



Welsh Women's Aid consultation response – November 2019

Ensuring access to the full curriculum

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These are the views of:	<i>Welsh Women's Aid (Third Sector) - the national charity in Wales working to end domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women.</i>

About Welsh Women's Aid

Welsh Women's Aid is the national charity in Wales working to end all forms of violence against women. We are a federation of specialist organisations¹ in Wales (working as part of a UK network of services) that provide lifesaving services to survivors of violence and abuse - women, men, children, families - and deliver a range of innovative preventative services in local communities. We have been at the forefront of shaping coordinated community responses and practice in Wales since we were established in 1978. We do this by campaigning for change and providing advice, consultancy, support and training to deliver policy and service improvements for survivors, families and communities. We also deliver services including the Welsh Government funded Live Fear Free Helpline and a National Training Service partnership. We are piloting the Survivors Empowering and Educating Services (SEEdS) project, which is empowering survivors of violence and abuse to collectively influence and inform improvements in public services and commissioning frameworks and help change attitudes. Our success is founded on making sure the experiences and needs of survivors are central to all we do.

We also deliver the Wales National Quality Service Standards (NQSS), a national accreditation framework for domestic abuse specialist services in Wales (supported by the Welsh Government) as

¹ Our membership of 20 third sector violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence specialist services in Wales, with whom we have national partnership agreements to ensure our work is coordinated and integrated includes: Aberconwy DAS, Atal y Fro, Clwyd Alyn Housing Association (CAHA) Women's Aid, Stepping Stones, Safer Merthyr Tydfil, Carmarthen Domestic Abuse Service, Calan DVS, Cardiff Women's Aid, Cyfannol Women's Aid, Domestic Abuse Safety Unit (DASU), Gorwel (Grwp Cynefin), Montgomeryshire Family Crisis Centre, North Denbighshire Domestic Abuse Service, Port Talbot & Afan Women's Aid, RCT Women's Aid, Safer Wales (including Dyn Project), Swansea Women's Aid, Threshold, West Wales Domestic Abuse Service and Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (RASASC) North Wales.

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part of a UK suite of integrated accreditation systems and frameworks. More information on the NQSS can be found [here](#).

Welsh Women's Aid welcomes the opportunity to inform on the consultation on ensuring access to the full curriculum. Providing children and young people with enough information and support to protect them from all forms of harm is paramount to ensuring the objectives and ambitions set out in 'A curriculum for Wales – a curriculum for life' are met. This includes information, awareness and knowledge on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) and healthy relationships.

As an organisation we have led on the specialist sector's campaigning to include compulsory healthy relationships education and a whole school approach within the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015. We worked with the Welsh Government to draft their 'Good Practice Guide: A whole education approach to ending violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in Wales'² and have been involved in the development of the new Relationship and Sexuality Curriculum content, which will be compulsory in schools from 2022 for years 7, 8 and 9.

We know that almost 20% of younger students aged 11-14 in Wales have experienced verbal abuse in relationships at least once or more, which rises to almost 40% of students aged 15-16, and up to one in five girls at secondary schools in Wales report they've experienced unwanted touching, groping or kissing by a boy whilst in school at least once.³

We also know that children and young people are experiencing VAWDASV in their childhood within their families. 4,263 children and young people are known to have accessed some form of specialist violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence support in Wales in 2018/19.⁴

Research by Public Health Wales has demonstrated how Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)⁵ can negatively impact children and young people's mental health, well-being, academic attainment and their relationships lasting well into adulthood. Education is a vital tool in achieving long term change in Wales for children and young people experiencing VAWDASV.

Due to this prevalence it is imperative that all children and young people are given access to high quality, VAWDASV informed appropriate relationships and sexuality education, which must be delivered by trained and skilled teachers, in partnership with specialist VAWDASV services.

² <https://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/communities/safety/domesticabuse/publications/good-practice-guide-a-whole-education-approach/?lang=en> (Accessed March 2019).

³ School Health Research Network survey of 35,071 students from 87 secondary schools in Wales (SHRN, 2015).

⁴ Statistics from our Annual Membership Report 2018-19 available here: <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Annual-Membership-Report-2018-19-FINAL.pdf>

⁵ Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Public Health Wales, <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/88524>



Successful health and well-being is intrinsic to all of our abilities to meet our potential. Experience of violence and abuse has a significant impact on children and young people's health and well-being, therefore if we do not integrate education about relationships and sexualities into the curriculum the Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE) of Health and Well-being won't be achieved.

RSE consultation response questions:

Question 1: What implications would there be for learners, parents / guardians / carers and schools if all learners were required to receive Religious Education (RE) and / or Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) lessons in the new curriculum?

Violence against women and girls exists in a culture of silence. It remains hidden in plain sight, reinforced and perpetuated by inequality between women and men by attitudes towards women and girls, which include oppressive, coercive and controlling behaviours and relationship cultures that are often minimised or romanticised. Children and young people are experiencing violence, abuse and harassment within their peer to peer relationships and at home, which means that access to the full curriculum will help to break the culture of silence where violence and abuse pervades.

Learners must have access to information on consent, healthy relationships, personal boundaries, safety and problematic language all delivered in an age appropriate format, which will increase their understanding of problematic relationship cultures, advocate and facilitate increased inclusivity around sexualities and contribute to a reduction of experiences of violence and abuse.

Parents should be engage in conversations with the school around gender, sexuality and consent with their children, secure in the fact that the school's safeguarding policies are being met and reinforcing a commitment to primary prevention, the structures and systems that perpetuate abuse, harms and inequalities will be challenged. These conversations should contribute to a shift in the attitudes and perceptions of the social and cultural norms that allow abuse to happen in the first place. The most significant implication for this, across all groups, is the reduction of harms such as coercive relationship cultures, sexual, verbal and online harassment, physical, emotional and mental abuse and sexual violence. Children are navigating everyday sexism and coercive relationship cultures, which means that a designated, inclusive space for children and their parents, guardians or carers to talk about healthy relationships is extremely important.

In the provision of RSE and in conversations regarding it with parents' educational institutions must have an awareness that parents may be currently in abusive relationships and may be



survivors and perpetrators. It is important in the delivery of RSE, educational institutions are provided with the adequate training and information to enable the identification of those affected by VAWDASV and to facilitate referral pathways for both children and parents to access specialist support.

The Welsh Government Good Practice Guide to Whole Education Approach to VAWDASV⁶ includes guidance and tips on engaging with parents, care-givers and family members, including on delivering workshops with parents and carers.

Question 2: What support, information and guidance would be needed if this approach was adopted?

If this approach was adopted, it would require full transparency on the curriculum in order to negate any parental concerns based on mis-information. The importance of engaging with the parents and the community of the school when it comes to successfully tackling all forms of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) is featured in the Whole Education Approach⁷, which advocates the need for parents, carers and family members to learn about all forms of abuse in order to support the well-being of children and young people.

As stated above the Welsh Government Good Practice Guide to Whole Education Approach to VAWDASV provides educational institutions with guidance on embedding RSE as part of a whole school approach to VAWDASV. This is complemented by the educational toolkit available [here](#).

Good relationships need to be built between educational institutes and their local specialist services. Specialist services can provide expertise, both to facilitate RSE delivery and to support referrals of children, parents or staff affected by VAWDASV.

Specialist services have the expertise to deliver lessons on consent, healthy relationships and gender equality in safe and sensitive ways. Many of our members deliver programmes, such as the STAR programmes, that can be used to assist in the development and delivery of a curriculum, co-facilitating lessons, support in the evaluation of lessons from an expert perspective and build referral pathways and support services drop-ins. This needs to be effectively securely and sustainably resourced.

longside the evidence-based research and programme development there needs to be a robust training and support programme for all teachers in the absence of a designated Relationships

⁶ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/good-practice-guide-whole-education-approach-to-violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence.pdf>

⁷ Good Practice Guide: A Whole Education Approach to Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence, Welsh Government, 2017 <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/good-practice-guide-whole-education-approach-to-violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence.pdf>



and Sexuality Education lead, as recommended by the Expert Panel⁸. This should complement the Ask and Act Training within the National Training Framework, which offers entry level through to specialist training on all forms of VAWDASV⁹.

Question 3: Our proposal is that parents should not be able to prevent their child from having RE or RSE lessons. This will be rolled out from September 2022, for all primary age learners and learners in year 7 in secondary school (with additional year groups being added each year).

Should the ability of parents/carers to prevent their child from receiving RE and RSE lessons also be stopped under the old curriculum from September 2022? (This would only have implications for learners in year 8 to 11 in 2022, year 9 to 11 in 2023 and so on.)

Yes. As already identified violence against women and girls (VAWG) doesn't discriminate based on age, and statistic show that almost 20% of younger students aged 11-14 in Wales have experienced verbal abuse in relationships at least once or more, which rises to almost 40% of students aged 15-16. We also know that up to 1 in 5 girls at secondary schools in Wales report they've experienced unwanted touching, groping or kissing by a boy whilst in school at least once¹⁰.

Children and young people all need to learn about age-appropriate relationships and sexuality education and have access to high-quality learning and support about equality, safety, sexual consent and healthy relationships. This education must be delivered by trained and skilled teachers, in partnership with domestic abuse and sexual violence specialist services. Schools also need to be better equipped to identify and support disclosures from pupils, parents and staff, and make sure there are clear routes to access support in the local community.

RSE is a key tool in keeping children safe from violence, and plays a significant role in identifying, instilling and reinforcing the norms of what behaviour is acceptable and not between peers, particularly in the context of utilising the Whole Education Approach to promote increased gender equality as a tool to reduce violence against women and girls.

Question 5: We would like to know your views on the effects that not including a right to withdraw in the new curriculum would have on the Welsh language, specifically on:

i) opportunities for people to use Welsh

⁸ The Future of the Sex and Relationship Education Curriculum in Wales, Welsh Government, 2015, <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/the-future-of-the-sex-and-relationships-education-curriculum-in-wales.pdf>

⁹ Ask and Act, Welsh Women's Aid, <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/training/ask-act/>

¹⁰ School Health Research Network survey of 35,071 students from 87 secondary schools in Wales (SHRN, 2015).



ii) treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

Welsh Women's Aid would urge that the use of the Welsh language is equally as robust as English. We would also urge that it is clear that a child or young person can disclose in Welsh and that the ability to respond in Welsh is promoted in order to ensure inclusivity in all contexts, which will contribute to a positive effect on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English. The Live Fear Free Helpline, delivered by Welsh Women's Aid funded by Welsh Government, provides all support bilingually as well as facilitating other language needs. This resource can support schools in the delivery of support in Welsh.

Question 6: Please also explain how you believe the proposed plan could be formulated or changed so as to have:

i) positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language

ii) no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

See above

Question 7: We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any issues related to this consultation, which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

Welsh Women's Aid recognise that violence against women and girls is everyone's problem and therefore needs tackling in an inclusive, holistic way. By marginalising conversations around abuse, we are contributing to the culture of silence where it thrives. Removing the opt in/opt out system of Relationship and Sexuality Education and embedding it within the curriculum as a core component will, in itself, contribute towards changing this culture around all forms of abuse.

Collaboration between schools, communities and specialist services will help to improve knowledge, change attitudes and raise awareness of the help available and promote an understanding of how we can achieve prevention within a right's-based framework. This will also contribute to a shift in the culture of silence by identifying VAWDASV as prevalent, preventable, serious, unacceptable and a human rights violation by promoting respectful, safe and equal relationships.



For more information or if you have any queries please contact:
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