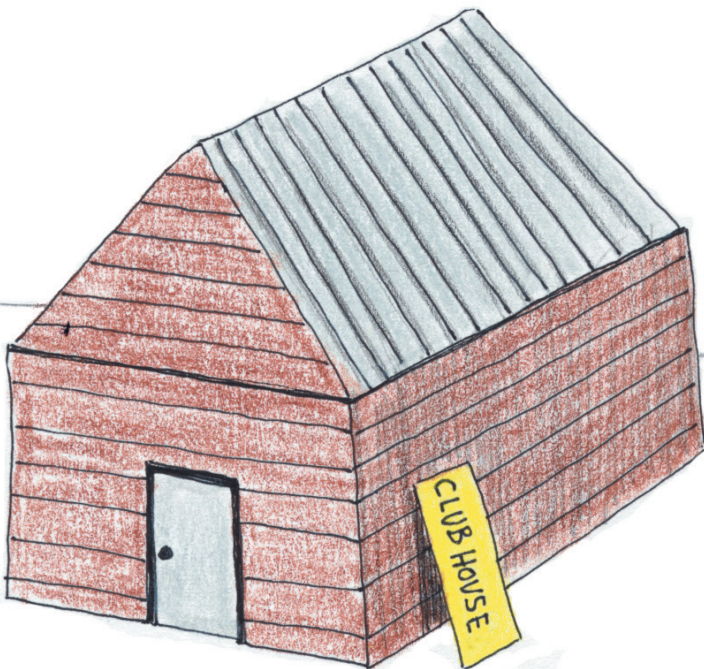




CAMPAIGN AGAINST VETTING



HOBBY CLUBS

APRIL 2007

THE MANIFESTO CLUB

The Manifesto Club (www.manifestoclub.com) is a new initiative that stands for a freer and more humane society. We have written a manifesto based on humanist principles (see Appendix A).

We are concerned about the damaging consequences that adult vetting has for the relations between the generations. That is why we have decided to join with other concerned people to campaign against the policing of adult-child relations.

We have launched an **online petition** opposing the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act (see Appendix B), signed by parents, teachers, volunteers, and individuals including Johnny Ball, Fay Weldon, and Alan Sillitoe. (www.manifestoclub.com/vetting)

We have also published two reports:

* **The Case Against Vetting**, which charts the growth of vetting, and illustrates its damaging consequences for communities.*

* **How the Child Protection Industry Stole Christmas**, which shows how child protection measures spoil Christmas fun.*

For more information, or to be involved in the campaign against vetting, email info@manifestoclub.com

* <http://www.manifestoclub.com/files/THE%20CASE%20AGAINST%20VETTING.pdf>

* <http://www.manifestoclub.com/xmas06>

INTRODUCTION

Hobby clubs – model flying clubs, fishing clubs, mountaineering clubs, gaming clubs – are valuable spaces for young people to develop independence, and pursue their own interests outside of home and school.

However, over-cautious child protection policies are now limiting children's access to these clubs. This report examines the case study of model flying clubs and shows how, over the past two years, the main result of 'child protection' policies has been to make adults wary of teaching and helping children. Policies brought through in the name of children's welfare have actually caused the exclusion of young people. Findings include:

- *Coaches are refusing to coach children, and adult flyers are refusing to help children if they ask for assistance.

- *Several model flying clubs have closed their doors to under-18s. 'Anti-child' attitudes have grown, with some adult flyers saying that they want nothing to do with children.

- *Teenagers have been turned away from clubs, because their parents could not accompany them flying.

The government says that it wants more young people to join sports and hobby clubs – to get them off the streets, and to encourage them to channel their energies in more productive ways. Gordon Brown has pledged a massive expansion of out-of-school sports clubs by 2010, largely staffed by adult volunteers.¹ Yet the government's heavy-handed child protection policies have the precise opposite effect.

All the measures now implemented in model flying clubs - including Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks for coaches, obligatory child welfare officers, and requirements for parental supervision - are following official guidance from the Child Protection in Sport Unit, which advises all sport and hobby clubs. When the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act comes into force in autumn 2008, CRB checks will be obligatory for all hobby club volunteers who work with children.

¹ The Times, 12 February 2007

At the Manifesto Club, we started to research this area after we were contacted by a number of model flyers concerned about the future of their sport. In model flying clubs, as in other hobby clubs, adults – on an entirely voluntary and informal basis – pass on complex technical skills to young people. Their efforts have borne fruit: some of the best flyers in the UK are under 18. Current policies mean that the next generation is unlikely to enjoy the same opportunities.

There is no known case of child abuse in model flying, but there are many cases of young people limited by excessive risk-aversion. The more child protection policies are implemented in hobby clubs, the more adults withdraw from children – and the more young people lose out on opportunities for self-development. If the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act is rolled out as planned in 2008, it is likely that the main losers will be the young.

Josie Appleton, convenor, Manifesto Club

1. MODEL FLYING AND YOUNG PEOPLE

There are around 780 model flying clubs across Britain, with some 36,000 members. As with other hobby clubs, model flying clubs offer a host of social and educational opportunities for young people.

Building and flying model planes is a technically demanding activity, which requires building complex structures from high-tech materials; programming computer control systems; and developing a good knowledge of practical aerodynamics. Young people can learn on the flying field in a way that is interesting and fun.

How model flying coaching worked, Grant Hole (coach)

‘Coaching young people wasn’t formal at all. If I had the time, and if the young person was at the field at the same time and asked me, then I helped them. Sometimes you would strike up a friendship with that young person, and coach them fairly regularly until they were able to fly for themselves. On two occasions I have mentored 12- and 13-year olds; one learnt easily, the other took a couple of years. You need somebody to mentor you until you are able to fly around without crashing.

‘Model flying is very difficult – it is the most difficult skill I’ve ever learnt, much harder than driving a car – and if you make a mistake the model crashes. You have to learn to manage four controls, and the controls reverse depending on the direction that the plane is travelling. It is impossible to learn without somebody helping you.

‘You have to be a fairly proficient model flyer in order to tutor somebody. Within model flying, there are not that many people who are proficient enough to take a crashing model and recover it. In a club such as mine, with 100 people, there are only 10 people who are really capable of providing tuition.’

Model flying clubs also help young people to develop socially and emotionally.

Tim Gill, an expert on childhood, argues:

‘When children find something they are good at and enjoy for its own sake, it raises their self-confidence and helps them to respond better to difficult situations elsewhere in their lives. Clubs offer young members a place where they feel a sense of belonging, and the chance to interact with people beyond home and school.’²

Peter Vivian, a model flyer, says:

‘Young persons joining what is basically an adult club will mix with their “elders and betters” on common ground and not as inferiors, and thereby learn a new and essential range of social skills. Youngsters joining a model flying club should make new friends of all ages, and become involved in what may become a long-term hobby.’³

Some young people have reached a very high level of ability, thanks to the training of adult volunteers. Nathan Farrell-Jones, now 17, is one of the two top model flyers in the country. Farrell-Jones started flying when he was 12, says Alex Whittaker, an instructor at the same North Wales club. ‘His mum used to leave him with we older flyers. It is a small community, and we all know each other - we would drop him off home after training.’⁴

Graham Roscoe, 16, explains why he is attracted to flying: ‘I go flying as a way to relax and enjoy myself. Ever since I got involved with the hobby, people have been very supportive.’ He has already achieved his instructor’s qualification, and says that ‘soon I am hoping to begin competing around the country’.⁵

Unfortunately, those a few years younger than Roscoe and Farrell-Jones may not have the same opportunities.

2 Email to Josie Appleton, 22 March 2007

3 Email to Josie Appleton, 25 March 2007

4 Interview with Josie Appleton, 25 March 2007

5 Email to Josie Appleton, 27 March 2007

2. COACHES WHO WON'T TEACH CHILDREN

Some flying coaches are now refusing to teach children – either because they are put off by specific child protection guidelines, such as requirements for CRB checks; or because they perceive working with children as too burdensome or ‘risky’.

The government denies that CRB checks put adults off volunteering. Joan Ryan, a parliamentary undersecretary of state responsible for the Act, argues: ‘I cannot agree...that [the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act] will discourage volunteers. I believe most people understand and respect the need for adequate checks on persons seeking to work with children and young adults’.⁶ John O’Brien, the Home Office official responsible for developing the Act, said that if adults did not want to undergo CRB checks there could be suspicious reasons for this.⁷

The case study of model flying suggests that CRB checks do reduce adult volunteering – which indicates that the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act will further reduce the training and support available for young people.

CRB Checks

British Model Flying Association (BMFA) guidelines (introduced over the past two or three years) state that a coach must be CRB checked, if the child is not accompanied by their parent. Clubs must comply with these guidelines if they are to remain insured by the BMFA. The procedure for gaining approval to coach children involves several stages, of which a CRB check is only the final part.

Guidance states:

- * ‘The club should require all members who work with children and vulnerable adults to complete a self declaration form... It should also require the applicant to complete an application form...in which

6 Parliamentary response, Joan Ryan, in response to question by Joan Humble MP

7 Conversation with Josie Appleton, 15 February 2007, at government briefing on Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act

he or she is given the opportunity to outline the reasons why he/she wishes to work with children...’

* ‘BMFA HQ will obtain at least two written references...from persons of responsibility, one preferably associated with the applicant’s former work with children or vulnerable adults. If this cannot be obtained then training is strongly recommended. Written references will always be followed up by telephone to confirm validity. If thought necessary, a formal interview will be conducted by BMFA HQ.’

* ‘All members that apply to the BMFA to work with children or vulnerable adults will be required to undergo clearance (Disclosure) through the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) for England and Wales...’⁸

These BMFA requirements were based on advice from the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU), which advises all UK hobby and sports clubs. In autumn 2008, when the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act is introduced, CRB checks will become a legal requirement for all volunteer flying coaches.⁹ After 2008, it will be a crime for a coach to train a young flyer without being CRB checked – the penalty will be a £5000 fine, for both the coach and the club.

The lost coaches – and their reasons

Mike Tidy, Surrey, former BMFA examiner/instructor:

‘I was informed that I would need to attend a child protection awareness workshop and submit details for a police check...which I think says a lot for the paranoia surrounding this issue and the power of the BMFA to lean on club officials. After nearly 20 years, I have offered my resignation as a club examiner as I will not submit to any more of this PC stupidity.’¹⁰

BMFA instructor, West Country:

‘I used to get a great deal of satisfaction teaching children. However,

8 BMFA Child Protection Policy, http://www.bmfa.org/childprotection/BMFA_PolicyIss1V2.pdf

9 A DfES official working on the Act confirmed that model flyers would need to be ‘covered by the scheme’, for giving training to children

10 Letter, Radio Control Models and Electronics magazine, May 2006

because of the need for CRB checks I no longer teach them. I refuse to go through the clearance procedure for one simple reason - we cannot rely on those who carry out the checks to get it right every time.’¹¹

Stuart McFarlane, chairman, Shropshire flying club:

‘After months of committee meetings filled with much deliberation and discussion I could not find anyone prepared to put themselves forward for CRB checks. Hardly surprising when we discovered that the CRB had made a few mistakes and wrongly labelled people!’¹²

Grant Hole, former coach:

‘These regulations load all manner of onuses and responsibilities on to the tutor - it made a rigmarole of something that never used to be. I now refuse to assist under-18s at my club, and two other coaches did exactly the same thing. It is now impossible to obtain assistance at my club on Saturdays, although I believe that it is possible to obtain assistance on Sundays.’¹³

Club instructor:

‘I will not have dealings with juveniles or vulnerable adults because of these policies - it’s just too much hassle. I go flying for fun - not to be an unpaid social worker.’¹⁴

Instructor, Midlands flying club:

‘Our club used to have an instructor in his 50s, who when in his 20s was prosecuted for theft. He did not want this to come to light, and refused to have a CRB check. As a result, he stopped instructing, which was a great loss because he was an excellent instructor.’¹⁵

Peter Vivian, model flyer:

‘I left my club - and am now club-less - because we were told not to be seen talking to a youngster on our own.’¹⁶

11 Email to Josie Appleton, 15 March 2007

12 Email to Josie Appleton, 16 March 2007

13 Telephone interview with Josie Appleton

14 Posting, 16 March 2007, <http://www.tabmfa.co.uk>

15 Telephone interview with Josie Appleton

16 Email to Josie Appleton, 25 March 2007

John Bridgett, Retford Model Flying Club:

‘In our club we have a policy that parents must stay with children, and one very good instructor is now paranoid and is reluctant to help youngsters, all in all a negative result.’¹⁷

3. CLUBS THAT KEEP YOUNG PEOPLE OUT

Some model flying clubs now refuse to admit under-18s, or make it hard for under-18s to join - often in response to child protection requirements. As well as CRB checks, another problematic child protection rule is that every club appoint a child welfare officer. Many clubs found it hard to find a volunteer for this position, which is perceived largely to involve bureaucracy and buck-carrying.

Barring under-18s

Peter Milier, Stour Valley Stickbenders Club:

‘we have decided that we will not accept junior members into the club and that if a member wants to bring their children along then BOTH parents must be present.’¹⁸

Loris Goring, Riviera Thermal Soaring Club:

‘My club decided that we could no longer have any child below the age of 18 as members. I personally hated this, but we have seen in the courts how “streetwise” kids have made false accusations against teachers.’¹⁹

17-year-old:

‘I have been turned down joining two clubs because of their child protection scheme. Because I’m not 18 yet I can’t join, and my parents don’t fly so they won’t come to the field. I can drive and I’m at college

17 Posting, 15 March 2007, <http://www.tabmfa.co.uk>

18 Letter, Radio Control Models and Electronics magazine, October 2006

19 Email to Josie Appleton, 22 March 2007

taking A-levels! It doesn't affect me too much as I'll be 18 not so long from now, but what about the kids who are 14, whose parents don't fly?'²⁰

Club member, Dorset:

'I am a member of two clubs (both BMFA affiliated): one says parents must stay and supervise youngsters and the other is over 18 only. Needless to say there are no youngsters in either club.'²¹

Stuart McFarlane, chairman, Shropshire flying club:

'The final policy that we came up with was that children under the age of 16 (not 18) had to be accompanied by a parent or a legal guardian. This policy, unfortunately, had the effect of barring one junior member.'²²

BMFA instructor, West Country:

'Our club constitution states that any junior member must be accompanied at all times by a responsible adult - either a parent or guardian or an adult appointed by the parent or guardian. However, even if they did join the club it is unfortunate that there is nobody there with CRB clearance to teach them so joining the club would be pointless unless they wanted to stand with their guardian and watch.'²³

Mike Cadman, Telford Model Aero Club:

'We introduced a rule that under-18s have to be supervised by a parent at all times. There was a young lad, who was 16, whose parents would not come with him, and so he had to stop coming to the club.'²⁴

John Bridgett, Retford Model Flying Club:

'We cannot get a volunteer for the child welfare officer position, which means that at our next meeting, we may have to decide "no under-18s". To deny children access to our facilities will be very sad. There is a nine-year-old flyer who would be excluded – he has

²⁰ Posting, 3 March 2007, <http://www.bmfa.org/forums/index.php?topic=1220.15>

²¹ Posting, 15 March 2007, <http://www.tabmfa.co.uk/>

²² Email to Josie Appleton, 20 March 2007

²³ Email to Josie Appleton, 15 March 2007

²⁴ Telephone interview with Josie Appleton

been coming to us since he was five, and now he can fly anything, including jets.’²⁵

Bromsgrove Model Flying Club:

will not admit under-18s, unless their parents join the club and look after their children on site.’²⁶

4. ‘ANTI-CHILD’ ATTITUDES

Highly bureaucratic child protection policies encourage ‘anti-child’ attitudes. Responsibility for children is transformed from being an informal civic duty, shared between adults, to a legal obligation for CRB-checked coaches or child welfare officers.

Taking a share of responsibility for children is no longer seen as a normal part of adult life, but is instead becoming an unwelcome burden to be defensive about. The question of who is responsible for children now often means: ‘who is carrying the can if something happens?’

When a number of adults were sharing the responsibility of training children at hobby clubs, this was a more enjoyable and not too onerous job. Once responsibility becomes legalised, some ordinary hobby club members take the view that ‘children are not my problem’. This means that young people increasingly encounter adults as hostile and stand-offish, denying them advice or assistance.

‘Anti-child’ attitudes

Stuart McFarlane, chairman, Shropshire flying club:

‘We could not find anyone prepared to stand as welfare officer...

In this modern time that we find ourselves in nobody from my club wants to get involved with children.’²⁷

25 Telephone interview with Josie Appleton

26 See www.bromsgrovemodelflyingclub.org.uk

27 Email to Josie Appleton, 16 March 2007

Peter Milier, Stour Valley Stickbenders Club:

‘The safety of children is the parents’ responsibility. Now, I’m aware that this...will bring an uproar and cries along the lines of “we need to encourage youngsters into the hobby”, etc. Well, if that is the way you feel, fine! Don’t tell me about it, you take them. We are not going to.’²⁸

Model flyer:

‘Quite simple really you cannot dump your kids on us. No child can be left on site without a parent being present.’²⁹

Reading and District model aircraft club:

‘No senior member of the club is to be expected to assume responsibility for a child... It is the parent or guardian’s responsibility to supervise any child...at all times, or to appoint a responsible adult to do so on their behalf. The club will not accept responsibility for appointing a responsible adult, nor will it make any recommendations about an individual’s suitability for that appointment.’³⁰

Grant Hole, coach:

‘These policies created a poisoned feeling. When a young person asks if you can assist, you have to say “no, come back on Sundays”. This has killed a great deal of good will that used to exist in our model club.’

5.PARENTAL OVER-SUPERVISION

When flying clubs request that parents accompany their children, this has the effect of excluding some young people – and stifling the independence and development of others.

Some parents may want to go flying with their children, or they may be flyers themselves – which is all to the good. The requirement for parents to

28 Letter, Radio Control Models and Electronics magazine, October 2006

29 Posting, 15 March 2007 <http://www.flyingsites.co.uk/forum/index.php?topic=4338.0>

30 Child protection policy, Reading and District Model Aircraft Club <http://www.rdmac.org.uk/Child%20PP%20V1.htm>

attend as childminders is a different matter – which dampens young people's independence.

Many parents are understandably reluctant to spend all Saturday at their children's side on a flying field. 'Model flying is not a spectator sport', says one Midlands instructor, 'most parents do not want to hang around'. The practical result of parents-only policies has been to exclude children.

John Bridgett, from Retford Model Flying Club, outlines the effects on his club: 'Before the child protection advice, parents would bring their children to our field and leave them with us for the day. Due to the ridiculous situation now, rules are in place that not only must parents remain with their children but they too must join as a member of our flying club. The net result is that junior membership has declined from 15 down to one over a two-year period.'³¹

A variety of other measures increase parental control over young people. There has been a growth in parental consent forms, for parents to give explicit approval for their children to be touched or photographed at the hobby club.

* The BMFA specifies that 'the parent or carer should give their written consent for any form of physical contact which should include the type/limits of contact', for example 'placing a hand around the waist of a child or person, such as instructing control line flying, or by placing a hand on the shoulder or arm to reposition someone on a flight line'.³²

* The Reading and District Model Aircraft Club states in its guidance for parents: 'Should physical contact be required during model flying for instructional or any other purposes these will be explained to you and you will be required to record your agreement in writing defining the type and limits of contact.'³³

31 Email to Josie Appleton, 19 March 2007

32 See the BMFA Child Protection Guidelines, http://www.bmfa.org/childprotection/BMFA_PolicyIss1V2.pdf

33 Reading and District Model Aircraft Club <http://www.rdmac.org.uk/Child%20PP%20V1.htm>

* The BMFA also requests that parents give their written consent for the club to take a photographic image of their child.³⁴

When parents are asked to sign off every photograph or ‘placing of a hand on the shoulder or arm’, this limits young people’s autonomy, and extends parental control throughout their teens.

Blanket child protection regulations infantilise under-18s, and take no account of their individual abilities or level of maturity. It becomes difficult for young people to take more responsibility for themselves and others, when they are deemed helpless victims until they are 18 - and potential abusers thereafter.

These policies may be particularly hard on those from a less stable home environment, who are looking for opportunities in hobby clubs that are lacking at home. When other adults in the community back off, these young people will be deprived of alternative sources of support and guidance.

6. FAILING TO PROTECT CHILDREN

Paranoia about child protection is out of all proportion to the real risk. The chief executive of the BMFA, David Phipps, says that he does not know of a single case of child abuse in model aircraft clubs.³⁵ One Welsh modeller, who has been involved in the model aircraft network for 35 years, says: ‘None of us has ever heard of a case. There is no reason that I know to support this policy.’³⁶

While the risk of child abuse appears small, the damaging effect of these policies is all too clear.

Tim Gill, an expert in childhood, argues:

‘Given the minute risk of abuse, and the real risk that clubs will become out of bounds for children, the burdens being imposed are

34 See the BMFA Child Protection Guidelines, http://www.bmfa.org/childprotection/BMFA_PolicyIss1V2.pdf

35 Telephone interview with Josie Appleton

36 Telephone interview with Josie Appleton

disproportionate. These new policies may even leave children less safe.³⁷

Indeed, when decent adults are less willing to look out for kids, it is certainly possible that children will become more rather than less vulnerable. Phipps said that the main child protection issue he had encountered was 'neglect': 'there were incidents where juniors were left alone at the club, for example, after it started raining and adults drifted back to their vehicles'.³⁸ Such incidents of neglect could well increase, as adults become increasingly wary of taking responsibility for children.

Clearly the child welfare officer cannot be at the club all the time; child welfare depends on all adults taking a share of responsibility.

Modeller Alex Whittaker, from North Wales, argues:

'Most of us have sufficient moral radar to sense improper situations concerning children and act swiftly.... [A]s the BMFA gets increasingly bureaucratic about this important matter, ordinary modellers will become wary of blame, frightened of malicious accusation, and will refuse to accept new duties. We also run the risk of club members palming off what should be a shared responsibility onto a single club individual, to the detriment of all our young people.'³⁹

7. THE FUTURE FOR YOUNG MODEL FLYERS

As model flying clubs close their doors to children, a new generation could be denied the challenges and benefits of having a hobby. Flyers of all generations are concerned for the future of model flying.

John Bridgett, Retford Model Flying Club, and Midland area education coordinator for the BMFA, says:

'I think the sport will die - so many people now say that they don't want to get anywhere near youngsters. We had a seven-year-old in

37 Email to Josie Appleton, 22 March 2007

38 Telephone interview with Josie Appleton

39 Article in BMFA News, April 2004

our club who got a BMFA A-certificate; things like that won't happen anymore. Once the change has happened, it will be too late – the situation is just on the precipice now.’⁴⁰

Graham Roscoe, 16, says:

‘Unfortunately the hobby needs an influx of junior members to keep the clubs alive and going, but I think with these new rules it will be harder for juniors to join. I can understand why the BMFA are doing this, but I feel it is all getting a bit out of hand. I think that it is very sad that in this day and age these rules even have to be considered.’⁴¹

While clubs once brought the generations together, now it seems that it is only by bypassing clubs that adults can train children in a normal and positive manner. Some are starting to look outside of clubs as a way of coaching young people.

One Midlands coach says:

‘I do take groups of children, three or four at a time, to another flying field that I have access to (not a club) and teach model flying during school holidays. This is totally against all advice, but the kids love it and they learn, and parents approve.’⁴²

CONCLUSION

Over a period of two or three years, child protection policies have meant that flying clubs have closed their doors to children. As clubs keep children out, and adults become wary of helping them, young people are deprived of experiences that would help them develop into adults.

Young people increasingly lack the spaces to pursue interests outside of home and school, and find it more difficult to gain assistance from their elders. Ultimately, it is children who stand to lose most from the child protection bureaucracy.

⁴⁰ Telephone interview with Josie Appleton

⁴¹ Email to Josie Appleton, 19 March 2007

⁴² Email to Josie Appleton, 27 March 2007

APPENDIX

A. Manifesto Club Principles

1. We are committed to freedom, free speech and genuine tolerance.
2. We support experimentation in all its forms - scientific, social and personal.
3. We support individual self-determination.
4. We uphold a human-centred perspective.
5. We believe in a universal humanity that transcends difference.
6. We continue to be inspired by the legacy of the Enlightenment.

To read the full manifesto, go to www.manifestoclub.com

B. Letter of concern about vetting

To sign, go to www.manifestoclub.com

We believe that the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Bill is a misguided response to a small number of tragic, but fortunately rare, incidents involving the abuse of children. The bill will mean that up to a third of the adult working population — those who come into contact with children through their work or volunteering — will be subject to continuous criminal records vetting. This could include babysitters and private tutors, as well as those who merely have access to information about children. The massive expansion of vetting is driven by suspicion and paranoia. The Criminal Records Bureau has already carried out 10 million checks since 2002, and it is now common practice to vet anybody from 16-year-olds teaching younger kids to read, to parents helping out in school, to the visitors to foster carers' homes.

Such child protection procedures do little to protect children from the small number of individuals who would do them harm. Instead, they damage adult-child relations and undermine the capacity of adults to contribute to children's welfare. Vetting calls into question the informal ways adults in a community collaborate in rearing children: from the local enthusiast running a football team, to the volunteer who helps out at school. Adults become more concerned with covering their backs than passing on their insights to the next generation.

Children become a “no-go” area: local sports teams and youth groups are struggling to find volunteers; some teachers are scared to put a plaster on a child's knee; and there are worrying cases of adults passing by injured or endangered children. We call for a more rational approach to adult-child interactions.