

**Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar [Flaenoriaethau'r Chwched Senedd](#)**

**This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) consultation on [Sixth Senedd Priorities](#)**

**CYPE SP 69**

**Ymateb gan: Cymorth i Ferched Cymru**

**Response from: Welsh Women's Aid**

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Beth yn eich barn chi yw'r prif flaenoriaethau neu'r materion y dylai'r Pwyllgor eu hystyried yn ystod y Chwched Senedd? Os oes modd, nodwch eich barn o ran sut y gallai'r Pwyllgor fynd i'r afael â hyn.

What do you consider to be the main priorities or issues that the Committee should consider during the Sixth Senedd? Where possible, please set out your view about how the Committee could address them.

**Theme 1: School-age education**

**Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021**

Implementation of the new curriculum and fully embedding RSE will be crucial for the success of a Whole-Education Approach (WEA). There is fair evidence that the most effective way of challenging norms and stereotypes is when it is embedded within curriculum and seen as a core value of the institution itself, supported by workshops delivered by external specialists. We often hear from survivors that had they been taught that the behaviour they were subjected to was abusive, they would have been better able to seek advice and/or support at a much earlier stage.

We understand the Welsh Government's desire to promote a positive, outcomes-focused approach to RSE, in line with the wider curriculum. However, it is our view and the view of the groups we consulted when responding consultation on *the Relationships and Sexuality Education Statutory Guidance and Code*, that harmful behaviour, relationships, stereotypes and norms need to be labelled explicitly for the intended audience to appreciate the value of RSE in preventing harm, and to achieve the four overarching purposes of the curriculum.

In our response to priorities for the Children and Young People Committee under the Fifth Senedd we highlighted the Welsh Government Good Practice Guidance on Whole School Approaches developed in conjunction with Welsh Women's Aid which set out a practical toolkit for embedding the principles ending violence against



women in educational settings. The guide outlines nine key elements that would ensure a comprehensive and holistic approach to prevention of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.<sup>1</sup> We would urge the committee to revisit this Good Practice Guidance and scrutinise in what way it is being used to inform the roll out of the new curriculum. We would hope to see the Guidance clearly define a 'whole school approach' in terms of its core elements (education for pupil, staff, and parents/carers; active participation of pupils and staff; community engagement; healthy school culture, supported by policies; partnerships with local specialist services /experts; ensuring high quality information, advice and support is available and accessible to all; and mechanisms for monitoring impact and informing change). It should be made clear that all these aspects, together, constitute a whole school approach.

### **Commissioning**

In our 2019 Children Matter report<sup>2</sup> we highlighted that of the regional VAWDASV strategies in Wales used to inform future commissioning, only two made concrete commitments to develop and provide specialist provision for children and young people affected by VAWDASV. An additional, three strategies only referred to children and young people in the context of raising awareness of healthy relationships in schools, not with any regard to ensuring any provision of specialist support and intervention.

We would like the committee to drive work to ensure regional VAWDASV strategies and subsequent commissioning sees support for children and young people as a priority, and as essential for preventing and ending VAWDASV in Wales.

### **Estyn review**

We can and should be aiming to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls. Our education institutions are critical in enabling this. We have legislation in Wales that says public bodies, including schools, must prioritise prevention of violence against women and girls. This means we should be aiming for schools that promote a culture of respect, equality and empowerment for all.

Time and time again women and girls have called for education that teaches boys and men to respect them equally. Education institutions must be clear that harassment, abuse and violence is not acceptable and actively challenge the attitudes and norms that allow for it to continue.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/commsafety/151020-whole-educationapproach-good-practice-guide-en.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Children-and-Young-People-participation-report-FINAL.pdf>



To do this staff and pupils need the tools and understanding to prevent, challenge and respond to violence against women and girls within their establishments. This must include:

- how pupils, staff, and parents can learn about violence against women and girls, and be involved in preventing it;
- how people experiencing abuse can be supported;
- and how abuse can be prevented in the wider community.

This work is already happening. Specialist services in Wales have been working with children and young people and their wider communities to prevent violence against women and girls and provide support that empowers survivors (old and young) to live free from abuse. Unfortunately this work is chronically underfunded. Sustainably funded specialist services will have capacity to build links with schools and offer this expertise.

We urge the committee to scrutinise the ongoing Estyn review, and follow whether or not survivors and specialist services are being adequately consulted. The remit of the review needs to be broadened and more in keeping with the existing evidence on the causes and drivers of sexual harassment, abuse, as well as other forms of violence against women and girls. It must look at all those that are perpetrating the harassment and place the responsibility to standing up to harassment on government and education institutions whose policies and practices can change the culture that allows it to be pervasive. Most importantly, the review needs to aim to identify how education institutions can uphold girls' rights to go to school, college and university without the fear of being harassed or abused.

## **Theme 2: Further and higher education**

### **HEFCW Guidance**

In 2019 Welsh Government and HEFCW produced guidance for colleges and universities on VAWDASV. However, there has been minimal promotion and limited monitoring as to how this is being implemented. As the Everyone's Invited disclosures have highlighted, sexual harassment and violence is highly prevalent in FE colleges and universities in Wales however this is not being covered by the Estyn Review mentioned above.



Students' reporting experiences of sexual violence in particular are increasing at an alarming rate<sup>3</sup>, underpinned by a profoundly sexist and victim blaming culture. These statistics alone demonstrate that experiences of VAWDASV are the rule, as opposed to the exception therefore implementation of the guidance is critical.

It is crucial that students and staff in universities are not only able to identify VAWDASV and get help when needed, but that VAWDASV and the attitudes underpinning it are actively challenged: undertaking Bystander interventions is one effective way of doing so which has been successfully evaluated.

Some good practice activity is taking place, however this is not consistent across all universities or integrated in to VAWDASV strategies. We recommend that the committee looks at how it can hold the Welsh Government and higher education leaders to account to instil a sense of urgency regarding the development of appropriate and effective VAWDASV provision for students and staff in FE/HE in Wales.

Good Practice examples include:

1. Welsh Women's Aid are delivering the 'Bystander Intervention' to some Welsh universities. This intervention, an adaptation of the original 'Intervention Initiative' and piloted by Welsh Women's Aid in four Welsh Universities in 2017 (see report [here](#)) yielded positive results, showing consistent improvements in students' knowledge of and attitudes towards domestic abuse and sexual violence; their ability to identify potential situations of VAWDASV; their awareness of different ways to safely intervene; and in their self-reported likelihood of intervening.
2. Cardiff University launched the Disclosure Response Team (DRT)<sup>4</sup>, a dedicated pathway of disclosure, support and referral for anyone at the university who experiences any form of violence, harassment or abuse. Survivors can make disclosures via an online form, or by contacting a confidential email address. To support this model, Welsh Women's Aid developed training for staff on how to manage disclosures in order to contribute to the culture shift pertaining to all forms of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) within the university.

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<sup>3</sup> Freedom of Information Request carried out by Channel 4 (2019) <https://www.channel4.com/news/82-increase-in-reports-of-sexual-violence-in-universities>

<sup>4</sup> The Disclosure Response Team, Cardiff University, <https://www.cardiffstudents.com/itsnojoke/report-an-incident/>



### **Theme 3: Health and well-being, including social care (as they relate to children and young people)**

Largely due to strategies and funding streams for VAWDASV being centred on adult provision and limited join up with social care children and young people focused strategic commitments and investment. The Regional Partnership Boards (RPB), overseeing elements of the social care budget offer an opportunity to improve investment into specialist support for children and young people experiencing VAWDASV. RPBs are tasked with developing an integrated approach to the commissioning of services for children and young people with complex needs. The RPB population needs assessment offer an opportunity to identify the complex needs of children and young people affected by VAWDASV across Wales and ensure that this feeds into strategic commitment and funding to provide sustainable specialist support to address their needs and enable children and young people to live free from abuse. Welsh Women's Aid and NSPCC Cymru has written to all RPB chairs in June 2021 to offer to support the needs assessment with the evidence we have in the needs of children and young people, so far only one has responded. The committee needs to ensure it scrutinises the mechanisms created to implement the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 to ensure that it is investing in the health and well-being needs of the most vulnerable children in Wales.

Welsh Women's Aid would encourage the committee to include the scrutiny of children and young people's experiences of VAWDASV and the role of engaging with children and young people in the prevention of future VAWDASV across all of its forthcoming scrutiny programme. The priority areas that we would recommend reflect those outlined within the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act (Wales) 2015.

### **Theme 4: Children and young people**

#### **Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)**

All too often children and young people's experiences of violence and abuse are forgotten about within in strategies and funding for VAWDASV provision. Our findings have highlighted that provision of services for children and young people in Wales is *'limited, patchy and hugely varied due in large part to unsustainable, inconsistent and in some cases total non-existence of funding towards specialist dedicated services for children and young people'*.<sup>5</sup> This means children are not given the support they need to manage their experiences as survivors in their own right, leading to long term impacts on their health and well-being throughout their lives.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Children-and-Young-People-participation-report-FINAL.pdf>



NSPCC has found that 1 in 5 children have been exposed to domestic abuse.<sup>6</sup> Despite the VAWDASV Act and the Domestic Abuse Act recognising children experiencing domestic abuse, support for children and young people across Wales is inconsistent and mapping of services have demonstrated the urgent need for better funding and resources to meet need. COVID-19 only intensified this; calls to helplines increased<sup>7</sup> during the national lockdowns and specialist services reported increased pressure on already stretched provision.

We ask of Welsh Government the following which is also being called for by NSPCC;

- For the shortfall in service provision for children to be addressed and sustainable funding secured.
- That regional strategies must provide services for children and young people and that in developing strategies, designing services and evaluating the success of interventions, children and young people are consulted.
- That early intervention work is prioritised.
- Carry out an inquiry into the adequate commissioning and provision of specialist services for children and young people affected by VAWDASV across Wales

We therefore urge the Committee to spotlight the gap in specialist VAWDASV service provision for children and young people in Wales, especially as we come to understand the impact of the past 18 months on this cohort of children. The provision of specialist services for children and young people should be accessible to all children that need it and delivered by skilled professionals with the experience to offer a range of specialist support to children and young people that reflect their diverse spectrum of needs. At present this is not consistently being provided in Wales due to the lack of strategic leadership in the funding and commissioning of this provision.

### **Early intervention and sources of support**

Our recently published report "*I trust them*"<sup>8</sup> presents the findings from an online survey designed to contribute to an evidence base of children and young people's sources of 'resilience' in communities.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/pre-2013/child-abuse-neglect-uk-today>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/about-us/news-opinion/2021/nspcc-child-abuse-helpline-pandemic/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/I-trust-them-CYP-Resilience-Survey-Report-English-1.pdf>



The survey found that there were some clear differences between the sources of potential support identified by Black and minoritized young people and their White British counterparts. In particular: Black and minoritized respondents were nearly half as likely to identify the Police as a source of support compared to their White British counterparts (17% and 32%, respectively). A similar pattern emerged in relation to 'parents', with 24% and 46%, respectively. Black and minoritized respondents were also three times less likely to identify 'employer' as a source of support (7% and 21%, respectively), and were less likely to identify anybody from within the education sector as a potential source of support (66% compared to 86%).

The findings suggest that normalisation / lack of understanding of abuse, combined with a culture of victim-blaming, remain prevalent factors affecting young people's likelihood of seeking support. It is also clear that key institutions, especially the police and education (and possibly workplaces), are not considered accessible, desirable, or trustworthy places to seek support by many young people, and that this is partly due to previous bad experiences and/or lack of means to attend. This is more pronounced for young people from Black and minoritized backgrounds.

The findings show a need for:

- The need for training for education staff as RSE curriculum is rolled out to be able to respond to disclosures in a trauma-informed and needs-led manner.
- The importance of enabling young people affected by VAWDASV early access to specialist support.
- Appropriate advice and support to made available online for young people.
- The benefit of enabling peer learning and sign posting.

As stated elsewhere, these are areas which are currently under invested in.

### **Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)**

Almost 9% of adults in Wales experienced a form of sexual abuse before the age of 16.<sup>9</sup> It has devastating impacts with both short and long-term effects which can last a lifetime.

We echo NSPCC in welcoming Welsh Government's National Action Plan on Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse. However, as we enter the final year of the Action Plan, we urge the Committee to consider the gaps still to be addressed and undertake an inquiry into the response to CSA and what a service standard for Wales should look like. We would like to see greater alignment between the new VAWDASV Strategy for Wales and the CSA Action Plan, which are currently delivered in silo.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/policy/nspcc-cymru-wales-manifesto-2021-2026-english.pdf>



As with our recommendations above, this must consider;

- What preventative and early intervention is available?
- Can children access specialist support in a timely manner?
- Are funding arrangements for specialist services sustainable?
- Do child survivors receive services to fulfil their right to support and recover?

As part of the scrutiny of the response to CSA, the Committee should examine Welsh Government commitments to the Child House model, especially in light of the Scottish Government recently committing to ensure all children have access to a Child House by 2025. This needs to be developed in partnership with sexual violence services across Wales to ensure a model that is built on the expertise in providing support to child and adult survivors of CSA. It needs to ensure that there is sustainable specialist services for children and young people across Wales (as previously mentioned) to form part of the integral multi-agency support.

