

## **Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1934](#): Develop an educational resource on gender-based violence for all year groups in High School, lodged by Craig Scoular on behalf of Greenfaulds High School Rights and Equalities Committee**

### **Brief overview of issues raised by the petition**

#### **Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)**

Local authorities have a statutory duty to secure an adequate and efficient education for children of school age in their area; what this education should entail is not set out in legislation. In developing their curriculum, teachers are expected to: apply their professional knowledge and skills; be aware of statutory duties and guidance; to use CfE's experiences and outcomes ("Es & Os") to plan learning, and outcomes to understand their learners' progress; work collaboratively with colleagues. Teachers will use a variety of resources to fill the content of the learning experiences in classrooms.

Some relevant Es & Os aimed at secondary pupils include—

I recognise that power can exist within relationships and can be used positively as well as negatively. HWB 4-45a

I reflect on how my attitudes, beliefs, values and morality can influence my decisions about friendships, relationships and sexual behaviour. HWB 4-46a

I know how to access services, information and support if my sexual health and wellbeing is at risk. I am aware of my rights in relation to sexual health including my right to confidentiality, and my responsibilities, including those under the law. HWB 4-48a

I know where to get support and help with situations involving abuse and I understand that there are laws which protect me from different kinds of abuse. HWB 4-49b

Es and Os are a resource to support teachers to plan learning. It is likely that Es and Os such as these would be covered through personal and social education classes, although schools may take differing approaches.

## **Relationships, sexual health and parenthood education**

Statutory guidance on the [conduct of relationships, sexual health and parenthood education in schools](#) published in 2014. This guidance states—

“Attention should also be paid to relevant emerging research and evidence relating to children and young people’s sexual health and wellbeing - for example, research highlighting the prevalence of abuse in teenage relationships. Links should be made to other related areas of health and wellbeing, such as drug and alcohol misuse and mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing. An integrated approach in this sense is welcome.” (para 44)

SPICE understands that the Scottish Government is working on updated statutory guidance and that this would be subject to a consultation in due course.

In the meantime, a non-statutory resource was launched last year, [RSHP.scot](#). The RSHP resource has been developed by a partnership of local authorities and health boards, with advice from Education Scotland and the Scottish Government. [The Scottish Government news release for the launch of RSHP.scot](#) stated—

“[RSHP.scot is a] new teaching website that strengthens the quality, consistency and relevance of education on relationships, sexual health and parenthood ... It aims to give teachers greater confidence in having valuable and engaging age-appropriate conversations with their pupils.”

Activity plans available [on the site aimed at lessons for secondary pupils](#) include topics such as—

- equality, feminism and sexual harassment; and
- consent and the Law.

### **Equally Safe**

The Scottish Government developed its Equally Safe Strategy (its strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls) in June 2014, with an updated version published in March 2016. Equally Safe included a number of commitments around education:

- pilot the development of a ‘whole school’ approach to tackling gender based violence
- through the Developing the Young Workforce programme, develop a holistic approach towards addressing gender stereotypes and norms in schools and education settings

- promote prevention programmes within the wider context of positive relationships and behaviour in schools, and encourage the harmonisation of prevention approaches across local authorities

A [progress report was published](#) in November 2020. The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government said the strategy would be reviewed during 2022 (see a [debate on International day for the elimination of violence against women](#), 25 November 2021)

In early 2020, the Scottish Government formed a [Gender Based Violence in Schools](#) working group to take forward specific actions to support children and young people in light of the reports. The National Improvement Framework (NIF) and Improvement Plan for 2022 – essentially the annual education action plan – stated:

“The work of the Gender Based Violence in Schools Group was paused as a result of COVID-19. However, work has been undertaken to consider the workplan of the group in light of the Everyone’s Invited publication. It has been agreed that the work of the group should continue as planned, and that links to wider work being undertaken to address Harmful Sexual Behaviour will be made in order to ensure a comprehensive approach to tackling this issue. The group has resumed its work and will produce guidance during 2022.”

In August 2021, [Rape Crisis Scotland launched Equally Safe at School](#). In a news release, Rape Crisis Scotland stated—

“Rape Crisis Scotland is pleased to be launching [Equally Safe at School](#) (ESAS), an innovative whole school approach to preventing gender-based violence, which we have been piloting with our research partners at the University of Glasgow since 2017 and which is now ready for use across Scotland. All secondary schools will have access to a free suite of online tools and resources to help them understand the problem and implement a set of holistic measures, with staff and students working together to promote equality and prevent violence.”

The Social Justice and Social Security Committee held an evidence session on [Domestic Violence and Violence against women and girls](#) on [3 March 2022](#). This included evidence from Girlguiding Scotland who, as part of their [ending sexual harassment in schools’ campaign](#), are calling for:

- Compulsory, high-quality sex and relationships education which covers consent, online abuse, gender equality and healthy relationships
- All schools to have a duty to prevent and tackle sexual harassment and be held accountable
- National guidance to ensure schools know how to take a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment.

## Prevalence of sexual harassment and gender-based violence in schools

The quote from the NIF above referred to [Everyone's Invited](#). This website allows people to anonymously share their experiences of gender violence. Following this, Ofsted was asked by the UK Government to undertake [a rapid review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges](#). Ofsted concluded—

“This rapid thematic review has revealed how prevalent sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are for children and young people. It is concerning that for some children, incidents are so commonplace that they see no point in reporting them. ... It recommends that schools, colleges and multi-agency partners act as though sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are happening, even when there are no specific reports.”

A [paper published in February by researchers from the University of Glasgow](#) found that in their study<sup>1</sup> of a sample of Scottish secondary pupils, “two-thirds reported any *victimization*: 64.7% ‘visual/verbal’ (e.g. sexual jokes) and 34.3% ‘contact/personally-invasive’ behaviors (e.g. sexual touching; most of whom also reported experiencing visual/verbal types) in the past 3-months.” It concluded—

“Our study confirms school-based sexual harassment is common but also finds significant nuance in the ways in which students distinguish between acceptable and harassing. School-based strategies to tackle sexual harassment must engage with this complexity.”

In answer to [S6O-00575](#), the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP, indicated that the Scottish Government would commission “an independent review to establish positive practice and further areas for improvement” in relation to preventing sexual harassment and gender-based violence. She said that this review would be commissioned “during this parliamentary session”.

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26/5/2022

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at [spice@parliament.scot](mailto:spice@parliament.scot)

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware

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<sup>1</sup> Sweeting H, Blake C, Riddell J, Barrett S, Mitchell KR (2022) Sexual harassment in secondary school: Prevalence and ambiguities. A mixed methods study in Scottish schools. PLoS ONE 17(2): e0262248. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0262248>

however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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