

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Hynt y gwaith gan Lywodraeth Cymru wrth ddatblygu Cwricwlwm newydd Cymru | Welsh Government's progress in developing the new Curriculum for Wales

CR 34

Ymateb gan: Cymorth i Ferched Cymru
Response from: Welsh Women's Aid

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).ⁱ 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 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 progress of the new curriculum development around violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) and healthy relationships 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 they've experienced unwanted touching, groping or kissing by a boy whilst in school at least once.¹

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. There has been a year on year increase of 14% in the number of children accessing refuge-based support services.

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.

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 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.

Six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE): Health and wellbeing

Ensuring children and young people are equipped to make informed, healthy choices and decisions around their relationships is intrinsic to protecting and promoting health and well-being and therefore allowing every child or young person to meet their potential.

Children and young people simply cannot be empowered to make these choices that could have a lifelong impact on their environments, communities and cultures without a sufficient education infused with knowledge and awareness of all forms of VAWDASV.

This is reinforced by the What Matters report, published in 2017, which detailed the emphasis on promoting:

- Children and young people's ability to respond positively and appropriately to both positive and negative experiences, and develop resilience, confidence and empathy, influencing their emotional and mental well-being.
- An understanding and awareness of diverse relationships, including friends, family, romantic, sexual, professional and spiritual relationships and how to develop the skills to form and maintain positive relationships based on trust and mutual respect, as well as knowing how to manage conflict, recognise unhealthy relationships, and when and how to seek support is also fundamental to health, safety and well-being.

¹ School Health Research Network survey of 35,071 students from 87 secondary schools in Wales (SHRN, 2015).

To ensure that these are an effective part of the curriculum the following areas need to be addressed:

1) Delivering the curriculum within a Whole Education Approach to VAWDASV

The Whole Education Approach Good Practice Guidance² 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 to promoting 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.**

Unfortunately, an Estyn thematic review into VAWDASV³ published last year showed that there were inconsistencies in schools delivery of a whole education approach. Most school leaders were not even aware of the Welsh Government guidance published in 2015 for schools to deliver a whole education approach to preventing violence against women. Welsh Women's Aid is currently engaging with regional VAWDASV teams and safeguarding teams to identify schools that could benefit from support with embedding the whole education approach. From this work it is clear that there are still many schools unaware of the guidance and/or in need of support to embed the practice in the schools.

Additionally many teachers had received little or no training on these issues. 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.

2) Development and delivery of Sex and Relationships 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

² 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

³ <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/A%20review%20of%20healthy%20relationships%20education.pdf>

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.⁴ 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).

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.

The curriculum developed should be age appropriate, be delivered by trained teachers and developed and delivered in partnership with specialist violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence specialist services.

Welsh Women's Aid has been working with Welsh Government and key stakeholders on the development a suite of Sex and Relationship Education resources for teachers of years 7, 8 and 9 across Wales, so that SRE can be delivered in a consistent, safe and appropriate way.

Welsh Women's Aid has engaged with survivors around their views on curriculum development. 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 specialist services in the locality to support both teachers and students if they require any pathway of referral. As children and young people's awareness of all forms of violence increases, so can their risk. This is especially significant to a child or young person who is living within an abusive home or experiencing abuse in a relationship. It is vital that the curriculum includes increasing the ability of children and young people to seek help⁵, and that are linked to appropriate services for

⁴ 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>

⁵ Miller, D. & Brown, J. (2014) We have the right to be safe: Protecting disabled children from abuse: Executive summary. NSPCC

those who disclose experiences of abuse in their own or their parents' relationships⁶.

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.

3) Ensuring all children and young people benefit from SRE curriculum

All children and young people must have access to quality and appropriate SRE, including those with special educational needs or in non-formal education for instance Pupil Referral Units, youth offending teams, higher education and further education need to be engaged in the delivery of healthy relationships and gender equality education programmes.

There is research to show that children who have a learning disability are at increased risk of sexual and physical abuse and neglect⁷. 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 children⁸. Children with a learning disability and their families, are also more likely to be socially isolated and to suffer material and emotional poverty⁹, 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.

4) Providing education and support prior to the new curriculum

⁶ 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

⁷ 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

⁸ Miller, D. & Brown, J. (2014) We have the right to be safe: Protecting disabled children from abuse: Executive summary. NSPCC

⁹ 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

Currently SRE is part of the basic curriculum, the design and implementation of schools' SRE programmes are determined by the school in line with their SRE policy. This has led to wide variation in the quantity and quality of SRE that children and young people receive. As the statistics above highlight, children and young people cannot wait until 2022 to ensure school responses are right. The children and young people in school today are telling us they are bombarded with confusing and misogynistic messages about sex and relationships. They want to be taught about domestic abuse and the help available, and about how to build safe equal relationships.

The Estyn review mentioned above has found that schools are not allocating enough time or importance to educating and supporting children to develop safe, healthy and respectful relationships from a young age. 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 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 promising practice. All pioneer schools should 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. Pioneer schools, supported by Welsh Government and specialist organisations should explore how the SRE curriculum can be embedded in a 'whole school approach'

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. One such tool Welsh Women's Aid has worked in partnership with Cardiff University and NSPCC Cymru, supported by the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales, to develop is the 'AGENDA: A Young People's Guide to Making Positive Relationships Matter'.¹⁰ AGENDA 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.

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 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.

¹⁰ <http://agenda.wales/>

Summary of Recommendations

- The Welsh Government should ensure effective promotion of the Whole Education Approach Good Practice Guidance 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:

ⁱ 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.