



# ***The Case Against Vetting***

## ***How the child protection industry is poisoning adult-child relations***

16 October 2006

### **REPORT SUMMARY**

#### **1. Vetting is out of control.**

*There has been a massive expansion of vetting in the past four years. People are being vetted who pose no possible danger to children.*

There has been almost a **100 per cent** rise in the annual number of criminal checks issued by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) since 2002.<sup>1</sup> The CRB recently announced its **ten millionth disclosure**.

*Financial year Number of disclosures issued*

2002-03	1,441,704
2003-04	2,287,109
2004-05	2,434,290
2005-06	2,772,929
Total	8,936,032

The **Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Bill** will mean that **one third of the adult working population** will be subject to ongoing criminal checks.<sup>2</sup>

Those now routinely vetted include: **16-year-olds who teach younger kids to read**; hospital secretaries who rarely meet children; **foster carers' friends**; school governors; **parent volunteers in schools**; cricket umpires; **private music tutors**; university lecturers who teach 17-year-olds; **students who help out on university open days**; plumbers who check the school radiators; **grandmothers who volunteer in schools**; child psychologists who review adoption applications; **teenagers whose parents are childminding a younger child**

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<sup>1</sup> These are 'standard' and 'enhanced' disclosures from police national records, between March 2002 and March 2006 <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2006-06-28a.77484.h>

<sup>2</sup> 9.5 million adults will be subject to the new vetting scheme, according to the DfES 'Vetting and barring scheme, policy briefing back', available at:

<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/vettingandbarring/>

The adult working population in England and Wales is 25.731 million

[http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme\\_labour/LMT\\_Oct06.pdf#page=48](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_labour/LMT_Oct06.pdf#page=48)

**Running an after-school club is now subject to more stringent tests than selling explosives, or practising law.<sup>3</sup>**

## **2. Vetting is damaging community life.**

*The expansion of vetting is threatening the jumble sales, local football teams, school trips and sports days that are key to children's lives.*

**Vetting makes it difficult to help the community** – in order to give an hour or two helping out at a school disco, an adult would have to **produce three forms of identification, pay £36, and wait for around four weeks.**

**Schools have suffered from a dearth of parent volunteers – at sports days, jumble sales or fetes** – because schools were insisting that parents were CRB checked. **Volunteers have been turned away** because their criminal records checks hadn't come through in time.

**Tennis coach and sports promoter, Dan Travis:** *'Vetting is helping to destroy the voluntary sector in sport. Four individuals I have worked with in the past year did not start their sport or music clubs because they thought that they were not "allowed" to do so. Fathers will not work with football teams in which their sons play because they don't want to come across as "dodgy".'*

**Events for children have been cancelled because of vetting.** Scottish Borders Council cancelled **foreign exchange visits** for children, because the foreign host families could not be checked.<sup>4</sup>

**Vetting teaches children to be suspicious of all adults,** and bureaucratises informal relationships.

**Jim Campbell, Mayor of Oxford:** *'The important informal ways in which people relate are going to disappear – everything will be done under contract. We are in danger of creating a generation of children who are encouraged to look at people who want to help them with suspicion.'*

## **3. Vetting doesn't work.**

*It is unlikely that vetting would have caught Ian Huntley – he didn't work at the school of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman. Vetting won't stop child abusers, and it may even make them harder to detect.*

**Vetting casts such a wide net that it becomes more difficult to distinguish between trustworthy and untrustworthy adults.**

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<sup>3</sup> Disclosure Scotland states that standard disclosure is available for senior bank managers and in the interests of national security, and those applying for explosives licences, but says that those who are involved in caring for children can get higher-level enhanced disclosures

<http://www.disclosurescotland.co.uk/typesofdis.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Report made to SPTC

**Simon Wessely, psychiatrist, King's College London:** *'People are blasé about vetting, and as a result they are much less likely to spot somebody who really is a danger. Vetting isn't based on any risk assessment. It is all part of fear of things that are largely illusory, forgetting fears that are more real.'*

**Judith Gillespie, Scottish Parent Teacher Council:** *'There is a danger we will de-skill children, and leave them unable to look out for their own safety and incapable of judging between risky and safe adults.'*

**Vetting is more about people covering their backs**, showing that they followed the correct procedure and are not to blame if something goes wrong.

**Eileen Munro, LSE:** *'This is blame avoidance rather than child protection. People prefer a mechanical process like a CRB check because there is no judgment involved and so no risk of making a mistake for which they might be blamed.... However, if you are trying to help children, you need to be sensitive to the unique situation of the child.'*

#### **4. A child protection industry is making money out of vetting.**

**Vetting places a financial burden on small organisations and volunteers**, channelling away money that could be spent on their work.

- Many volunteers have to pay for themselves to be checked, which costs between **£7 and £30** in administration charges. Employers pay the CRB either **£31 or £36** for a disclosure<sup>5</sup>, and it costs **£45 or more** to go through an umbrella body.
- **Volunteer Reading Help** spends £4300 vetting its 120 staff; 2000 volunteers pay for themselves to be vetted, totalling at least £14,000 – which all adds up to **£18,300**.<sup>6</sup>
- The **Scout Association** carries out 50,000 checks a year, at a total cost of **£250,000**.<sup>7</sup>

**But it feeds an ever-growing child-protection industry.**

- The CRB's disclosure process cost around **£83 million** for 2005-6, with government contributing **£7 million**.<sup>8</sup> The CRB's deal with Capita was worth around **£400 million**, over 10 years.<sup>9</sup>
- The new vetting and barring scheme will have additional set-up costs of **£16.6 million**, and annual running costs of between **£12 million and £15 million**.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The prices are for standard and enhanced disclosures, respectively

<sup>6</sup> Research on the cost of vetting to voluntary bodies, Sadhavi Sharma

<sup>7</sup> Research on the cost of vetting to voluntary bodies, Sadhavi Sharma

<sup>8</sup> Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Research Paper, p40

<http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2006/rp06-035.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> *The Times*, 22 May 2006

<sup>10</sup> Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Research Paper, p40

<http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2006/rp06-035.pdf>