

Education Reform

Consultation on behalf of Professor Ken Muir, University of the West of Scotland and Independent Advisor to The Scottish Government

Respondent Information Form

Please Note this form **must** be completed and returned with your response.
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Are you responding as an individual, group or an organisation?

- ☐ Individual
☐ Group
☒ Organisation

If responding as an individual or group, which of the following best describes your role in the education system?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Parent / Carer | ☐ Child / Young Person |
| ☐ Teacher / Lecturer / Practitioner | ☐ Support Staff |
| ☐ School / Centre Leader | ☐ National Agency Officer |
| ☐ Local Authority / Regional Officer | ☐ Employer / Industry |
| ☐ Other, please state: | |

If responding as an individual or group, which of the following best describes your sector?

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| ☐ Early years | ☐ Primary |
| ☐ Secondary | ☐ Tertiary (Further / Higher Education) |

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The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response.

Please indicate your publishing preference:

- ☒ Publish response with name
- ☐ Publish response only (without name)
- ☐ Do not publish response

Information for organisations:

The option 'Publish response only (without name)' is available for individual respondents only. If this option is selected, the organisation name will still be published.

If you choose the option 'Do not publish response', your organisation name may still be listed as having responded to the consultation in, for example, in the analysis report.

We may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No

Scottish Women's Aid response to Scottish Government consultation on education reform

November 2021

Scottish Women's Aid (SWA) is the lead organisation in Scotland working to end domestic abuse through advocacy, research, and support for 34 local specialist services across Scotland. As Scotland's expert domestic abuse organisation, we play a vital role in embedding effective responses at national and local level. We take a systems approach by promoting policy and practice improvement at national and international levels while supporting excellent, survivor-led services locally.

We welcome the opportunity to submit views to this consultation on the reform of education in Scotland. We believe that education reform presents an opportunity to tackle the pervasive and interconnected issues of gender inequality and gender-based violence in our school environments. We refer to the more detailed responses submitted by sister organisations Zero Tolerance and Rape Crisis Scotland for a full overview of the prevalence of gender inequality, harassment and violence in schools, the current barriers which hinder it being combatted and ultimately prevented, and highlighting of evidence-based methods and approaches to meaningfully implement culture change within schools. We support them in their calls to revise and align the curriculum with Equally Safe, to develop statutory outcomes at every age and stage on understanding gender equality and healthy relationships, to support educators with the help of a dedicated team working to end gender-based violence and inequality in schools, and to embed expertise in gender inequality in school inspections. In our response, we wish to highlight an issue hitherto not widely understood in Scotland: that of the prevalence of abuse within intimate relationships experienced by girls and young women of school age.

Services across the Women's Aid network report increasing levels of young women (aged 12-25) experiencing domestic abuse in their own relationships. Domestic abuse can often be seen by this age group as something that happens to older women, or women with children, therefore making young women less likely to access support from specialist domestic abuse services (A report on this is forthcoming from Scottish Women's Aid and the Young Women's Movement). Indicators of abuse experienced by young women and girls may not be identified or taken seriously by adults, due in part to a lack of awareness and training on the issue. This is especially the case in school environments, leading to a culture which enables sexist language, gender stereotyping, sexual harassment and abuse (Equally Safe at Schools Map of Barriers, 2021).

Scottish Women's Aid has partnered with the Young Women's Movement (YWCA Scotland) on a participatory research and digital campaign project to hear directly from young women and girls about their understanding of what constitutes a healthy relationship, and where to find support if they are being abused. 454 young women, aged 12-25, took part in the research from across 31 local authority areas in Scotland. Preliminary analysis of results shows that over one third of these respondents (36%) had been in an intimate relationship with someone who was physically or emotionally abusive, while almost three quarters (74%) said that they knew someone who had been in an abusive relationship.

This research offers the first national perspective on the prevalence of the issue in Scotland. Young women and girls across Scotland are experiencing domestic abuse in

their own relationships, and yet, the issue goes largely unaddressed in school environments. Results suggest that the issue is not that young women cannot identify abusive behaviours (over 91% of respondents indicated they understood the term domestic abuse and gave examples of what it includes), but rather that girls and young women do not feel confident in disclosing to their teachers or in the current reporting structures in place in school (Young Women Lead Report on Sexual Harassment in Schools, 2018). The national resource on Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) in its current state does not adequately address the gendered dynamic of abuse within relationships. Without statutory learning outcomes on the issue from early years to secondary, adequate time and resource set aside for educator professional development, and scrutiny of school environments with a lens on gender-based violence, school environments will continue to excuse and enable gender inequality, harassment and violence.

We urge any review and reform of education in Scotland to take a proactive stance on combatting these issues. We, along with sister organisations hope to work with Professor Ken Muir and the Scottish Government to ensure we utilise the opportunity to improve the wellbeing and safety of girls and young women in school environments. We note that the Practitioner Stakeholder and Advisory Group (PSAG) established to assist Professor Ken Muir with this review does not include any specialist gender equality or gender-based violence organisations, and urge reconsideration of this as a starting point.

Contact:

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References

Equally Safe at School and University of Glasgow, Map of Barriers (2021)

<https://esas.kumu.io/tackling-sexual-harassment-in-secondary-school?token=wQFjq0Ob1nrwd89o>

Scottish Women's Aid and Young Women's Movement (forthcoming publication)
Research findings from national survey on intimate partner abuse experienced by young women and girls in Scotland. Please contact susie.dalton@womensaid.scot for more information

Young Women Lead (2018) Report on sexual harassment in schools

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/WebSPEIRResources/YWL-Report-FINAL.pdf>