



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Peer-on-peer sexual harassment in education settings: action plan

Action plan to prevent and respond to peer-on-peer sexual harassment in education settings.

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Introduction

Since the launch of the [Everyone's Invited platform](#), subsequent Estyn reviews and the Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee inquiry we now have a much greater awareness of the prevalence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment in our schools. We know that some children and young people are at greater risk, such as those who are LGBTQ+ and those who have additional learning needs (ALN). Compounding this is the complexity of how these experiences affect different people in different ways, including their learning, relationships, mental health and longer-term life prospects.

Sexual harassment can occur anywhere, including online. It is a societal issue, which needs a societal response. Education settings undoubtedly play a crucial role in this, educating children and young people about the importance of respectful behaviour and attitudes. Sexual harassment can also form part of a continuum of behaviours that enables abuse to manifest through shaping social norms and problematic cultures.

Children's rights

The Welsh Government adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and embedded it into Welsh legislation in the [Rights of Children and Young Persons \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#) (www.legislation.gov.uk). The UNCRC is the framework underpinning all our policy-making, to ensure we all uphold children's rights to be protected from violence and abuse.

Human rights is a cross-cutting theme within [Curriculum for Wales](#).

Learners should experience their rights through their education and develop a

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critical understanding of how their educational experience supports their rights. Schools and settings can develop this experience by taking a children's rights approach. A key principle of this approach is the rights of children and young people to participate in decisions about their learning and their wider school experience. However, learners and adults should have opportunities to collaborate to develop and maintain a school or setting community based on:

- equality
- dignity
- respect
- non-discrimination
- participation

This includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both practitioners and learners and promotes wellbeing.

This action plan will have a positive impact and contribution towards making the UNCRC a reality for children in Wales, and to the following articles of the UNCRC specifically:

- article 2 (non-discrimination)
- article 12 (have their voice heard in decisions that affect them)
- article 19 (be protected from violence, abuse and neglect)
- article 28 (have an education)
- article 34 (be kept safe from sexual abuse)
- article 36 (be kept safe from harm to their development)
- article 39 (have special help if they have been abused)

Sexual harassment can be a traumatic experience. It is important, therefore, for education settings to adopt a trauma-informed approach when dealing with peer-on-peer sexual harassment or other traumatic and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Taking an approach that is not trauma-informed could compound the victim's trauma or retraumatise them.

There is growing interest across schools, further education institutions (FEIs) and higher education institutions in trauma-informed approaches. To help support the development of consistent and good practice across services in Wales, the Welsh Government commissioned the development of a trauma-informed practice framework for Wales. The **Trauma-Informed Wales Framework** (traumaframeworkcymru.com) seeks to help everyone in Wales understand the impact trauma can have and everyone's roles in supporting those who are affected.

The Trauma-Informed Wales Framework has established 5 practice principles and 4 practice levels, and it is likely that different staff within an education setting will operate at different levels within this. However, all staff within the setting could benefit from being at least 'trauma-aware'. There are a range of training materials and resources available for schools and FEIs to help them become ACE-aware and trauma-informed. These can be found on the **Hwb** and **ACE Hub Wales**.

As well as being trauma-informed, approaches should be intersectional, recognising that different cohorts will have different experiences, responses and needs. Sexual harassment needs to be seen as part of a wider set of social and behavioural concerns, which need a holistic approach to ensure that children and young people are fully supported as members of their communities.

The actions in this plan are the priorities as they appear now, but this is intended to be a 'live' document that will evolve to meet new and different challenges and priorities in this space. As such, actions will be kept under review, including a continued dialogue with young people, to ensure ongoing value and impact in meeting needs. Progress against the plan will be reported, at a minimum annually, with the **Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Blueprint**, via its Children and Young People Workstream, ensuring whole-system scrutiny of progress made against the actions within this action plan.

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Sexual harassment

The Welsh Government-agreed definition of peer-on-peer sexual harassment in educational settings is as follows.

Any unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature by a learner towards another learner that can occur online and offline. Sexual harassment is likely to violate a learner's dignity, and/or make them feel intimidated, degraded or humiliated and/or create a hostile, offensive or sexualised environment.

Education professionals may encounter reports (from inside or outside their settings) of behaviours including:

- sexual comments, such as telling sexual stories, making lewd comments, making sexual remarks about clothes and appearance, and calling someone sexualised names
- sexual 'jokes' or taunting
- physical behaviour, such as deliberately brushing against someone, interfering with someone's clothes (schools and colleges should be considering when any of this crosses a line into sexual violence, it is important to talk to and consider the experience of the victim)
- displaying pictures, photos or drawings of a sexual nature
- upskirting (which is a criminal offence)
- online sexual harassment

Online sexual harassment may be standalone, or part of a wider pattern of sexual harassment or sexual violence. It may include:

- consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images or videos (taking and sharing nude photographs of under-18s is a criminal offence **Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people (www.gov.uk)** provides detailed

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- advice for schools and colleges)
- sharing of unwanted explicit content
 - sexualised online bullying or unwanted sexual comments and messages, including on social media
 - sexual exploitation, coercion and threats
 - coercing others into sharing images of themselves or performing acts they are not comfortable with online

The **Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015** defines sexual violence as sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, or threats of violence of a sexual nature.

Purpose

Peer-on-peer sexual harassment is a societal issue and this action plan outlines the actions the Welsh Government, working with partners, will undertake to prevent and respond to the issue of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and **harmful sexual behaviour (HSB)** (www.safeguarding.wales) in education settings. Evidence shows that girls and young women are the primary target of peer-on-peer sexual harassment, with LGBTQ+ learners and learners with ALN also at high risk. While evidence is less readily available about how other protected characteristics affect experiences of sexual harassment, we do know that issues of sexism often intersect with issues of racism, ableism and other forms of discrimination. This action plan aims to reflect the nature of sexual harassment as an intersectional issue and, in doing so, meet the needs of different groups of learners such as Black and minority ethnic, LGBTQ+, neurodiverse and disabled learners. The voice of young people will also be at the core of designing the response to peer-on-peer sexual harassment.

This action plan incorporates actions being taken to address:

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- the [recommendations of Estyn's report following a thematic review into experiences of peer-on-peer sexual harassment among pupils in secondary schools in Wales \(www.estyn.gov.wales\)](https://www.estyn.gov.wales), published in December 2021
- the [recommendations of Estyn's report following a thematic review into peer-on-peer sexual harassment in FEIs \(www.estyn.gov.wales\)](https://www.estyn.gov.wales), published in June 2023
- the [CYPE Committee inquiry \(business.senedd.wales\)](https://business.senedd.wales) into peer-on-peer sexual harassment

Scope of the action plan

This action plan is focused on peer-on-peer sexual harassment (as defined under 'Sexual harassment'), not on sexual abuse. We recognise the 2 issues are strongly interrelated, and it is important to note that sexual harassment is on a continuum of behaviours, which if left unchallenged can lead to sexual violence and abuse. However, there are nuanced differences. Sexual abuse and sexual harassment are quite different from a legal viewpoint. This action plan seeks to complement work to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse, including HSB and child sexual exploitation.

When considering incidents of sexual harassment between peers, it is important to identify if the behaviour is isolated or forms part of a recurring pattern. While isolated incidents could be qualified as inappropriate, a recurring pattern of sexual harassment could be an indicator of problematic behaviour that crosses the line into HSB.

HSB can be defined as sexual behaviours expressed by children and young people under the age of 18 that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards themselves or others, or be abusive towards another child, young person or adult. This definition of HSB includes both contact and non-

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contact behaviours (grooming, exhibitionism, voyeurism and sexting or recording images of sexual acts via smart phones or social media applications).

This action plan will focus on primary and secondary education settings (maintained and independent) and on FEIs. The work aligns with the VAWDASV National Strategy and the Blueprint approach to delivery. The governance of this action plan will sit within the VAWDASV working group on children and young people.

While this action plan focuses on schools and FEIs, we recognise that violence, harassment and abuse are issues in wider society and that they affect students and staff in higher education. As students in higher education are adults, often living and studying independently and away from their homes, higher education takes account of similar and different factors when supporting students experiencing violence, harassment, and abuse. The Welsh Government wrote to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) to raise the issue of sexual harassment and abuse with the higher education sector as a matter of urgency. In 2020, HEFCW, working with the Welsh Government, published sector guidance '**Tackling violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence in HE**' (www.hefcw.ac.uk). Universities in Wales are also informed by a series of UK-wide guidance published by Universities UK between 2016 and 2022 called '**Changing the Culture: our work on tackling harassment**' (www.universitiesuk.ac.uk).

All universities in Wales have wellbeing and health, including mental health strategies and suicide safer strategies which HEFCW monitors. Strategy-monitoring provides HEFCW with assurance that universities' strategies and plans remain fit for purpose, are appropriately ambitious and respond effectively to the needs of staff and students.

We will continue to collaborate with stakeholders and HEFCW, as well as the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) once established, to ensure a coherent approach to further developments across the post-16 sector.

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The scope of this action plan does not extend to abuse of power by employees within educational settings. However, the **VAWDASV Blueprint** is an action plan that draws together different organisations to jointly deliver a whole system approach to address key objectives including a focus on workplace harassment. Other workstreams will focus on gender-based harassment in all public spaces, and sustainable commissioning. Sustainable commissioning involves looking at:

- whole-system approach
- prevention and tackling perpetration
- the needs of older people
- the needs of children and young people

Within the governance structure, the team will be cognisant of the lessons to be learned from other areas such as the blueprints already created for Youth Justice and Female Justice as well as in other cross-cutting policy.

Vision

- Children and young people can recognise the characteristics of safe, healthy relationships and understand how healthy relationships are vital for a healthy body and mind.
- Children and young people develop the skills to form, nurture and maintain healthy relationships based on autonomy, equity and respect.
- Children and young people recognise the rights of themselves and others to be treated with fairness, kindness, compassion and empathy, and those rights are respected.
- Children and young people in Wales grow up free from damaging and limiting ideas around gender roles, power, control and coercive behaviour and are given the tools to be empowered to call out unacceptable behaviours when safe to do so.
- All children and young people are given the message that their voice, views

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and experiences are valued and taken seriously by adults and all avenues of reporting sexual harassment are welcomed, including online.

- Adults role model appropriate behaviour and are empowered to support children and young people's rights to equality, information and safety.
- Education settings understand their roles and responsibilities in ensuring that all children and young people have access to a safe learning environment in which they are comfortable, where peer-on-peer sexual harassment is challenged and addressed.

Background

In response to the testimonies on the [Everyone's Invited platform](#), the Minister for Education and Welsh Language commissioned Estyn to undertake a [thematic review into culture and processes in secondary schools \(www.estyn.gov.wales\)](#) to help protect and support young people better. Key findings to emerge were that:

- around half of all pupils say they have personal experience of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and three-quarters of all pupils report seeing other pupils experiencing this
- nearly all pupils understand how peer-on-peer sexual harassment can have a negative impact on young people's emotional and mental health
- a majority of female pupils (61%) report having personal experience of peer-on-peer harassment and many (82%) report seeing others experience it, compared with (respectively) 29% and 71% of male pupils
- according to pupils, there are only a few secondary schools who always deal well with incidences of negative or sexist attitudes when they are made aware of them

Subsequently, Estyn was commissioned to undertake a further [thematic review, focusing on peer-on-peer sexual harassment among 16 to 18-year-](#)

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old learners in further education (www.estyn.gov.wales). Key findings were that:

- colleges have well-established learner disciplinary policies and processes and most deal effectively with the most serious reported cases of alleged peer-on-peer sexual harassment
- although specific training sessions on addressing sexual harassment held by some colleges have helped staff to recognise incidents and address them appropriately, many staff still lack confidence in dealing with incidents and feel there is a need for more professional development as well as further education-specific resources to support them
- learners identifying as female, LGBTQ+ or as having an ALN may be more likely to experience sexual harassment, which can involve a mix of face-to-face and online issues

In December 2021, the **CYPE Committee commenced its inquiry into peer-on-peer sexual harassment (business.senedd.wales)**.

The inquiry focused on the issue of peer-on-peer sexual harassment among school and college-age learners. Its primary focus was on education settings themselves and what support education settings, colleges, other relevant organisations and families needed to protect children.

The inquiry report was published on the Senedd webpage on 13 July.

The report contains 24 recommendations covering a range of issues, some broad and some specific for the Welsh Government, Estyn and other bodies to action.

The recommendations from both Estyn reviews and the CYPE inquiry have informed this action plan.

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Context

Curriculum for Wales

Central to Curriculum for Wales is a **Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience** which aims to ensure that learning and support around issues such as physical, mental and emotional health are provided to all young people in Wales.

One of the four purposes of Curriculum for Wales is to support learners to become 'healthy, confident individuals'. The characteristics of this include learners being able to build relationships based on mutual trust and respect, as well as developing their mental and emotional wellbeing by improving their resilience and empathy. The Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience is about developing the capacity of learners to navigate life's opportunities and challenges, and helping them understand and value how feelings of belonging and connection that come from healthy relationships have a powerful effect on health and wellbeing.

The **Curriculum for Wales framework** has been developed to be inclusive of all learners and includes a mandatory **relationships and sexuality education (RSE) code of practice** ("the RSE Code").

Safeguarding all our young people and supporting them to navigate the complex area of RSE is vital. Schools and settings have an important role to play in creating safe and empowering environments and RSE will support learners' rights to enjoy fulfilling, healthy and safe relationships throughout their lives.

The RSE Code sets developmentally appropriate learning that aims to tackle issues such as bullying, sexual harassment and discrimination. Online safety in particular is a key feature within the RSE Code and educating young people on how to engage with social media safely is a cross-curricular issue. It aims to

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support learners to navigate a range of challenges, including:

- an understanding of the need to keep safe online, an ability to take steps to protect themselves and an ability to share with trusted adults where something is seen that should not have been or is upsetting or uncomfortable
- an awareness of the different kinds of harmful or abusive behaviour (such as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect, peer on peer harassment and bullying) and the role technology can play in them

Our **RSE guidance** is clear that learners should also be supported to:

- recognise all forms of discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect, including violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence
- seek help and advice where appropriate

The RSE Code includes mandatory learning on a number of very important issues relating to tackling harmful and discriminatory behaviours, including:

- developing a sense of individual and social responsibility to others, including consideration of how we respond to behaviours that are discriminatory, disrespectful and harmful, offline and online
- awareness of laws in place to protect from different forms of discrimination, violence, abuse, neglect and harassment

Enhancing digital resilience in education: An action plan to protect children and young people online

Originally published as the online safety action plan for children and young people in Wales in July 2018, this action plan set out the Welsh Government's commitment to working with a range of partner organisations across Wales to enhance online safety provision, policy and practice across Wales.

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Since then, the action plan has evolved to reflect the important roles cyber resilience and data security have in ensuring children and young people are safe and secure online. The Welsh Government's commitments to enhancing online safety are now articulated in our [digital resilience in education action plan for children and young people](#). The action plan sets out the actions we are undertaking to support children and young people, as well as their families and school communities to stay safe online.

A collaborative approach is essential to delivering our action plan. We are committed to working across government and with expert partners including the National Crime Agency, Internet Watch Foundation, UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS), the NSPCC, Internet Matters and Childnet.

A core element of this action plan is the provision of advice and support. **'Keeping safe online'** is a single dedicated area of Hwb that provides learners, families, education practitioners, professionals and governors with the latest resources, information, guidance and training to enhance their digital resilience. This includes a dedicated area to support with addressing the issue of online sexual harassment.

Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV)

The [VAWDASV strategy](#) was published in May 2022 and is the second strategy to be delivered under the groundbreaking Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015. The strategy outlines how we will work with other organisations to tackle VAWDASV. While setting the agenda for Welsh Government and the agencies it directs and funds, it is also a strategy for the whole of Wales, across government, including non-devolved bodies, the public and private sectors and the whole of Welsh society.

The second objective in the strategy closely aligns with the work of this action

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plan:

- Increase awareness in children, young people and adults of the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and empower them to make positive personal choices

The VAWDASV strategy will be delivered through a Blueprint approach that brings together devolved and non-devolved organisations with the aim of strengthening the partnership between public, private and specialist sectors. There will be a number of workstreams within the Blueprint and the Children and Young People Workstream, will be the mechanism for taking forward this action plan and holding delivery partners to account. Integration and interdependencies will be highlighted across all workstreams to ensure that there is a joined-up approach to delivering objectives.

The **National Training Framework** on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence provides guidance on the statutory requirements for training across the public service and specialist third sector. The framework is made up of 6 groups. All professions within the public service, including education, will fall into one of these groups and a minimum training requirement is outlined per group.

Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

The **National Action Plan Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse** set out actions the Welsh Government would take to prevent child sexual abuse, and to support children who are sexually abused. This 3-year action plan ended on the 30 June 2022. A delivery report about what was achieved under the action plan was published at the end of November 2022. The Welsh Government will review what has been achieved under the action plan, consider the recent recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (published in October 2022) and commission engagement events with key

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stakeholders to inform the next phase of work. Regional safeguarding boards continue to take forward work on this issue.

The Wales Safeguarding Procedures and All Wales Practice Guides explain to practitioners how to apply the safeguarding legislation and guidance. They promote consistent, evidence-based safeguarding practice across agencies and across Wales. Currently, an all Wales practice guide on safeguarding children from child sexual abuse is being considered by the Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board. The board will go on to publish the guide, the date is to be confirmed but is expected to be early in 2024.

Youth Justice Blueprint

The Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales, published in July 2019, sets out the vision for youth justice in Wales, taking a 'children-first' rights approach. This means ensuring our efforts are child-centred rather than service-focused, responding in a way that recognises the best interests of the child in order to best meet individual need.

Through the Youth Justice Blueprint Prevention Workstream a practical framework for the delivery of preventative services in Wales is being developed collaboratively with youth offending services and other key stakeholders. It will build on existing good practice and the evidence base of what works. The high-level goal of the Youth Justice Blueprint Prevention Workstream is to further embed a consistent model of practice across Wales which enables collaboration between services while also supporting innovative practice and allowing for flexibility to meet local circumstances.

In our work to develop a Youth Justice Prevention Framework consideration will be given to peer-on-peer sexual harassment as well as other offending behaviour.

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Serious Violence Duty

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 received Royal Assent in April 2022 (UK Parliament). It creates a new Serious Violence Duty (SVD) which will require local authorities, the police, fire and rescue authorities, specified criminal justice agencies and local health boards to work together to:

- formulate an evidence-based analysis of the problems associated with serious violence in a local area
- produce and implement a strategy detailing how they will respond to those particular issues

Serious violence has a devastating impact on lives of victims, their families, and communities, and is extremely costly to society. The Duty is a key part of the UK Government's programme to prevent and reduce serious violence. It takes a multi-agency approach, focusing on prevention and early intervention, and is informed by evidence. This policy intention is supported by the Welsh Government as it will benefit the people and communities of Wales in improving their safety.

In December 2022, the **Serious Violence Duty statutory guidance** was published which included a Wales-specific chapter to capture the different legislative and partnership structures in Wales. This chapter was developed in partnership with the Wales Safer Communities Network and the Wales Violence Prevention Unit.

The **Serious Violence Duty Strategic Needs Assessment Guidance for Wales (www.violencepreventionwales.co.uk)** was published in March 2023. Partnerships are currently expected to publish their first serious violence strategy within a year of the date of the implementation of the Duty.

To support partnerships in developing their serious violence response strategy,

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the Wales Violence Prevention Unit has co-designed **A Shared Framework for Preventing Violence among Children and Young People** (www.violencepreventionwales.co.uk) with the Peer Action Collective Cymru. The development of this framework has included extensive consultation with professionals across Wales, including workshops, interviews and an online consultation, and children and young people through workshops, a 'pop-up' shop and an online consultation.

The framework, which focuses on primary prevention, includes a definition of violence among children and young people which was developed by children and young people, information on the risk and protective factors of violence among children and young people, and detail of strategies that work to prevent this violence. It also provides partners with guidance on effective evaluation of interventions to prevent violence.

Remote learning as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19)

The COVID-19 pandemic has had direct implications for all of us, particularly our learners, who spent more and more time on online platforms during successive lockdowns. While the pandemic was in no way a catalyst for online abuse and harassment, it did result in an escalation with Childline seeing an 11% increase in contacts about online sexual abuse during the lockdowns.

The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) identified that the pandemic encouraged activity online for learning, gaming and entertainment. Education staff needed to ensure that they understood online platforms, particularly TikTok, and how best to manage any incidents on those platforms in terms of reporting, signposting and supporting children and young people.

Estyn's thematic reviews also reminded us that social networking platforms are a vehicle for peer-on-peer sexual harassment. Some sexual harassment takes

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place on social networking platforms that may not occur otherwise. The National Education Union told us that the pandemic has led to a huge increase in activity on social media, for instance using cameras and uploading videos to TikTok.

CollegesWales, the WLGA and ADEW told us there had been a significant increase in the use of platforms such as TikTok during the lockdowns, which made sharing of sexual images easier. One college noted a number of incidences relating to harassment and involving messaging apps such as Snapchat and WhatsApp. They added that when “speaking with learners who have sent such messages or images, it takes some time to explore with them the impact receiving such messages has on a person”.

We appreciate that the pandemic may have had an impact on learners’ access to quality personal and social education (PSE) provision. We are confident, however, that schools are now making good progress with the implementation of RSE within Curriculum for Wales. Whether learners are formally under the current PSE curriculum or the new RSE Code in the coming years, we are confident that the new RSE Code and statutory guidance, professional learning offer and resources will support practitioners teaching under both.

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

www.legislation.gov.uk aims to tackle the long-term challenges in Welsh communities in order to create a Wales that we all want to live in, now and in the future. The 7 wellbeing goals it outlines will be supported by this action plan, ensuring a collaborative vision and approach.

In line with the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, schools and colleges should maintain an emphasis on prevention, in terms of early intervention, with a view to reducing the risks children are exposed to and subsequent difficulties in later life. Exposure to ACEs, and other sources of

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adversity and trauma, is associated with poorer health and wellbeing outcomes across the whole life course. Early identification, intervention and action to prevent and mitigate the impact of ACEs is vital.

Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Schemes (WNHSS) and a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing

A health-promoting school is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as a school that is constantly strengthening its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning and working. The concept of health-promoting schools embodies a whole-school approach to promoting health and attainment in school communities by using the organisational potential of schools to foster the physical, social-emotional and psychological conditions for health as well as for positive education outcomes.

The Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Schemes (WNHSS) supports schools to develop and sustain whole school approaches to health and wellbeing within schools in line with national criteria. This includes developing, embedding and sustaining a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing. In March 2021, the Welsh Government issued the **Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being** as statutory guidance to governing bodies of maintained pupil referral units (PRUs) and nursery, primary, secondary, middle and special schools, as well as to local authorities in Wales. The framework aims to provide direction to address the emotional and mental wellbeing needs of all learners and the wider whole school community. As part of a whole-school approach, the framework and accompanying guidance and support provided gives schools the opportunity, through a continuous improvement approach, to promote positive emotional and mental wellbeing, prevent mental ill health and to take action to support individuals where needed.

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Both the statutory framework and the supporting WNHSS programme promote equity as a driving principle alongside core values of belonging, relationships and voice.

The [VAWDASV educational toolkit](#), which provides primary, secondary and further education providers with a range of best practice materials, will be reviewed through the Children and Young People Workstream of the VAWDASV Blueprint.

Actions

1. Prevention

Education settings adopt a whole-system approach to create safe learning environments to prevent peer-on-peer sexual harassment before it occurs. Settings support learners to:

- develop the knowledge, skills and values to identify what is and is not appropriate sexual behaviour
- understand the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships
- provide safe supportive environments where learners can grow and develop pro-social norms and values

1.1 Through the RSE Code, the Welsh Government will ensure children and young people are:

- taught about the forms sexual harassment can take, its consequences and the underlying culture that allows sexual harassment to become normalised
- provided with the skills to develop and maintain healthy relationships, and to recognise and respond to HSB

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This includes the role of peer groups as well as intimate partner relationships, to encompass the breadth of ways young people can experience sexual harassment.

1.2 The Welsh Government will support schools to develop clear policies on preventing and responding to incidence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment. This will include the safe use of electronic devices.

1.3 The Welsh Government will publish national trans guidance for education settings to support schools in supporting trans students. Guidance will set out how leaders and practitioners can ensure trans learners feel safe, included and welcome in their education environment.

1.4 The Welsh Government will update its statutory anti-bullying guidance 'Rights, respect, equality' to set out more specific information about how to prevent and respond to prejudice-based bullying and harassment of learners. This will include specific considerations in relation to holistically protecting the rights of learners with protected characteristics, including those who are LGBTQ+.

1.5 Funded by the Welsh Government in 2023 to 2024, further education colleges are working together to carry out a collaborative project. The project aims, through research, to gain a greater understanding of the current issues within the sector and in turn will provide professional learning opportunities for staff in recognising possible signs of peer on peer sexual harassment and how to manage incidents.

2. Early intervention

To identify and provide support for children and young people experiencing, witnessing, and perpetrating sexual harassment at the earliest opportunity, providing safe, accessible and effective support, Welsh Government will do the

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following.

2.1 We will continue to support Welsh Government-funded helplines, specifically Childline Cymru, Live Fear Free and Meic.

2.2 Working with partners, we will collaborate with children and young people to support learner-led early interventions, particularly by those with lived experiences.

2.3 We will collaborate with partners to develop resources that aid education settings in supporting learners who are displaying harmful behaviours.

2.4 We will **review current guidance on peer sexual abuse**, exploitation and HSB and consider what additional support might be needed by education settings to develop robust safety plans, underpinned by restorative approaches.

2.5 Alongside the Young People's Advisory Board and those with lived experience, we will carry out a review into the support provided to young people who have experienced peer-on-peer sexual harassment, with a view to making recommendations to education settings, local authorities and others as required to improve the quality and timeliness of that support.

3. Learner support and wellbeing

The Welsh Government will ensure all learners have access to a safe learning environment that promotes their wellbeing and empowers them to be able to report and safely challenge all forms of harassment, providing a safe place to disclose information about unwanted behaviours to help protect them from harm.

3.1 We will establish a children and young people's advisory board, made up of a representative sample of young people across Wales, to co-design the Welsh Government's response to peer-on-peer sexual harassment to ensure children

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and young people's voices are central to our response.

3.2 Alongside the Young People's Advisory Board, we will conduct an awareness-raising campaign targeted at learners across Wales about the sources of support available for those who have experienced sexual harassment.

3.3 We will update the Welsh Government's statutory anti-bullying guidance in relation to how schools and local authorities can use data around sexual harassment to identify trends and patterns, as well as how this information can be shared for transparency.

3.4 We will collaborate with schools and the further education sector to improve the consistency and effectiveness of reporting and analysis of bullying and harassment, recognising the range of safeguarding and wellbeing issues that learners may experience and supporting the sector to strengthen recording and reporting.

3.5 We will support schools to consider the needs of their staff and learners in relation to addressing peer-on-peer sexual harassment as part of their improvement plans, linked to embedding the Welsh Government's Framework on a whole-school approach for emotional and mental wellbeing and the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework.

3.6 Through Estyn inspection activity, we will consider the effectiveness of the systems and processes used in schools and colleges for staff to record concerns about peer-on-peer sexual harassment and actions, and how well they use monitoring systems and stakeholders' views to evaluate the quality of their work and plan for improvement.

3.7 Through Estyn inspection activity, we will consider how well schools and colleges record and respond to incidents of sexual harassment and how well they manage those who are displaying harmful behaviours.

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4. Professional learning and leadership

The Welsh Government will ensure the development of quality professional learning, designed collaboratively with children and young people, to ensure that education settings feel confident speaking and teaching about all forms of sexual harassment, gender stereotypes and misogyny in a developmentally appropriate way, which is responsive to learners needs, for example those who are particularly vulnerable to grooming and exploitative relationships.

4.1 We will ensure that work on professional learning in all education settings reflects the specific experiences and needs of learners who are particularly vulnerable to grooming and exploitative relationships, including but not limited to those learners with ALN and LGBTQ+ learners. Professional learning should also recognise the nature of sexual harassment as an intersectional issue and, in doing so, meet the needs of different groups of learners, such as Black and minority ethnic learners.

4.2 We will support professional learning in further education to recognise sexual harassment and abuse, challenge inappropriate behaviour and support healthy relationships, tailored to the post-16 context and curricula.

4.3 We are working with partners to ensure that schools and settings are supported with professional learning and resources on designing a fully LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum. This will include delivering LGBTQ+ inclusive RSE for all.

4.4 We will develop training programmes and guidance to empower professionals to adequately support LGBTQ+ young people and tackle homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying by embedding a rights-based approach. This will provide an opportunity to align these two pieces of work here, and to use the whole-school approach guidance as the basis for professional learning.

4.5 We will develop a toolkit of resources to preventing and responding to all forms of discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect, including violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

4.6 We will provide training to empower professionals to adequately support and enable learners with neurodivergent characteristics and other ALN to understand and recognise sexual harassment and abuse, challenge inappropriate behaviour and develop healthy relationships.

4.7 We will collaborate with local authorities to create and maintain databases of third sector organisations that provide support services for education settings and colleges that could assist them in their response to peer-on-peer sexual harassment.

4.8 We will work alongside Estyn, WNHSS, relevant academics and the Young People's Advisory Board to gather and collate examples of evidence-based practice alongside local good practice examples of peer-on-peer sexual harassment, with a view to creating a bank of resources for education settings to facilitate the sharing of good practice across Wales.

5. Parents, carers and the community

The Welsh Government will support parents, carers and families to talk to their children about sexual harassment, outlining what steps parents and carers can take to limit their children's access to inappropriate content and establish healthy norms in the community.

5.1 Alongside the Young People's Advisory Board, we will carry out an awareness-raising campaign targeted at parents, carers and families to raise awareness and develop understanding of peer-on-peer sexual harassment, including how and when it is perpetrated and the impact it has on young people.

5.2. Through the '**Parenting. Give it Time**' website, we will promote links to resources to support families experiencing incidents of peer-on-peer sexual harassment, including families of LGBTQ+ young people.

5.3 We will develop resources specifically targeted at families of neurodivergent learners to help them both understand the impact of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and talk to and support their children.

5.4 As part of our work to develop Community Focused Schools, we will build positive relationships with parents and carers, and support them with information and guidance about sexual harassment and other unwanted behaviours of a sexual nature.

6. Addressing sexual harassment in the online context

The Welsh Government will support education settings, children and young people and their families to better understand what constitutes online sexual harassment, the impact it can have, ways it can be prevented and how to effectively respond to online incidents. This programme of work is part of a wider commitment to support digital resilience in education (see the '**Enhancing digital resilience in education**' action plan).

6.1 We will engage with children and young people to ensure their voice is central to our work to challenge the normalisation of sexual harassment online.

6.2 We will provide direct advice to children and young people through the Keeping safe online area of Hwb so that they can recognise the different types of online sexual harassment and understand what to do, how to report and what support they can access if they are affected.

6.3 We will work with young people and partners to develop campaigns that support important conversations about unacceptable online behaviours,

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including sexual harassment.

6.4 We will support education settings with training to develop their approach to effectively prevent and respond to online sexual harassment.

6.5 We will provide guidance to support education settings to embed a culture in which online sexual harassment is unacceptable and ensure a consistent and appropriate response to incidents, treating them with the same seriousness as any other safeguarding concern.

6.6 We will ensure that there are bilingual resources available on Hwb to support education settings to address the issue of online sexual harassment with their learners in an appropriate way.

6.7 We will provide information and advice for families to support with the cooperation and communication between education settings, learners and their parents and carers in addressing online sexual harassment.

6.8 The Welsh Government will continue to engage with the UK Government on the development of the Online Safety Bill.

7. Research and evaluation

The Welsh Government will continue to explore possible solutions, undertake evaluation, and learn from existing or planned research into sexual harassment.

7.1 We will consider what research is needed to understand instances of peer-on-peer sexual harassment among primary school-aged children, drawing on the expertise and guidance of children's charities, academics and the Children's Commissioner for Wales as appropriate.

7.2 We will support Welsh colleges to fully explore the issues of peer-on-peer sexual harassment, deliver training, evaluate the impact of that training, review

guidance and develop appropriate methods of reporting abuse and sexual harassment for learners.

7.3 We will partner with Swansea University on the C2CHAT, Child2Child Abuse Talk research project which will scope how linguistic analysis of child-to-child sexually abusive digital discourse could enhance practitioner understandings. Research findings and recommendations will be used as a platform for future research and the potential development of prevention resources based on the new perspective that linguistic analysis can offer into the realities of children's lived experience.

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