

From Bishop Viv Faull, deputy lead safeguarding bishop and co-chair designate of the All Party Parliamentary Group on safeguarding in faith settings.

"We welcome the announcement in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill being introduced in Parliament today, that faith leaders who have sexual relationships with 16 and 17-year-olds in their care will be breaking the law under new legislation planned for England and Wales.

This was one of the recommendations in the interim report from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, IICSA, in 2019, in its Anglican Church investigation.

Current legislation states that while the age of consent is 16, it is illegal for those in some professions - such as teachers, social workers and doctors - to have a sexual relationship with 16 or 17-year-olds in their care. These new proposals will now include faith leaders and sports coaches.

We responded to the IICSA recommendation at the time indicating our full support for the change in law. The Church takes all safeguarding issues very seriously and expects the highest standards of its clergy and leaders. But as the recent overarching IICSA report has shown us, the Church of England has failed to respond well to victims and survivors who have come forward and has failed to protect some children and young people from sexual predators within their midst. We are committed to improving our safeguarding processes and changing our culture and we welcome this proposed change in legislation as part of this.

"We would also like to thank thirtyone:eight and the All Party Parliamentary Group on safeguarding in faith settings for all their important campaigning work on the Positions of Trust issue and personally I look forward to working with them and others across parliament in the future".

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