



CHILD SAFEGUARDING & PROTECTION POLICY



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INTRODUCTION

Purpose and scope

The QUEST Child Safeguarding Policy establishes the mandatory code of conduct, prevention systems, values and mechanisms through which the organisation fulfills its duty of care, safety, wellbeing, and harm prevention with and for children.

This policy governs all physical and digital spaces managed, co-funded, or organised by QUEST. It provides a roadmap to move from safeguarding as a reactive bureaucratic obligation to a proactive, living organisational culture.

This policy is based on a zero-tolerance approach to violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect of children, and it applies unconditionally to :

- all QUEST's personnel, including board members, permanent staff, consultants, volunteers and interns
- All those acting on behalf of QUEST, including members (both individuals and organisations) and consultants
- All children in QUEST's Youth Advisory Board and participating in QUEST's activities
- All adults accompanying children to events and activities organised by QUEST
- All participants who participate in QUEST's activities, events, and meetings involving children, including policy makers, event facilitators, journalists, sponsors, etc.

We strongly encourage these actors to develop, maintain, implement and review their own safeguarding policies, and we expect all individuals involved during events and activities to actively promote child safeguarding as a joint responsibility with QUEST.

Foundational human rights framework

The policy is constructed to mirror international legislative baselines, including :

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, explicitly balancing absolute physical protection with the active support of child agency, self-determination, and structural participation.
- The globally recognised safeguarding matrix (**Policy, People, Procedures, and Accountability**) mandated under the Keeping Children Safe (KCS) International Standards and embedded within the European Commission's Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Guidelines.

This policy draws on guidance from QUEST's Youth Advisory Board (YAB) members.

PILLAR I: POLICY

(Commitment, definitions, and agency)

1) Multi-dimensional glossary of harm

To ensure clear, unambiguous operational standards, QUEST defines harm multi-dimensionally. We recognise that violence, exploitation, and violations of a child's rights manifest through direct interpersonal contact as well as through structural, environmental, and digital forces.

Below, a definition of different forms of harm we consider in this policy :

- **Physical abuse** : Any intentional act causing non-accidental physical injury, trauma, or bodily pain to a child, including any form of corporal punishment, hitting, shaking, or the unwarranted use of physical coercion and restraint.
- **Sexual abuse and exploitation** : The involvement of a child in any form of sexual activity, digital or physical sexual grooming, the production, possession, or distribution of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), or any contact that breaches physical and sexual boundaries, completely independent of a child's apparent compliance or lack of overt protest.
- **Emotional and psychological abuse** : Persistent, systemic patterns of non-physical mistreatment that damage a child's self-esteem, emotional security, or cognitive development. This includes terrorising, rejecting, isolating, scapegoating, verbal degradation, or subjecting a child to constant breaches of respectful communication.
- **Neglect** : The chronic, systematic failure to provide a child with essential life necessities, including quality nutrition, clothing, shelter, clean and healthy environments, medical care, safe learning spaces, or basic emotional supervision, thereby placing their development and health at severe risk.

- **Bullying** : Is defined as deliberately hurtful behaviour, usually repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for those bullied to defend themselves. It can take many forms, but the three main types are physical (eg: hitting, kicking, theft), verbal (eg: racist or homophobic remarks, threats, name calling) and emotional (eg: isolating an individual from the activities and social acceptance of their peer group). Bullying can occur in both physical and online setting
- **Structural and institutional harm** : Harm embedded within organisational processes, macro-social arrangements, or pedagogical environments that systematically disadvantages, marginalises, or oppresses certain children. This includes enforcing rigid, discriminatory institutional rules, designing educational architectures that cause systemic anxiety, exclusion, or psychological trauma, or failing to modify physical and digital spaces to ensure full equity of access for all children regardless of race, gender, identity, socio-economic background, ability, and their intersections.

2) Core pedagogical approach : Balancing safety and protection, child agency, and active participation

QUEST explicitly rejects paternalistic, overly restrictive safeguarding approaches that treat children as passive, fragile objects in need of containment. In alignment with international child rights frameworks, QUEST believes that **children's participation promotes children's protection, and children's protection promotes children's participation**. The obligation to respect the right of children to be heard and to participate actively (including in their learning process) is equal to the obligation to protect (Eurochild's Child Protection Policy). Effective, sustainable protection can only be achieved by listening to children and creating spaces where they feel able and willing to speak freely, empowering them to become active agents in their own protection without fear of further discrimination, censorship, or shame.

2.1. Policy pledge

To ensure these participation requirements are met safely across all activities, projects, and learning environments, QUEST is bound to this **policy pledge** :

- **Respect for boundaries** : We maintain absolute respect for personal space and emotional and bodily autonomy. Physical contact requires explicit consent, and adults maintain strict professional boundaries with children and youth at all times.
- **Inclusion and constructive communication** : We treat all participants with kindness and equity, regardless of background or ability. We use accessible language, share the floor, and resolve disagreements together using NVC.
- **Privacy and digital responsibility** : We protect personal data and confidentiality. We do not engage with youth participants via personal social media accounts or use project media for personal purposes.
- **Proactive vigilance** : We do not tolerate or ignore shaming, bullying, or boundary violations. We commit to a purely reporting role, escalating concerns immediately to the CPO without attempting private investigations.

2.2. 8 core requirements

More precisely, QUEST follows these **9 requirements** :

- 1 Transparency and information** → Before any activity or learning module begins, clear information must be shared with the participating children in an accessible, child-friendly way. This grants children the right to make truly informed choices, creating a good understanding of how the activity will unfold, what their role is, and what rights and responsibilities they hold within that space. To avoid extractive participation, children will also be told how their input will influence outputs and policy decisions.
- 2 Voluntary engagement and child agency** → Consent/Assent (definitions in [Annex A](#)) are continuous dynamic processes. Every participating child retains the uncompromised right to refuse participation in any specific activity (game, interview, exercise, media capture...) at any point and independent of prior parental consent forms ([Annexes D and E](#)). This includes an absolute right to bodily autonomy ; no child will ever be forced into physical contact (such as handshaking, hugging, or close-contact games) against their will. No child will ever face coercion, shame, or exclusion for exercising their right to say "no."
- 3 Deep respect** → Personnel must pay continuous, careful attention to their own words, tone, and actions to ensure they actively validate

children's views. This requirement applies peer-to-peer : children and adults alike are expected to share the floor, take turns speaking, and listen respectfully even when they disagree. If conflicts or disagreements arise within an activity, facilitators will guide participants to resolve them calmly and constructively. If a child objects to an educational framework and proposes an alternative way to run an activity, their proposal must be taken seriously (cf. PILLAR III).

4 Relevance → Activities and educational spaces are **co-designed** whenever reasonably possible in order to give children meaningful opportunities to express their views on issues that directly affect them. If such co-design is not possible for anything including, but not limited to:

- The child not being able to easily express themselves due to a disability
- The project concerning a group of people that cannot be safely consulted for such co-design
- QUEST not being able to find children interested in the issue to consult at some point in the project.

Then QUEST shall include a domain expert (who can also be a relative of a member of the group of interest) in the group of people that plan the project to make sure that their voice is heard and that the project meets the needs of the group.

However, this should always be a last resort, and use of assistive technologies to allow a participant/ member of the group being consulted to express their opinions must always be preferred over this.

5 Child friendly frameworks → Explanations, visual aids, environments, and feedback loops must be tailored to the age, developmental stage, and language proficiency of the participants. Recognising that many children do not speak the event's primary language fluently or may have varying hearing capabilities, facilitators must use clear, accessible language and speak at a comfortable, deliberate pace. Furthermore, children must be supported to participate in whatever way suits them best (whether through speaking, writing, drawing, or active silence). Facilitators must actively check in with the children to verify whether explanations were clear and allocate *sufficient* time within the program schedule to answer their reflections and questions.

6 Radical inclusivity (cf. section 3) "*Accessibility and inclusive safeguarding*") → Participation spaces must be proactively managed to avoid unequal power dynamics, racism, classism, negative discrimination, or marginalisation.

7 Ongoing training (cf. section 2) “Core pedagogical training tracks”) → This ensures that adults are structurally prepared to shift from rigid instructors to supportive facilitators who know how to step back and safely hand over agency to youth.

8 Safety and sensitivity to risk → Safety parameters can be co-created with children for their own meetings, workshops, and digital spaces. Safeguarding is constantly monitored by the Child Protection Officer, and sufficient time is allocated to prepare children physically, psychologically, and emotionally before any activity starts to reduce risk of secondary trauma or harm. Participants are trained to immediately report any worry to the CPO rather than attempting to investigate concerns themselves.

3) Accessibility and inclusive safeguarding

A child’s experience of safety is directly shaped by intersecting identities, including disability, neurodivergence, race, gender expression, socio-economic status, and language proficiency. Children facing systemic discrimination are statistically at a significantly higher risk of experiencing both interpersonal abuse and institutional harm. Furthermore, traditional reporting mechanisms are often designed for neurotypical, able-bodied, dominant-language speakers, which creates systemic barriers that effectively silence children coming from non-dominant groups.

To bridge this gap, QUEST commits to moving beyond passive inclusion. We employ a proactive social justice lens that actively deconstructs institutional privilege, removes physical and linguistic barriers, and redistributes protective resources more equitably.

- **Differentiated reporting channels and adaptive safety literacy :** Project teams must provide alternative, non-verbal, and highly accessible reporting tools at project implementation. This includes installing anonymous, physical complaint boxes at project/event sites, integrating digital reporting buttons on virtual platforms, and distributing visual evaluation forms for children with limited literacy or communication barriers.
- **Anti-discriminatory equity measures and power redistribution :** To actively combat systemic discrimination, racism, and classism within educational settings, staff are operationally required to audit their own pedagogical spaces to ensure children from non-dominant backgrounds are not disproportionately disciplined, spoken over, or isolated by peers or facilitators. Moreover, QUEST establishes anti-bias

feedback loops, allowing youth to safely flag if they experienced microaggressions, cultural erasure, or tokenisation. If structural bias or exclusionary behavior is detected within an activity, facilitators must pause the scheduled curriculum to address the power imbalance collectively through a restorative, democratic circle, ensuring that the burden of safety and education never falls on the child being discriminated against.

- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** : During pre-activity risk mapping, staff must apply Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. This means safety instructions, physical environments, and emergency procedures cannot rely solely on written or spoken text. Staff must prepare multi-sensory safety orientations (eg: pictorial schedules, and quiet sensory-decompression zones at live events). If a venue or digital platform cannot be adapted to accommodate assistive technologies or mobility needs, it is structurally rejected as an unsafe environment, where QUEST-affiliated events cannot be held.

PILLAR II: PEOPLE

1) Roles and responsibilities

QUEST has a designated **Child Protection Officer (CPO)**, responsible for supervising the systematic consideration of the child safeguarding policy within projects. In case of long absence of the Child protection officer, a deputy is also named to take on the role.

In project settings or external activities where QUEST's CPO is not directly involved or always present, a designated and trained project CPO is given the role and responsibility to ensure child safeguarding throughout the whole project/activity. The project CPO is in close connection with QUEST's CPO (more in Pillar III, Section 2 "Projects' safeguarding frameworks").

All CPOs acting in a project should wear a pin clearly indicating that they are CPO for that project when they are in the environment, whether physical or digital, that the activity is performed in. In the case of digital environments, the CPO's account's display name shall also clearly indicate the CPO status. Failure to wear this pin in any physical activity or update the display name on the respective platform where a digital activity is performed constitutes a breach of this policy.

2) Structural recruitment

Safeguarding is embedded directly into the institutional recruitment filters of QUEST before any individual is allowed to engage with beneficiaries. All potential staff, board members, consultants, and long-term volunteers (1+ year) who will likely interact with children in their work with QUEST will be asked to submit an extract from the criminal record with their consent in accordance with Belgium law ("extrait de casier judiciaire modèle 596-2").

Short-term volunteers (<1 year) who do not have a background check are strictly prohibited from ever violating the proximity standard and must always be paired with permanent staff.

Within the first week of their contract, and strictly prior to any field engagement, project implementation, or interaction with children, all new hires must complete an onboarding session covering this safeguarding policy and formally sign this policy. Refusal to sign or abide by this policy renders employment or association instantly void.

If this policy is updated in the future, all parties to the old policy must also commit to the new one.

3) Core pedagogical training tracks

QUEST treats safeguarding as an active, evolving organisational culture. Besides abiding by the policy, all personnel undergo a mandatory, ongoing training track designed to eliminate institutional power imbalances and prevent harm :

- **Child safeguarding and protection** : For each new staff / volunteer onboarding, this policy is carefully presented and a Q/A is organised around it within 3 weeks of having taking up the position.
- **Democratic education pedagogy** : People joining QUEST are systematically trained in democratic education models that highlight the rights of children to self-determination, autonomy, and structural participation within community processes.
- **Sociocratic organisational structure** : QUEST operates internally through sociocracy (a system of governance using horizontal circles, feedback loops, and shared consent). This prevents the accumulation of unchecked hierarchical power, ensuring that safeguarding concerns can be raised horizontally across any circle without fear of professional retaliation.
- **Nonviolent Communication (NVC)** : Staff and volunteers undergo continuous training to identify and eliminate subtle verbal or emotional expressions of power imbalance, ensuring all interpersonal environments remain emotionally and psychologically safe.

PILLAR III : PROCEDURES

Key principles:

- Confidentiality
- Taking all complaints seriously and addressing them seriously
- Non-retaliation for anyone reporting concerns (whistleblowers)
- Ensuring safety and protection for witnesses and survivors

1) The "Double Agency" proximity rule

To maintain strict physical and psychological safety during live events, workshops, school visits, or educational projects, QUEST implements a mandatory Two-Children-to-One-Adult proximity standard. Under this rule, an adult staff member or volunteer must never find themselves entirely alone or unobserved in an enclosed space (including virtual spaces and digital breakout rooms) with a single child. Recognising that requiring two adults to accompany a single child at all times can create an intimidating dynamic of hyper-surveillance that can put undue pressure on the child, this standard ensures that adults engage with a minimum of two children together. This configuration maintains essential peer support, preserves the child's comfort, and eliminates one-on-one vulnerabilities.

In situations where unavoidable one-to-one interactions occur, they must take place in a visible, open, or easily observable space, with the door open where appropriate, and another staff member informed as soon as possible. The interaction should be brief, necessary, and documented if it involves a safeguarding concern, personal support, transportation, medical issue, or emotional distress.

2) Projects' safeguarding frameworks

QUEST uses child safeguarding procedures in working in connection with other organisations, particularly in the context of large- or small-scale cooperation projects. The proximity rule above operates within a broader safety infrastructure integrated across every stage of a project's lifecycle (from design to implementation and evaluation).

Prior to the launch of any project, the partners must designate a project Child Protection Officer (CPO) (that can be or not QUEST CPO depending on the project), who holds authority to alter or halt activities if standards are compromised. The Project CPO serves as the direct, visible focal point for complaints from any participant or affected person. They are responsible for welcoming disclosures, treating every report with equal gravity, and sharing them immediately with the central QUEST CPO.

During activities, this safeguarding and protection framework mandates compliance with the policy pledge and requirements listed in Pillar I and the following child-participation and engagement protocols:

- **Rules of mindful engagement** → Every staff member, partner, and volunteer must interact with children in a deeply mindful way that actively embodies the core QUEST principles of nonviolent communication, effective collaboration, confidentiality, active listening, democratic decision-making, non-discrimination, equity, and inclusion.

>> This requires paying careful, continuous attention to how one's own words and actions impact a child, remaining strictly responsible for one's own emotions, and reflecting deeply on the short- and long-term consequences specific statements or arrangements have on a child's opportunities, health, and well-being.

- **Child agency and informed consent/assent** → Every child is informed of their right to be safe, QUEST's Child Safeguarding Policy, the Child Protection Officer they can raise concerns to and how to do so.

>> No child may participate without their own explicit assent and their legal guardian's signed QUEST Consent Forms ([Annexes D and E](#)). Children retain the right to refuse participation at any single moment. If a child objects to a scheduled framework but proposes an alternative way to run the activity to which they would consent, the alternative will be considered and proposed to the group. The activity may be updated only if all participants give their democratic consent, turning a structural adjustment into a collaborative learning opportunity. Where activities involve groups, options will be provided for non-participation (eg: alternative task, seating, or withdrawal) without being singled out.

- **Preparation and feedback loops** → Before every activity begins, a child-friendly briefing must be conducted to grant children informed choices, clarify their rights, and ensure emotional readiness. Facilitators must actively solicit feedback immediately following this briefing to ensure explanations were clear, allocating sufficient time to answer questions before starting.

>> At the conclusion of every activity, feedback must be systematically gathered via the QUEST Safeguarding Evaluation for Children to guarantee that well-being has been fully preserved and to provide a safe space for children to share their perceptions, feelings, and personal learnings collectively.

- **Informed safeguarding and reporting loops** → Safeguarding must be actively monitored throughout all operations. At the end of a project, the QUEST project team is required to assess how effective the team was at ensuring and reinforcing child safeguarding procedures, highlighting identified good practices and challenges. The QUEST CPO will gather these reports to update internal policies, present lessons learned to the team, and actively promote best practices across the network and beyond.

3) Sign recognition and prevention in different settings

Staff must maintain continuous, preventative vigilance to identify warning signs across all settings where we implement our activities.

A. Live, physical (educational) settings

- Behavioral shifts : Sudden, unexplained withdrawal from peer groups, extreme, uncharacteristic compliance, hyper-vigilance or an intense fear of physical contact, or sudden bursts of externalised anger and non-cooperation.
- Physical indications : Unexplained, recurrent bruising, burns, or lacerations, frequent somatic complaints during specific sessions or around specific adults ; or clothing that is severely unsuited for the weather or environment.
- Environmental red flags : An adult worker consistently attempting to isolate a single child outside the visibility of the "Double Agency" rule, or trying to exchange personal contact details outside official project frameworks.

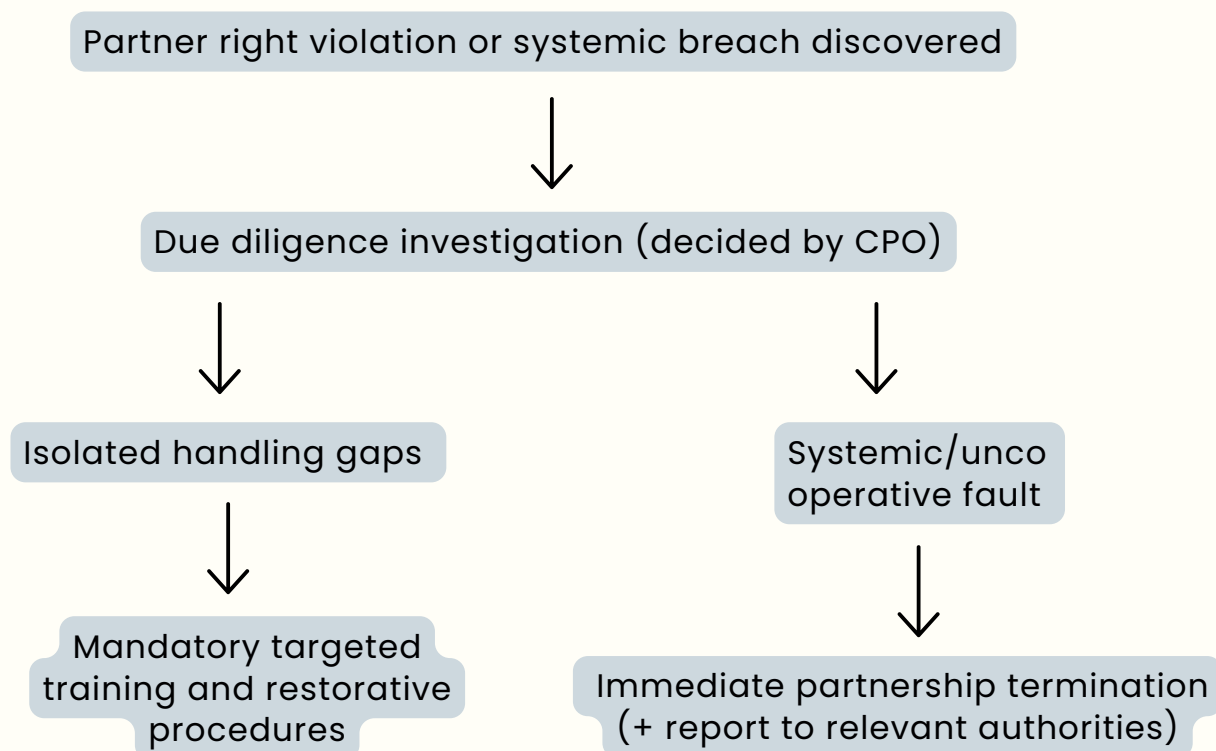
B. The online and digital dimension

QUEST operations also happen through collaborative technologies, virtual rooms and communication tools. Staff must actively monitor for signs of digital abuse, cyberbullying, or online exploitation.

- Digital behavior red flags : A child showing sudden distress, anxiety, or hyper-secrecy when using laptops or mobile devices during digital workshops ; or abruptly deleting online profiles or leaving collaborative project spaces without explanation.
- Peer-to-Peer cyberbullying : The use of shared digital platforms, chat rooms, or comment threads to isolate, mock, dox, exclude, or intimidate a participant. This includes using exclusionary or derogatory language in online project platforms.
- Virtual grooming and erasure of boundaries: An adult facilitator, visitor, or peer attempting to message a child via private social channels or (encrypted) apps outside the transparent, designated group infrastructure. Or an adult sharing inappropriate, adult-oriented digital content, memes, or links under the guise of casual engagement.
- Digital privacy and algorithmic breaches : The non-consensual capture, storage, algorithmic processing, sharing, or public dissemination of a child's image, video, or research data on public websites or social channels without verifiable, child-friendly consent forms (using the QUEST Consent Forms, [Annexes D and E](#)).
- Easy access to this policy : All those to whom this policy applies to (see section 1. Introduction, subsection Purpose and Scope), have the right to access both versions of this policy easily in order to be aware of their rights and obligations. In any digital space or initial communication relating to a project, this policy must be prominently acknowledged and a link shall be provided to the latest versions. Failure to include such notice is considered a breach of this policy.

4) Partnership frameworks and breach procedures

QUEST collaborates with a vast international network of educational institutions and project partners. To ensure that our joint actions do not jeopardise child safety, activities are governed by the following compliance sequence :



Due diligence investigations: Any report of a safeguarding breach, right violation, or omission within a partnership instantly triggers a formal due diligence investigation led by the designated Child protection officer. Every complaint is processed with equal gravity.

Handling more isolated deficiencies : If an investigation reveals that a violation occurred but was poorly or insufficiently managed by the partner, QUEST decides on an immediate intervention, and will rigorously evaluate the partner's internal policies and require their staff to undergo targeted training. Refusal to execute this leads to the exclusion from the network.

Systemic or uncooperative breaches : If the investigation uncovers deep-seated, systemic structural failures that compromise children's rights (or if the partner exhibits a refusal to restructure their spaces, personnel, or culture) QUEST reserves the right to immediately terminate the partnership, cancel all joint project agreements, deny network membership (rejecting the QUEST Membership Form), and formally report the entity to the appropriate authorities.

5) Communication and notification protocol

When a safeguarding incident, disclosure, or suspected breach occurs, communication and containment must follow a strict timeline designed to maintain an open environment, where protection issues can be addressed transparently and free lines of communication exist between children and adults.

The notification protocol for receiving disclosures is the following :

If a child actively discloses an incidence of harm, personnel must adhere to an empowering, non-interrogative standard of care. **The adult's role is exclusively to listen actively, validate the child's courage, assure them that the situation is being handled with absolute priority, and record verbatim statements** on the QUEST Safeguarding Report Form ([Annex F](#)).

The protection of the child remains the overriding priority, and the response must focus entirely on their psychological well-being, free from any dynamic that could induce further discrimination, shame, or systemic silencing. Information will be shared on a need-to-know basis and stored securely.

- **Step 1 - Immediate internal escalation (🕒 0-2 hours)** : The individual who witnesses the event, receives the disclosure, or detects the red flag must :
 - If the child is in immediate danger → Contact emergency services first
 - Second, contact the QUEST CPO or the designated project CPO → inform or submit the formal QUEST Safeguarding Report directly to them.
 - Any failure by personnel to report a suspected red flag or policy non-compliance within this window constitutes an environment of passive neglect and can result in disciplinary action, contract termination or expulsion from the network.
- **Step 2 - Internal safeguarding procedure and guardian notification (🕒 24 hours)** :
 - Action A (Management): The CPO will instantly inform QUEST Mission Circle to immediately freeze any field or digital contact between the accused party and the organisation's activities.
 - Action B (Guardians): The CPO must contact the child's legal guardians to provide a clear, empathetic summary of the situation while coordinating supportive care resources.
 - * If there is any credible suspicion that the legal guardians themselves are implicated in the harm or neglect of the child, **this step is suspended** until public child protection services or law enforcement authorities are engaged and advise on a safe communication paths

- **Step 3 - Public authorities mobilisation (🏠 24–48 hours)** : Any suspected criminal conduct following an immediate internal review of the safeguarding report will lead the CPO to report the case to the police and/or any competent local or national authorities. QUEST defers all investigation to these legal bodies.

Immediate interim care and containment measures : Simultaneously with this notification loop, the alleged perpetrator is immediately suspended from all physical and digital spaces without prejudice. If medical attention is required, transport to a local facility is immediately arranged alongside long-term trauma support. All case records are encrypted and maintained strictly on a need-to-know basis.

6) Receiving a disclosure from a child (do's and don'ts)

DO

- Stay calm; listen; take the child seriously; thank them for telling you.
- Do not promise secrecy or confidentiality to a child. Explain you may need to share information to keep them safe, assuring them that it will only be shared with relevant people.
- Ask only open, minimal questions needed to understand immediate safety needs
- Let the child know what you are going to do next and that you will let them know what happens
- Write down the facts as soon as possible using the incident form (what was said/observed, time, place, people present).
- Report promptly via the safeguarding reporting route.

DO NOT

- Do not interrogate, pressure, or ask leading questions.
- Do not confront the alleged person yourself.
- Do not delay reporting.
- Do not share information beyond those who need to know.

7) Internal governance breaches and appeals process

All the same applies **when safeguarding violations are committed by QUEST personnel or network members** during organisational activities, in

which case they will be reported to the CPO for confidential investigation. QUEST Mission Circle will initially work with the accused party to correct the behavior. If the party proves unwilling or unable to meet the policy standards, the Mission Circle may suspend collaboration, end the contract, or revoke network membership. Affected organisations have one week from written notification to appeal the decision by submitting their grounds in writing to the QUEST Mission Circle. The Mission Circle will independently re-examine the evidence and issue a final, unappealable written verdict. Any suspected criminal misconduct will be turned over directly to the police and/or competent authorities.

PILLAR IV: ACCOUNTA- BILITY

QUEST recognises that structural safety and true children/youth input cannot exist without complete institutional transparency. We maintain an independent whistleblowing mechanism where both personnel and network members are structurally protected against organisational retaliation or censorship if they challenge internal management decisions regarding a safeguarding and protection failure.

1) Internal oversight structures

- **The QUEST Child Protection Officer (CPO):** QUEST maintains a permanent designated Child Protection Officer responsible for cross-checking the safeguarding components of all QUEST activities, events, and projects. A designated replacement is explicitly named in the event of any extended absence.
- **Annual Reporting:** The CPO prepares an annual performance and monitoring report detailing all risk assessments, feedback trends, and any reported observations for presentation directly to the Mission Circle and the Board.
- **Policy review and feedback:** The Child Safeguarding Policy will be reviewed every two years, with feedback gathered from QUEST's 100+ member organisations, including 60+ schools. A child-friendly version of the policy has been developed and will be updated with the help of our youth advisory board to ensure children understand their rights and the measures in place to protect them.
- **Reporting box :** A dedicated tab in QUEST's website will be launched in 2026 for children and youth to report any CSP violations in our network. A poster with a QR code will be distributed to school members so that children can report breaches of the CSP directly on QUEST's website.

2) Verification of compliance

By signing this document ([Annex C](#)), QUEST, its associated member organisations, and operational partners formally pledge to uphold this policy as a legally binding operational framework. Any failure to enforce these standards constitutes a material breach of contract, resulting in immediate suspension or expulsion from the QUEST network.

A. DEFINITIONS

Child : Is defined as anyone under the age of 18, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

Child safeguarding : Child safeguarding is the responsibility that organisations have to make sure their staff, operations and programmes do no harm to children, that is that they do not expose children to the risk of harm and abuse, and that any concerns the organisation has about children's safety within the communities in which they work, are reported to the appropriate authorities (Keeping Children Safe, 2024, p.6)

Child protection : Is the fundamental responsibility to prevent and respond to all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children, rooted in the obligations of States Parties under Article 19 of the UNCRC. While QUEST does not investigate external cases of harm (such as those caused by teachers, parents, caregivers, or community members), we hold a duty to report and refer incidents through our safeguarding pathway to the appropriate child protection authorities (meaning all State actors and agents involved in child protection, as well as the laws, procedures, systems, and processes established to safeguard children).

Child agency / self-determination : A child's ability and right to make choices and influence decisions affecting them, consistent with their evolving capacities and this agency's connected responsibility.

Consent : The voluntary, informed, and explicit agreement given by a person who has the legal capacity and maturity to do so ; typically a parent, legal guardian, or a child who has reached the legal age of majority or independent decision-making under local law.

Assent : A child's affirmative agreement to participate, separate from parent/guardian consent.

Quality education : A process allowing the development of every learner's full potential, in connection with oneself, others and the world, in a flexible, learner-based and evolving manner. Quality education thus promotes lifelong skills' adoption in a holistic way. It recognises the learning experience as multiple and influenced by its political, cultural and economic contexts, while occurring within healthy, safe and open environments.

As such, Quality Education could be said to be composed of the following 8 aspects:

1. Self-education of the adults
2. Trustful relationships
3. Intrinsic motivation
4. Personal development in democratic environments
5. Free play
6. Contact with the real world
7. Situational and process orientated
8. No discrimination or segregation

B. CHILD SAFEGUARDING PLEDGE

By acting on behalf of QUEST, I pledge to hold myself to the highest ethical and behavioral standards to protect the safety, dignity, and active agency of every child. I commit to upholding the following principles across all physical and digital spaces :

1. To respect and treat every child equally, which means :

- a. Promoting equity and non-discrimination: I will treat every child with deep kindness, respect, and fairness, actively celebrating differences in background, ability, identity, gender expression, or opinion.
- b. Deconstructing systemic bias: I will consciously audit my own (pedagogical) habits to ensure children from non-dominant backgrounds are never disproportionately disciplined, spoken over, or isolated by peers or facilitators.
- c. Honoring diverse communication: I will use clear, unhurried, and accessible language to accommodate different language fluencies and hearing levels, ensuring no child feels excluded or left behind.
- d. Fostering a culture of belonging: I will proactively manage groups to prevent peer-to-peer exclusion, bullying, or marginalization, ensuring that every child feels valued as they are.

2. To act continuously towards protecting every child's rights, which means :

- a. Maintaining absolute boundaries: I will respect each child's bodily autonomy and right to set personal space boundaries. I will never initiate physical contact (such as touching, hugging, or holding hands) without explicit consent, and I am strictly prohibited from any behavior that crosses professional, emotional, or physical boundaries.
- b. Upholding environmental and proximity standards: I will strictly abide by the "Double Agency" Proximity Rule, ensuring I am never alone or unobserved with a single child in physical or digital spaces. I will also keep all QUEST environments completely alcohol, drug, and smoke-free.
- c. Enforcing digital and media privacy: I will protect children's personal data and confidentiality. I will secure written consent before capturing photos or videos, respect their right to withdraw that consent, and never connect with youth participants via personal social media accounts or use project media for personal purposes.
- d. Fulfilling my duty to report (no private investigations): I will maintain zero tolerance for any form of physical, verbal, or psychological harm (including shaming, teasing, or ignoring). If a violation occurs, I recognize that my sole operational role is to report, not to investigate. I will calmly validate the child and escalate the data to the Child Protection Officer (CPO) within the mandatory 2-hour window.

3. To promote children's participation in every matter affecting their life, which means :

- a. Championing youth agency: I explicitly reject paternalistic safeguarding models that treat children as passive objects. I will actively co-create safety parameters with youth, treating them as active agents in their own protection and learning.

- b. Ensuring dynamic, informed choice: Before any activity, I will share clear, child-friendly information so children can make truly informed decisions. I will honor a child's uncompromised right to say "no" or withdraw from an activity at any moment, regardless of prior parental consent forms.
- c. Shifting from instructor to facilitator: I will actively share the floor and power, take turns, and create space for children to express themselves in whatever way suits them best, whether through speaking, writing, drawing, or comfortable silence.
- d. Honoring the weight of children's input: I will explicitly inform children how their data and ideas will influence final project outputs and policy decisions, entirely eliminating extractive or tokenistic child/youth consultation. If a child objects to an educational framework and proposes a collaborative alternative, I will take it seriously and help the group navigate it democratically.

Name:

Position:

Project/Activity:

Date & Signature :

C. DECLARATION FOR STAFF AND ASSOCIATES OF QUEST

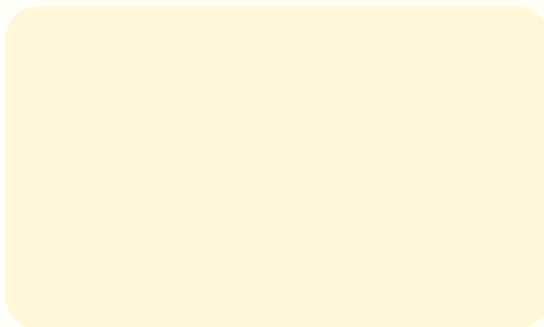
1. I confirm that I have read QUEST's Child Safeguarding Policy and agree to comply with its provisions.
2. I confirm that I understand my roles and responsibilities under this policy. If I have questions related to my roles and responsibilities under this policy, I will seek guidance from the QUEST Child Protection Officer.
3. I confirm that I have read the Safeguarding pledge (ANNEX B) and agree to adhere to it.
4. By my signature below, I certify that the above statements are true and correct.

Name:

Position:

Project/Activity:

Date & Signature :



D. GENERAL CONSENT FORM

Dear parents / legal guardians,
Dear children,

QUEST, [in collaboration with [insert name of your organisation], is organising a [insert name of the activity]. Some important information about the activity :

- **Topic:** [describe the topic and goal of the activity]
- **Location:** the activity will take place [insert in-person or online], in [insert the place you will be conducting the activity]
- **Time and Date:** the activity will take place on [insert date and time from XX to XX]
- **Number and age of children involved:** the activity will include [insert number and age group of the children involved]
- **Child safeguarding:** QUEST and [insert name of your organisation] are committed to creating a safe and respectful space where children can freely express their thoughts and ideas. A designated Child Protection Officer from [insert name of the organisation], [insert their name], will be present during the consultation to help ensure the safety and well-being of all participants. If you feel unsafe or uncomfortable during the activity, you can speak to this Child Protection Officer or another trusted adult.

Below, you will find the consent form to be signed by one of the parents or legal guardians and the child. We ask you to fill in and sign this consent form to ensure that both of you understand and agree to all aspects of participating in this consultation. This consent form will be kept by QUEST for no longer than 5 years. You can withdraw your consent at any time. Should you have any questions or require additional information, your direct point of contact from [insert name of your organisation] is: [insert name and contact details]. Thank you for your trust and support in making children's voices heard.

Your personal information

Your first and last name:

Your relation to the child:

Information about the child

First and last name of the child:

Age of the child:

Does your child have any medical conditions and/or additional needs that we should know about? Please note them below:

Does your child have any special dietary requirements/allergies that we should know about? Please note them below (Only for in-person meetings):

[Insert name of the activity] consent:

Please tick the boxes to confirm that you understand that:

- ☐ By completing and signing this form, you give your consent for your child to take part in [Insert name of the activity], organised by [insert name of the organisation] in collaboration with QUEST, [insert date and time from XX to XX]
- ☐ Your child's participation in the consultation is voluntary, so they can choose to withdraw from the project at any time without consequences.
- ☐ A designated Child Protection Officer from [insert name of the organisation], [insert name] will be present during the consultation. Your child can speak to this person if anyone makes your child feel uncomfortable or if your child witnesses behaviour that violates the Code of Conduct.

If you or your child prefers, the comments of your child can be anonymised in the consultation report, so that no one will be able to identify your child as the contributor.

Do you want the comments of your child to be anonymised?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Place and Date :

Name and signature of the child :

Name and signature of the guardian :

E. VIDEO AND IMAGE CONSENT FORM

I, the undersigned (Name and Surname)

in the capacity of parent, guardian, or legal custodian of (Name and Surname)

declare that I am fully aware of and give my consent for their participation in (name of the event and location) and for the taking of photographic, audio, and video recordings that may include him/her.

I grant QUEST and its possible partners and collaborators all non-exclusive rights to use, adapt, reproduce, distribute, publish, and display the images, audio, and video recordings, or any adaptations or extracts that portray them, without limitations in context, time, or location.

All organisations involved will handle their information, images, and materials in strict compliance with safeguarding policies and procedures. We are committed to using the data only with your permission and in line with European data protection rules.

☐ I authorise the use of the material for communication, promotion, and awareness-raising purposes related to the activities of the involved organisations. This includes, but is not limited to: Printed and online publications; Websites and social media; Press releases, articles, and other forms of media dissemination; Public screenings, events, festivals, and conferences.

☐ I authorise the use of the material, both in full or in part, offline or online, including future use for activities not directly related to the attended meetings but falling within the institutional and promotional purposes of the involved entities.

I acknowledge that my authorisation is granted free of charge and without time limits, and no compensation will be requested for the use of the material.

The media consent forms will be kept by QUEST, but the child or parent/guardian can withdraw their consent at any time.

Date and location:

Name & Signature of child:

Name & Signature of parent:

F. SAFEGUARDING REPORT FORM

Have you been made aware of or witnessed a right violation? Fill this form to the best of your knowledge and share it to your Project Child Protection Officer and/or QUEST's Child Protection Officer no later than 24 hours after the safeguarding concern happened.

The report should be written and signed only by you to guarantee confidentiality. It should be sent only to the Child Protection Officer (contact in Annex G) who will hold it in a safe and secure place and treat it with the strictest confidentiality.

Your report might protect children from harm, abuse or neglect, thank you!

1. ABOUT YOU

First name

Last name

Job title

Organisation

Nature of your contact with the child :

Tel.

Email

1. ABOUT THE CHILD

Don't ask those information directly to the child.

First name

Last name

Age

Address

Parents / Guardians

If medical concerns, fill in the information below:

Has any treatment been given to the child? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Treatment given by:

Taken to hospital? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, which hospital and how was the child transported there:

About your concern / Details of the incident

Was the incident:

☐ Observed by you

☐ Suspected

☐ Disclosed by someone else

If the concern was shared by someone else, please state who and their relationship to the child:

What happened? Give cause (how and why) if known. If you include personal observations, please make a distinction between what is a fact and what is opinion or hearsay (e.g. child's emotional state, visible injuries, etc.):

Did the child/young person or another source say anything to you [if relevant], and how did you respond to him or her: [Do not lead the child. Record actual details]

Date of the alleged incident:

Time of the alleged incident:

Location of the alleged incident:

Name of the alleged perpetrator (if applicable):

Function and organisation of the alleged perpetrator (if applicable):

Were there any other children/people involved in the alleged incident?

Are any other children at risk of harm?

Action taken by you:

Any other comments or details you would like to give:

Place and Date :

Signature :

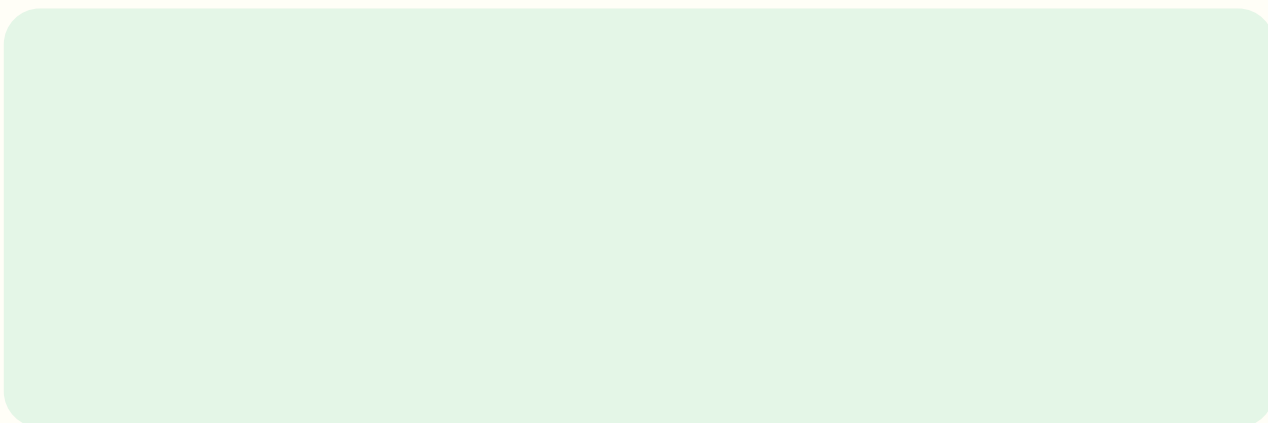
For completion by the Child Safeguarding Focal person:

Incident/Accident investigated: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Written investigation report necessary: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Written investigation report necessary: ☐ Yes ☐ No

In order to determine the cause of the incident or accident, it may be appropriate to interview parties who were involved. Witness detail, statements, etc. can be added here:



G. THE LUNDY MODEL OF PARTICIPATION + CHILD EVALUATION FORMS

Developed by Professor Laura Lundy (University College Cork), this model translates children's right to be heard (Article 12, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) into practice. The model is used by the European Commission's own EU Children's Participation Platform and by international bodies, national governments, and NGOs worldwide.

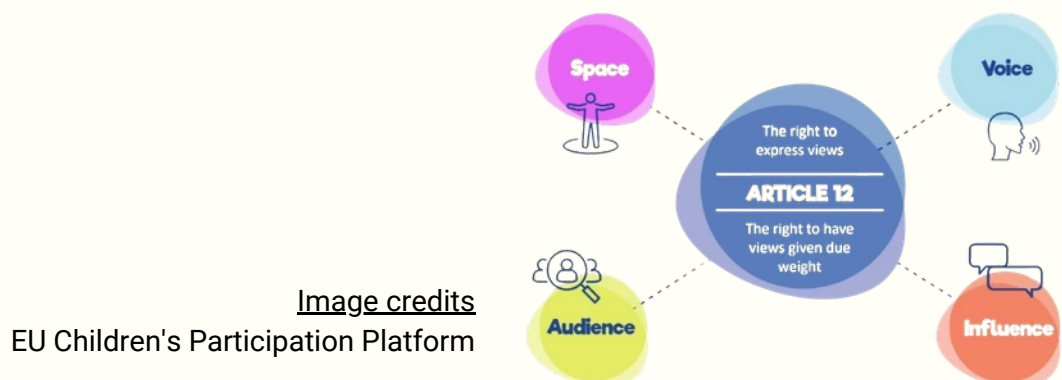
The model has 4 interconnected elements :

- **Space** --> Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express a view. Adults are responsible for making these spaces accessible and welcoming to children from different backgrounds.
- **Voice** --> Children must be facilitated to express their views, with the information, support, and freedom to decide if and how they want to participate.
- **Audience** --> The view must be listened to by someone with the responsibility to hear it, and decision-makers must genuinely commit to hearing and responding.
- **Influence** --> The view must be acted upon, as appropriate. Decision-makers must give feedback to children on how their input was considered or why a decision went a different way.

Evaluating activities against the model

In line with this framework, **children can evaluate each activity they take part with QUEST or any other organisation, using the Child Evaluation Form**, which asks them to reflect on their experience across the four elements above (i.e. whether they felt safe and included, whether they were able to express themselves, whether they felt listened to, and whether they could see their input made a difference).

👉 You can access the “evaluation checklist”, the “evaluation form for groups meeting face-to-face”, and the “evaluation form for groups meeting online”, all in 23 languages, in [The Lundy Model of Participation – EU Children's Participation Platform](#)



H. KEY CONTACTS

QUEST Child Protection Officer

Martina Paone

martina@quest-eu.org

External Contacts

Centre for general welfare services (Centrum Algemeen Welzijnswerk): to be contacted for general advice and support on child protection questions in Brussels:

www.cawbrussel.be

During working hours: +32 (0)2 2270200

Outside working hours: 106

Kind & Gezin, Belgium: www.kindengezin.be ; +32 (0)78 150100

European Emergency Number (Police, Ambulance and Fire Brigade): 112

Doctors on call: +32 (0)2 201 22 22

Médecine de garde (Belgium): 1733 (after 18:00)

Taxis Verts Bruxelles: +32 (0)2 349 49 49

Erasmus Hospital: Route de Lennik 808, 1070 Bruxelles; +32 (0) 2 555 31 11

Clinique Saint-Jean: Boulevard du Jardin Botanique/Kruidtuinlaan 32, 1000 Brussels ;
+32 2 221 91 11

Hotline to report violence (Belgium): 1712

Centre to report child abuse (Belgium): +32 (0)2 4776060; kindinnood@uzbrussel.be



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