

Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) evidence submission to the Public Bill Committee, Crime and Policing Bill

April 2025

About RCPCH

We are the membership body for paediatricians in the UK and around the world. We have about 24,000 members in the UK and internationally, and play a major role in postgraduate medical education, professional standards, research and policy. Child protection plays a role in everything we do as child health professionals, and is about protecting individual children identified as suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect.

Summary

- This evidence submission from RCPCH relates to Part 5, Chapter 2 (Duty to Report Child Sexual Abuse).
- The goal of any child protection policy is to ensure that children are protected from harm. An evidence review by the RCPCH has shown that mandatory reporting of child abuse increases the instances of reported abuse; however, there is limited evidence to show that an increase in reports leads to an increase in protection of, or better outcomes for, children.
- Outcomes for children depend, at least in part, on the capacity of the system into which reports are made. It is essential that the Government ensures that systems are in place to be sure that every single case of reported abuse will be investigated and acted upon, and that potential unintended consequences of mandatory reporting do not occur.
- The RCPCH (“the College”) has concerns with the measures set out in Part 5, Chapter 2 on mandatory reporting and whether these measures are best for children in England and Wales.
- The College is asking the government and members of the bill committee to consider five key points before agreeing to these measures:
 1. All types of child abuse must fall under any mandatory reporting duty.
 2. A children’s rights-based approach must be followed, and a children’s rights impact assessment must be carried out.
 3. A government systems impact assessment must be carried out.
 4. Measurable outcomes for children must be built into any plans.
 5. Clearer definitions must be provided before further consultation.
- The College cannot recommend a blanket introduction of mandatory reporting, as this Bill would allow for, until these recommendations are addressed.
- Instead, the College believes strengthening measures can be applied to existing mechanisms, such as better use of the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) system, increased registration (by regulators) of professionals, standardisation and strengthening of the LADO system, and an alignment of standards across the UK regulators in relation to mandatory reporting.

Mandatory reporting: Position summary and the College's five key asks

- 'Mandatory Reporting' refers to a duty, placed on an individual or organisation, to report child abuse to the relevant authority. The RCPCH published an updated position statement on mandatory reporting in February 2025.
- Prior to this, the RCPCH published a position on the introduction of mandatory reporting in 2023. This statement reviewed the literature and concluded that there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate that mandatory reporting improves outcomes for children.
- The updated position statement, published in 2025, incorporates new literature published between 2023 and 2025. The RCPCH did not find evidence to contradict the conclusions outlined in the 2023 position. The College's current position is therefore substantively the same as the position set out in 2023, albeit now – in 2025 – with further evidence to support that 2023 position.
- The statement in this document sets out the RCPCH's position and is informed by the 2025 update including an updated literature review, the findings of the final report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) (October 2022) and the Government's subsequent call for evidence on an introduction of Mandatory Reporting
- The RCPCH acknowledges the extensive evidence shared with the IICSA and commends the survivors and victims for bravely sharing their testimonies. It is imperative that the Government listens and makes a change which will protect children from abuse in the future. It has therefore been important for the RCPCH to consider the available academic evidence in order to determine whether the introduction of mandatory reporting is likely to improve outcomes for children.
- Based on this threshold, the RCPCH cannot currently recommend that a blanket mandatory reporting duty is introduced. This document sets out our reasons for this in detail.
- If the Government is to consider the introduction of mandatory reporting, the RCPCH suggests that the following five things) must first happen in order to ensure that outcomes for children are placed at the centre of decision-making and to avoid negative unintended consequences:
 1. **All Types of Abuse:** Any introduction of a mandatory reporting duty must apply to all forms of child abuse, not individual categories of abuse such as child sexual abuse. It is important that any duty applies to all types of abuse to avoid a 'hierarchy of abuse' being inadvertently created.
 2. **Children's Rights-based Approach:** The RCPCH recommends that the Government must carry out an assessment of the introduction of mandatory reporting of child abuse, for example using UNICEF's seven principles of a rights-based approach.
 3. **Impact Assessment:** In light of evidence that social care systems cannot always respond to the rise in reports when mandatory reporting is introduced, the RCPCH recommends that the Government carries out a full impact assessment in order to better understand how social care systems will adequately respond to child abuse reports.
 4. **Outcomes for Children:** Should the Government proceed with mandatory reporting, the RCPCH recommends that clear, defined outcomes for children are identified and built into any proposals and that the result of an introduction of

mandatory reporting is monitored to ensure that it is resulting in better outcomes for children, rather than simply an increase in reports.

5. **Clear Definitions:** The Government must establish and clearly define the practical mechanisms which would exist as a part of a mandatory reporting duty including :
 - i. Thresholds for reporting
 - ii. Reporting systems
 - iii. Reporting processing
 - iv. Abuse types
 - v. Thresholds for culpability

Mandatory reporting: full position

- Our latest position statement, which is supported by the Royal College of General Practitioners, on mandatory reporting was published in March 2025 and is enclosed and available and at this link: <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/rcpch-position-mandatory-reporting-child-abuse>.
- This full position statement covers:
 - What is already known about mandatory reporting of child abuse
 - What this position statement adds regarding mandatory reporting of child abuse
 - Adopting a children's rights-based approach to mandatory reporting: overview
 - Current Landscape: existing duties to report child abuse
 - Evidence: Research and literature review findings
 - Effects of introducing a mandatory reporting duty
 - Barriers to reporting of abuse
 - Unintended consequences of a change in threshold for reporting
 - Public policy transfer
 - Types of abuse
 - Monitoring the impact of changes to the child protection system
 - Interim recommendations
 - Aligning the requirements of existing regulators
 - Standardising-cross professional approaches to the reporting of child abuse
 - Strengthening the role of the LADO
 - Strengthening the role of the DBS
 - Consistent Child Identifier
 - Measured application
- If you would like to discuss our position on the Bill or anything within our position statement on mandatory reporting please contact: public.affairs@rcpch.ac.uk.