

**GORDONSTOUN RESPONSE TO SCAI 28 APRIL 2017****Part B – Current Statement****3. Retrospective Acknowledgement/Admission****3.1 Acknowledgement of Abuse**

- i. *Does the organisation/establishment accept that between 1930 and 17 December 2014 some children cared for at the establishment were abused?*

Following our review of records, and the information-gathering that has been undertaken as part of responding to the Inquiry, we believe from what we know now that there are instances where some children cared for at the establishment suffered abuse.

- ii. *What is the organisation/establishment's assessment of the extent and scale of such abuse?*

As a result of our inquiries and review, and also from reaching out to the school community, to date around a dozen cases have been reported to the School, either by survivors themselves or through third parties. These cases do not appear to be connected. They took place over a broad period of time (1960s to 2010s), affected children of different ages, both boys and girls, and took place in separate locations. They range from an allegation of rape to a report of a teacher holding hands with a pupil while on a [REDACTED] tour.

There are also concerns regarding staff or peer bullying and of inappropriate instances which have come to our attention. We are currently undertaking a comprehensive review of our records and our electronic 'Wellbeing Information Sharing System' to better quantify the extent of abuse as defined by the SCAI guidance for completion and will be better placed to answer in more detail in Part D.

**Aberlour House**

We are aware of cases of abuse at Aberlour House which took place there before the school fell under Gordonstoun's jurisdiction in 1999. Any cases that have come to our attention in recent years have been reported to the police.

- iii. *What is the basis of that assessment?*

This assessment has been made on the basis of:

- Cases already known to the School and to the police
- Cases that have been brought to us as a result of our direct and proactive appeals for survivors to come forward
- Cases that have been identified to us through alumni networks both online and through alumni events
- Interviews with past staff and governors
- Examination of all relevant available files for staff and students (this work is ongoing)
- Detailed analysis of our 'Wellbeing Information Sharing System', a bespoke, sophisticated online system for centralised tracking of pastoral care, including the recording, management and consequences of any problems within the student body.

**3.2 Acknowledgement of Systemic Failures**

- i. *Does the organisation/establishment accept that its systems failed to protect children cared for at the establishment between 1930 and 17 December 2014 from abuse?*

In undertaking the review for this response, we have identified that the sector's historic reporting, record-keeping and referencing practices, which were also adopted at Gordonstoun, were not of the rigorous type required today.

We have not identified a pattern of sexual abuse, or evidence of a network of sexual abusers, and the cases do not appear to be connected. Any such pattern could indicate a failure of systems, but we have not seen this in the review undertaken.

Although bullying has never been tolerated at the School, our review indicates that there were episodes in the school's history where higher levels of bullying did take place, within particular boarding houses and at particular times.

Our review shows that in applying our current processes retrospectively, the non-recent cases which have been identified would have been less likely to occur - or would have been dealt with differently - if today's standards had been in place.

- ii. *What is the organisation/establishment's assessment of the extent of such systemic failures?*

In undertaking the review for this response, we have identified that the sector's historic reporting, record-keeping and referencing practices, which were also adopted at Gordonstoun, were not of the rigorous type required today.

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Although bullying has never been tolerated at the School, our review indicates that there were episodes in the school's history where higher levels of bullying did take place, within particular boarding houses and at particular times.

Our review shows that in applying our current processes retrospectively, the non-recent cases which have been identified would have been less likely to occur - or would have been dealt with differently - if today's standards had been in place.

As a result of carrying out the review for the purposes of the response to the Inquiry, we have identified the possibility that in at least two of the non-recent cases, the level of information or references supplied may not have prevented the teachers involved from teaching elsewhere.

- iii. *What is the basis of that assessment?*

This assessment has been made on the basis of:

- Cases already known to the School and to the police
- Cases that have been brought to us as a result of our direct and proactive appeals for survivors to come forward

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- Cases that have been identified to us through alumni networks both online and through alumni events
- Interviews with past staff and governors
- Examination of all relevant available files for staff and students (this work is ongoing)
- Detailed analysis of our ‘Wellbeing Information Sharing System’, a bespoke, sophisticated online system for centralised tracking of pastoral care, including the recording, management and consequences of any problems within the student body.

iv. *What is the organisation/establishment’s explanation for such failures?*

In undertaking the review for this response, we have identified that the sector’s historic reporting, record-keeping and referencing practices, which were also adopted at Gordonstoun, were not of the rigorous type required today.

The majority of cases that we are aware of are non-recent, and were not reported by victims at the time. In the cases that we believe were reported at the time, a low level of record-keeping and retention at the school during the period in question makes it hard to draw any conclusions, although oral evidence indicates that swift action was taken either to expel students or remove teachers.

As a result of carrying out the review for the purposes of the response to the Inquiry, we have identified the possibility that in at least two of the non-recent cases, the level of information or references supplied may not have prevented the teachers involved from teaching elsewhere.

We are clear, from general wellbeing incidents that occur from time to time at Gordonstoun, that our current processes (which include a full-time school clinical psychologist) are allowing us to respond more quickly where wellbeing appears in jeopardy. The most recent Care Inspectorate Report from 2015 found the care and support at Gordonstoun to be ‘Very Good.’

**3.3 Acknowledgement of Failures/Deficiencies in Response**i. *Does the organisation/establishment accept that there were failures and/or deficiencies in its response to abuse, and allegations of abuse, of children cared for at the establishment between 1930 and 17 December 2014?*

In undertaking the review for this response we have identified that the sector’s historic reporting, record-keeping and referencing practices, which were also adopted at Gordonstoun, were not of the rigorous type required today.

The majority of cases that we are aware of are non-recent and were not reported by victims at the time. In the cases that we believe were reported at the time, a low level of record keeping and retention at the school during the period in question makes it hard to draw any conclusions, although oral evidence indicates that swift action was taken either to expel students or remove teachers.

As a result of carrying out the review for the purposes of the response to the Inquiry, we have identified the possibility that in at least two of the non-recent cases, the level of information or references supplied may not have prevented the teachers involved from teaching elsewhere.

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Allegations of non-recent abuse started to surface through a closed alumni Facebook group in 2013. The School's reaction was immediate, proactive and supportive. Actions taken include:

- A letter was posted on the alumni Facebook group page asking group members to report cases to the police as well as to the school, and offering support from the school (including from the full time school clinical psychologist).
- The Principal and an alumni Governor met with an alumni representative and the convenor of the alumni Facebook group to discuss their concerns.
- Following press publicity in 2015 concerning alleged historic abuse, we wrote to alumni again, appealing for people to come forward and report any incident they wanted to. This appeal was repeated in the Chairman's speech at the annual alumni day that year.
- Governors and staff met with NSPCC, Children First, Mandate Now, other providers of care, and other experts in wellbeing to understand best practice in survivor support and to inform wellbeing practice at the School.
- As a result of the reluctance of some survivors to contact the school about their experience, in 2016 Gordonstoun engaged the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELSIS) to talk to them on our behalf. CELSIS's work is focused on asking what survivors would like in terms of support; it is due to report to the Board imminently.
- We extended the scope of a research report being conducted by Edinburgh University about the Gordonstoun curriculum to include alumni experiences. 1183 alumni participated in the research and were offered the opportunity for open-ended comment on their school days. We briefed the researchers on what to do if any cases emerged through that process.
- Once the SCAI announced that Gordonstoun would be one of the 60 institutions involved, we again wrote to our stakeholders, and included contact details for the Inquiry in the Chairman's report in the alumni magazine.

We are clear, from general wellbeing incidents that occur from time to time at Gordonstoun, that our current processes (which include a full-time school clinical psychologist) are allowing us to respond more quickly where wellbeing appears in jeopardy. The most recent Care Inspectorate Report in 2015 found the care and support at Gordonstoun to be 'Very Good.'

ii. *What is the organisation/establishment's assessment of the extent of such failures in its response?*

The majority of cases that we are aware of are non-recent and were not reported by victims at the time. In the cases that we believe were reported at the time, a low level of record keeping and retention at the school during the period in question makes it hard to draw any conclusions, although oral evidence indicates that swift action was taken either to expel students or remove teachers.

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As a result of carrying out the review for the purposes of the response to the Inquiry, we have identified the possibility that in at least two of the non-recent cases, the level of information or references supplied may not have prevented the teachers involved from teaching elsewhere

iii. *What is the basis of that assessment?*

This assessment has been made on the basis of:

- Cases already known to the School and to the police
- Cases that have been brought to us as a result of our direct and proactive appeals for survivors to come forward
- Cases that have been identified to us through alumni networks both online and through alumni events
- Interviews with past staff and governors
- Examination of all relevant available files for staff and students (this work is ongoing)
- Detailed analysis of our 'Wellbeing Information Sharing System,' a bespoke, sophisticated online system for centralised tracking of pastoral care, including the recording, management and consequences of any problems within the student body.

iv. *What is the organisation's explanation for such failures/deficiencies?*

We believe that both across the sector and at Gordonstoun, children did not feel able to report what had happened to them at the time. Similarly, there was no formal historic requirement for teachers to report any concerns they might have had. However, a low level of record keeping and retention at the school during the period in question mean it is difficult to make a more detailed assessment. In addition, in the past, referencing practices were not as rigorous as is rightly demanded by today's standards and regulation.

### 3.4 **Changes**

i. *To what extent has the organisation/establishment implemented changes to its policies/procedures and practices as a result of its acknowledgment in relation to 3.1 – 3.3 above?*

Child protection is taken extremely seriously at Gordonstoun today. Making sure our students are happy, healthy and safe is our absolute priority. It is at the heart of everything we do and we are committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment. Our ongoing work in this area was recognised in our most recent independent Care Inspectorate Report (January 2015) which gave us a rating of 5 'very good' for pupil Care and Support and noted the 'comprehensive child protection procedures' in place.'

Particularly since the 1990s, deliberate and continual improvements have been made to the pastoral care at Gordonstoun. These have been designed to strengthen and improve the culture, and to update practice guidelines in line with national and sectoral legislative changes. Societal expectations and feedback from parents and students alike have also influenced the development of modern pastoral care at Gordonstoun.

The improvements include the appointment of a dedicated Child Protection Officer, independent of the senior management team, to whom students are encouraged to turn to if they felt they are not being treated appropriately, and who liaises with outside agencies (social



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work, health or the police) as appropriate. School policy additionally states that if students have concerns about the Child Protection Officer these should be reported to the Head. If the concern is about the Head, this should be reported to the Chairman of the Board of Governors.

In 2013 we implemented our 'Wellbeing Information Sharing System', which constitutes a sector-leading step-change in record-keeping about student wellbeing. The 'Wellbeing Information Sharing System' is a bespoke, sophisticated online system for centralised tracking of pastoral care, including the recording, management and consequences of any problems within the student body. It is strictly monitored and access is privileged, overseen by the Deputy Head (Pastoral) and the School's Wellbeing and Child Protection Coordinator. Every incident which raises any concern – either reported to any staff member or witnessed by any staff member – and which might affect the health and happiness of a child is recorded. The system thus maintains comprehensive electronic records of those reports and their consequences. The 'Wellbeing Information Sharing System' allows varying levels of access for specific members of staff, from widely shared information for all relevant staff to very restricted access, as in the case of child protection issues, to a very small group. Previous records of wellbeing issues, recorded on paper, are available comprehensively from 1997.

Our rigorous recruitment and selection process is also designed to support the School's child protection policies. All the school's recruitment and selection procedures include the use and provision of:

- Detailed job descriptions and person specifications for any post, which are updated as necessary
- Application forms which are specifically designed to obtain as much legitimate information as possible about the candidate, conforming with the Equality Act
- The fulfilment of Identity checks and the verification of documents – all candidates must bring original, specific documents to interview: a passport or other photographic evidence of identity, proof of current address, and all education and professional qualifications.

All appointments are made after an applicant has completed the school's application form. CVs are only accepted in support of an application. In the application form the candidate signs a declaration that the information they are providing is true. There is a disclaimer which states that if this is found not to be the case, they face dismissal. If the application is of interest, the candidate is invited to interview. And following a successful interview the job is offered on the following conditions:

That the candidate has:

- Satisfactory clearance through the Disclosure Scotland PVG scheme
- The right to live and work in the UK (following visa/passport checks and UK Visa and Immigration guidance)
- Has supplied two satisfactory employment references
- Has satisfied an occupational health check.

The candidate must then complete a two term probationary period if they are teaching staff, and a six month employment period if they are support staff. This can be extended if necessary if improvement is needed, but this probationary period also presents an opportunity

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to terminate employment if necessary. Both attendance and performance are monitored in this time.

References: Candidates are asked to provide two employment referees on the applications form. Any gaps in employment are scrutinised carefully and the giving and receiving of references is controlled through the school's staffing/HR office; by the Financial Director for non-teaching appointments, and the Headmaster for teaching appointments. If a verbal reference is taken by telephone from a current or past employer, a record must be kept of that conversation by those responsible for making the appointment.

Criminal record checks: Any candidate who lives overseas must provide evidence of a clear criminal record from the appropriate authority in the country/countries in which they have resided. The exchange of conviction information with other European countries and non-EU countries provides challenges in this, as many countries have different justice systems and policies on retaining conviction information, and there are further significant challenges in translating and interpreting any information that might be provided. However, all checks must be in place prior to the candidate starting employment and an employee should not be in school at any time without the appropriate clearance.

In addition, following the emergence of allegations of non-recent abuse through a closed Facebook group in 2013, the Board and school took the immediate and proactive action already outlined in section 3.3 i, and made these explicit changes:

- It is now an explicit part of formal school policy to report directly to the police any allegation of non-recent abuse that is brought to our attention;
- We have also amended the staff Code of Conduct to include:
  - A Whistle-blowing clause requiring members of staff to share concerns about any other member of staff behaving inappropriately with a child to the Child Protection Co-ordinator;
  - An explicit addition to the gross misconduct category in all staff contracts to include any failure to report any concern about a member of staff behaving inappropriately with a child or young person. Adherence to this Code of Conduct is included within every employee's contract.

In 2016, we designated a governor the Wellbeing Governor to take forward our responsibility for the pastoral brief, which is also part of the standing brief of the Education Committee. Governors have also attended Safeguarding and Prevent training with staff to signal this as a board-level priority.

We are committed to playing a full part in SCAI, thereby learning any lessons we can from the past, in order to protect children better both now and in the future.