

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

12th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday
29 June 2022

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

Note by the Clerk

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 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. This is a new petition that was lodged on 31 May 2022.
2. The petition seeks to tackle violence against women by educating children on the causes of gender-based violence and providing tools to help create a safer society for women. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.

4. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected to collect this information. 160 signatures have been received.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

6. 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



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 study¹ 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”.

Ned Sharratt

Senior Researcher

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

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

Annexe C

Scottish Government submission of 6 June 2022

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

Thank you for your email of 5 May 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. I have been asked to reply as I am responsible for policy on relationships, sexual health and parenthood (RSHP) education in the Scottish curriculum.

I appreciate the petitioners have previously corresponded with the Scottish Government through their local MSP and were informed the Scottish Government does not "prescribe" what is taught in Scottish schools. It may help if I set out the reasons why Scotland does not have a prescriptive curriculum as well as offer some further information on the wider work underway to help tackle gender based violence in schools. This is designed to ensure our pupils received relevant and meaningful learning and teaching to help create a safer society for women and girls.

In terms of defining the landscape of what is taught in Scottish schools, Scotland's curricular framework, Curriculum for Excellence, is set at a national level. The Scottish Government believes it is best for schools and teachers to design and deliver a curriculum that meets the needs of pupils and their communities and, as a result, it is for teachers to determine what is taught in their classrooms. This includes freedom to select the resources they consider will best help communicate particular topics or messages within their specific classroom context. Teachers are expected to use their professional judgement, experience and understanding of their pupils to respond sensitively to complex and challenging issues, when delivering learning and teaching within the curricular framework. It is considered good practice for schools to consult with their pupils and respond to their views appropriately, to ensure the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils in the school or educational setting.

To support teachers to deliver relevant and meaningful learning and teaching, including on the causes of gender based violence and ensure pupils leave school with the tools to help create a safer society for women and girls, there is a wide range of action and resources already in place on those topics, some of which were set out in the response provided through the local MSP. I have included below, further detail on these pieces of work which include:

- high quality RSHP education, an important part of the health and wellbeing curriculum in Scotland, which supports pupils to learn about safe and healthy relationships. Resources available to teachers, for example¹, include lesson plans to support progressive learning where pupils will leave school with an understanding of what sexual harassment is and discuss how sexual harassment in school can be tackled. They will also learn about the laws around sexual consent:
 - At first level (P2P4), learning is designed to encourage children to be whatever person they want to be, free from stereotypes and gender biased expectations;
 - At second level (P5P7), learning about a fair and equal life for boys and girls; on consent, where children learn abuse is wrong; and, on protecting me and abuse and relationships; and,
 - At third/fourth level (S1S3), learning about sexual harassment as well as about equalities and feminism;
- a resource² for professionals to help them support young people aged 11-18 in their understanding of healthy relationships and consent. This resource sets out that relationships should be mutually respectful, consensual, positive, healthy and enjoyable. The messages it contains are applicable to all romantic relationships – from those that are about holding hands to those where young people are sexually active, regardless of whether they are in same sex or mixed sex relationships. The messages are intended for professionals who work with young people (from secondary age to young adult) using their own professional judgement to determine when the messages are age and stage appropriate for the young person or people they are working with. A set of Key Messages on Healthy Relationships for ages 3-11, is also being developed.
- Gender Based Violence in Schools Working Group are developing a framework document to help ensure consistency in messages on sexual harassment and gender based violence to everyone working with children and young people. The Working Group will also carry

out a review of existing resources and identify examples of effective practice, as well as developing new resources.

- This framework will be backed up by resources that the Scottish Government have committed to developing from the Personal and Social Education review that will support schools to teach confidently about the issue of sexual harassment. The Personal and Social Education Lead Officer Network is working on collating resources to ensure teachers have confidence in delivering learning and teaching on sexual harassment.

I hope the Committee finds this letter helpful and I'm happy to provide any further information should the Committee require it.