

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

3rd Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
22 February 2023

PE1934: Develop an educational resource on gender-based violence for all year groups in High School

Petitioner	Craig Scoular on behalf of Greenfaulds High School Rights and Equalities Committee
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to work with Education Scotland to develop an educational resource on gender-based violence for all year groups in High School. This resource should – <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Educate on the causes of gender-based violence and– Ensure that young people leave school with the tools to help create a safer society for women
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1934

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [29 June 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. It also agreed to write to COSLA.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new responses from COSLA and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills which are set out at **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1934: Develop an educational resource on gender-based violence for all year groups in High School

Petitioner

Craig Scoular on behalf of Greenfaulds High School Rights and Equalities Committee

Date lodged

31/05/2022

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to urge the Scottish Government to work with Education Scotland to develop an educational resource on gender-based violence for all year groups in High School. This resource should –

- Educate on the causes of gender-based violence and
- Ensure that young people leave school with the tools to help create a safer society for women

Previous action

We have written to our local MSP Jamie Hepburn, who in turn contacted the Education Secretary who wrote to our group. In the response Shirley-Ann Sommerville outlined what the government already do. We asked the Education Secretary about mandatory lessons, however she informed us that the government does not "prescribe" what is to be taught in schools. We have also conducted a survey to find out if young people felt enough was taught about this issue in school. 85% of respondents said no, there was not enough teaching.

Background information

During the period between March and September 2021, 81 women were killed at the hands of men in the UK. Violence against women is an issue felt disproportionately by women of colour and trans-women. Among the 375 transgender people killed in 2021 globally, the vast majority were black transgender women (Forbes, 2021). Gender based violence

increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, where reported cases increased dramatically due to national lockdowns. It was predicted there would be an additional 31million gender-based violence cases if lockdown only lasted 6 months, the final figure will be devastatingly larger due to prolonged lockdowns. In Scotland alone, there were 65,000 cases of domestic abuse reported last year, the fifth time in a year it has risen.

It is our goal to help tackle violence against women, which destroys too many lives every year. We believe that educating our children will end any existing cycles of gender-based violence and prevent any new ones from starting.

Annexe B

Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1934 on 29th June 2022

The Convener: PE1934 is on developing an education resource on gender-based violence for all year groups in high school. It has been lodged by Craig Scoular on behalf of Greenfaulds high school rights and equalities committee. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to work with Education Scotland to develop such an educational resource. The resource should educate on the causes of gender-based violence and ensure that young people leave school with the tools to help them to create a safer society for women.

Statistics on gender-based violence are included in the petition background information. The petitioner states that

“educating our children will end any existing cycles of gender-based violence and prevent any new ones from starting.”

The Scottish Government’s response outlines existing resources and guidance that are relevant to the subject of the petition. They include learning about topics including, in primary school, gender-biased expectations, up to learning about sexual harassment and feminism in high school. It also states that the gender-based violence in schools working group will review existing resources, identify effective practice examples and develop new resources.

Based on the evidence that we have received on this important petition, do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

Alexander Stewart: I think that we need to communicate with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to find out specifics about the area, and about the planned independent review on sexual harassment and gender-based violence and the practice that covers that, which is mentioned in the petition.

It is also important that we find out from the Scottish Government and Education Scotland how they monitor children and young people who are being consulted on the curriculum across Scotland, in line with the Scottish Government’s best practice, and whether the Scottish Government currently monitors data in relation to sexual assault in schools.

Details on the membership are also important; we need to find out the membership of the gender-based violence in schools working group.

If we could require all that, it would give us a much better outlook and understanding of where the Scottish Government is with the process and how it is progressing it.

The Convener: Thank you. Do we have any other suggestions from colleagues?

Paul Sweeney: It would perhaps be worth writing to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and to the 32 local authority education services to ascertain what provision they make within schools. That could help to establish a pattern of activity.

The Convener: Shall we write to COSLA in the first instance?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C

COSLA submission of 3 August 2022

PE1934/B: Develop an educational resource on gender-based violence for all year groups in High School

Relevant information held by COSLA on the current provision of gender-based violence lessons across local authorities in Scotland.

COSLA and the Scottish Government's [joint Final Report on Equally Safe](#), (November 2020). Relevant information is attached as **Appendix 1**.

The agreed priorities for next steps for COSLA and the Scottish Government (20/21) as cited in the report included: -

- Develop an age and stage appropriate resource on key messages on healthy relationships and consent aimed at professionals working with younger children.
- Continue to pursue our gender equality ambitions in education and learning via the mechanism of the Deputy First Minister's Gender Equality Taskforce in Education and Learning

COSLA has been engaged with the Scottish Government in ongoing work in both areas.

The Board Paper 'Equally Safe at School – Whole School Approach to the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)' was considered in 2021 by COSLA Community Wellbeing Board (item 2.4/September 2021) and COSLA Children and Young People Board (Item 04/October 2021). Extracts from the minutes of these meetings are included in **Appendix 2A and 2B**

The Board Paper 'Tackling Gender Based Violence in Education' was considered by COSLA CYP Board (Item 06/April 2022). A summary description of the Paper and the position agreed at the meeting is attached as **Appendix 3**.

As a member of the Mentors in Violence (MVP) National Steering Group, COSLA holds relevant information on the current provision of MVP in

Scottish schools, taken from the MVP National Steering Group Minutes – 29/06/22. The relevant information is attached as **Appendix 4**.

In correspondence (22/07/2022) with Scottish Rape Crisis Equally Safe at School National Coordinator, update information received on current participation levels and key things to note. The relevant information is attached as **Appendix 5**.

Appendix 1

COSLA and the Scottish Government's [joint Final Report on Equally Safe](#), (November 2020). Relevant information from 'Achievements in Relation to Priority One: *Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls*'.

- Equally Safe at School is an intervention designed to support schools to take holistic measures to prevent gender based violence and respond appropriately when it occurs by promoting gender equality hand-in hand with preventing and improving responses to gender based violence. Intervention mechanisms that have been trialled have included an assessment, an action group formed of students and staff, staff training, a review of the curriculum and relevant policies and a young-person led initiative or campaign. The project has been piloted by Rape Crisis Scotland, with support from Zero Tolerance, in six secondary schools within 3 local authorities, enabling intervention materials and approaches to be refined. Evaluation has been completed and an online platform is under development for full roll out in 2021.
- Local Rape Crisis centres deliver an evidence-based intervention to young people in secondary schools across Scotland. From 2018-2020 they reached 42,900 young people in over 200 schools with programmes of up to 3 workshops. Prevention Workers deliver workshops modules that cover gender, consent, sexual violence and how it can be prevented, sexualisation and pornography, social media, the impact of sexual violence and how to access support. The programme aims to provide consistency in approaches to the prevention of sexual violence and contributes to Equally Safe in its aim to address the systematic inequality, attitudes and assumptions that give rise to violence and abusive behaviour. Feedback from young people continues to demonstrate high levels of agreement with the messages of the workshops and that young people self-assess as having gained knowledge and

understanding in relation to sexual violence. One key aim of the Equally Safe delivery plan was to extend the programme into every local authority, and this has now been achieved with support through Scottish Government funding. Despite most schools having been unable to accommodate prevention workshops as a result of COVID-19 restrictions put in place earlier this year, prevention workers have adapted materials for remote delivery, as well as engaging with young people via social media and further developing relationships with partner organisations.

- All 32 local authorities are engaged with the Mentors in Violence Prevention programme, a peer education programme that gives young people the chance to explore and challenge the attitudes, beliefs and cultural norms that underpin gender-based violence, bullying and other forms of violence. All but three of these authorities have begun a roll out to secondary schools and sixteen local authorities now have their own trainers. Approximately 190 schools have a trained staff team who have delivered mentor training to seniors who in turn have delivered the MVP programme to younger learners.

Appendix 2A:

Considered by COSLA's Community Wellbeing Board (item 2.4/September 2021)

Extract from the minute of the COSLA Community Wellbeing Board (item 2.4/September 2021)

Equally Safe at School (ESAS) - Whole School Prevention of VAWG

This paper highlighted the national launch of the new Equally Safe at School website and programme for schools. This is a deliverable agreed by co-owners and stakeholders of Equally Safe as one of the 118 actions committed to in the Equally Safe Delivery Plan (2017 – 2021). The work has been led by Rape Crisis Scotland, working together with pilot schools in local authorities and further supported by the University of Glasgow. The paper invited the Board to recognise the positive contribution being made to the prevention and eradication of violence against women and girls through this programme and its' offer in respect to Local Governments response to the gendered effects of the pandemic, outlined in the Local Government Blueprint.

Rape Crisis Scotland offered Members a short presentation on the free resources now available to all schools in Scotland to support their work to prevent and tackle gender inequality, gender stereotyping and gender based violence and harassment in a school community. The presentation included a short film created by young people highlighting the issues being tackled.

Members welcomed the development and launch of the Programme and highlighted other GBV prevention work ongoing in their own areas with young people, including Mentors in Violence Prevention (MPV). Cllr Docherty highlighted her concerns that language used in respect to the issue of violence against women should better reflect that, whilst both men and women may experience incidents of domestic abuse and other forms of Gender-Based violence, women are considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of abuse, including sexual violence, perpetrated overwhelmingly by men, and that this is a consequence of women's unequal status in society.

Members agreed the recommendations in the paper including that Equally Safe at School (ESAS) should be highlighted as an important resource in preventing and tackling Gender-Based violence in a whole school setting and that the views from COSLA's Children and Young People's Board on the challenges facing or opportunities for Local Government to embed prevention of VAWG in schools and youth/place based approaches should be sought to inform the upcoming Equally Safe Funding Review.

Appendix 2B:

Considered by COSLA's Children and Young People's Board (Item 04/October 2021)

Extract from the minute of the COSLA Children and Young People Board (Item 04/October 2021)

Equally Safe at School – Whole School Approach to the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

This paper highlighted the recent national launch of the Equally Safe at School (ESAS) website and programme for schools, which focusses on early intervention in schools. A short animation, commissioned by the University of Glasgow and produced by Media Co-op, was also shared. Members were invited to recognise the positive contribution being made to the prevention and eradication of violence against

women and girls through this programme, and discuss the offer in respect of Local Government's response to the gendered effects of the pandemic.

Members noted the animation and shared experiences of similar work being carried out in their respective local authorities.

Members:

- i. Confirmed their recognition of the positive contribution being made to the prevention and eradication of violence against women and girls through Equally Safe at School (ESAS);
- ii. Agreed to raise awareness of the ESAS whole schools approach in their own authorities along with other available programmes and approaches as helpful and free resources available to local authorities in their response to the prevalence of violence against women and girls and the gendered impacts of the pandemic
- iii. Highlighted and discussed any challenges facing Local Government in the embedding of schools-based or youth/place-based prevention of VAWG
- iv. Offered further views on the challenges facing or opportunities for Local Government to embed prevention of VAWG in schools and youth/ place based approaches in recovery and renewal planning; and
- v. Instructed that officers should reflect Members' views in the upcoming refreshment of the Equally Safe Delivery Plan and the Equally Safe Funding Review.

Appendix 3

Considered by COSLA Children and Young People Board (Item 06/April2022)

Tackling Gender Based Violence in Education

This paper updated the Board on the current status of relevant, gender related work and seeks their support on the direction of travel outlined. As co-signatories of Scotland's Equally Safe Strategy, COSLA is committed to the prevention and eradication of all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG), also referred to as gender-based violence. This includes VAWG experienced or perpetrated by children and young people.

COSLA contributes to a number of national forums intended to consider and address gender-based violence in education. Whilst some of these workstreams have progressed and violence against women has been a growing concern, some workstreams focused on addressing gender-based violence in education paused during Covid-19.

The Board:

- i. Agreed that this area of work be considered within the interim Equally Safe Delivery Plan (to September 2023) and in the design of the refreshed Equally Safe Strategy and Delivery Plan for roll out thereafter.
- ii. Agreed the position outlined at paragraphs 7 and 8. (see below)

Para 7: Officers will work with Scottish Government and relevant colleagues to develop and agree the National Framework and resources on preventing gender based violence in schools.

Para 8: COSLA will support coherence with ongoing development of the interim Equally Safe Delivery Plan and the design of Equally Safe's next substantive phase of activity from October 2023.

Appendix 4

From MVP National Steering Group Minutes – 29/06/22.

- Schools delivering MVP
 - Number of schools delivering the programme has returned to pre-pandemic levels with a slight increase overall.
- Breakdown of reach of MVP in different regional collaborative areas
 - MVP reaching most areas across Scotland with majority of areas either trained in or delivering the programme.
- Practitioner professional learning
 - 669 practitioners have been trained and 22 new trainers have been brought in across various local authorities.

Appendix 5

From correspondence (22/07/2022) with Scottish Rape Crisis Equally Safe at School National Coordinator, update information received on **current participation levels** and **key things to note**.

- Aberdeen - 1 school
- Aberdeenshire – 1 school
- Angus – 1 school
- Argyll and Bute – 1 school
- Edinburgh City – 13 schools
- Dumfries and Galloway – 1 school
- Dundee - 1 school
- East Ayrshire – 1 school
- East Dunbartonshire – 1 school
- East Renfrewshire – 2 schools
- Glasgow City – 4 schools
- Highlands – 6 schools
- Midlothian – 2 schools
- Moray – 1 school
- North Ayrshire – 2 schools
- Orkney – 2 schools
- Perth and Kinross – 2 schools
- Renfrewshire – 4 schools
- Scottish Borders – 3 schools
- South Ayrshire – 1 school
- South Lanarkshire – 4 schools
- Stirling – 3 schools
- West Lothian – 2 schools

Key things to note:

- Of these, 11 are independent schools
- While there are around 60 schools registered with an ESAS account, only about 10% of these schools have been implementing ESAS activities (as far as our reporting mechanism identifies anyway)
- Conversations with schools and local authorities imply that many schools have been looking at the resources since signing up and have built ESAS into their School Improvement Plans, so we expect to see more schools implementing in the new school year

(Rape Crisis Scotland) has informed COSLA that it has been working closely with some very committed local authorities to create a local authority approach whereby local authority Education, Health and Wellbeing Leads are taking the approach of asking 1-3 schools to implement ESAS initially, then bringing a few more schools on board each year to ensure a slow and steady approach to roll out whereby the local authority Education Leads can offer extra support to a few schools at a time. These local authorities have been supporting their schools to build ESAS into school planning and strategy, have organised information sessions for school staff and have been part of meetings with an individual school (and the national co-ordinator) to discuss getting started with ESAS.

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 10 August 2022

PE1934/C: Develop an educational resource on gender-based violence for all year groups in High School

The Scottish Government recognises the importance of education in tackling gender based violence in schools as a preventative approach to addressing this issue within communities and society. We have established the [Gender Based Violence in Schools Working Group - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot) and are committed to developing a national framework for schools to help tackle sexual harassment and genderbased violence. This framework, which will be developed with the Working Group, including representatives from Education Scotland, will be supported by appropriate teaching resources to help school staff deliver confident and meaningful learning to combat sexual harassment and genderbased violence in schools. I can confirm that the framework will include content on the causes of genderbased violence.

The Committee has also asked how the Scottish Government and Education Scotland monitor whether children and young people are being consulted on the curriculum and what feedback is provided to show how their views have been taken into account. At a national level, children and young people's views on these matters were sought as part of the Personal and Social Education Review undertaken by Education Scotland. The Personal and Social Education Review recommendations

were published and their contribution was recognised as part of that publication. It is for schools and education authorities to engage with children and young people on the delivery of the curriculum locally.

With regard to the Committee request for information on:

- whether the Scottish Government currently monitors data in relation to sexual assault in schools across Scotland;
- whether the planned independent review of sexual harassment and gender-based violence prevention practice will cover the issues raised in this petition; and,
- the membership and remit of the Gender Based Violence in Schools Working Group.

The response to these is set out below.

In relation to the first point, recording and monitoring of incidents is essential and best carried out locally where recurring patterns can be understood and acted upon. A consistent and uniform approach to recording and monitoring of incidents will help identify key measures and actions that can be undertaken to address any issues. The Bullying and Equalities Module on SEEMiS, the schools management information system, was updated to reflect this uniform approach. SEEMiS is local authority owned and is a schools management tool that is in use in all public schools in Scotland. The improvements made to SEEMiS for recording and monitoring incidents of bullying also allow schools to record any instances of sexual harassment that a pupil reports. Guidance published at the time also outlines the responsibilities of local authorities and head teachers to monitor incidents at a local level. A final evaluation will be undertaken in 2022 to assess how successfully the new system has been embedded. Monitoring and recording of incidents of genderbased violence will also feature within the framework which the Gender Based Violence in Schools Working Group is developing.

The planned independent review of sexual harassment and genderbased violence prevention practice will commence on conclusion of the work we have been undertaking with the Gender Based Violence in Schools Working Group and the Gender Equality Taskforce for Education and Learning. This will also complement work being undertaken as part of the PSE Review to provide resources for schools

to help them teach confidently about the issue of sexual harassment. Altogether, these actions will cover the issues raised in this petition.

Regarding the membership and remit of the Gender Based Violence in Schools Working Group, this is available on the Scottish Government's website at <https://www.gov.scot/groups/gender-based-violence-in-schools-working-group/>.

In addition to the work outlined above, the Gender Equality Taskforce in Education and Learning was established in response to one of the recommendations made by the First Minister's National Advisory Committee on Women and Girls (NACWG). The NACWG wants every girl and young woman to have a gender competent experience of education and learning. The Taskforce's overarching ambitions are that all girls and young women:

- Are taught by gender competent educational professionals;
- Do not experience sexism, sexual harassment or genderbased violence in the classroom or other educational setting; and,
- Freely chose subjects and areas of study, including those traditionally dominated by boys and men.

The Taskforce recently worked with The Collective, an intersectional feminist organisation, to develop a theory of change model and a set of recommendations to enable them to take forward their ambitions. This was done with input from the Children's and Youth Parliaments, in order to ensure young people's views were embedded in it. Two of the recommendations highlight the issue of genderbased violence in schools and how it should be addressed. The Taskforce will take these forward, working closely with the Gender Based Violence in Schools Working Group and in the wider context of Equally Safe, which will help inform the Taskforce's work more generally.

In the meantime, the Scottish Government wants all children and young people to develop mutually respectful, responsible and confident relationships. We expect schools to deliver an inclusive and supportive learning environment for children and young people, which is why we are committed to ensuring all children and young people receive high quality relationships, sexual health and parenthood (RSHP) education. RSHP education is an important part of the school's health and wellbeing curriculum and supports pupils to learn about safe and healthy

relationships, including online relationships. This backed up by a range of actions being taken forward in schools to address gender based violence and sexual harassment. Our Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) Scotland Programme is working to tackle gender stereotyping and attitudes that condone violence against women and girls. MVP is a peer education programme that gives young people the chance to explore and challenge the attitudes, beliefs and cultural norms underpinning gender based violence, bullying and other forms of violence. It can address a range of behaviours including namecalling, sexting, controlling behaviour and harassment.

Our Equally Safe Strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls emphasises the importance of challenging the underpinning attitudes which enable genderbased violence. We are implementing the Equally Safe at School project, developed by Rape Crisis Scotland and Zero Tolerance, which applies a whole school approach to inequality and gender based violence in schools. Furthermore, we are funding Rape Crisis Scotland to help deliver programmes which aim to tackle sexual harassment and violence in our schools including their national sexual violence programme which is aimed at local secondary schools across Scotland.

I hope the Committee finds the information in this letter helpful and the Committee is reassured we are taking forward a wide range of actions to address the concerns raised by the petitioners.