arrangements. It is all part of a system of which there is a number of jigsaw pieces and interconnected parts.

Mr O’Loan:

I wish to make a few comments and then ask a question. The Committee had a paper previously — I cannot recall precisely from whom it came — that argued against the inclusion of sports coaches. That argument was along the lines that, if sports coaches are included, it ought to extend even broader than that. I remember, at that time, expressing the view that I was not very happy with that being the last word on the issue from the Committee’s point of view.

Secondly, I was not clear on the context before we started the discussion, although I am a bit clearer now. We could have been given more information on the background to why we are considering the issue and on the existing definition of positions of trust. However, that is somewhat clearer now.

Thirdly, I was involved in an Ad Hoc Committee on —

The Chairperson:

Declan, DCAL briefed us on the matter six weeks ago. That will help you to understand the background.

Mr O’Loan:

I apologise if I have not picked up all the context.

I was on an Ad Hoc Committee that dealt with the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, which I think is what we are talking about today. One thing that I learnt on that Committee is that law cannot be written on the matter that absolutely covers every particular case. It is very difficult to write law in this area. In response to David, Colin raised the issue of the discretion of the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) in taking a prosecution, and that is a very important point.

Finally, I come to my question. Are you suggesting that a group not being defined formally effectively gives protection to a person or group? Surely the PPS and the courts still have discretion to take a prosecution. Ultimately, it is up to those bodies to decide whether the position that someone holds is a position of trust.

Ms Toner:

The PPS has its own rules that it applies in all cases of sexual abuse. Obviously, the NSPCC deals with a range of child protection issues and sexual abuse cases. We have a young witness service in which we work with young people who have been abused and are going through the court process. However, the PPS makes its own decisions on certain cases that come to it.

Mr O’Loan:

Finally, in case I have said too much and have not been clear, I wish to clarify that it is my instinct that sports coaches should be formally included in such a definition.

Mr Leonard:

Good to see you, folks. Colin, I am relieved to hear of another parent whose life is tortured by sports.

This is a serious matter. I must admit that I would struggle with how to create legislation that comprehensively covers something so difficult. I know that there has been a consultation event and so on. However, what evidence, even if anecdotal, is coming to your organisation rather than to anyone else? Perhaps you have covered some of that already. We always ask what this body is saying and what that body is saying and do the official line. We do not want to think that it is

something that will be foisted on sportspeople and sports coaches. We want information from them about more of the on-the-ground issues, rather than the governing bodies replying officially.

I really struggle with the extension of categories, although I have no problem including this category. However, if we are going to argue that it can be extended to one group in the informal sector, which Ken referred to, or virtually any sector, why not extend it to another group? Why not extend it across the board to any position of trust? That may not be legally possible, but why does it have to be categorised?

Mr Reid:

That is a good point. We do not want to see a creeping age of consent. We have a consent age of 16 and we are raising it, de facto, to 18. We probably need to have a debate on where to draw the line. We have focused on sports coaches, but there are other positions of responsibility; clergymen and doctors, for example, are in a similar position. However, we have brought sports coaches to the table because that is where we have the evidence base. We started the debate about sports coaches, in particular, at the time when the sexual offences legislation that Declan referred to was being introduced. However, we need to draw the line somewhere. As someone else said, we cannot capture everything, so let us capture where there is a degree of risk and protection is needed.

It will not be an offence for a 16-year-old to engage in sexual activity with a coach. There will be no offence and there will be no prosecution if it is consensual. Consent is the key issue.

Mr Leonard:

What about the feedback from people on the ground?

Mr Stephenson:

The proactive governing bodies who have embedded safeguarding into their organisations would welcome this, because they have had to deal with those issues, and they cannot take them to a legislative outcome. Therefore, it would benefit them, as well as safeguarding young people. I have talked to the parents of young people who have been groomed and trapped — whatever terminology you want to use — by people in positions of power, and they are frustrated that they have not had an outcome. When they go to the police, the police say that they can take no further action.

Mr Leonard:

I was asking more from the point of view of the coaches at the local Gaelic club, for example. Have they given you feedback on what would be of benefit to them?

Mr Stephenson:

You would need to ask a governing body that. I have delivered training courses, and many sports coaches are teachers. They just say that you cannot abuse your position, because that is the law. That is their understanding in their professional role: they assume that it is the law already.

Ms Toner:

That is why a broader consultation, involving coaches and young people, would have been beneficial. We could have had a handle on people's views.

Mr Leonard:

Yes, you would get some real conversations.

The Chairperson:

I thank Colin, Kathleen and Paul from the NSPCC for coming to the Committee.