

Submission to the Cumberlege Commission
by
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In general, the implementation of the Nolan 'Programme for Acton' has been successful and Copca has fulfilled most of the goals set. I want to highlight two serious areas of concern that have arisen as the implementation has unfolded.

1. The policy of immediate suspension by the Church of a person who is the subject of an allegation needs to be reviewed. The Government has had to review a similar policy as it applies to school teachers and the Church should learn lessons from that review. The actual damage to an innocent person's reputation and well-being needs to be weighed against the real as opposed to the theoretical risk to children, especially as regards allegations about supposed offences from decades ago.
2. The situation of a member of a religious order who is accused or guilty of abuse needs more careful thought. If the religious is a priest, they may be suspended or dismissed from the priestly state. To remove somebody from a religious order is a separate step and one that most orders only do in the case of persistent disobedience. So the order will continue to take responsibility for the offender. Indeed, we have a duty to society to do so, as the offender may relapse if simply cast out of the community where he may have lived his whole adult life. The situation of a monastic community is even more particular: unlike members of other religious orders, Benedictine and Cistercian monks take a vow of stability to one particular community. In practice, some Diocesan CPO's and Copca have shown too little understanding of this particular situation. At the lower level of offence, such as a person who accepts a criminal caution, to say a monk can no longer live with his monastic community creates profound problems and needs further reflection.