

PRESS RELEASE

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ISA VBS REVIEW – “HOLD YOUR NERVE, MINISTER”, URGES CCPAS

The Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS), one of the UK's leading experts in advising and training Christian and secular organisations in child protection practices, today urged Children's Minister Ed Balls to hold his nerve in the recent controversy over the Independent Safeguarding Authority's (ISA) Vetting and Barring Scheme (VBS). Last week Balls asked ISA chairman Roger Singleton to report by early December whether or not the balance was right in defining what activities should and should not be covered by the scheme.

David Pearson, Chief Executive of CCPAS, who has 40 years experience in child protection: said: "I totally agree with Mr Balls when he said there had been some 'inaccurate and misleading reports about the operation of the new arrangements'. What is important now is that the Singleton Review does not provide some sort of fig leaf, or excuse, which leads to many of the essential and well thought-through reforms encapsulated in the VBS being watered-down or jettisoned.

"Any difficulty with the Scheme lies in its complexity. Most people currently do not understand how it will work, so some individuals and organisations are using the confusion to advance their own agendas by fermenting a kind of 'moral panic' amongst media and commentators.

"That could easily be prevented by government giving clearer, more concise information on the working of the Scheme - and especially who will be required to join it. CCPAS is working with the DCSF to try to achieve this.

“In all of the misinformation a number of key issues have been ignored. Much emphasis has been laid on children’s work, and especially in parents transporting children to sporting events, for example. But the fact is that private arrangements between parents are not covered under the scope of the Scheme, so parents in this position have absolutely no need to register.”

The VBS is based on the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, which in turn had its roots in the Bichard Inquiry Report (2004) into the Soham murders of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in August 2002. The original Bill was debated extensively in both Chambers of the House, where it received cross-party support. Pearson added: “It is unhelpful and surprising, therefore, that politicians across the spectrum have been so critical and ignorant in relation to what the VBS is.

“By contrast, people need to understand that the Scheme will significantly enhance our ability to protect children and those who are vulnerable. Instead of being checked against a number of government lists of those deemed unsuitable for working with children or vulnerable adults, the VBS represents a major improvement.”

This is because of how the VBS works. In future, an individual will join the Scheme by completing a CRB application. At that time the person’s employer will be linked to them. If they are a volunteer the Scheme is free. Those in paid employment pay a one off fee of £64, which includes the cost of the CRB check.

Currently, a CRB disclosure is a just a snap shot in time. Were an individual to commit an offence the day after the disclosure is received, an employer would not get to know about this information. Even where employers undertake regular re-checks, these usually take place every three years or so.

Under the VBS, conversely, should an individual commit offences against children or vulnerable adults and be removed from the Scheme as a result, then any employer with a legitimate interest in the individual will be informed – *immediately*.

Pearson concluded: “There is no doubt whatsoever that the VBS represents a major step forward in safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. We urge Mr Balls not to be deflected from this important, timely and thoroughly worthwhile reform by a combination of

private interest and general ignorance. In particular, the Singleton review must not be allowed to dilute these proposals.”

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

CCPAS is an independent Christian charity providing professional child protection advice and support across church denominations and organisations throughout the UK.

CCPAS was established in 1977. It assists churches, organisations, social services and other child care agencies as well as individual children and families by:

- helping churches and other organisations adopt safe practice in order to protect children from abuse – and youth workers from the possibility of false allegations
- advising on individual cases, giving ongoing help to leaders and others.
- training across the UK and providing “in-house” training and other resources
- acting as external consultants to denominational/organisational child protection advisors
- counselling individual adults or children about past or present abuse.

For more information, please see www.ccpas.co.uk