



11 December 2015

Clerk to Public Petitions Committee  
Room T3.40  
The Scottish Parliament

For the attention of Committee Members

**Consideration of Petition PE1573 (on statutory teaching of LGBTI + issues)**

Thank you for your letter to Councillor Stephanie Primrose, COSLA's Spokesperson for Education, Children and Young People. COSLA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Public Petitions Committee call for evidence.

The Committee should be aware that the timing of the call for evidence has not allowed us to present a paper to our Education, Children and Young People's Executive Group or to seek their views. We have based our response on existing knowledge and having held conversations with colleagues involved in the provision of education services.

**Curriculum for Excellence**

The petitioner is seeking to have the teaching of LGBTI + issues subject to legislation. We note the Chair's opening remarks at the evidence session on 27 October 2015 that there have been a number of petitions where organisations have sought for certain subjects to be introduced by legislation into the curriculum and that the Parliament have resisted such moves. It should be remembered that we do not have a national curriculum and under Curriculum for Excellence, decisions about what is included in the curriculum are taken locally. We feel that the proposals in the petition are counter to the ethos of CFE. Education authorities, head teachers and their staff should have flexibility to develop the curriculum to suit their local circumstances within the parameters set by CFE.

**Training**

The petitioner noted that if the teaching of LGBTI + issues could not be introduced by statute, their fall-back position was that greater teacher training in equality and diversity was needed. Training provided by Stonewall Scotland was highlighted and we appreciate that a number of schools have taken the courses provided. However, we would not wish to endorse one particular course or provider over any others as we understand that there are a number of training providers in the marketplace. Decisions on which courses and training providers to use are rightly a matter to be decided locally. We are aware that Respectme (Scotland's anti-bullying service) are funded by the Scottish Government. Respectme have a lot of resources on their website and they are available to provide advice to education authorities, schools and teachers, their services being free of charge.

Undoubtedly the best place for teachers to receive training in the Equality Act 2010 and equality duties in relation to protected characteristics is during initial teacher training. It should be acknowledged that this is a busy time for trainee teachers and that there are lots of other demands on their time. All teachers should have knowledge of equality and human rights issues and for existing teachers this is likely to be gained and kept updated through information provided by their schools and through career-long professional learning.

### **Guidance on anti-bullying**

COSLA officers are part of the group which is revising anti-bullying guidance "A National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People". This guidance was originally published in 2010. The review is chaired by Scottish Government and membership includes Stonewall Scotland, Education Scotland, Respect Me and LGBT Youth. The revised guidance is due to be published in the first half of 2016. Guidance will cover the Equality Act 2010 and protected characteristics and also provide links to organisations and resources which can be used by individuals and schools. The guidance will emphasise the need for local authorities to review their anti-bullying policies and for schools to produce and publish their own individual school anti-bullying policy.

COSLA also co-chairs with Scottish Government, the Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools. SAGRABIS commissions the 3 yearly Behaviour in Scottish Schools Report which surveys all schools in Scotland. Generally this research has indicated a trend towards better behaviour in all areas (with the exception of the use of mobile phones) in schools since the first report in 2006.

### **Conclusion**

We agree that teachers need to have knowledge and understanding of the Equality Act 2010 and protected characteristics. There are various resources for schools and local authorities related to LGBTI + issues and other protected characteristics and some of these resources are free. Our view is that it should be up to education authorities and head teachers to decide which resources to use. We would not support the introduction of legislation to prescribe a list of subjects to be taught in schools as we think decisions about the content of the curriculum should be taken locally within the framework of Curriculum for Excellence. The National Approach to Anti-Bullying guidance is currently being refreshed and this will give a greater focus to the protected characteristics including LGBTI + issues. We are working together with Stonewall Scotland, LGBT Youth and Respectme to produce the revised guidance.

If you have further enquiries please contact the author.

Yours faithfully

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