

Safety checking of vocational trainees as required by the Vulnerable Children's Act 2014

4 December 2015

Tertiary education organisations (TEOs) are responsible for “vocational trainees” to be safety checked under the Vulnerable Children's Act 2014 (VCA).

The approach to the enforcement of safety checking requirements of vocational trainees will allow time for the Children's Action Plan Directorate to work with the sector to determine how best to implement the VCA requirements.

In the meantime, the Children's Action Plan Directorate is available to answer your questions, and support you through the implementation of the VCA. You can contact the Directorate by emailing admin@childrensactionplan.govt.nz

Why safety checking of vocational trainees is important

Safety checking is part of fostering a safe and competent children's workforce who work together to identify, support and protect vulnerable children. A number of TEOs and organisations are already implementing the safety checking requirements.

Since 1 July 2015, all new core workers entering the children's workforce need to be safety checked. Core children's workers are in charge of, or work alone with, children. Generally, the VCA applies to workers who are paid or funded directly or indirectly by state sector agencies, but it also applies to unpaid work that is undertaken as part of an education or vocational training course.

From 1 July 2015, under the VCA students or “vocational trainees” being placed in host organisations as part of their training – for example nurses, social workers, doctors, paediatricians, youth counsellors and teachers – need to be safety checked if they are working with children in core children's worker roles.

Safety checking will apply to students and trainees from 1 July 2016

From 1 July 2016, TEOs will need to safety check students or trainees on placement in non-core workforce roles as well. Non-core children's workers may have regular or overnight contact with children as part of their role, but don't meet the definition of core workers. For example: non-teaching school staff, general hospital staff and many social and health workers.

What is the safety check and when does it need to be done?

These requirements above come into effect when a vocational trainee starts work as a children's worker rather than when they start their study. Current students will need to be considered as new workers at the time they take up their placement.

Safety checking for 'new' children's workers includes:

- an interview with questions relevant to suitability to work with children
- reference checking with questions about suitability to work with children
- work history and professional memberships
- identity check
- a police vet, and
- an overall assessment of the person's safety in working with children.

Who will do the safety checks?

TEOs generally already undertake similar checks, so it is expected that your organisation will continue to conduct these as part of your screening and enrolments processes.

In many cases, your organisation may be in the best place to complete safety checks, as "vocational trainees" may have placements at many different host organisations, and you can do the check on their behalf which will reduce duplication. This ensures that candidates are more likely to meet workforce safety requirements for the children's workforce from the start of their training.

Host organisations receiving students on vocational placements are accountable for ensuring relevant safety checks have been completed. They can rely on checks undertaken by others on their behalf within the previous three years, as long as they also confirm the identity of the student, and have assessed the risk they may pose to the safety of children (based on the information available).

Because the VCA says the checking needs to be done on behalf of the host organisation, if your organisation is undertaking checks you will need to confirm you are acting on behalf of the host organisation through a Memorandum of Understanding or similar.

Universities NZ has created an implementation framework, with common guidelines, and is happy to share this with other TEOs. You can adapt this to suit your organisation. There will be a link available on the CAP website (<http://childrensactionplan.govt.nz>), as one of the tools developed to help organisations implement the safety checking requirements.

The VCA does not specify who should complete these safety checks for vocational trainees, but host organisations are accountable for ensuring the necessary checks are completed.

Contact

If you have any questions, contact the Children's Action Plan Directorate at admin@childrensactionplan.govt.nz