

## **WRITTEN EVIDENCE PAPER TO THE CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

### **Minister for Education and Welsh Language; Minister for Social Justice April 2022**

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We welcome the opportunity to provide information in support of the Committee's inquiry into *Peer on Peer sexual Harassment Among Young Learners*.

We have addressed each of the Committee's areas of interest below and look forward to discussing further with the Committee on 27 April.

#### **The scale and nature of the issue in education settings and how many learners are affected.**

We welcome [Estyn's report](#) which provides valuable information on the incidence of peer on peer sexual harassment in schools. The Everyone's Invited website was used by Estyn to inform their report, and at the time of writing over 15,000 anonymous testimonies had been submitted from across the UK and shared on the website

We acknowledge bullying and harassment in our schools and education settings, and agree with the findings of Estyn's report that there is a lack of robust reporting. The impact of an inconsistent reporting system is that we cannot be sure of the scale of the problem– we do not currently collect this data at a national level. Most Welsh local authorities collect data on different forms of bullying and harassment, however it is very inconsistent and can vary from school to school.

The School Health Research Network's 2019-2020 report on student health and wellbeing in Wales, published in March 2021<sup>1</sup>, found that:

- 33% of children and young people in years 7-11 had been bullied at least once or twice in the past couple of months; and
- Girls were more likely than boys to have been bullied (35% vs. 30%), but less likely than those who identified as neither a boy nor a girl, of whom over 3 in 5 had been bullied in the past couple of months.

The 2020 Crime Survey for England and Wales<sup>2</sup> estimated that:

- Around one in five children aged 10 to 15 years in England and Wales (19%) experienced at least one type of online bullying behaviour in the year ending March 2020;

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<sup>1</sup> Page N., Hewitt G., Young H., Moore G., Murphy S. (2021) *Student Health and Wellbeing in Wales: Report of the 2019/20 School Health Research Network Student Health and Wellbeing Survey*. Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK [SHRN-NR-FINAL-23\\_03\\_21-en-AMENDED06.08.21.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Online bullying in England and Wales: year ending March 2020 - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

- One in four (26%) did not report their experiences to anyone; and
- Nearly three out of four children (72%) who had experienced an online bullying behaviour experienced at least some of it at school or during school time.

However, this data in itself is inconsistent – it does not cover different types of education settings and does not give an accurate picture of the current situation. The Welsh Government is currently undertaking scoping work to ascertain how we can meet the need for more robust data in this space, which covers the different forms of bullying and harassment in our education settings.

We will use the findings of Estyn's report to inform our ongoing cross government response and work with stakeholders to deal with this important issue. The Minister for Education and Welsh Language has also asked Estyn to carry out a further review in 2022-23, which will focus on further education institutions.

### **The extent to which this issue also occurs outside the formal education setting, including online.**

The Estyn report is clear that we need to think wider than the school day. Violence against women and girls, including harassment, is far too common. This is a societal problem, which requires a societal response. We must challenge attitudes and change behaviours of those who behave abusively. It is not for women and girls to modify their behaviour, it is for abusers to change theirs.

That is why the Welsh Government Programme for Government commits to strengthening the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Strategy to include a focus on violence against women in the street and workplace as well as the home in order to make Wales the safest place in Europe to be a woman. A public consultation on the draft VAWDASV National Strategy 2022-2026 was held between 7 December and 7 February, with a proposed publication date of late spring 2022.

The Strategy clearly outlines our vision that tackling all forms of VAWDASV is everyone's business. It is not the responsibility of the Welsh Government alone. It is for us all to join together, to recognise the levers we each have and to make best use of them to ensure women, girls and all those experiencing or at risk of VAWDASV are protected and supported but also to ensure that the root causes of such behaviour are effectively challenged and eradicated.

Our whole Wales approach can only be effective if all parties feel a sense of ownership of the Strategy and commitment to the shared endeavour necessary to achieve this vision. The Cabinet has confirmed their support for the Strategy and we will be adopting a cross-Government approach to ensuring its success.

Estyn found that peer on peer sexual harassment is more prevalent online and outside school than in school.

We are committed to keeping learners safe online and our [‘Enhancing digital resilience in education: An action plan to protect children and young people online’](#), sets out the coordinated work that we are taking forward with UK-wide partners and other key stakeholders to meet our common aim of enhancing the digital safety and resilience of children and young people in Wales.

Through the [Keeping safe online](#) area of Hwb, we have developed resources to support practitioners to address online sexual harassment with learners in an age-appropriate way. Resources include the ‘Step up, speak up’ and ‘Just a joke?’ teaching toolkits, which are designed to support a whole school approach in understanding, preventing and responding to online sexual harassment. Guidance for education settings in responding to incidents of sharing nude and semi-nude images is also available, and an accompanying [training module](#) was developed and published in October 2021 to support schools to embed this guidance.

To ensure that children and young people are supported to have positive online experiences, a new ‘Online worries answered’ area has been launched on Hwb. The advice has been shaped by the Welsh Government research conducted during 2021 into children and young people’s online experiences and worries and some of the barriers to getting help.

The new area includes information and advice for children and young people on 10 different online safety topics, including online bullying, sharing nudes and online sexual harassment. The advice pages offer children and young people important information and guidance on what to do and where to turn for help if they are worried about something that has happened online. The online sexual harassment page aims to help learners understand the different forms it can take, the impact this behaviour can have, how to deal with it and get further support. We continue to explore opportunities to further enhance the confidence of education practitioners in this critical area.

Youth work settings provide young people with the opportunity to speak to trusted adults about issues that affect them. The Interim Youth Work Board are aware of the Estyn report and are keen to help address issues going forward. Youth work has clear safeguarding procedures in place. It can also provide young people with opportunities to have discussions about issues in a safe environment, challenge unacceptable behaviour and understand their rights in dealing with them.

Currently we do not know enough about the prevalence or nature of peer on peer sexual harassment in further education institutions, and Estyn’s upcoming thematic review will provide valuable information to help understand the scale of the issues.

### **[The impact on pupils’ learning, mental health and well-being.](#)**

VAWDASV can have a huge impact on children and young people. It can affect their wellbeing, their educational attainment, family and peer relationships, and their ability to enjoy healthy, happy, respectful relationships now and in the future.

We recognise the damaging impact of peer on peer sexual harassment on learners; the impact of the incident of sexual harassment itself, but also how the education setting responds to such incidents. Our priority is to ensure learners have access to a safe learning environment which promotes their wellbeing and protects them from harm.

It is positive that Estyn found that in the most effective schools, leaders promote a strong ethos of respect in all areas of their work, prioritise wellbeing and adopt a whole-school, proactive approach to promoting and celebrating diversity; with policies, procedures and guidance for staff and pupils which links clearly to aims and objectives which ensure that wellbeing is at the forefront of the school's work.

The whole-school approach seeks to support good emotional and mental well-being by promoting a positive cultural environment in schools, where children and young people form positive relationships with staff and other learners. The Whole-School Approach and the statutory framework guidance published in March 2021 highlights that there are certain risk factors that make some children and young people more likely to experience problems than other children. These factors do not occur in isolation and an individual may experience several at any given time; they carry varying degrees of risk, can be short- or long-term, and some are more common than others. They include being bullied and abused (including sexually) and being subject to trauma. Schools are expected to consider the individual needs of learners and we are supporting them in introducing both universal and targeted wellbeing interventions. The Welsh Government is investing over £43m over the course of the next three years (2022-23 to 2024-25) to support implementation of the whole-school approach and improve wellbeing in schools.

### **The impact of peer on peer sexual harassment may manifest in attendance and behaviour issues.**

Estyn found that despite the fact that schools generally record behaviour and bullying incidents, they do not make productive use of the data and information available to them to categorise and analyse incidences of peer on peer bullying and harassment well enough or identify trends, which hinders schools from having an accurate picture of the extent of different types of bullying and harassment, such as sexual harassment. This makes it difficult to link incidences of poor attendance or behaviour as the consequence of peer on peer sexual harassment. However, we recognise the likely link with attendance and behaviour.

Our All Wales Attendance Framework sets out the important role that the Education Welfare Service plays in managing safeguarding concerns.

It is the role of all Education Welfare Service team members to:

- Help identify welfare concerns and indicators of possible abuse or neglect of all pupils at an early stage, referring those concerns to the appropriate agency; (categories of abuse are physical, emotional, sexual and neglect).
- In conjunction with the LA ensure that all school staff are familiar with safeguarding procedures and understand their responsibilities.

- In conjunction with the LA provide advice and training when required.
- When requested, assist child protection agencies in the investigation of abuse and in the protection of pupils “at risk”.
- Represent Education at Child Protection case conferences, core groups and reviews.
- When appropriate, act as an advocate for the child.
- Be aware of the issue of forced marriage, child trafficking, safeguarding children in whom illness is fabricated and safeguarding children from abuse.

They also have a role to work closely with Police, Safeguarding and Support, Probation, LA and the schools to prevent and reduce offending behaviour.

There is a growing recognition of the long-term impact of exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on children’s life outcomes, including on their health and wellbeing, relationships with others, educational attainment and prosperity.

In 2016 the Welsh Government made a commitment to support the development of ACE aware public services. As part of delivering this commitment, we made available £300,000, between 2017 and 2020, to the ACE Support Hub to develop and deliver ACE awareness and trauma informed training for schools. The training was offered to all schools and the courses and support materials have now been made available on the Hwb. More generally, the Welsh Government has confirmed a further three years of funding for the ACE Support Hub, at £500k for each year from 2022-23 to 2024-25, to continue to raise awareness and understanding of ACEs and the adoption of trauma-informed practices.

In January 2022 the Deputy Minister for Social Services published a written statement setting out plans for the continuing development of the Welsh Government’s ACEs policy. This included a commitment to develop an ACEs Plan. Work has begun on the plan, which will be published this summer, alongside a new trauma informed practice framework developed jointly by the ACE Support Hub and Traumatic Stress Wales. The framework, which is currently out to consultation, will support services to understand the effect of trauma on individuals and what they can do help them. Schools will be able to use the framework to support learners who may have experienced sexual harassment and reduce its impact on their learning and educational attainment.

On 7 June 2021 we published the final evaluation of our CAMHS school in-reach pilots, which see specialist mental health practitioners providing consultation, liaison, advice and training in schools. We provided funding of £3.9m of the whole school budget for 2021-22 available to support national rollout of the pilots in line with the final evaluation findings and recommendations and are providing over £5m further funding to support activity in 2022-23. Health boards have told us the new funding will enable the recruitment of over 100 full time equivalent staff to work with schools. An important role of the service will be to support school staff in identifying issues and ensuring children and young people in distress are directed to the most appropriate support in a timely manner.

Behavioural issues often go hand-in-hand with poor mental health and emotional well-being and addressing this in schools has long been a priority of the Welsh Government. Counselling is a key part of ensuring children and young people with emotional and mental health issues have access to the support they need. The Welsh Government proposes investing over £10m over the next three years (2022-23 to 2024-25) to enhance counselling provision across Wales.

### **The impact on education settings and staff, for example in terms of discipline and the extent to which harassment among learners has become 'normalised'.**

Welsh Government guidance 'Practical Approaches to Behaviour Management in the Classroom', highlights that where teachers have good preventative and responsive skills the likelihood of difficulties emerging or developing into incidents will be markedly reduced. Developing and implementing such skills in teachers should be supported, whether they are highly skilled and experienced teachers with responsibility for supporting others, teachers who want to extend their classroom behaviour management skills or newly qualified teachers (NQTs).

Estyn found that, generally, pupils do not tell teachers when they experience sexual harassment. This is because it happens so regularly, they often either only tell a friend or keep it to themselves. They feel that it has become normalised behaviour and say that teachers are not aware of the extent of the problem. In addition, pupils say teachers often dismiss incidences as trivial or encourage pupils to ignore them. Nearly half of pupils who said they had experienced sexual harassment from their peers report that they kept sexual harassment to themselves.

This was particularly felt by LGBTQ+ pupils who have substantial personal experiences of verbal homophobic harassment, with many saying that homophobic bullying is happening all the time and that this is the most common type of harassment in their school.

Recent feedback to the Welsh Government from teachers, senior leaders and young people themselves, shows that there is a real lack of confidence among practitioners in having – sometimes difficult – discussions around homophobia, sexual harassment, gender and race. Anecdotal evidence shows that many practitioners are worried about the impact of having these types of discussions, and there is fear about possible repercussions – this is often illustrated via examples of discussions regarding gender identity and transphobia, for example.

The impact of this lack of confidence is that these types of discussions are avoided or dismissed, this is in line with the findings of Estyn's report, which leads to a lack of confidence among pupils to share or report their own concerns and/or experiences.

It is vital, therefore, that the Welsh Government's work to deliver a whole school approach to Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and robust updated anti-bullying guidance is developed and completed alongside the professional learning and continuous development for our teaching staff and practitioners. Updated anti-bullying guidance will be published in July 2022.

VAWDASV, including all forms of harassment, is not inevitable. It is more than 'behaviours' of individuals that enable VAWDASV. It is societal norms, attitudes and beliefs that must be challenged as these are what perpetuate, excuse, legitimise and 'normalise' VAWDASV. Our revised Strategy aims to challenge the public attitude to VAWDASV across the Welsh population through awareness raising and space for public discussion with the aim to decrease its occurrence.

### **The specific impacts on particular groups of learners, for example older pupils, girls and LGBTQ+ pupils.**

We know from the Estyn report that peer on peer sexual harassment disproportionately affects particular groups of learners, including older pupils, girls and LGBTQ+ learners.

Teaching our children and young people how to safely challenge all forms of harassment is essential, but preventative action through education is also crucial. Our new Curriculum for Wales Framework, which comes into effect from September, has been developed to be inclusive of all learners and includes a mandatory RSE Code. The RSE Code has equality and inclusivity at its heart and has been designed to equip learners with skills for life which includes developmentally-appropriate understanding of behaviours, including all bullying, and LGBTQ+ based bullying, sexual violence and gender-based violence in a range of contexts, including online.

We have commissioned training for school leaders to embed our anti-bullying guidance and to provide them with the tools to tackle all forms of bullying in schools, including homophobic bullying. We are making professional learning a key priority over the coming months to support schools and settings ahead of the implementation of RSE, and are currently working with practitioners and partners to develop a National Plan of Professional Learning for RSE. Informed by advice from Estyn, we will be working closely with the further education sector to ensure that appropriate professional learning, guidance and support are in place to tackle sexual harassment and bullying.

We will also consider how future training for schools and school leaders can go further to embed the knowledge and tools needed to tackle specific forms of bullying, such as homophobic and transphobic bullying, and racial harassment.

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (a legal obligation under the Equalities Act 2010 for all schools, colleges and local authorities), schools and colleges are under an obligation to ensure appropriate and effective action is taken to remove or minimise disadvantages encountered by learners due to their having protected characteristics, such as, sex, sexuality and gender assignment.

Our VAWDASV National Strategy is informed by the global and national evidence that women and girls are disproportionately affected by all forms of abuse. However, we also recognise that the impact of VAWDASV is not uniform, affecting different people in different ways and so understanding the equality impact of VAWDASV on an intersectional basis will be vital if we are to address the problem for everyone in Wales.

Cultural differences can affect issues like honour based abuse and violence. Sexuality and gender identity can shape the experience of VAWDASV and data shows that disabled people experience significantly higher rates of domestic abuse.

It is essential therefore that our VAWDASV Strategy links with work on the Strategic Equality Plan, the draft Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan, the draft LGBTQ+ Action Plan and the Disability Rights action Plan as it is developed. This will ensure our response understands and reflects issues of equality and our response is tailored accordingly.

### **The effectiveness of existing policies and guidance, and the identification of potential solutions and improvements.**

All education settings in Wales have a legal duty to ensure that children have access to a safe learning environment; we expect these safeguarding responsibilities to be taken seriously.

The Welsh Government has issued statutory guidance [Keeping Learners Safe](#) (KLS) to support schools in creating and maintaining a safe learning environment for children. This guidance must be read and followed by local authorities and governing bodies of maintained schools (including maintained nursery schools), voluntary-aided and foundation schools, and further education institutions, under section 175 of the Education Act 2002.

The Keeping Learners Safe chapter *Safeguarding responsibilities in specific circumstances*, includes a section peer on peer abuse and harmful sexual behaviour. It also includes guidance on the appropriate response from education setting staff with safeguarding concerns.

We reviewed this guidance to ensure that it reflected changes to legislation and strengthens safeguarding arrangements. We consulted on the revised KLS from 18 July to 7 November 2019. The purpose of the consultation was to establish whether the revised draft guidance met the needs of key audiences. The updated consultation version of the guidance was welcomed but respondents offered suggestions for how it could be improved, which we used to inform revisions made to the final version of the guidance published October 2020.

The Welsh Government has developed a safeguarding audit tool to provide support to schools (and all other education settings) to ensure that there are effective systems in place to meet their legal safeguarding obligations in line with the KLS guidance. The audit tool is included in the revised KLS guidance as a matter of effective practice for all education settings.

The Hwb hosts a series of e-learning modules, which have been developed by the Welsh Government. The [Keeping Learners Safe Modules](#) support all staff in education settings to understand their safeguarding responsibilities as set out in the KLS guidance. There are five separate modules available on Hwb. The designated safeguarding person (DSP) or a head teacher can assign the modules to other members of staff to help them to monitor the progress and attainment of staff. The [Keeping Learners Safe Module Guidance](#) provides advice to DSPs and head

teachers on how to use and assign these modules. The modules have been updated in line with the revised Keeping Learners Safe guidance.

The KLS modules are available to the independent sector enabling them to carry out their safeguarding duties effectively and the learning available will be the same as in maintained schools.

Through the [Keeping safe online](#) area of Hwb, we have developed resources to equip practitioners to educate and support learners with the prevalent issue of sharing nude images. In recognition that responding to incidents involving peers can be complex, as there can be many different motives or reasons behind the behaviour, we published [guidance](#) for education settings to support them to effectively respond to incidents of sharing nude and semi-nude images in December 2020. An accompanying [training module](#) was developed and published in October 2021 to support schools to embed this guidance. This module can support with developing procedures for handling incidents to ensure an appropriate and proportionate response.

The [Wales Safeguarding Procedures](#) are for children and adults at risk of abuse and neglect. They detail the essential roles and responsibilities for practitioners to ensure that they safeguard children and adults who are at risk of abuse and neglect.

These procedures are intended to guide safeguarding practice for all those employed in the statutory, third (voluntary) and private sectors in health, social care, education, police, justice and other services. They promote consistent, evidence based safeguarding practice across agencies and across Wales.

This includes an *All Wales Practice Guide- safeguarding children where there are concerns about harmful sexual behaviour*. The guide includes advice on responding to peer on peer abuse in a way that safeguards children and young people and in line with the 'children first' principle provides appropriate support and intervention to children who have harmful sexual behaviour to prevent harm.

The [National Action Plan](#) on preventing and responding to child sexual abuse was published in July 2019 and includes actions to prevent and respond to harmful sexual behaviour. This has included the development of a multi-agency open access online learning session, advice for practitioners across agencies and advice for parent/carers of children and young people where there are concerns about harmful sexual behaviour. The Plan also includes an action for regional Safeguarding Boards to review arrangements for early intervention pathways for children where there are concerns about inappropriate sexualised behaviour or harmful sexual behaviour.

We have several Welsh Government funded helplines already established, specifically Childline Cymru, Live Fear Free and the MEIC service. In addition there is extensive guidance available on preventing and responding to child sexual harassment and abuse, including our statutory guidance [Keeping Learners Safe](#).

We have accepted Estyn's recommendation to *ensure schools receive regular and informative updates on best practice and suitable resources that are available to support them in the delivery of relationships and sexuality education*.

This is a priority area for the Welsh Government and a national plan of professional learning for RSE is currently being developed with practitioners and partners. Officials are in dialogue with wider Welsh Government and key stakeholders to identify gaps, and to commission new high quality resources where required to support implementation. National Network conversations will also provide an opportunity to discuss RSE resources, which resources are considered high-quality and to address any gaps where new resources may need to be commissioned.

The previous VAWDASV National Strategy committed to increasing awareness amongst children, young people and adults of the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and empowering them to positive personal choices. This objective has been carried over to the next iteration of the Strategy. We must give young people the opportunity to grow up free from damaging and limiting ideas around gender roles, power and control and give them the tools to call out unacceptable behaviours.

The Welsh Government continues to fund Hafan Cymru's Spectrum project, which promotes the importance of healthy relationships and raises awareness of VAWDASV. Spectrum also delivers training for school staff and governors about understanding the impact of domestic abuse on a child and promotes a whole-school approach to tackling domestic abuse.

## Higher Education

This term, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) will be publishing a circular on safeguarding to secure safe and inclusive higher education. The circular will require institutions to provide HEFCW with further assurance on both policies and processes to ensure the safety of students, relating to violence, abuse and harassment.

HEFCW meet regularly with officials from the VAWDASV team to ensure their work continues to align with Welsh Government priorities. HEFCW submitted a [consultation response](#) on the VAWDASV National Strategy in February 2022.

HEFCW have discussed with FE officials alignment of their review of safeguarding in HE (scheduled for 2022/23) with the Welsh Government review of peer on peer harassment in FE colleges. The FE review, led by Estyn, will be a parallel review to the completed schools' review, therefore, HEFCW will have a system-wide set of reviews to inform their understanding of tackling violence against women in education and tackling misogynist cultures where they exist.

HEFCW held a HE event on 17 February to discuss: violence against women; the implications for HE of the Welsh Government forthcoming Strategy on VAWDASV; spiking; collaboration with third sector agencies supporting women and tackling violence and harassment; issues arising from the Covid-operating context and adoption of Bystander training. The event was attended by all Welsh universities and a number of further education colleges and third sector partners. Speakers included the Welsh Government VAWDASV team, Public Health Wales and Welsh Women's Aid. HEFCW have arranged to meet the CEO of Welsh Women's Aid, Sara

Kirkpatrick, to discuss how they might work more closely in partnership with universities, to tackle VAWDASV.

VAWDASV guidance for Higher Education Institutions was published in partnership with HEFCW in March 2020 as planned, this was revised in November 2020 to account for the impact of the COVID pandemic.

HEFCW has committed £2m annually to universities to support the implementation of well-being and health strategies and HEFCW expect these strategies and implementation plans to address issues affecting well-being and health in all its forms.

**The effectiveness of the roles of a wide range of statutory bodies in respect of this issue, including the police, social services, local authority education departments, pupil referral units and schools themselves, and the extent to which a multi-agency approach is being taken where appropriate.**

Recognising that a multi-agency approach is key to tackling the issue of peer on peer sexual harassment; from the outset we have engaged with Policing in Wales. Both Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC) and Police Forces are committed to working with the Welsh Government to address the issue of peer on peer sexual harassment in education settings.

The Minister for Social Justice and the Minister for Education and Welsh Language met with representatives of the Offices of PCCs and Police Forces to address the findings of the Estyn Report.

The Minister for Social Justice meets regularly with the current chair of the All Wales Policing Group, PCC Dafydd Llywelyn, where a range of issues are discussed, including peer on peer sexual harassment and the wider issue of misogyny.

It was pleasing to see the positive references in the Estyn report to the work of the Wales Police Schools Programme (WPSP). The programme has been supported by Welsh Government since 2004 and we invest £1.98m in it each year. This is match funded by the four Welsh Police Forces.

Over the years, the Programme has evolved by broadening its scope to cover wider community and personal safety issues at all key stages of the curriculum. The core programme includes substance misuse, anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, bullying, online safety, sexting, child sexual exploitation and consent, delivering a balanced programme within primary and secondary schools.

Officials are working closely with the Police on implementing the recommendations from a review of the programme which took place in 2019.

We know that to date in the academic year 21/22 the programme has delivered 8,180 Crime Prevention lessons with 70% of schools in Wales accessed. Also, there have been 289,029 pupil contacts so far this school year (including Assemblies).

4,544 Supportive School Policing Activities have been carried out including 2,636 incidents dealt with in schools using the School Crime Beat Protocol.

As part of the Community Focussed Schools work, on 22 March we announced £3.84m of funding to support Family Engagement Officers in schools. These roles will be focused on working with children and young people experiencing difficulties and working with them and their families to address any issues. These roles will contribute to our work in tackling issues such as peer to peer sexual harassment by identifying the problem at an early stage and working with others to provide support.

**The effectiveness of the Welsh Government's joint response across all its relevant departments with a focus on education, social services and community safety and its inclusion of non-devolved services such as the police and the criminal justice system.**

It remains a cross-government priority to ensure that every child and young person is supported and that they are able to report any concerns they may have. In recognition that there are broader cultural challenges in dealing with this issue we continue to work together cross-government in relation to our ongoing response.

We will use the findings of Estyn's report to inform our ongoing cross government response and work with stakeholders to deal with this important issue; including developing a multi-agency action plan. The action plan is intended for children and young people, and all those working with children and young people in an education setting who would benefit from understanding the actions taken by the Welsh Government and partners to tackle peer on peer sexual harassment in education settings.

The action plan will set out the current and proposed future actions to tackle the issue of peer on peer sexual harassment in education settings against identified key themes. Importantly this action plan will link to sister plans: National Action Plan for Preventing Child Abuse; Digital Resilience in Education Action Plan and the VAWDASV Strategy, in order to aid understanding of the work and support available to empower children and young people.

Following his written statement of 16 June, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language wrote to all of the schools listed in the Everyone's Invited report to seek assurances of their safeguarding measures and to offer support and advice. A letter also went to all schools from the Director of Education and Welsh Language.

Joint working is essential to delivering our aim to tackle VAWDASV and make Wales the safest place in Europe to be a woman. We have worked with a wide range of key partners including teams across the Welsh Government, the police, specialist sector, survivors to develop our next five-year VAWDASV Strategy. Collaboration and co-production with partners has been essential in developing the draft Strategy and it will also be key for its delivery.

The Strategy will be delivered through a blueprint approach, which brings together devolved and non-devolved organisations, as well as strengthening the partnership between public private and specialist sectors.

Overseeing the delivery of the Strategy will be a new National Partnership Board – a Ministerial-led board co-chaired by Dafydd Llewelyn, the lead PCC for Wales.

Welsh Government Social Services leads on the implementation of Part 7 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, related statutory guidance and the Wales Safeguarding Procedures. Safeguarding responsibilities are shared across devolved and non-devolved agencies. All of the work developed by the Welsh Government on safeguarding children involves cross-government working and is informed by engagement with external bodies and organisations on a multi-agency basis. A cross-government Safeguarding, VAWDASV and ACEs Group is in place to ensure information sharing and awareness of cross-cutting work to support a joined up approach.

### **Schools, colleges and local authorities' collection and use of bullying and harassment data, as relevant to this issue.**

It is clear from the Estyn report that there is a clear need for more robust reporting of instances of sexual harassment in education settings, with children and young people lacking the confidence to report instances to their teachers. This in turn can lead to a lack of knowledge of the true scale of the issue in schools, as well as a lack of consistency in reporting systems and data collection. This is reflected across various types of harassment and bullying, including racial harassment and homophobic bullying.

We have accepted Estyn's recommendation to *work with local authorities to improve the way they collect bullying and harassment information from schools and ensure that local authorities identify and respond to patterns and trends in behaviour*. This is in order to plan suitable guidance, training and support for schools. We know, too, that colleges' approaches to collecting and reporting this information varies, so work on improving reporting systems needs to extend across education settings.

We are already considering the changes we need to make to our anti-bullying guidance, [Rights, Respect, Equality](#) in relation to racial harassment and bullying in schools, in line with the Race Equality Action Plan – An Anti-racist Wales. We will also consider how this work can be effectively widened to include robust reporting, recording and data collection of peer on peer sexual harassment, and homophobic harassment and bullying.

Robust and consistent reporting will:

- increase the confidence of children and young people that their concerns are taken seriously;
- embed the culture in our education settings that harassment or bullying of any kind is totally unacceptable; and
- lead to an increase in longer term data collection and trends which will help inform our policy making and create change.

## **The role of families, parents, and carers, as relevant to this issue.**

Tackling negative attitudes towards gender roles and relationships is everyone's business and a whole society approach is a fundamental part of the new VAWDASV National Strategy. Harassment, abuse and violence are daily occurrences for women and have conditioned their lives for far too long.

We will continue to work in partnership with specialist services to raise awareness of the inequality and safety issues faced by women and girls, and to end all forms of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, and will continue to work with Welsh Police Forces, PCCs, public safety boards and the Crown Prosecution Service to instil confidence in victims to report incidents of abuse and violence when they occur and to hold those who abuse to account.

Tackling male violence, and the misogyny and gender inequality that lie behind it, are how we will break the cycle and address the root causes of VAWDASV

VAWDASV is committed primarily but not exclusively by men against women. It is important to recognise therefore that not all victims of VAWDASV are women and it can also affect men and those with a non-binary identity. All perpetrators, regardless of their gender, will be held to account for their actions, however male violence defines VAWDASV and properly addressing the power and control dynamic created by gender inequality is key.

This must start with boys and young men if future generations are to be offered an opportunity to break this cycle and to develop healthy relationships based on respect and consent.

As part of our work to develop Community Focussed Schools we will build positive relationships with parents/ carers. Community Focused Schools are better able to identify issues at an early stage and work with others on providing support.

## **The role of the new Curriculum for Wales in developing healthier attitudes towards relationships and sexuality issues.**

The new curriculum from September 2022 will include a Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience which will enhance the new curriculum's focus on the health and wellbeing of learners. This is an innovative part of the new curriculum and aims to ensure that learning and support around issues such as physical, emotional and mental well-being are provided to all young people in Wales.

RSE is a statutory requirement in the Curriculum for Wales Framework and is mandatory for all learners. Schools and settings have an important role to play in creating safe and empowering environments in supporting learners' rights to enjoy fulfilling, healthy and safe relationships throughout their lives.

RSE will be implemented in primary schools, maintained nursery schools, and non-maintained nursery settings from September 2022.

Within the new RSE statutory guidance, it is clear that the approach to RSE should be positive, protective and preventative, considering how learners might need to be supported to 'have the knowledge to recognise all forms of discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect, including violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and a link is included to a toolkit of resources to support schools and settings on this important issue.

Raising children and young people's awareness of equality, respect and consent is crucial if we are to stop VAWDASV. We want to ensure all children and young people have access to developmentally appropriate, high quality learning that responds to their needs and experiences. The VAWDASV National Strategy 2022-2026 will run alongside the new RSE Code and guidance. Furthering our aim to ensure all children and young people have the ability to enjoy healthy, happy, respectful relationships now and in the future.

Safeguarding all our young people and supporting them to navigate the complex area of RSE is vital. Parents, of course, have a central role to play in this, but there is a crucial role for schools and a role which is now more important than it has ever been.

A National Network has been established to bring together teaching professionals, experts, stakeholders, policy makers and enabling partners to identify and address the barriers to, and opportunities for, the implementation of Curriculum for Wales. The conversations will provide a key opportunity to discuss a national approach on resources, supporting materials and professional learning needs. This will include any additional support and resources to support learners with additional learning needs.

Jeremy Miles MS  
Minister for Education and Welsh Language

Jane Hutt MS  
Minister for Social Justice