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Welsh Women's Aid consultation response – July 2019

Our National Curriculum: A Transformational Curriculum

Name:	<i>Catherine Phillips, Children and Young People Public Affairs Officer</i>
Organisation:	<i>Welsh Women's Aid</i>
Email address:	<i>CatherinePhillips@welshwomensaid.org.uk</i>
Telephone number:	<i>02920 451 551</i>
Address:	<i>Pendragon House, Caxton Place, Pentwyn, Cardiff CF23 8XE</i>
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).¹ 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 direct services including, for example, 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

¹ Our membership of 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, Bangor and District Women's Aid, 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, Newport Women's Aid, 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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collectively influence and inform improvements in public services and commissioning frameworks, and help change attitudes.

We also deliver the Wales National Quality Service Standards, 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/>)

Introduction

Welsh Women's Aid welcomes the opportunity to inform the consultation on the new curriculum development particularly in relation to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) and health and well-being in order to ensure the objectives and ambitions set out in *A Curriculum for Wales – A Curriculum for Life* are met.

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. We also know that up to 1 in 5 girls at secondary schools in Wales report that they have experienced unwanted touching, groping or kissing by a boy whilst in school at least once.²

We also know that children and young people are experiencing VAWDASV in their childhood within their families. 1,121 children were supported by specialist VAWDASV community/outreach services in Wales in 2017/18, and 1,065 children under 16 years of age were supported in refuge provision.³ There has been a year on year increase of 14% in the number of children accessing refuge-based support services.⁴

These experiences 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, however it is absolutely imperative that a whole school approach is adopted in order to increase gender equity and negate all forms of violence.⁵

Children and young people 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 violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence specialist services in Wales. Schools also need to be better equipped to identify and support disclosures from pupils, parents and staff, and

² School Health Research Network survey of 35,071 students from 87 secondary schools in Wales (SHRN, 2015).

³ Welsh Women's Aid membership data: State of the Sector report 2018 <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/State-of-the-Sector-2018-Eng.pdf> [accessed 16.07.19].

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See Welsh Government's *Good Practice Guide: A Whole Education Approach to Ending VAWDASV* <https://gweddill.gov.wales/docs/ds/jlg/publications/commsafety/151020-whole-education-approach-good-practice-guide-en.pdf> [accessed 16.07.19]



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make sure there is a clear understanding of what support programmes there are in the local community and how to access them. All of these areas are covered in the *Good Practice Guide*.⁶

After reviewing the Transformational Curriculum in full this consultation response focuses on the following areas:

- 1) Feedback from Welsh Women's Aid member services;
- 2) A whole education approach to addressing gender inequality to increase well-being and academic attainment;
- 3) Ensuring a VAWDASV informed approach to the development of the curriculum, including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE);
- 4) Identifying and tackling oppressive gender norms to shrink the gender attainment gap;
- 5) Current resources available;
- 6) Adequate training for teachers to provide support for students affected by VAWDASV on issues of assessment and attendance;
- 7) Intersectionality and inclusivity;
- 8) Consent, coercion and control.

1. Feedback from Welsh Women's Aid member services

As 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, we have consulted with our membership to inform this consultation response.

Members have identified the following priorities for the new curriculum:

- A whole education approach to tackling violence against women and girls;
- Integrated education on gender equality, inclusivity and equal representation;
- Increased awareness and education on healthy relationships, outside of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE);
- Provide staff with sufficient training on signs and symptoms of abuse and available pathways of specialist support;
- Identification and discussion of oppressive norms to tackle sexism, aspirations and attainment.

VAWDASV specialist services across Wales are already delivering or developing work that focuses on these areas, which includes one-to-one support, group work through the STAR programme and the Recovery Toolkit, and the delivery of domestic abuse and healthy relationships workshops in schools.

Specialist services are not usually funded specifically to deliver prevention work in schools as this role has been filled by the Spectrum Project, so are unable to provide support to schools on a regular basis. This is often due to lack of resources and staff availability, despite the economic evidence for early intervention and prevention work with children and young people. Through this work, WWA member services have identified the current gaps:

⁶ Ibid.



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- Understanding what VAWDASV is;
- Understanding the differences between abusive and non-abusive relationships;
- Understanding what support is available if they are experiencing any form of VAWDASV.

Members would like to see links redeveloped between schools and local specialist services to promote the delivery of guest speakers on specialist subjects, healthy school days and PHSE lessons, and for a commitment to providing opportunities to deliver VAWDASV awareness sessions for staff and students.

The focus of support should be:

- Access to external experts within specialist services to support delivery of lessons or content on healthy relationships and/or abuse;
- Awareness of the availability of local specialist services to provide support for children and young people;
- An understanding of what programmes or support services local specialist services provide.

Member services are calling for funding to enable VAWDASV specialists to be involved in delivering a more comprehensive, inclusive approach to health and well-being in schools for the objectives for the Transformational Curriculum to be met.

2. A whole education approach to gender equality

The *Good Practice Guide: A Whole Education Approach to ending VADASV*⁷ was developed by the Welsh Government in conjunction with Welsh Women's Aid to provide a guide for schools on how to develop and successfully deliver a Whole Education Approach. It promotes gender equality and respect to challenging violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence to promote health and well-being.

It recommends the following nine key elements be put in place:

1. Children and young people learn about VAWDASV;
2. Staff learn about VAWDASV;
3. Parents, care-givers and family learn about VAWDASV;
4. Monitoring and evaluation systems are in place to measure impact of this work;
5. Measures are in place to support people who experience forms of VAWDASV;
6. Active participation of children and young people, staff and parents/care-givers to prevent VAWDASV;
7. Taking action to prevent VAWDASV in the wider community;
8. Working in partnership with relevant local experts;
9. Embedding a comprehensive prevention programme.

⁷ *Good Practice Guide: A Whole Education Approach to Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence in Wales*, https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/522394/A-Whole-Education-Approach-to-Violence-Against-Women,-Domestic-Abuse-and-Sexual-Violence-in-Wales.pdf



Welsh Women's Aid understands that all forms of violence against women are both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality,⁸ therefore addressing this within education and ensuring women and issues of gender are not absent from the curriculum is of paramount importance.

Reinforcing positive messages and education about gender equality needs to be part of the academic infrastructure that exists both within and outside of the classroom, for example physical education can be used to discuss gender equality in sport and personal boundaries; history to discuss the suffragette movement; maths to do a statistical analysis of the prevalence of sexual violence in Wales and art to explore sexualisation in the media. Furthermore, women need to be more visible in the curriculum, especially within the STEM subjects, to demonstrate what is achievable and normal for women and girls.⁹

The importance of training teachers to recognise and address methods and language that perpetuate gender inequalities relating to academic attainment, achievement and aspiration, should also be considered.¹⁰

1. A VAWDASV informed curriculum

Welsh Women's Aid welcomed the announcement by Cabinet Secretary for Education in May 2018 that Relationship and Sexuality Education will become statutory from the age of 5 to 16 in the new curriculum by 2022, following the recommendations made in the publication of The Future of the Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) Curriculum in Wales: Recommendations of the Sex and Relationships Education Expert Panel report.¹¹ These recommendations were set out by the SRE Expert Panel established to help inform the development of SRE curriculum as part of the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning Experience (AoLE), and included representation from Welsh Women's Aid.

The report highlighted that evidence based SRE programmes play a vital role in working with children and young people, parents, carers and communities to explore the information and values about sexuality and relationships that children are already exposed to and often struggle to negotiate for themselves.

It also highlighted international research that shows that the most effective SRE programmes are those that have a rights and gender-equity based approach. Human rights and equality issues need to be prevalent in the content of, and within, curricular and extra-curricular opportunities to reinforce key messages across a range of subjects, making it accessible to a variety of ages, stages and life experiences.

⁸ United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,

<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>

⁹ Bian, L., Leslie, S-J., Campian, A., Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early and influence children's interests, Science, Jan 2017 <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/355/6323/389>

¹⁰ Jones, K., Evans, C., Byrd, R., Campbell, K. (2000) Gender equity training and teacher behavior. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 27 (3), 173-178, <http://www.freepatentsonline.com/article/Journal-Instructional-Psychology/66355136.html>

¹¹ The Future of Sex and Relationships Education Curriculum in Wales, Welsh Government, December 2017:

<https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/the-future-of-the-sex-and-relationships-education-curriculum-in-wales.pdf>



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Welsh Women's Aid has engaged with survivors around their views on the curriculum development throughout the process. Survivors have told us that gender equality should be part of the school structure and that cross-curriculum integration of gender equality is needed, as well as school structures that promote gender equality and respect, and support for children and young people in school that are impacted by VAWDASV.

I want my daughter and her friends to know. I wish I'd had more knowledge, I never saw it coming and I'm not stupid, but we just didn't have any education or awareness. I didn't know there were services to help me. This should be taught in all schools. Anya* (survivor)

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, so too can their risk. This is especially significant to a child or young person who is living within an abusive home or experiencing abuse in their own relationship. It is vital that the curriculum includes increasing the ability of children and young people to seek help¹², and that are linked to appropriate services for those who disclose experiences of abuse in their own or their parents' relationships¹³.

The curriculum needs to be focused on inclusivity and equality in order to help identify and challenge unhealthy relationship cultures or oppressive gender norms that perpetuate abuse in line with the following recommendations:

- The SRE Curriculum should be guided by the following core principles: Rights and Gender Equity; Creative and Curious; Empowering and Transformative; Experience-near and Coproduced; Holistic; Inclusive; Protective and Preventive;
- The Health and Wellbeing AoLE should have an equal status to other AoLEs;
- The curriculum needs to be developed with VAWDASV survivor-informed expertise in order to promote awareness, inclusivity and gender equality;
- The curriculum should be developed in partnership with specialist violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence specialist services to ensure it is based on their expertise and creates pathways to support;
- The new curriculum content needs to align with the current resources, such as the Relationship and Sex Education curriculum and the Whole Education Approach;
- Children and young people need to be given the opportunity to both inform the new curriculum and provide feedback.

As the statistics above highlight, children and young people cannot wait until 2022 to ensure school responses to VAWDASV and gender equality are appropriate. The children and young people in school today are telling us that they are bombarded with confusing and misogynistic messages about sex and

¹² Miller, D. & Brown, J. (2014) We have the right to be safe: Protecting disabled children from abuse: Executive summary. NSPCC

¹³ 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



relationships. They want to be taught about domestic abuse and the help available, and about how to build safe equal relationships.

2. Identifying and tackling oppressive gender norms

Alongside improved and increased integration of gender equality throughout the curriculum as a mechanism to increase well-being, healthy relationships and reduce all forms of VAWDASV, oppressive gender norms that perpetuate the attainment gap need to be addressed.

Despite girls consistently doing better than boys in test scores¹⁴, and nearly 100,000 more women than men applying to university in 2016/17¹⁵ there are still significant inequalities that exist for women across the professional spectrum including a lack of representation in national parliaments¹⁶. The gender pay gap also currently stands at 18.4% for full time workers and 13.7% for part time workers¹⁷.

Welsh Women's Aid has conducted workshops with children and young people throughout Wales to gather their views on masculine and feminine norms and identified oppressive ideals. Characteristics that remain heavily gendered, such as passivity, submission and reduced professional attainment in pursuit of a 'work/life balance' for femininity, and strength, dominance and career prestige for masculinity, all of which reinforce socio-cultural norms of gender inequality. This work reinforces the need to interrupt these problematic ideas.

3. Current resources available

The 2017 Estyn review of Healthy Relationships Education found that schools were not allocating enough time or importance to educating and supporting children to develop safe, healthy and respectful relationships from a young age.¹⁸ The report also found that personal and social education is too inconsistent in its content and delivery, and that schools are particularly failing to educate young people about violence against women and girls and to deliver a whole school approach to prevent such abuse.

A few schools in Wales are delivering promising practice, which involves working closely with specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence services to plan and co-deliver sessions, in areas where specialist services in the community are also funded to support children who are being abused. This needs to be shared across schools to build on this work. All pioneer schools should therefore be leading the way in utilising these tools and engaging with specialist services. However, at present there is little evidence that this is consistently happening.

¹⁴ <http://www.gendertrust.org.uk/gender-inequality-in-the-british-education-system/>

¹⁵ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/gender-gap-university-students-men-women-applications-uk-a8442941.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>

¹⁷ <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/close-gender-pay-gap>

¹⁸ <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/review-healthy-relationships-education>



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Additionally, work has been carried out by the third sector to develop tools to deliver in educational settings where positive attitudes toward gender equality and healthy, respectful relationships can be fostered now and in the future.

AGENDA: A Young People's Guide to Making Positive Relationships Matter¹⁹ is Wales' first national guidance for young people on how they can safely and creatively make positive relationships matter. Its aim is to help young people exercise their rights, be inspired by the stories of others and support each other in getting started to share and change what matters to them. It was developed in partnership between Cardiff University (Dr Emma Renold), Welsh Women's Aid, NSPCC Cymru and the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

S.T.A.R (Safety, Trust and Respect) Suite of Services is a range of group programmes that have been created to teach children and young people about Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) and to support children and young people who have experienced it either directly or indirectly. The programmes focusing on support are aimed towards younger children, from age 4 to 11, which are delivered only by Welsh Women's Aid specialist service members by dedicated Children's Workers in recognition of the importance of delivering this work ethically and appropriately. Programmes for older children and young people (11-25 years old) are preventative (it should be noted that priority is however, given to those who have experience of domestic abuse) and are often delivered in youth clubs and schools to inform children and young people about issues surrounding VAWDASV. Welsh Women's Aid has previously designed participatory focus group discussions that sought to give an opportunity for children and young people to talk about the S.T.A.R programme.

4. 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.²⁰

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.

¹⁹ <http://agenda.wales/>

²⁰ Estyn: A review of healthy relationships education, <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/review-healthy-relationships-education>



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- Active participation of children and young people, staff and parents/carers to prevent VAWDASV, which includes older children being trained to mentor younger ones and/or deliver workshops or assemblies on relevant topics and parents and teachers given access to information and encouraged to lead conversations or programmes.
- Access to local experts and links to specialist VAWDASV services.

However, *Estyn: A review of healthy relationships in education* noted that too often the provision in schools for teaching about domestic abuse was one of a themed day, a stand-alone lesson or small block of sessions. As a result, schools do not always deliver essential messages often enough to ensure that pupils understand them fully, despite most schools having some arrangements in place to support pupils who have experienced domestic abuse or sexual violence.

5. Intersectionality and inclusivity

There is research to show that children who have a learning disability are at increased risk of sexual and physical abuse and neglect.²¹ Disabled children at greatest risk of abuse are those with behaviour/conduct disorders, other high-risk groups include children with learning difficulties/disabilities, children with speech and language difficulties, children with health-related conditions and deaf children.²² Children with a learning disability and their families, are also more likely to be socially isolated and to suffer material and emotional poverty,²³ suffering from multiple intersecting inequalities. It is therefore critical to empower them with an education that helps them to seek support and have a clear understanding of their rights to healthy and consensual relationships.

6. Consent, control and coercion

RSE should remain compulsory up to the age of 18. 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.²⁴ Conversations around consent, coercion, control and abuse need to be on-going to ensure there is a cultural shift that sustains well into adulthood.

Conclusion

All children and young people have a right to a full range of learning opportunities, to be equipped to understand consent, gender stereotypes, what's not acceptable in relationships, and how to get help from specialist services if they're experiencing abuse. Educational settings are an important site where attitudes that condone violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, and gendered stereotypes, can be challenged, and positive attitudes towards gender equality and healthy

²¹ Allington-Smith, P., Ball, R., & Haytor, R. (2002). Management of sexually abused children with learning disabilities. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, vol. 8, pp. 66–72

²² Miller, D. & Brown, J. (2014) We have the right to be safe: Protecting disabled children from abuse: Executive summary. NSPCC

²³ Allington-Smith, P., Ball, R., & Haytor, R. (2002). Management of sexually abused children with learning disabilities. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, vol. 8, pp. 66–72

²⁴ Estyn: A review of healthy relationships education, <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/review-healthy-relationships-education>



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relationships can be fostered. Effective delivery of SRE curriculum will contribute in the short-term to increased protection of young people, and in the long-term to the reduction of the prevalence of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Summary of Recommendations

- The Welsh Government should ensure effective promotion of the *Good Practice Guide: A Whole Education Approach to ending VAWDASV in Wales* to all schools with support to embed it in practice.
- Teacher training needs to be delivered by external experts to increase awareness and empower staff to identify signs and symptoms so that all children and young people can feel supported.
- The SRE Curriculum should be guided by the following core principles: Rights and Gender Equity; Creative and Curious; Empowering and Transformative; Experience-near and Coproduced; Holistic; Inclusive; Protective and Preventive
- The Health and Wellbeing AoLE should have an equal status to other AoLEs.
- The curriculum needs to be developed with VAWDASV survivor-informed expertise in order to promote awareness, inclusivity and gender equality.
- The curriculum should be developed in partnership with specialist violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence specialist services to ensure it is based on their expertise and creates pathways to support.
- The new curriculum content needs to align with the current resources, such as the Relationship and Sex Education curriculum and the Whole Education Approach.
- Children and young people need to be given the opportunity to both inform the new curriculum and provide feedback.
- Ensure all children and young people benefit from access to quality and appropriate SRE curriculum and whole education approach, including those with special educational needs or in non-formal education.
- Pioneer schools, supported by Welsh Government and specialist organisations should explore how the SRE curriculum can be embedded in a 'whole school approach'.

Anyone affected by domestic abuse or any other form of violence against women can contact the Live Fear Free Helpline - a 24 hour helpline for women, children and men experiencing domestic abuse, sexual violence or other forms of violence against women - on 0808 80 10 800, via its webchat or via email info@livefearfreehelpline.wales.

Welsh Women's Aid will continue to work to improve the safety of children who have experienced domestic abuse by working with survivors and their children to get their voices heard. If you have any comments or questions about this briefing, please don't hesitate to get in touch with:

Catherine Phillips

Children and Young People Public Affairs Officer

CatherinePhillips@welshwomensaid.org.uk



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