Effective safeguarding and a shared commitment to minimize risk to students, families and staff, is unequivocally important and a unifying factor which binds quality international school communities together worldwide. This is regardless of location, curriculum, phase or school size. As educators, school leaders and board members, we appreciate that collaborative and joint initiatives are proven ways to get the best results. With strength in ‘partnerships’ in mind, the International Task Force for Child Protection (ITFCP) held its first face to face meetings in Leiden, Netherlands on 20 and 30 September 2014.

The ITFCP has been established in direct response to a number of recently reported and shocking child protection criminal cases which have affected children and their families within the International school community worldwide. It became clear to many in the International school sector that following a series of failings, a collaborative approach to safeguarding was required and essential. Many asked, How could this have happened? Why did we not see the signs? What should I do if I suspect abuse? Where do I turn if no resources are available in my community?

With lots of recent activity connected to the ITFCP, this article sets to 1) highlight the existence and objectives of the ITFCP 2) to illustrate the range of stakeholders within the group and to invite others to participate 3) to communicate a call to action for schools to operate within and promote a safeguarding culture 4) to implement and regularly review child protection policies and the principles of safer recruitment practice 5) to access and cascade high quality child protection training 6) to cooperate with law enforcement agencies and 7) to remain vigilant and professionally equipped to report on suspected incidences.

Since the formation of the ITFCP in May 2014, the international community response and willingness of volunteers to contribute to the ITFCP has been strong. To date, members of the ITFCP include:

- 17 international and regional associations/organisations which support international education
- Over 50 serving senior school leaders from international schools
- Over 15 international recruiting agencies and organisations
- Over 10 international educational accreditation and inspection agencies
- Criminologists, psychologists and counsellors from licensed organisations
- Representatives from companies owning international schools

In addition, the transnational governmental participation and support for the ITFCP is growing with the following agencies actively engaged:

- CEOP Command, National Crime Agency, UK
- Europol
- International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (and U.S. National Center)
- Interpol
- Netherlands Ministry of Security and Justice
- RCMP’s Canadian Police Centre for Missing and Exploited Children/Behavioural Sciences
OBJECTIVES, STRUCTURE AND ACTIONS OF THE ITFCP

The ITFCP is committed to a clear set of objectives. Unanimously, all organisations involved work together to apply collective resources, expertise and partnerships to address historic, current and future child protection challenges. The structure of the ITFCP leads it not to become a bureaucratic body. The ITFCP structure comprises of 3 sub-committees which consult widely and, report back to the ITFCP. The 3 sub-committees are:

1. **The School Evaluation Committee** with representatives from accreditation and inspection agencies, associations and serving heads of school. This committee has collated, reviewed and assessed current external processes, standards and indicators which are used to regulate, evaluate and monitor school practices connected to ensuring child protection and well-being.

2. **The School Recruitment Committee** with representatives from international recruitment agencies, associations and serving school leaders. This committee has researched and reviewed the range of tools available and used by schools and international recruitment agencies to attract, screen and conduct criminal background checks on current and potential members of the school workforce.

3. **School Policies and Resources Committee** with representatives from international school communities. Again, this committee has collated, reviewed and created resources for school communities to establish effective operational policies and practices for the selection, employment and training of members of the school workforce to ensure child protection and well-being. School policies and resources have been categorised into the following groups, prevention, reporting, conflict resolution and recovery.

Each sub-committee is responsible to promote effectiveness in each of these three areas. These include conducting research and the dissemination of policies, procedural documents, training materials and inspection protocol between associations, schools and accreditation and inspection agencies. Plus to support preventative measures and effective pastoral and legislative proceedings, recommendations from anonymised case studies of alleged and confirmed child protection cases have been shared. Actions have been identified which in turn are designed to further raise International school standards of child protection and safer recruitment practices.

The recent ITFCP meetings at the end of September were attended by over 40 task force members and volunteers. The agenda explored a number of areas, delivered by expert child protection and law enforcement professionals. These included:

- **The Global Environment and Realities about Child Abuse and Exploitation.** Various national and international governmental agencies illustrated the reporting and tracking systems of known child abuse and exploitation offenders which are available through crime prevention and law enforcement agencies, including Lennert Branderhorst from the Netherlands Ministry of Security and Justice and Yvonne Nouwen from the Dutch Police. Discussions focused on how schools can identify risks, gaps and challenges in identifying, reporting and tracking transnational child abuse and exploitation offenders. Potential new initiatives were discussed, all of which aim to make criminal background checks between countries stronger.

- **Why do offenders do that?** Led by Dr Michael Bourke, from the U.S. Marshalls Service, Department of Justice. During this session, the mind-set and behavioural characteristics of sex offenders was discussed drawing on imperial evidence and published theory.
- **Why do international schools attract child sex offenders?** Why have international school offenders gone undetected or unreported? What is the role of schools? What is not the role of the school? This session was led by Fernando Matus from the U.S. Diplomatic Security Service and the U.S. Department of State. Mr Matus referenced FBI investigation and his role in specific cases.

- **Resources and Training for School Educators, Parents and Children.** Led by Guillermo Galarza, from the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children. This session enabled attendees to share details of how child abuse and exploitation reporting systems varied enormously in different countries and for example, how legislation doesn’t exist in many countries to prosecute against child protection incidences.

In addition, ITFCP Committees reported on their progress to date and subsequent action points.

Members of the ITFCP, including the Chairs of the three task force sub-committees (School Evaluation, School Recruitment and School Policies and Resources), will report on their findings and recommendations at the upcoming **AAIE Conference to be held in San Francisco in February 2015.** We are grateful to AAIE for scheduling this update during one of the conference general sessions so that we may hear from attendees about their specific questions and concerns as we move forward with our work.

Finally, within the unity and diversity of our inclusive sector and building on current safeguarding and safer recruitment practices, can you, colleagues or students at your International school or organisation support the work of the ITFCP?

Perhaps by publishing and disseminating information/resources, identifying and hosting quality training programmes, recommending excellent child protection/safer recruitment speakers who can effectively train and raise the awareness of students, parents and members of our school workforce?

To get involved or to suggest recommendations that will guide and add value to the ITFCP, please contact Jane Larsson, ITFCP Chair [janelarsson@cois.org](mailto:janelarsson@cois.org), or any member of the Task Force.

**MEMBERS OF THE TASK FORCE:**

- Colin Bell, CEO, Council of British International Schools (in liaison with BSME, FOBISIA, LAHC and NABSS)
- Bambi Betts, Executive Director, Academy of International School Heads
- Christine Brown, Regional Education Officer for Europe, U.S. Department of State, Office of Overseas Schools
- Linda Duevel, President-elect, Association for the Advancement of International Education
- Roger Hove, President, International Schools Services
- Jane Larsson, Executive Director, Council of International Schools (Chair)
- Kevin Ruth, Executive Director, ECIS