

Welsh Women's Aid Response: Statutory induction of newly qualified teachers in Wales

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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 umbrella organisation in Wales that supports and provides national representation for independent third sector violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) specialist services in Wales (comprising our membership of specialist services and members of the regional VAWDASV Specialist Services Providers Forums). These services deliver life-saving and life-changing support and preventative work in response to violence against women, including domestic abuse and sexual violence, as part of a network of UK provision.

As an umbrella organisation, our primary purpose is to prevent domestic abuse, sexual violence and all forms of violence against women and ensure high quality services for survivors that are needs-led, gender responsive and holistic. We collaborate nationally to integrate and improve community responses and practice in Wales; we provide advice, consultancy, support and training to deliver policy and service improvements across government, public, private and third sector services and in communities, for the benefit of survivors.

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 part of a UK suite of integrated accreditation systems and frameworks. (More information on the NQSS can be found here: <http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/our-members/standards/>)

Welsh Women's Aid Welcomes the opportunity to input into this consultation on the statutory induction of newly qualified teachers in Wales.

Introduction

As the umbrella organisation for Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) in Wales, our response will be focused on how support and induction for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) should align to the preventing, and supporting survivors of, VAWDASV. At the outset, it is important to reiterate our full support for the aims of introducing a new, mandatory RSE curriculum that is rooted in principles of rights, equity, and inclusivity.

In the VAWDASV sector education has long been recognised as essential for preventing VAWDASV. However, school communities (staff, pupils, parents, wider community) are not experts in VAWDASV and do not necessarily have an understanding of its root causes. Therefore, we cannot assume that all individuals will have a comprehensive enough understanding of why RSE is a necessary and powerful tool for preventing VAWDASV, as well as the skills to identify and support those in need. .

Alongside a VAWDASV informed new curriculum is the need to engage with VAWDASV specialist services in the locality, to support both teachers and students if they require any referral for support. As children and young people's awareness of all forms of abuse increases, there must be the referral pathways embedded to direct them to specialist support. This is especially significant to a child or young person who is living within an abusive home or experiencing abuse in their own relationship. Under the new Domestic Abuse Act 2021, children are viewed as victims in their own right,¹ access to high quality specialist support should be a reflection of this. It is vital that the curriculum includes means of increasing the ability of children and young people to seek help, and that schools are linked to appropriate services for those who disclose experiences of abuse in their own or their parents' relationships.²

Adequate training for teachers

750,000 children and young people across the UK witness or experience domestic abuse every year, and in a school of 1,000 children, made up equally of both genders, 250 of the girls and 180 of the boys will have experienced some form of violence from their boyfriend or girlfriend.³

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents/enacted>

² Stanley, J. Ellis, N. Farrelly, S. Hollinghurst, and S. Downec (2015) Preventing domestic abuse for children and young people: A review of school-based interventions. Children & Youth Services Review

³ Estyn: A review of healthy relationships education, <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/review-healthy-relationships-education>

Survivors stressed the importance of providing these children with “meaningful engagement” and ensuring all teachers are aware of any issues, so the pupil can be supported in class. This was in addition to access to adequate sign-posting so that teachers know where they can go for extra help and listening to the non-abusive parent when they voice concerns.

A Good Practice Guide: A Whole Education Approach to Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence in Wales sets out the importance of a multi-layered ‘whole school’ approach to give children the support they need, through nine key areas. This includes:

- Staff training offered in all schools in line with the National Training Framework under the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015.
- Active participation of children and young people, staff and parents/carers to prevent VAWDASV, which includes older children being trained to mentor younger children and/or deliver workshops or assemblies on relevant topics, alongside parents and teachers given access to information and encouraged to lead conversations or programmes.
- Access to local experts and links to specialist VAWDASV services.

Findings from the 2021 Estyn Report⁴ show that sexual harassment, sexism, and misogynistic behaviour is often normalised and accepted by young people, their teachers and parents, meaning that it can remain hidden or unseen within a school and wider culture. This allows harassment to prevail. It is vital that the report exposes the true scale and intrinsic intertwining of sexual harassment, sexism and misogynistic behaviour faced by girls and young women in schools, and clearly situates this issue within the context of gender inequality.

Findings from our I Trust Them report⁵ showed overall rates for selecting education were lower when respondents were asked where, personally, they would be most and least likely to turn to for support: approximately half of the young people aged 13-17 identified ‘education’ as a source of support they were likely to turn to, while the other half stated they were unlikely to turn to education. For the 18-25s, only 29% stated that they were likely turn to education for support. A reason for these lower rates is perhaps linked to how individuals’ were responded to when they did seek support for experiences of abuse : 50% of those who reflected on their experiences stated that education professionals had been

⁴ <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-report/we-dont-tell-our-teachers-experiences-peer-peer-sexual-harassment-among-secondary>

⁵ <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/I-trust-them-CYP-Resilience-Survey-Report-English-1.pdf>



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unhelpful. Despite this, education institutions appeared to be useful at signposting young people to other places/people whom the young people did find helpful.

The experiences of Black and minoritised girls and women of sexual harassment is often racialised. Our I Trust Them report⁶ shows that overall, approximately 75% of respondents identified 'education' (teachers, support staff, tutors, lecturers, other staff) as a potential source of support for young people. Yet there was a disparity here between Black and minoritised young people and their White British counterparts, with 66% of the former and 86% of the latter selecting 'education'. The report also showed that Black and minoritised respondents were less likely to identify anybody from within the education sector as a potential source of support (66% compared to 86%).

Teachers require robust guidance and support to ensure they are fully equipped and confident to deal with potential disclosers and challenges to normalised attitudes to peer-on-peer sexual harassment, which may follow the introduction RSE. Introducing this training and support as a specific part of the induction period for NQTs will be most effective in embedding this knowledge and practice at the earliest possible stage and ensuring a level of consistency in teachers training, knowledge and practices.

We broadly support the consultation proposal to allow induction to take place in pupil referral units (PRUs) that teach the new Curriculum for Wales. As stated above, full understanding of the new Curriculum (in particular RSE) will be crucial for a preventative approach to ending VAWDASV in Wales. We recommend that as part of a wider induction on the importance of delivering mandatory RSE under the new curriculum, all staff also be required to complete Ask and Act⁷ in addition to the standard safeguarding training.

⁶ <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/i-trust-them-CYP-Resilience-Survey-Report-English-1.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/training/ask-and-act/>

