

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 9 October 2024
15th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

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

Introduction

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 –

- 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>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 8 November 2023.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the University of Glasgow and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.
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 written submissions from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and the University of Glasgow which are set out in **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 gave its initial response to the petition on 6 June 2022.](#)
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 170 signatures have been received on this petition.
8. Since the last consideration of this petition, the Scottish Government published a Gender Based Violence in Schools Framework titled '[Preventing and responding to gender based violence: a whole school framework](#)'.

Action

9. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
October 2024

Annexe A: Summary of petition

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

3 May 2022

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 –

- 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 8 November 2023

The Convener: Our next petition, PE1934, which was lodged by Craig Scoular on behalf of Greenfaulds High School rights and equalities committee, calls 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. 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.

We last considered the petition on 22 February, when we agreed to write to COSLA, Rape Crisis Scotland and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. COSLA has provided information on the mentors in violence prevention—MVP—programme, noting that 31 local authorities are at the delivery stage, with the final local authority having planned to undertake professional learning earlier this year. Estimates from the national MVP team indicate that more than 6,000 sessions have been delivered, reaching more than 47,800 younger learners.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills has indicated that the gender-based violence in schools working group is expected to publish its national framework, which will help schools to tackle sexual harassment and gender-based violence. Additionally, the gender equality task force in education and learning is establishing what educational resources already exist that cover gender inequality.

Rape Crisis Scotland has highlighted on-going work to address gender-based violence, including its sexual violence prevention workshops in schools. The submission acknowledges the issues that the petitioner raises, and highlights that, although the Government cannot prescribe specific measures in the curriculum, there is a duty to ensure that educational outcomes are met and that the required systems and resources are in place to assure that.

Do members have any comments or suggestions?

David Torrance: I ask the committee to consider writing to the University of Glasgow, seeking further information about the evaluation of the equally safe at school strategy, as noted in Rape Crisis Scotland's submission, including details about the scope of the evaluation and its expected timescale for reporting. We could also write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to ask for an update on the work of the gender equality task force in education and learning to establish what educational resources exist that cover gender inequality. The committee could also ask for an indication of what the task force's next steps will be when it completes its work.

The Convener: Are members content with those suggestions?

Members *indicated agreement.*

CPPP/S6/24/15/4

The Convener: As there does not appear to be any other suggestions, we will keep the petition open and return to it on receipt of responses to the points that Mr Torrance has proposed.

Annexe C: Written submissions

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 9 December 2023

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

Thank you for your letter of 7 July 2022 on behalf of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee regarding Petition PE1934 to develop an educational resource on gender-based violence for all year groups in high school.

Specifically, the Committee requested an update on the work of the Gender Equality Taskforce in Education and Learning to establish what educational resources already exist that cover gender inequality, and an indication of what the taskforce's next steps will be when it completes this work.

The Taskforce has undertaken a range of work, including engaging with the Children's Parliament and Scottish Youth Parliament in order to gain a detailed understanding of the ways in which gender inequality is still sadly impacting upon girls and young women in school settings. The reports from the [Children's Parliament](#) and [Scottish Youth Parliament](#) contain experiences which make for challenging reading. However, the issues highlighted, and suggestions for solutions, are articulated clearly in them and they will help the Taskforce make the most of their opportunity to tackle head on any deep-rooted gender inequality which girls and young women continue to face in education settings.

The Taskforce acknowledges that this work is complex, and long term. Creating a robust plan of action to drive the suggested systemic change outlined in the reports necessitates a joined up and cross sector response, underpinned by an intersectional approach.

Following the publication of the reports, the Taskforce appointed my predecessor, Shirley-Anne Somerville as chair. Since my appointment as Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, I have been considering how the Taskforce should continue with the ambitions in the report, namely that all girls and young women have a gender equal experience of education, and I look forward to outlining that shortly.

While the Taskforce has committed to working with organisations in the education and gender equality sectors to develop professional learning and curriculum resources in the context of education reform, in terms of educational resources which already exist that cover gender inequality, while the Taskforce does not hold a definitive list, in the first instance I would direct you to Education Scotland's [Improving gender balance and equalities 3-18 | Resources](#) .

The Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research (BISSR) report published on 28 November 2023. We commissioned BISSR in order to obtain a clear and robust picture of teachers' and support staff's experiences of relationships and behaviour in publicly funded mainstream schools. While the results of the 2023 report highlight

that most children and young people are well behaved in class and around the school, it also tells us that low level disruptive behaviour, disengagement and some forms of serious disruptive behaviours have increased since 2016. This includes an increase of reported sexist abuse towards staff, and new and emerging patterns of behaviour including a rise in misogynistic views expressed by male pupils. I am absolutely clear that our schools should be safe and consistent learning environments for all, and that violent and abusive behaviours towards pupils or staff is unacceptable.

In previous correspondence regarding this petition, I have highlighted that Scottish Government are working in collaboration with the Gender Based Violence in Schools Working Group to develop a framework document to help ensure consistency in messages on sexual harassment and gender based violence for everyone working with children and young people in schools. The Framework includes guidance on responding to GBV experienced by a member of school staff, and will play an important role in responding to the concerns raised within BISSR. Good progress has been made with this work and we anticipate publication of the Framework in the next few weeks. Following publication of the Framework, we have committed to commissioning an independent review to establish positive practice and further areas for improvement, during this parliamentary session.

The Committee will wish to be aware the Scottish Government consulted on revised statutory teaching guidance for relationships, sexual health and parenthood (RSHP) education between 3 August and 23 November 2023. We are currently analysing the responses received. The revised teaching guidance included a specific section with guidance to support learning and teaching on consent and healthy relationships in response to the recommendation of the Personal and Social Education Review, which recommended current guidance is reviewed to strengthen delivery of consent education that is stage and age appropriate.

I hope the Committee finds the information in this letter helpful, and the Committee is reassured we are taking forward a range of actions to ensure that young people leave school with the tools to help create a safer society for all.

Jenny Gilruth MSP

University of Glasgow submission of 15 December 2023

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

We thank the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee for the opportunity to share further information on the Equally Safe at School evaluation called “Whole-school approach to addressing Gender-Based violence (GBV) in secondary school (Equally Safe at School): A pragmatic cluster-randomised trial and mixed-methods evaluation. This [three-year evaluation](#) (2023-2026) is funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR).

Background

The Equally Safe at School (ESAS) intervention was developed via a 6-year collaboration between University of Glasgow and Rape Crisis Scotland (RCS). The intervention development phase (2016-2018; CSO Catalytic Research grant CGA/16/9) involved student/staff group interviews and stakeholder consultation. The resulting 'theory of change' and draft intervention design were refined via consultations with voluntary and statutory stakeholders. MRC programme funding [MC_UU_00022/3] supported small-scale formative evaluation research alongside a 3-school pilot implemented by RCS (2019-2021).

Although recognised as a widespread problem, limited evidence on GBV and sexual harassment in schools exist in the UK, including Scotland. Our recently published paper ([Sweeting et al., 2022](#)) showed that two-thirds of students reported being a victim of one or more of 17 sexual harassment behaviours in last three months. At school, sexual harassment most commonly involves unwanted jokes and gestures and showing or sending unwanted sexual images or messages and less frequently includes kissing or sexual touching. [An animated video](#) co-produced with young people also presents evidence from the pilot phase study.

Attitudes that enable or excuse GBV are underpinned by harmful beliefs about gender. Sexual harassment and GBV in adolescence can lead to men's violence against women later in life. Teachers, students and policymakers want to address this major problem and recognise the importance of improving the whole-school environment. However, there is little evidence on the best ways to do so.

Evaluation overview

This underscores the significance and timeliness of assessing the Equally Safe at School intervention. Adopting a comprehensive 'whole-school approach,' the intervention works across every aspect of school life to continually build and reinforce messages that challenge gender-based violence and promote gender equality. This includes the school curriculum, staff training, everyday interactions between staff and students, school policies and procedures, and the culture and ethos of the school community.

The aim of this study is to find out whether the ESAS intervention is effective and cost-effective. We will assess whether the ESAS intervention is effective in reducing sexual harassment within secondary schools alongside other benefits. We are currently recruiting 36 secondary schools in Scotland, half of whom will start ESAS immediately, and half of whom will join a 'waitlist' and start ESAS one year later. We will compare the level of sexual harassment in schools that have implemented ESAS (group 1) with those who have not yet started (group 2), by surveying students at the beginning of the trial and after 12 months. We will compare schools in group 1 and group 2 again at 24 months.

We will assess whether ESAS makes it more likely for students to report incidents of sexual harassment to teachers and for teachers to feel more confident in intervening. We will also evaluate whether the ESAS intervention represents value for money, and whether it is delivered well. We will focus on how closely schools follow the intervention guidance, the degree of involvement and acceptance of the school community, and any barriers or aids to successful implementation.

Additionally, we will investigate any unforeseen impacts, and aim to understand how ESAS causes change to happen.

As part of the process evaluation, we will also conduct case studies in six schools over two years to see how well the ESAS approach works in practice and if it helps establish changes in school culture over time. We will collect detailed information from staff, students, and parents to produce scientific evidence on the effectiveness, costs and delivery process of ESAS. This evidence will help policymakers decide how to address GBV in schools.

Timeline and dissemination

The evaluation is taking place between July 2023 and September 2026. The full results of the evaluation are anticipated to be published in December 2026. Dissemination of emerging research findings will take place periodically throughout the study. The research team will prioritise communication of study findings to policymakers, practitioners, and evaluation participants. This includes a regular newsletter on evaluation progress to interested stakeholders. Other dissemination channels include blogs, workshops and conferences.