

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Equally Safe informal participation session with students

Wednesday 29 November 2023

Note of discussion

Committee member attendees

Sue Webber MSP (Convener)
Ruth Maguire MSP (Deputy Convener)
Stephanie Callaghan MSP
Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP
Ross Greer MSP
Liam Kerr MSP
Ben Macpherson MSP
Willie Rennie MSP
Michelle Thomson MSP

Apologies were received from Bill Kidd MSP

Discussion on Equally safe in relation to colleges and universities

The Committee spoke with 7 students across three universities and one organisation on Equally Safe in relation to colleges and universities. The following summary is intended to provide an overview of the main themes that emerged from the discussion.

Increasing awareness of GBV (gender-based violence) and prevention

- It is important to recognise what GBV is and whether it has happened to you.
- The narrow consideration of GBV must be reconsidered as it is much wider and includes acts that are not talked about such as spiking or stealthing. There also needs to be training about warning signs that girls and women are often told to ignore.
- The definition of student needs to be widened and understood more, acknowledging that students can often be married, have children and that their abuser might be someone they live with.
- GBV was described as an epidemic and consent education in schools was said to be 'patchy'.
- There is a need for mandatory consent training across all colleges and universities which could also address any incorrect assumed knowledge regarding what is understood by consent.
- The disparity across funding for colleges and universities was acknowledged however this should not prevent the roll out of mandatory consent training across all organisations. This should also include active bystander training.
- All training needs to be accessible, for example, subtitles for people who are deaf etc.
- There is a need to move away from thinking that it is women and girls' responsibility to avoid abuse and think about the perpetrator's role in preventing abuse.
- There needs to be an opening up and ongoing conversation about GBV where it has to be continually spoken about.
- There is a need to ensure young people in secondary schools are educated on GBV.
- Concern was expressed around a lack of education and understanding around LGBT+ communities experiences' and GBV. More inclusive language is needed.

- Although prevention was said to be important, it was highlighted that this can sometimes be better resourced at the expense of support.
- There should be more signposting to available resources.

Reporting and data sharing

- Data sharing was said to be important and useful however it was acknowledged that there are barriers to data sharing due to GDPR.
- Report and Support was used in some universities which is licensed from a private company. Other universities have their own system.
- It was highlighted that licensing costs for reporting systems can cause difficulties for some organisations.
- Multiple routes to reporting are needed, including an online system where information and evidence can be uploaded.
- Examples of good practice were highlighted such as Fearless Edinburgh and Fearless Glasgow with institutions working together.
- Culture shift created a collective license for Fearless Glasgow to establish the Report + Support online system within several of their HEI's. Fearless Glasgow have aligned all reporting categories for data gathering and analysis purposes. The Scottish Government partially funded the initial licensing agreement.

Effective referral pathways

- There is a need to reduce waiting times for support and access to this support should not be time-limited to a specific number of weeks.
- Accessing support should be made easier as it can often be difficult to navigate while studying and beginning a career.

- It was highlighted that counselling does not work for everyone and that deeper therapy is often needed.
- Participants have suggested that there should be more consideration for cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), dialectal behavioural therapy (DBT), and others which go on for a significantly longer amount of time as an alternative to counselling.
- Concern was raised regarding the lack of diversity within counselling and mental health services which could prevent some students from accessing support services.
- Some students have said their experience of trying to access services is re-traumatising and that some universities can be very dismissive.
- Students with lived experience should be involved in designing referral pathways, including student groups who are working on these issues and building networks for survivors.
- Concern was raised about students having to go through several layers and feeling traumatised by having to retell their story time and again and not getting justice from that process.
- Report systems must be redesigned to support both parties (victim/abuser) and alleged victims should have a right to appeal.
- Support should not be contingent on reporting.