

Agenda – Children, Young People and Education Committee

Meeting Venue:	For further information contact:
Hybrid – Committee room 4 Tŷ Hywel and video conference via Zoom	Naomi Stocks Committee Clerk
Meeting date: 23 November 2022	0300 200 6565
Meeting time: 09.15	SeneddChildren@senedd.wales

Private pre-meeting

(09.00 – 09.15)

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

(09.15)

2 Mental Health support in Higher Education – evidence session 9

(09.15 – 10.45)

(Pages 1 – 32)

Jeremy Miles MS, Minister for Education and Welsh Language

Lynne Neagle MS, Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing

Sinead Gallagher, Deputy Director of Higher Education Division, Welsh
Government

Tracey Breheny, Deputy Director Mental Health and Vulnerable Groups, Welsh
Government

Attached Documents:

Research Brief

Welsh Government – CYPE(6)–24–22 – Paper 1



3 Papers to note

3.1 Scrutiny of the financial implications of Bills

(Pages 33 – 35)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Finance Committee to the First Minister CYPE(6)-24-22 – Paper to note 1

3.2 Forward work programme

(Pages 36 – 38)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing – CYPE(6)-24-22 – Paper to note 2

3.3 Peer on peer sexual harassment among learners

(Pages 39 – 53)

Attached Documents:

Information submitted by NASUWT in response to the letter sent on the 26 September about sexual harassment of school staff – CYPE(6)-24-22 – Paper to note 3

3.4 Peer on peer sexual harassment among learners

(Page 54)

Attached Documents:

Information submitted by NEU in response to the letter sent on the 26 September about sexual harassment of school staff – CYPE(6)-24-22 – Paper to note 4

3.5 Peer on peer sexual harassment among learners

(Pages 55 – 75)

Attached Documents:

Information submitted by UNISON in response to the letter sent on the 26 September about sexual harassment of school staff – CYPE(6)-24-22 – Paper to note 5

4 Motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to resolve to exclude the public from the remainder of this meeting

(10.45)

5 Mental Health support in Higher Education – consideration of the evidence

(10.45 – 10.55)

6 Online Safety Bill – briefing from UK Government officials (POSTPONED)

Break

(10.55 – 11.05)

7 Legislative Consent: Schools Bill – consideration of the draft report

(11.05 – 11.20)

(Pages 76 – 80)

Attached Documents:

Draft Report on the Schools Bill LCM – Private Paper 1

8 Peer on peer sexual harassment among learners – consideration of correspondence from Teaching Unions

(11.20 – 11.30)

Document is Restricted

CYPE(6)-24-22 - Paper 1

Jeremy Miles AS/MS
Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd Meddwl a Llesiant
Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing

Jayne Bryant MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee
SeneddChildren@senedd.wales

10 November 2022

Dear Jayne,

Thank you for the invitation to attend Committee as part of its inquiry into Mental Health Support in Higher Education. Attached is written evidence that we are submitting jointly in advance of our attendance at the 23 November session.

We look forward to discussing this topic in more detail with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Jeremy Miles AS/MS
Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd Meddwl a Llesiant
Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

CYPE Evidence Paper: Mental Health Support in Higher Education

We welcome the opportunity to provide information in support of the Committee's inquiry into mental health support in HE. We have addressed each of the Committee's areas of interest below, as set out in the inquiry's terms of Reference, and look forward to discussing these further with the Committee on 23 November.

Extent of need

The current situation with regard to the mental health of students in higher education, and any particular challenges they face with their mental health and ability to access support.

With record numbers of students entering higher education, combined with the pandemic and cost of living crisis, we might expect to see a rise in the numbers of students declaring that they have a mental health condition. Research, from Universities UK and the Education Policy Institute amongst others, suggests that changing student demographics may lie behind the higher prevalence of mental health issues.

In 2021 UCAS identified an increase of 450% in mental health declarations over the last decade¹, estimating that over 70,000 students with mental health conditions may enter HE each year. Whilst this suggests an increased willingness to declare a condition, 49% of first year students surveyed with a mental health condition chose not to declare it. The UCAS study also identifies an increase in the number of students declaring a mental health condition once they start at university, indicating students remain reluctant to declare a mental health concern at the application stage. This suggests some students still perceive a stigma around poor mental health which needs to be addressed if we are going to be able to provide these students with the support they need whilst at university to help them succeed and realise their potential.

The 2022 Student Academic Survey² also provides an insight into the current mental health and well-being of students and identifies a number of factors that can impact their sense of well-being and health:

- 30% of students reported they had considered leaving their course, and of those 34% the main reason being their mental/emotional health;
- Students have reported significantly lower levels of wellbeing than ONS surveys of the general population, both before and since the pandemic;
- only 14% of students reported 'low anxiety' compared to 37% of the general population in 2021 (ONS); and
- 23% of students report feeling lonely "most or all of the time", compared to only 5% of the general population. The proportions are higher amongst black, LGB+, disabled and trans students³.

¹ [450% increase in student mental health declarations over last decade but progress still needed to address declarations stigma | Undergraduate | UCAS](#)

² [AdvHE HEPI SAES 2022 1654522609.pdf](#)

³ Distinct analysis was conducted on the experiences of students who identify as being trans or have a trans history.

We are also seeing an increase in the numbers entering HE from more deprived areas for whom financial concerns may be more prevalent.

Mental health support for students in higher education is tailored to the needs of this group, reflecting their status as independent adults and recognising the particular pressures they face around living independently, managing their own money and coping with the challenge of independent study.

We recognise the tension this can create where students may nevertheless be dependent on their families for financial and emotional support. We are also very aware of the sensitivities that need to be managed in supporting students with their mental health. We welcome the UUK's publication of guidance⁴ for the sector on how and when institutions should intervene where they have serious concerns about the safety of a student. The tragic cases of student suicides and rising incidence of mental health declarations highlight the need for institutions to be proactive in recognising where students are struggling; for them to ensure their processes and procedures are appropriate and are being followed; and for any barriers to students accessing health services are identified and addressed.

Whether there are different challenges with regard to mental health for different groups of students, and if there are any groups of students in higher education who are disproportionately affected by poor mental health.

With increased access and growth in the numbers entering HE we must be alert to the potential for higher levels of risk for those who might be the first in their family to go to university, may be returning to education from employment, or from a low participation background. For most learners attending university is an exciting time but it can be an unfamiliar environment for some. Progression to university can be challenging, especially where students are separated from familiar support mechanisms and services. For some young people the move to living independently, whilst also making new friends and settling into their studies are new responsibilities which can be difficult to balance. There are many factors that can affect mental health and some students will experience multiple factors.

In taking forward our student finance reforms we recognised the link between high levels of financial concern and poor student mental health. Our student finance package aims to relieve some of that worry by providing help where it is needed. We provide the highest level of maintenance support of all the UK administrations for undergraduate students. Students receive a guaranteed level of maintenance support, based on the National Living Wage, irrespective of their household income. Other grants are available to eligible students, including grants in connection with a disability and for students with dependents. Additional support may also be available for students in receipt of social security benefits.

The effect, if any, that Covid-19 had generally on students' mental health and well-being and the pandemic's impact on the levels and type of support provided by the higher education sector.

⁴ [Universities to involve trusted contacts when there are serious concerns about a student's safety or mental health \(universitiesuk.ac.uk\)](https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk)

HE in Wales and across the UK was significantly affected by the COVID pandemic: in-person teaching and learning was suspended for significant periods causing disruption to learning and repeated periods of self-isolation and quarantine requirements, travel restrictions and restrictions on socialising all impacted negatively on the wellbeing, physical and mental health of many staff, students and graduates. The impact of repeated periods of lockdown and isolation may have exacerbated a range of mental health issues, in addition to increasing feelings of loneliness, anxiety and lack of belonging contributing to increased levels of poor physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing,

Students faced an enormous challenge during the pandemic to remain at university, to keep themselves and those around them well and to stay engaged with their studies. Recognising these particular difficulties and challenges we allocated additional funding of £50m to HEFCW in 2020-21 to bolster support for students, particularly those facing financial, emotional or mental health difficulties. £10m was provided specifically for student mental health and well-being services and £40m to boost support for students facing financial hardship. A further £27m was also provided to HEFCW to establish a Higher Education Investment and Recovery Fund designed to support the sector in mitigating the effects of the pandemic including maintaining teaching capacity to support continued learning.

HEFCW had been working with our universities and with students prior to the pandemic, to develop a Wales-wide, strategic approach to well-being and health, including mental health. The additional funding enabled HEFCW and the sector to build on this strategic approach and extend the range of measures and interventions offered to students. Institutions were able to increase capacity within their students support services and in student unions to provide advice, support and well-being services. Hardship funding included targeted help for those students who were most in need as a result of the pandemic and facing greatest financial hardship due to ongoing lockdown restrictions. This included support for student mental health and student hardship services, providing food packages, access to resources and digital learning, counselling and bereavement support as well as accommodation costs.

In 2021-22 HE institutions received a further £2.1m via HEFCW to support their response to the impacts of the pandemic: £1.3m was provided to support well-being activities for students aged 25 or under as part of the “Winter of Well-being” to help them to better engage with their learning and wider society. Institutions were required to work collaboratively with their Student Unions in the designing and delivering activities to support and improve the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of participating young people; and £750k was provided to fund improvements to ventilation in campus buildings to improve air quality and reduce risks associated with the spread of the virus. £600k has been allocated to HEFCW in 2022-23, from the Post-16 and Transition Project under the Renew and Reform Programme, to deliver a package of mentoring support to learners engaged in 16-19 education.

Responding to the pandemic required a huge, sustained and concerted effort across all HE activities. While the challenges were unprecedented, requiring a rapid and urgent response and some very difficult decisions to be made, we also saw great innovation and some positive developments and opportunities that we should

capitalise upon. We need to ensure that progress in these areas is not lost.

Identification and provision

How effectively higher education providers promote an ethos of universal good mental health and well-being to all students, and whether this an integral part of the learning experience and interactions with staff.

How effectively the sector ensures early identification of students who need individual and targeted support.

Our annual, targeted funding has enabled HEFCW to increase the support institutions are able to offer both staff and students. HEFCW has developed a strategic approach to this work. Through the efforts of HEFCW, Universities Wales and NUS Wales working together with leading health charities and other agencies, we have seen significant improvements in recent years in the assistance and support provided to students during their time at university. This is a long-term commitment, firmly embedded within institutions' strategic operations.

HEFCW's 2019 Well-being and Health Policy Statement committed them to ensuring providers' make an ongoing commitment to well-being and health. Since 2019 all Welsh HEIs have had well-being and health, including mental health, strategies in place. HEFCW monitor institutions' strategies and provide feedback and challenge to ensure they remain fit for purpose, they are appropriately ambitious and respond effectively to the needs of staff and students in HE, enabling universities to strengthen their approach, and to share good practice.

In reviewing their strategies, and to inform their further development, HEFCW requires universities to use the [UUK Stepchange self-assessment toolkit](#). The UUK self-assessment tool was developed to encourage universities to plan and implement a whole university approach, as set out in Stepchange: mentally healthy universities.

HEFCW have embedded the Universities UK: Stepchange mentally healthy university and Suicide Safer frameworks into their policy work. From 2019/20, all Wales universities committed to adopt the Universities UK Step change: mentally healthy universities [Stepchange: mentally healthy universities \(sustainabilityexchange.ac.uk\)](#) and Suicide-Safer Universities approaches [Suicide-safer universities \(universitiesuk.ac.uk\)](#). HEFCW has also updated its 2019 guidance on Student Charters, which requires institutions' Charters to include a statement on its commitment to supporting student well-being, including mental health, and signposting to related well-being and health and mental health policies and information. From 2022/23 HEFCW expects institutions to include a commitment to promoting student health and wellbeing and a commitment to supporting suicide-safer approaches from 2022/23.

Whilst we have seen significant progress in recent years we are not complacent in our responsibilities to these young people. The rise in the incidence of students declaring a mental health condition, the tragic occurrence of suicides in the UK student population (in the academic year ended 2020 it is estimated 64 university

students took their own lives in in England and Wales⁵⁾) and increasing numbers of students seeking to access student support services, there is clearly more we must do to support students during their time at university. More innovative and collaborative approaches will be required to ensure support services are able adequately to meet the needs of these students and are tailored to their particular circumstances, as a mobile population.

How effectively the higher education sector and the NHS work together to deliver the right mental health support for individual students when and where they need it.

In 2019, additional WG funding of £2m enabled HEFCW to fund five innovative, collaborative well-being and health projects. The collaborations, led by Welsh universities, aimed to improve the well-being and mental health provision and identify approaches that were sustainable and could be shared across HE in Wales and more widely, to secure whole system change.

The fund provided £600k to support the pilot phase of the Mental Health University Liaison Service, a service developed by the South East Wales Mental Health Partnership, a collaboration between Cardiff University, Cardiff Metropolitan University, the University of South Wales, the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, and delivered in partnership with the NHS through Cardiff and Vale Health Board. This innovative project, which was launched at the Senedd in June, aims to bridge the gap between university Student Support Services and local NHS mental health services by improving access to crucial mental health support in cases where students are presenting as particularly at risk or unwell.

Students and service providers should have a clear and consistent understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different service providers and the extent of the support each service is able to provide. We were pleased to meet with representatives of the Universities Wales led cross-sector working group earlier this year to discuss their policy principles and recommendations. Their work has helped to highlight the particular issues experienced by learners as they progress through different stages of their education and transition between NHS services.

This is everybody's business in which we all have a part to play. The Deputy Minister will be Chairing a new cross-sector policy advisory group focussing on identifying prevention and early intervention measures that will reduce the incidence of poor mental health and improve well-being. The Group will also focus on the interface between health services and tertiary education, examining the barriers that lead to poor or unequitable access to services. We are committed to developing a whole system, whole service approach, framed around the needs of learners.

Whether there are specific issues with access to NHS mental health support, for example the impact of changing GPs more frequently; that many students are at an age where they are transitioning from CAMHS to adult mental health services; any issues with data sharing.

⁵ [Estimating suicide among higher education students, England and Wales: Experimental Statistics - Office for National Statistics](#)

Improving mental health support is a priority for the Welsh Government and an additional £50m has been allocated for mental health and well-being support in 2022-23.

We are clear the only sustainable way of responding to rising demand and the multifaceted nature of mental health support is to ensure there is good, universal support available and good access to specialised services which is why we are adopting a whole system approach to service provision in Wales.

We have developed the NEST/NYTH Framework as a planning tool for RPBs to implement a Whole System Approach in their areas. We have recently appointed a NEST Implementation Lead who is working across Government, with RPBs and external stakeholders to truly embed NYTH/NEST in children and young people's policy. The NYTH/NEST Framework aims to improve children and young people's mental health and wellbeing through providing a no wrong door approach to accessing support and adopting a preventative approach to mental health.

We have strengthened and expanded our tier 0/1 offer to provide open access to a range of non-clinical mental health support that can be accessed over the phone or online without a referral from a health professional.

This includes the Young Person's Mental Health Toolkit which links young people, aged 11 to 25, to websites, apps, helplines, and more to build resilience across six categories; anxiety, low mood, keeping active and healthy, bereavement, coronavirus information, and crisis support.

Young people and their families in Wales can now access free online mental health therapy through the NHS without needing to be referred by a GP. Following a successful pilot in Powys, SilverCloud Wales online therapy now has a suite of support programmes designed to help young people manage their mental health and wellbeing. Parents and carers can sign up for a free 12-week online therapy programme to help children and young people aged 4-18 with mild-to-moderate anxiety. Teens aged 16-18 can also sign up themselves, without needing adult consent, for support with anxiety or low mood directly via their mobile, tablet or laptop.

We also recognise there are specific challenges in Higher Education settings linked with young people leaving home and travelling to different parts of the UK to visit university. This presents challenges in terms of providing a seamless transfer between health services in different parts of the country with data sharing being a key area of concern when it comes to sharing medical records. From the point the record is received in Wales, the current paper process can take up to 11 days. To make this more efficient and seamless work is underway to transfer medical records digitally within 30 minutes of a patient registering with a GP. We expect this to be rolled out in Wales within the next 12 months.

There is an added complexity for CYP in this age group who will have the dual challenge of transitioning through both the education and care system.

In January 2022 TGP Cymru were contracted by the Welsh Government to engage and deliver a small number of face to face or virtual workshops with young people across Wales who have experienced/are experiencing CAMHS to AMHS transition services in-order to understand and establish what transition support solution they would value.

The report included some helpful insights and recommendations in terms of how the sCAMHS to AMHS transition could be improved by, for example, improving the access to information around transitions and redesigning the young person passport.

Officials are in the process of bringing together the dedicated Mental Health Transition Managers across Wales to consider the recommendations in detail and what can be done to further improve the service across Wales.

This review will consider how HBs in Wales work with universities and HBs across the UK to ensure that geographical transitions between services are also streamlined.

How well the wider post-16 education sector works to promote good mental health, particularly with regard to transitions.

We have adopted a whole system approach to health and well-being building on the commitment in Education in Wales: Our National Mission to excellence, equity and well-being in our education system.

The new Curriculum for Wales places greater emphasis on health and well-being, supporting learners to make sense of their experiences and feelings and developing an understanding of where and how to seek help and support. The Curriculum for Wales also emphasises the importance of transition into post 16 education and any effective transition would need to consider learners' health and well-being and the support they had received in school.

The post-16 education and training sector provides several well-established services to support student mental health and wellbeing across universities and colleges:

In higher education, universities have provided a range of services and resources to support student mental health for many years based on a strategic approach, as outlined above.

In further education, Welsh Government has provided over £10m of funding to support the mental health and wellbeing of staff and learners since 2020. This funding has supported the development of mental health and wellbeing strategies within further education colleges and has also enabled the appointment of wellbeing staff, pastoral coaches, counsellors, and mentors.

In the 2021-22 academic year, over £33m of additional funding was issued to FE colleges and school sixth forms to support learner progression. A further £13m was allocated to FE colleges and local authorities to support the transition of learners into and between the post-16 sectors.

In December 2021 funding was allocated to ‘Winter of Wellbeing’ activities aimed at supporting the social, emotional, and physical wellbeing of children and young people up to 25 years of age over the winter months of 2021/22; delivered by universities, FE colleges, local authorities, schools, and national organisations.

Funding has also been provided for the ‘University Ready’ project, a collection of resources from Welsh universities hosted by the Open University’s Open Learn platform, to support learners transitioning to higher education whose learning has been disrupted by the pandemic.

In summer 2021 Welsh Government published the Post-16 and Transitions Plan, setting out a programme of support for learners transitioning through different stages of post-16 education and training during and following the Covid-19 pandemic.

The post-16 and transitions project has been working collaboratively with colleagues in health, local health boards, universities and colleges to consider the challenges, barriers and issues facing post-16 students in education and the staff who support them in our HE and FE institutions on access to mental health and well-being support. This will be used to inform future collaboration programme. The Committee’s review is therefore welcomed as the research, comments and recommendations will be valued and support this work.

Welsh Government policy, legislation and funding

How effectively the Welsh Government’s policy, funding and regulatory arrangements for the sector support the mental health of students in higher education, and whether there is more that the Welsh Government could do.

In 2010, the Welsh Government introduced the Mental Health Measure which, together with other mental health legislation provides the regulatory context for universal services in Wales. The Measure is a unique piece of legislation designed to provide a legal framework to improve mental health services for Welsh residents. This includes the implementation of Primary Mental Health Services and to ensure people receiving secondary mental health services have a holistic care, a treatment plan and a care co-ordinator.

Financial support for mental health and well-being within HE is predominantly delivered through HEFCW.

In 2018-19, in response to increasing numbers of students declaring a mental health condition and the tragic incidences of suicide amongst the student population, we placed a renewed and raised focus on mental health and well-being in HE. Recognising the link between wellbeing and learner outcomes HEFCW were remitted to work with their stakeholders and partners within Wales and beyond to strengthen its approach to safeguarding, health and well-being by addressing the factors that affect health and well-being, including mental health. Additional funding of £2m was allocated to HEFCW that year to support this work.

We have adopted a broad definition of health and well-being, which encompasses safeguarding, building resilience, tackling domestic and sexual violence, harassment and other factors that can adversely affect the mental health and well-being of staff and students. In 2019-20 £1.5m was allocated via HEFCW to support the improvement of safeguarding and well-being practice and policies including promoting period dignity.

Since 2018-19 funding of around £2m has been ringfenced within HEFCW's budget annually to fund the development and improvement of health and well-being support, including mental health, within HE. Measures have focused primarily on students but support has also been provided for staff working within the sector. Significant additional funding was provided during the pandemic to bolster the support institutions were able to provide to staff and students and to keep campuses and our communities safe.

HEFCW's fee and access plan guidance for new providers and the February 2020 guidance, which provided the underpinnings for the current process (and through which regulated institutions are required to maintain levels of student support) sets out that all providers should take HEFCW's Well-being and Health in Higher Education Policy Statement into account when applying for a plan. Regulated institutions use the student support element of the plans to provide a range of bursaries and hardship funds.

Through ringfenced funding and prioritising activity within HEFCW's remit letter HEFCW are able to use their funding and regulatory powers to engage strategically with the sector and support delivery of our priorities on mental health and well-being and safeguarding.

In the context of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill, what a whole-system approach to mental health and well-being in post-16 education may look like, and what the role of higher education and healthcare providers would be.

The Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER), established by the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act, will be responsible for the funding and oversight of universities, colleges, school sixth-forms, apprenticeships, and adult learning provision. CTER will be subject to the well-being duties of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and will have its own duties to promote collaboration and coherence in tertiary education.

A whole-system approach to supporting learner mental health will be a priority for CTER. We expect it to build upon the existing work done by HEFCW, local authorities, schools, and higher and further education providers in this area, including building on lessons learned from the pandemic.

The creation of CTER could also provide opportunities for greater sharing of information, data and best practice between further and higher education providers, aiding support for students who transition between the two sectors.

Welsh Government funding, delivered through HEFCW, has supported the piloting of the new NHS Mental Health University Liaison Service for southeast Wales (referenced above).

Such projects will help the development of new collaborative provision of support services for student mental health and wellbeing that extend to further as well as higher education through the coordination and oversight of CTER. As we move to implementation of the TER Act and establishment of CTER, we intend to work with education providers and health services to identify further opportunities for greater collaboration in service provision.

We welcome the Committee's views on where greater coordination and collaboration, both within the education sector and between education and health providers, can improve support services for mental health and wellbeing of students and learners.

How the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research should approach mental health and wellbeing for students in higher education, and in the wider tertiary education sector.

The TER Act requires CTER to ensure that it is satisfied with the effectiveness of the registered tertiary education providers' arrangements for supporting and promoting the welfare of its students and staff. The Commission may also set similar terms and conditions for providers which it funds.

This is the first legal duty of its kind in the UK and will require CTER to set out clear expectations for universities and colleges regarding their policies, services, and processes for supporting student and staff wellbeing, welfare, and safety.

It will ultimately be for CTER, as an arms-length body, to determine its expectations of providers on these matters. We intend to engage with relevant stakeholders during the process of CTER implementation to inform the development of policy and welcome the views of the Committee on this area.

We expect that CTER will develop arrangements for long-term monitoring and oversight of mental health and wellbeing in the sector, for us to assess the impact of different initiatives and aid the planning of future services. CTER will be able to build on the extensive work undertaken in recent years to support mental health and wellbeing in both FE and HE, including collaborative initiatives.

CYPE(6)-24-22 - Paper to note 1

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Cyllid

—
Welsh Parliament
Finance Committee

Mark Drakeford MS
First Minister

16 November 2022

Dear First Minister

Scrutiny of the financial implications of Bills

I am writing to you given your overarching responsibility for the Welsh Government's Legislative Programme.

The Finance Committee is deeply concerned that the Welsh Government has moved away from the practice in the Fifth Senedd of providing a written response to Committee Stage 1 reports before the Stage 1 debate takes place and before the Senedd is required to agree a Financial Resolution.

The Finance Committee's role is to consider the financial implications of Bills and our reports often conclude that we are content with the financial information contained alongside Government Bills subject to a commitment from the Minister to provide further financial information that we have requested. As the motion to agree a Financial Resolution usually takes place straight after the Stage 1 motion has been agreed, the Welsh Government's refusal to provide a formal response to our recommendations means that the Senedd is being asked to agree to committing resources before the Minister's views are known. We consider this to be unacceptable and it undermines the scrutiny process.

The Committee has considered the financial implications of all Bills that have been introduced this Senedd, excluding the consolidation Bill which is subject to different procedures. In our scrutiny of the first Bill introduced, the *Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill*, we set out our expectation for this Senedd that RIAs should contain the best estimate possible for costs and benefits to enable us to fully scrutinise the overall financial implications of a Bill. This built on issues outlined in the Fifth Senedd Finance Committee's Legacy Report which sets out further expectations in terms of the presentation of financial information that all Bills should adhere to.



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We have recently received the Welsh Government's response to our recommendations on the *Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastics Products) (Wales) Bill*. The Committee was disappointed that in many cases the Minister has "agreed in principle" to provide further financial information requested. However, the preamble suggests that the Minister's officials are assessing the feasibility of updating the original cost and, if they are able to, "any work will take at least six months to complete". Even if the costs will be updated, the Bill is likely to have completed its legislative passage through the Senedd by the time the information is available.

This is simply not good enough. It is unhelpful to receive this information after the Senedd has already agreed to the Financial Resolution. It also undermines the Committee's efforts which, in turn, greatly increases the risk of the Senedd passing bad laws with uncertain financial outcomes that could place significant pressures on already stretched budgets.

We therefore request that Ministers revert to previous practice and provide a written response to the Finance Committee's recommendations prior to the Stage 1 debate and the consideration of a Financial Resolution as a matter of principle. This will ensure the Senedd is able to make an informed decision in relation to committing resources.

I would be grateful if you would circulate this letter to your cabinet colleagues. I am also sending a copy to the Business Committee and Chairs of Policy Committees.

Yours sincerely



Peredur Owen Griffiths MS
Chair of the Finance Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.



We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



Agenda Item 3.2

CYPE(6)-24-22 - Paper to note 2



**Lynne Neagle AS/MS,
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd Meddwl a Llesiant
Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing**

**Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government**

16 November 2022

Jayne Bryant MS
Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

Dear Jayne,

Thank you for your letter dated 25 October 2022 setting out the views from the Committee in relation the request for an update on Mind Over Matter.

Since the publication of the Mind Over Matter Report in 2018, and the follow-up report in 2020 - a huge amount of work has been undertaken to improve the support available for children and young people's emotional and mental well-being. The Mind over Matter recommendations have been fundamental in shaping Welsh Government policy, for instance through our joint-Ministerial Whole School Approach, now Joint Ministerial Whole System Approach and the development and implementation of our NEST NYTH framework. Most notably we have:

- Published statutory guidance on the Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing in March 2021. We are continuing to work with schools and other partners to implement and embed the Framework, which is supported by implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales and the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience in particular. We have also made over £43m available jointly from health and education budgets over the course of the three-year budget period to enhance wellbeing in schools and support PfG commitments in relation to school counselling and the development of CAMHS school in-reach services.
- In further education over £10m of funding has been allocated since 2020 to support the mental health and wellbeing of staff and learners. Institutional projects support the appointment and training of staff; collaborative projects bring colleges together to develop new strategies and share resources; and national projects support colleges in developing resources and initiatives on areas such as substance misuse, active wellbeing, Adverse Childhood Experiences and trauma.

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0300 0604400

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

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We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

- All our universities have well-being and health strategies in place. HEFCW monitors the implementation of the strategies to ensure they are appropriately ambitious and respond effectively to the needs of staff and students in HE. HEFCW have also embedded the Universities UK: Stepchange mentally healthy university and Suicide Safer frameworks within their policy work. In order to be eligible for health and well-being funding HEFCW expects HE institutions to sign up to UUK's #stepchange and Suicide Safer Universities frameworks and ensure that their expenditure plans align with the approaches outlined.
- We have invested significantly in tier 0/1 support to provide easy access to a range of support for children and young people – including the CALL Mental Health Helpline, Young Persons Mental Health Toolkit and BEAT's Eating Disorder helpline.
- We have also invested to establish a Wales wide offer, where young people and their families can access free online mental health support, without needing to be referred by a GP. This online therapy now has a suite of support programmes designed to help young people manage their mental health and wellbeing. Parents and carers can sign up for a free 12-week online therapy programme to help children and young people aged 4-18 with mild-to-moderate anxiety. Teenagers aged 16-18 can also sign up themselves, without needing adult consent, for support with anxiety or low mood directly via their mobile, tablet or laptop.
- We are also investing in crisis care with roll out of the all age 111 press 2 option for urgent mental health. Hywel Dda University Health Board is the first to establish this service on a 24/7 basis and all health boards are working towards implementation. As part of the Co-operation Agreement, we have also recently agreed four pilots to test alternatives to admission for young people in crisis.
- All health boards have made progress in improving eating disorder services and are working towards earlier intervention and achieving a 4-week waiting time for assessment. We have also commissioned a feasibility study to investigate the potential for a specialist eating disorder unit here in Wales.
- We have developed the NEST/NYTH Framework as a planning tool for RPBs to implement a Whole System Approach in their areas. We have recently appointed a NEST Implementation Lead who is working across Government, with RPBs and external stakeholders to truly embed NYTH/NEST in children and young people's policy and services.

The Committee will be aware that the current 10 year Together for Mental Health Strategy is coming to an end this year and work is underway to develop the successor strategy. As part of this process, we are reviewing the work already undertaken to take forward and embed the Committee's Mind Over Matter recommendations and identify remaining work that will need to shape the new national Together for Mental Health strategy. We will be taking a thematic approach to this and will provide the Committee with an update on progress in the New Year.

In the meantime, there is a Committee session planned with the Minister for Education and Welsh Language and myself on 23 November, when I am happy to answer any questions on progress against the Mind over Matter recommendations. I am also very happy to attend a separate scrutiny session with the Committee on Mind Over Matter if the Committee would prefer to do that.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Lynne Neagle', written in a cursive style.

Lynne Neagle AS/MS

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd Meddwl a Llesiant
Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing

Agenda Item 3.3

CYPE(6)-24-22 - Paper to note 3

Information submitted by NASUWT in response to the letter sent on the 26 September about sexual harassment of school staff.

NASUWT

Undeb Yr Athrawon



CYMRU

The Teachers' Union

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17 October, 2022

Re: Sexual harassment of female school staff

Dear Ms Bryant,

Thank-you for your letter of 26 September requesting views on the prevalence of sexual harassment of school staff by pupils.

A survey carried out by the NASUWT in 2018 found that more than eight in ten (81%) teachers believe they have suffered sexual harassment or bullying in the workplace. One in five said they had been sexually harassed at school by a colleague, manager, parent or pupil since becoming a teacher. Nearly a third (30%) of those who had been sexually harassed have been subjected to unwanted touching, while two thirds (67%) had experienced inappropriate comments about their appearance or body. Over half (51%) had been subjected to inappropriate comments about sex, and 21% sexually propositioned. 3% said they had suffered upskirting or down blousing (photos taken up their skirts or down their tops).

In an online NASUWT survey conducted in 2016 over 7 days over 1300 teachers responded. Over half reported that they had had negative comments or information posted on social networks about them related to their role as a teacher in the last twelve months. 55% of comments were from pupils and 51% from parents. 80% of comments were insulting remarks and some included threatening behaviour. 60% of teachers received comments on Facebook,

NASUWT

The largest teachers' union in Wales
Yr undeb athrawon mwyaf yng Nghymru

26% on Ratemyteacher and 16% on Twitter. Of incidents involving pupils, the majority were from pupils aged 13 and over, although there were comments from children as young as 7.

The teachers responding were asked to provide details of the abuse in an open field entry. Comments from pupils of a sexualised nature against women teachers included the following:

- A Facebook group set up to mock me and my appearance a couple of months after I started at the school.
- Threats of sexual violence and rape towards me
- Fake account set up where a group of boys spoke about me suggestively
- They started a site called "teachers we want to f**k and found photos of female staff to put up where people left comments.
- A 6th former took a photo of me when I was riding home from work in my lycra kit then shared it on a Whatsapp group.

This survey was used as part of the evidence given to the Westminster, Women and Equalities Select Committee. I copy of the full evidence is attached to the email I sent with this letter,

Yours sincerely



Neil Butler
NASUWT National Official Wales

**Inquiry into
Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools
May 2016**

**NASUWT evidence
to the Women and Equalities Select Committee**

The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Women and **Equalities Committee inquiry into the scale and impact of sexual harassment** and sexual violence in schools.

The NASUWT's submission sets out the Union's views on the key issues identified by the Committee in the terms of reference for the Inquiry. The NASUWT's evidence is informed directly by serving teacher and headteacher members and by the Union's individual and collective casework.

The NASUWT is the largest union representing teachers and headteachers in the UK.

For further information, parliamentarians may contact:

Ms Chris Keates
General Secretary
chris.keates@mail.nasuwt.org.uk
www.nasuwt.org.uk

Executive Summary

1. Effective strategies to tackle violence against women and girls require concerted action across all spheres of society. Schools can make a vital contribution, alongside wider children's services, in relation to identifying needs, safeguarding and creating a climate in which difference and diversity are recognised and in which women and girls are treated with respect.
2. Children, young people and staff in schools have a right to learn and work in a safe and secure environment that is free from intimidation, harassment, abuse and violence and where they feel valued and respected. A school that fails to tackle effectively sexual and other forms of harassment and bullying of its employees will find it more difficult to develop an effective and credible response to safeguarding pupils.
3. The growing sexualisation of young people and its links to sexual harassment and violence against women not only shatters the lives of girls and women but also prevents boys and young men from relating to girls and women as human beings and peers and from forming healthy relationships. This requires whole school strategies for educating school pupils about gender equality and the impact of violence against women and girls within a fully funded and consistent equalities framework.
4. The NASUWT is the only teachers' union that undertakes an annual survey of teachers on the abuse of technology to determine the extent of the problem. The latest report 'NASUWT Survey of Abuse of Technology 2016'¹ shows that this continues to be a problem blighting the lives of teachers across the UK.
5. Teachers' lives continue to be blighted by regular incidents of sexual harassment and violence, predominantly through the use of abuse social media by pupils and parents. This is having a deleterious impact on the mental health of many teachers and their ability to carry out their work, particularly where the incidents are not taken seriously by employers or are considered as "banter" or "jokes". Teachers and pupils need to feel that their concerns are taken seriously and processes adopted for recording and monitoring all incidents of sexual harassment and violence in schools for staff and pupils.
6. Effective training for teachers on dealing with the sensitive issues of girls' sexualised behaviour and acts of sexual harassment is urgently required within all initial teacher training routes and continuing professional development

¹ Survey of abuse of technology (2016) NASUWT, Birmingham.

7. An intersectional approach to strategies for tackling sexual harassment is required in order to establish an inclusive response to this problem and one that recognises the multiple identities of women and girls along the lines of ethnicity, religion or belief, gender identity, age, disability and sexual orientation. The NASUWT asserts that there must be an intersectional lens to strategies for tackling sexual harassment and violence in order to have a truly inclusive approach to addressing this form of abuse.
8. Children can benefit enormously from good PSHE and SRE education so that they are safe and make informed choices. However, there is a disparity in the provision and quality of PSHE and SRE education across schools partly as a result of the Government's education reforms, cuts to public sector funding and Academisation with the extensive freedoms and flexibilities. A consistent approach to educating young people regardless of type of school is urgently required.
9. There are opportunities for Ofsted to inspect for effective policies and strategies that address sexual harassment and violence, however inspectorates need to be knowledgeable and fully trained on identifying good practices and gaps in provision. Moreover, schools should be encouraged to record and monitor incidents against teachers and pupils of a sexualised nature, alongside other discriminatory areas.
10. Government should send a clear message that those who seek to abuse, harass and threaten staff and pupils through the use of social media and mobile phones will face serious sanctions. A zero tolerance approach should be adopted. Schools require robust and effective advice on tackling the abuse of technology. The current Government advice on addressing this issue is woefully inadequate.
11. The voice and expertise of the teaching profession is essential for the development and delivery of strategies for addressing sexual harassment and violence in schools. Government programmes of work will be futile and ineffective if teachers and other staff are not considered to be key stakeholders within this work. The NASUWT requests to be involved fully in the development of resources and advice for schools on tackling sexual harassment and abuse against women and girls.

Introduction

1. The NASUWT's submission focuses on the four key Committee remit themes highlighted within the Inquiry:
 - establishing the scale of the problem;
 - understanding the impact of sexual harassment in schools;
 - what can be done to reduce levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools?;
 - what can schools do to support students to deal better with the online elements of this problem.
2. The NASUWT agrees with the comments from the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee that sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools is having a profound impact on the day to day lives of children and young people. The NASUWT therefore welcomes the launch of this inquiry as a step forward in considering what needs to be done to ensure that no child's education or teachers' working life is blighted by this abuse.
3. The NASUWT believes that all children, young people and staff in schools have a right to learn and work in a safe and secure environment that is free from intimidation, harassment, abuse and violence and where they feel valued and respected. It is, therefore, welcome to see the remit will also explore the extent to which teachers are victims of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools.
4. Tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools has been of growing concern to the NASUWT for many years. These issues have been part of our anti bullying/harassment work for over a decade of which the NASUWT has lobbied numerous Governments – working alongside organisations such as the Anti-Bullying Alliance, Childnet International, Stonewall and other organisations. The NASUWT was the first union to launch a programme of work on prejudice-related bullying, which included work on gender-based harassment and violence and challenging the sexualisation of women and young girls.
5. The NASUWT believes that sexual bullying and its link to violence against women must be recognised, understood and taken seriously in schools. Bullying is too often dismissed as 'part of growing up' or just 'teasing and joking'. The latter, 'it was just a joke', has been used since time immemorial by perpetrators of bullying, victimisation and harassment to excuse and justify their behaviour.

6. The Fixers report² commissioned by the Women and Equalities Committee to inform this inquiry confirms that sexualised behaviour has become normalised in schools. The reports from the young people taking part in the survey that they 'were under massive pressure to have sex and behave in a sexualised way' from as young as 12 years of age is of great concern to the NASUWT, however they are issues raised by the Union with successive Governments.
7. In a response to the Bailey review on the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood in 2011, the NASUWT expressed concern at the growing sexualisation of young people and its links to violence against women and provided evidence that sexual harassment of girls is taking place at an increasingly early age. The Union's submission noted that sexualisation of girls is not just shattering the lives of girls and women but that it is also preventing boys and young men from relating to girls and women as human beings and peers and from forming healthy relationships. The NASUWT called on the Government for effective whole school strategies for educating school pupils about gender equality and the impact of violence against women and girls within a consistent equalities framework.

Establishing the scale of the problem

8. Regrettably, there have been a number of factors that have impeded the much needed support and resources required in addressing the growing sexual harassment and violent incidents in schools.
9. Since 2010, the UK education landscape has undergone excessive reforms, including a radical fragmentation of its schools system and de regulation process. Curriculum reform has been introduced at a breathtaking pace with insufficient time and support for teachers. Cuts to public sector budgets and local services, academisation and the serious reduction in the role of Local Authorities have all been part of the landscape. The NASUWT believes that collectively these factors have hindered significantly the ability to provide and to ensure schools have the necessary support, training and funding required to address the growing problem of sexual harassment and violence in schools and to ensure that there is a consistency of approach.
10. The findings of the Fixers Report and corresponding case studies showed that sexualised behaviour is the new social norm in young people's daily lives and are of serious concern.

² Fixers Investigates: The trouble with sex in schools (2015)

11. A BBC Freedom of Information request in September 2015³ found that more than 5,500 sexual offences in schools were reported to the police over a three year period. The figure includes incidents of children being raped on school premises. In some cases the victims and suspects of sexual offences were as young as five years old.
12. These stark reports strongly resonate with NASUWT surveys and casework reports from teachers who have witnessed young girls being pressured into sexualised behaviour, particularly through the use of social media and mobile phones. Teachers regularly hear girls referred to as 'sluts' or 'slags' or witness unwanted sexual touching and when they attempt to tackle and report these incidents they are often faced with disbelief or find their concerns trivialised as pupil to pupil 'banter'. These teachers then find themselves isolated and unsupported by management.
13. The NASUWT works collaboratively with a number of organisations in tackling these issues in schools, including End Violence Against Women, (EVAW) which is the largest coalition of UK women's organisations established to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. The NASUWT has contributed to the many EVAW campaigns and various programmes of work that have developed coherent and effective policies and challenged Government policies that mitigate against these aims.
14. A YouGov survey commissioned by EVAW in 2010 showed that almost a third of 16-18 year olds had been subjected to unwanted sexual touching at school. In addition, 71% of all 16-18 year olds had heard sexual name calling towards girls at school at least a few times a week.
15. In addition, a more recent YouGov survey again commissioned by EVAW which reported in March 2016 further demonstrates that women experience unwanted sexual attention in public places. 85% of women aged 18-24 had experienced such sexual assaults by men. 64% had experienced sexual harassment and 35% of all women has been touched sexually. Sadly only 11% of these women reported that someone had intervened when they had experienced unwanted sexual touching.
16. The NASUWT recognises that the problem of sexual harassment and violence is a societal problem and schools cannot be left to tackle this problem alone. However, the Union strongly believes that schools can make a vital contribution, alongside wider children's services, in relation to identifying needs, safeguarding and child protection, and in providing for children's health, safety and wellbeing.

³ BBC Freedom of Information request to UK forces on the number of reported sexual offences in schools (September 2015)

Teachers experience of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools

17. Sexual harassment and violence is not confined to pupils. *The Safe to Teach?* report of the NASUWT⁴ survey of 5,000 teachers on health and safety in schools showed that more than one in six (17%) female teachers have suffered from sexist abuse at school or college in the last two years compared to one in 17 (6%) male teachers. Overall 67% of teachers had suffered some form of prejudice-related bullying themselves whilst at work over a two year period. 52% of incidents were committed by pupils. The most common form of bullying reported by respondents was general abuse in 36% of the cases, 16% reported abuse on the basis of body image, 13% sexism, 6% racism, 5% homophobia, 4% faith and 2% disability. Over 73% of the incidents were reported; however, 45% of the respondents said that no appropriate action was taken following the incidents that took place.
18. Whilst teachers and other school staff should be protected by Health and Safety laws the NASUWT research demonstrates that employers fail to take their responsibilities seriously.
19. The NASUWT has been campaigning about the growing problem of cyber harassment/bullying for almost a decade. Reports to successive governments have demonstrated that pupils and parents are routinely using social media and mobile phones to abuse and harass teachers and other school staff. Evidence from case studies and surveys of teachers demonstrating the extent of the problem has been provided to Ministers and for the last three years the Union has conducted an annual survey.
20. The NASUWT is the only teachers' union that undertakes an annual survey of teachers on the abuse of technology to determine the extent of the problem. The latest report 'NASUWT Survey of Abuse of Technology 2016'⁵ shows that this continues to be a problem blighting the lives of teachers across the UK.
21. In an online NASUWT survey conducted over 7 days over 1300 teachers responded. Over half reported that they had had negative comments or information posted on social networks about them related to their role as a teacher in the last twelve months. 55% of comments were from pupils and 51% from parents. 80% of comments were insulting remarks and some included threatening behaviour. 60% of teachers received comments on Facebook, 26%

⁴ NASUWT (2011) *Safe to Teach*. Birmingham.

⁵ Survey of abuse of technology (2016) NASUWT, Birmingham.

on Ratemyteacher and 16% on Twitter. Of incidents involving pupils, the majority were from pupils aged 13 and over, although there were comments from children as young as 7.

22. The teachers responding were asked to provide details of the abuse in an open field entry. Comments from pupils of a sexualised nature against women teachers include the following:

- *A Facebook group set up to mock me and my appearance a couple of months after I started at the school.*
- *Threats of sexual violence and rape towards me*
- *Fake account set up where a group of boys spoke about me suggestively*
- *They started a site called "teachers we want to f**k and found photos of female staff to put up where people left comments.*
- *A 6th former took a photo of me when I was riding home from work in my lycra kit then shared it on a Whatsapp group.*

23. Comments from parents of a sexualised nature against women teachers include:

- *I want to slap her (the teacher's) bitch face;*
- *Parents threatened to come in and 'sort that bitch out'*
- *Accusing the school staff of 'sucking the head's titties'*

24. The survey also revealed many incidents of false accusations against teachers alleging that the teacher had punched or kicked the pupils or 'pushed them down the stairs' and inciting acts of violence from other parents. One teacher reported that it was a 'regular thing' for parents to post derogatory and false claims about teachers on public Facebook pages. 34% of respondents said that they did not report the incident. Reasons for non reporting ranged from teachers being told they are being over sensitive to lack of confidence in employers taking action.

25. For the first time, the 2016 NASUWT survey also asked teachers about sexualised incidents and bullying between pupils. Teachers reported:

- pupils filming themselves masturbating and sharing images.
- girls taking nude pictures of themselves in sexy poses and sending them to older boys;
- regular incidents of girls sending nude pictures to their boyfriends who then forward the images on to their friends;
- insults about gay people, misogynistic comments directed at girls, derogatory sexist comments and racist and Islamophobic comments.

26. The teachers report that the issues of sexualised behaviour and abuse is so rife in schools that its prevalence is dismissed as "banter" and senior management sometimes choosing to turn a blind eye with accusations of overreaction against

teachers who report it. Some teachers admitted in the survey that the downward pressures, excessive workload and other demands on teachers are often, regrettably, barriers to challenging and reporting incidents of sexual harassment and sexualised behaviour. Many had not received any training on dealing with the sensitive issues of girls' sexualised behaviour within either initial teacher training programmes or on-going professional development.

27. The NASUWT believes that the manner in which a school responds to the incidents of sexual harassment and bullying of its staff will be indicative of how seriously and also how effectively the bullying and harassment of pupils is tackled. A school that fails to tackle effectively sexual and other forms of harassment and bullying of its employees will find it more difficult to develop an effective and credible response to safeguarding pupils.

Intersectionality and sexual harassment

28. The NASUWT notes that many strategies for tackling sexual harassment and violence against women and girls are developed within an homogenous context where all women's experiences are considered to be the same. An intersectional approach to tackling sexual harassment is essential, as it recognises that one form of oppression can be shaped by and inform other forms. For example, racism can be sexualised, or women's oppression can be racialised. The sexist behaviour that black (BME) women face is often shaped by their ethnicity and the racism they face can be shaped by their gender – thus the two are intimately connected. Similarly a lesbian, bisexual or trans woman or girl cannot disconnect from a particular identity when experiencing sexualised abuse that is of a homophobic or transphobic nature.

29. The NASUWT hosts annually the largest gatherings of Women, BME, Disabled and LGBT teachers across the country on an annual basis. The women teachers attending these events often describe their experiences of discrimination that intersect across a number of identities that are often overlooked.

30. The NASUWT asserts that there must be an intersectional lens to strategies for tackling sexual harassment and violence in order to have a truly inclusive approach to addressing this form of abuse.

What can be done to reduce levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools?

31. There is evidence to show that children express fixed views about women and men's roles at a very early age. Gender divisions are observed in attitudes

adopted to play and to learning activities and in addition it is perceived that girls and boys are guided towards atypical subject choices that impact negatively on their learning and career choices. Boys are conditioned to behave in particular ways, leading to violence, disruption or bullying. Hyper-masculine behaviour in the playground is driven by the need to be the dominant male as determined by wider cultural experiences. There is a need to eliminate this damaging gender stereotyping which adversely affects the life chances of girls as well as boys.

32. The curriculum has a critical role in ensuring that the education system plays its full role in building an equitable and just society, in challenging and countering discrimination through the promotion of equality and diversity, and by being structured in a way that allows all pupils to achieve and succeed to the fullest possible extent. The curriculum should, in this context, be seen not only as a means by which all learners can acquire skills, knowledge and experience but also as a mechanism for the transmission of positive values to children and young people that can encourage and sustain efforts to develop positive and inclusive attitudes and beliefs.

33. Educating school pupils about gender equality and violence against women will be futile if the issue is not seen as a whole school responsibility. If behaviour in the playground and whole school environment is inconsistent with the messages in the classroom, school pupils may become confused and not take the issue seriously. All stakeholders - school staff, parents, governors, students - need to develop shared values and operate within a consistent equalities framework.

34. The NASUWT believes that good Personal, Social, Health and Economics (PSHE) Education can support young people in making safe and informed choices. There needs to be room in the life of the school for an exploration of wider social issues that contribute to the wellbeing and engagement of all pupils. PSHE education has been the subject of many reviews on which the NASUWT has commented on. In January of this year, the Chair of four key House of Commons committee's wrote to the Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, asking for PSHE to be a statutory element of the national curriculum. In a letter from the education, health, home affairs and business committees the Chair argues that 'PSHE is a crucial part of preparing young people for life' and that it could 'help protect young people from abuse in many forms'. The Secretary of State has responded that schools are expected to make provision for PSHE and to provide a wide range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for pupils to develop their character, but making it statutory "would do little to tackle the most pressing problems with the subject". However, this response ignores that fact that not all schools are required to deliver PSHE education – academies are not required to deliver the national curriculum and they now make up the majority of Secondary

school education in England. There is therefore a disparity in the provision, inspection and quality of PSHE education.

35. PSHE and Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) are useful tools for issues of sexual harassment and violence to be addressed within the context of a coherent National Curriculum that allows for important links between different subjects to be drawn.
36. The NASUWT has campaigned for PSHE and SRE to be key elements within all initial teacher training routes and the provision of high quality continuing professional development. Teachers are committed to protecting children and young people from sexualised behaviour, harassment and violence but there is an urgent need to ensure that early and on-going training is provided. The NASUWT believes that such provision will help to counter the growing problem of sexual harassment and violence in schools.
37. The Government has pledged £80 million in funding to tackle violence against women and girls within its Ending Violence against Women and Girls strategy document 2016-2020⁶. The NASUWT welcomes this commitment but it is notable that the aim to fund critical local services, such as refuges, have diminished as a result of deep austerity cuts.
38. The Strategy document rightly acknowledges the importance of working in partnership with stakeholders to provide an effective response to violence and abuse, particular on prevention strategies in schools. However, it is extremely disappointing to note that once again the Government has not acknowledged the important role that teachers play in this regard. The NASUWT asserts that Government prevention strategies on educating and challenging sexual harassment and abuse in schools will be unproductive if the voice and expertise of the education workforce is overlooked. The NASUWT has a key role to play in the development and delivery of this programme of work and requests to be involved fully in the planned update of the Government guidance for schools on SRE education

The role of Inspection

39. Ofsted has made substantial changes to the frameworks and processes for the inspection of schools which includes a much reduced single common inspection framework, Ofsted inspectors are now required to make judgements on the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils by evaluating the extent to which the school is successfully promoting and supporting their commitment to learning. In addition, inspectors will assess the extent to which the school

⁶ HM Government: Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2016-2020. March 2016

promotes and supports pupils on how to keep themselves safe from risks such as abuse, sexual exploitation and extremism, including when using the internet and social media. This provides an opportunity for inspectors to make judgements about what a school is doing to prevent sexual harassment and sexual violence. However, the NASUWT is not confident that inspectors are either sufficiently knowledgeable or trained to ensure that children and young people are being educated against these practices. Moreover, schools are not required to explicitly monitor and record sexualised bullying and harassment incidents and so it is difficult to identify what data could be made available.

40. Safeguarding and keeping pupils safe is a key area in which schools should evaluate how well they are fulfilling their statutory responsibilities for protecting children from sexual abuse and all forms of gender-based violence as well as other forms such as racist, homophobic or transphobic behaviour. School leaders and governors are required to create an effective safeguarding culture and Ofsted inspectors could play a key role in ensuring that immediate action is taken if there are concerns about a pupil either displaying adverse sexualised behaviour or a victim of sexual abuse.
41. The NASUWT has produced guidance for school leaders on the new Common Inspection Framework which includes advice on the inspection process and how inspectors should be examining and inspecting a school's work on preventing and tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence. The guidance reminds school leaders of their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality duties to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between groups who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
42. The NASUWT believes that inspection reports should be monitored to ensure that inspectors examine and report on a school's effectiveness in tackling and preventing sexual harassment and sexual violence.

What can schools do to support students to deal better with the online elements of this problem?

43. The NASUWT works collaboratively with organisations that support schools with online safety provisions and policies. For example, the Union has jointly produced guidance with Childnet on protecting staff from cyber bullying and harassment. The Union is also represented on the UK Child Internet Safety Board that promotes and advises on the use of safe internet use in schools.
44. The provision of high quality training for school staff on dealing with cyber bullying and harassment is an essential requirement for tackling sexual

harassment and violence in schools. This issue affecting women is too often ignored and needs to be privileged to underline its importance. Time and space needs to be identified during the normal working day for such training.

45. All schools, regardless of type, should be required to have whole school policies on preventing sexual harassment and violence. It is essential that such policies include the prevention of sexual harassment against school staff as well as pupils.
46. Ofsted inspectors should receive explicit training on inspecting for effective strategies in schools, in particular on how schools are monitoring and recording incident of sexual harassment and abuse.

Agenda Item 3.4

CYPE(6)-24-22 – Paper to note 4

Information submitted by NEU Cymru Wales in response to the letter sent on the 26 September about sexual harassment of school staff.

Sexual harassment of female school staff

NEU Cymru Wales submission to Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry, November 2022

Dear Chair,

Whilst we have seen Peer-on-peer sexual harassment as a widespread issue for young people in Wales, it seems that the situation with pupil to education professional sexual harassment is more difficult to gauge at present. We have certainly received anecdotal evidence that it is happening in Wales, but these are incidents which rarely come to the attention of the union as they are either dealt with locally - and often seem to be worryingly dismissed as 'banter' in the cases which have been brought to our attention.

It is our belief that the RSE curriculum should be taken seriously by everyone, and that dignity and respect for everyone should be included as fundamental within that curriculum. As we said in our evidence on peer of peer sexual harassment, it is critical that schools acknowledge the often gender-based nature of such harassment.

The workplace should be a safe space for everyone, and working in an environment of dignity and respect is a critical right, therefore any local behaviour policy should deal explicitly with this issue.

Yours sincerely,

David Evans,
Wales Secretary, NEU Cymru

CYPE(6)-24-22 - Paper to note 5

Information submitted by UNISON in response to the letter sent on the 26 September about sexual harassment of school staff.

Sexual harassment of female school staff

UNISON Cymru Wales submission to Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry, November 2022

About UNISON Cymru Wales

UNISON is the UK's largest trade union organising and representing 1.3 million public sector workers UK wide, including 100,000 public sector workers across Wales.

Our members, 85 per cent of whom are women, work in the delivery of public services through direct public sector provision, private and voluntary contractors providing public services, and in the essential utilities. They include frontline staff and managers working full or part-time in public administration, local authorities, health and social care, the police and justice service, universities, colleges and schools, the electricity, gas, environment and water industries, transport, and in the voluntary and community sectors.

UNISON Cymru Wales represents thousands of school support staff including teaching and learning support assistants, reception and office staff, kitchen and catering staff, midday supervisors, caretakers, pastoral care, technicians and librarians. These school staff are predominantly female. This submission paper is shaped by their experience.

The issue of safety of school support staff and concerns about their security on school premises is very relevant. The Committee's inquiry into sexual harassment of female staff sits alongside the work UNISON has been involved in on violence and aggression faced by teaching and classroom assistants in across the UK.

We also wanted to support the Committee's investigations by providing detailed feedback on how support staff in Wales feel about these issues and surveyed our members in October.

Summary of UNISON position

School support staff are often referred to as 'unsung heroes' of our schools. They perform a vital role which makes our schools the success they are, but the majority

are low-paid women who suffer an institutional discrimination that belittles their role. This can have a serious impact on how they feel about reporting incidences of violence and sexual harassment, how schools might treat such complaints from them and how these members of staff are supported.

The evidence we provide in this paper shows school support staff are overwhelming worried about violent behaviour in their job in schools (70% of respondents to our survey said they were worried about this). Staff are frequently verbally abused and violent incidents and injuries to staff are commonplace, yet staff do not feel supported by their headteachers and nor have many been given training on how to deal with violent situations.

While violent behaviour is an everyday occurrence across Welsh schools, support staff report a much lower incidence of sexual harassment in the workplace, though of course, it is no less serious. As we will detail later, 11% of school support staff respondents had experienced sexual harassment at work, the most common being verbal harassment followed by physical harassment. Of those who had suffered harassment, the perpetrator in the majority of cases was a pupil or learner.

School support staff suffering sexual harassment said they would feel much more confident about reporting this to their headteacher and more confident that it would be dealt with appropriately, than when a violent incident occurs.

The consequences of violent pupil behaviour can be grave for the mental and physical health of support staff. Many teaching assistants describe a feeling of dread of going into school each morning fearing they will be subject to violence and aggression. They might suffer panic attacks and many talk of being plagued by anxiety so much that it disturbs their sleep.

This worry is aggravated because they feel unsupported by headteachers and the general perception in school that violence is to be endured as a normal part of the working culture.

Anxiety is further compounded because support staff say many schools either don't have protocols for dealing with aggressive children or don't make support staff aware of them and don't provide staff with training to de-escalate situations and protect themselves.

Schools must have robust policies around violence and sexual harassment of staff and make pupils and colleagues aware that this will not be tolerated in any way.

In particular, UNISON makes three urgent recommendations: improve the reporting process around attacks, provide staff with medical and psychological support and

ensure they don't have to continue working with the young person who's just assaulted/harassed them.

Role of teaching assistants

Without doubt, schools could not survive without teaching assistants. They help to support Special Educational Needs children and those underperforming; help teachers to cope with big classes and release teachers for preparation time and help those with English as an Additional Language, amongst other things.

It is in the interests of schools therefore to prioritise the safety and well-being of school support staff as a way of guaranteeing their school is a high-performing one.

Most of the evidence gathered by UNISON was from teaching assistants and the frightening testimonies we hear from them in Wales every day, clearly shows that schools are not doing enough in this area. Teaching assistants are extremely worried about violent behaviour in their job.

Academic report into the violence and aggression faced by teaching assistants in the UK

UNISON at a UK level contributed to a recently published academic study by University of Roehampton criminologist, Dr Amanda Holt, into the violence and aggression faced by teaching and classroom assistants in Wales, England and Scotland – the first analysis of its kind (extensive data already exists into pupil-on-pupil violence and aggression towards teachers and senior managers.)

Dr Amanda Holt led the qualitative research that involved in-depth interviews with 16 teaching and classroom assistants. UNISON helped recruit the support staff who took part in the research.

All described being the target of student aggression in a range of ways, including being hit in the face, punched, kicked and bitten. Researchers found that in several cases staff reported receiving death threats from pupils. 53% of teaching assistants had experienced physical violence from students in the previous year.

Physical injuries included cuts, a black eye, a dislocated thumb, a broken finger and ripped ligaments. Staff also reported a range of psychological problems, including stress, anxiety and depression. Two workers were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

The report also noted that the response of schools to attacks was sometimes inadequate. Teaching assistants felt the message from their employers was that it

was their job to manage pupil violence. This, combined with their low status, normalised violence against them.

The report includes guidance on the steps schools should take to better protect teaching assistants in future. UNISON is rolling out the new advice about dealing with violent behaviour.

Dr Holt said: “For the first time there’s an understanding of the ferocity of attacks on teaching assistants and their devastating physical and mental toll.

“This knowledge will help schools better understand and improve their response to violent behaviour by pupils. Setting out the steps every school should take to protect staff and support them in the aftermath of an attack is an important first step.

“This raises big questions about the expectation of schools, and in some cases insistence, that teaching assistants should be the first line of defence against pupils who display violent or aggressive behaviour.

“With the profession dominated by women, forcing them to become classroom enforcers could do long-term harm. Combined with the role’s lack of professional status, this risks creating an environment where violence becomes normal, particularly towards women. As pupils become adults this worrying development could have serious ramifications for society.”

The Holt report is submitted by UNISON alongside our evidence to the Committee.

UNISON Cymru Wales survey of teaching assistants

As the main trade union representing school support staff in Wales, we wanted to support the Committee’s investigations by providing detailed feedback on how support staff feel about these issues.

We launched a survey of UNISON school support staff on 18 October 2022 which closed on 27 October. 212 members, across primary, secondary and special schools, 3-16 learning community, pupil referral units, completed our survey. The overwhelming majority of respondents were teaching assistants.

The key findings are summarised below.

Key survey data

Q1. Are you worried about violent behaviour in your job?

- 70% (149 people) said 'yes'

Q2. How frequently have you personally experienced violence at work in the past 12 months?

- 16.8% experience verbal abuse at least daily; 28.8% experience verbal abuse at least weekly
- 10.7% experience threats at least daily; 20.1% experience threats at least weekly
- 10.6% experience assaults at least daily; 15.2% experience assault at least weekly

Q3. How often do you observe violent incidents towards staff in your school?

- 70 people observe violent incidents at least daily
- 58 people observe violent incidents at least weekly

Q4. If you have been assaulted, what behaviours did this include? Tick all that apply

- Pushing – 105 people
- Kicking – 121 people
- Punching – 92
- Throwing of object/ furniture – 127 people
- Spitting – 84 people
- Biting – 80 people
- Scratching – 76 people
- Attacked with a weapon – 27 people
- Verbally – 117 people
- Other – 22 people

Q5. Have you ever suffered an injury as a result of violence/physical abuse at your school?

- 8% said 'yes, major injury requiring medical assistance'
- 43% said 'yes, minor injury requiring first aid'

Q6. If you have experienced a violent incident, did you feel supported by your head teacher/line manager?

- 41% said 'no'

Q7. Respondents were asked if violent behaviour from pupils had an impact on your health and wellbeing, in what ways? Only a sample is given below. Each bullet-point denotes a different respondent.

- It caused me to have anxiety about going to work & also made my asthma a lot worse due to the stress & anxiety of being attacked every time I was in the class with the child to the point I had to take 6 weeks off work.
- *My confidence and self esteem has been effected, questioning if I am in some way doing something that is provoking behaviour*
- Just recently I had a table thrown at me, damaging my arm and resulting in so far three weeks off.
- *Working in a special needs school it comes with part of the job but I don't feel there is enough support after incidents. Staff shortages and inexperienced staff cause behaviours to be worse. We are just expected to get on with it as it's a part of the job without actual support and support of our wellbeing. I feel overworked, under paid and under appreciated.*
- Yes scared to work with individuals on a daily basis. Been put in the same class as an individual who has bitten, kicked pushed me.
- *I am very wary of children approaching me from behind and have become more nervous at home when family comes quietly near me*
- Drained, stressed, unable to complete daily tasks. Miserable in my role. On high alert constantly, waiting for next attack
- *Yes. Went in sick leave for six months. Couldn't cope. Was going through a difficult time at home and then daily upset in work and felt like I wasn't supported at all.*
- Don't want to come to Work. Worry that if you speak up that they'll listen and won't react badly. Worry if you'll be supported for telling pupils to stop.
- *It made me leave that school and job for something I didn't want to do. I hid in toilets as much as I could and became miserable at home which damaged my relationship with my partner*
- Absolutely it has, it has impacted both my health and wellbeing. I am currently still off work from my last attack and in awful pain. Dreams where I'm woken up by the pupil or can't sleep for it running through my mind.
- *Yes. Going to school every day feeling anxious in case a child becomes aggressive, physically or verbally abusive. Lack of acknowledgment or support from parents - denial of behaviours. TAs (Teaching Assistants) just being left to deal with poor behaviours.*
- Has encouraged me to look for employment outside of the education sector.
- *Yes. I have been attacked several times by ALN (Additional Learning Needs) students. One time was particularly bad and I had to go to A&E to get my nose and eye socket x-rayed.*
- Made me feel inadequate and no good at my job. Dreaded going into work, also felt I was failing the pupil involved and the other pupils in the class.

- *I would come home after work and take my frustration out on my children. Shouting at them for silly things, having no tolerance towards them etc.*
- Yes, started having panic attacks and unable to sleep
- *Feeling tired, no energy to complete family activities, having to hide marks & bruises from husband & own children*
- Yes, in the last year I have had panic attacks, I have also been having chest pains and other symptoms, which medical professionals have told me is likely due to the stressful nature of my job. This term I often feel anxious and I am losing weight as I have lost my appetite.
- *Yes I ended up in A&E twice! Once with a facial injury that needed treatment. Multiple permanent scars from being bitten and scratched, It left me feeling nervous about coming to work and had a negative effect on my wellbeing, I was left feeling stressed and anxious daily.*
- Yes, I feel like a sitting duck in my school because assaults/threats towards support staff are often turned back on us by SMT (Senior Management Team) and we are made to feel it is our fault even though there are no clear policies and procedures we can refer to of what to do when such serious incidents occur such as when a pupil is in possession of a weapon. I personally have been reprimanded by SMT recently for asking an open question to colleagues as to why wasn't a pupil dealt with in a particular way when in possession of a weapon being unaware at the time of the actual procedure.
- *I don't go to work to be a battering ram for a child to kick and lash out at and keep getting told that tomorrow is another day. It brings in anxiety and a feeling of not wanting to go to work*
- Yes it made me dread going to work and fear serious injury
- *Yes. We are seeing staff hit, kicked, elbowed, pushed sometimes deliberately, sometimes when breaking up fights but it's becoming so regular you can't help but worry. Starting to not feel safe there anymore and this is a standard comp, not a special school or PRU (Pupil Referral Unit).*

Q8. *Is there a clear protocol at your school for reporting a violent incident towards staff?*

- 16% said 'no'
- 21% said 'don't know'

Q9. *Have you seen a risk assessment or behaviour plan for any of the learners you work with where this is required?*

- 48% said 'no'

Q10. *Is the risk assessment/behaviour plan updated following an incident?*

- 11% said 'no'
- 49% said 'don't know'

Q11. *Does your school have policies, risk assessments and control measures in place?*

- 5% said 'no'
- 33% said 'don't know'

Q12. *Have you been given training on how to deal with violent situations?*

- 46% said 'no'

Q13. *Respondents were given the opportunity to describe measures that their school has taken to deal with violence in their workplace. Only a sample is given below. Each bullet-point denotes a different respondent.*

- Tried to exclude pupils but LEA (Local Education Authority) made school have them back
- *"It's part of the job"*
- There are policies and measures in place, but the headteacher does not follow them so the whole process does not work. It is only when the headteacher is on the receiving end that they do anything about it. Support staff are not considered at all.
- *Referred child to educational psychologist.*
- Since I and another colleague have been signed off sick by Dr we have been made aware of violence policies and violence at work forms
- *Pupil was removed for a time period but has returned, behaviour is still a problem.*
- Some avoidance tactics that rarely work.
- *Yes. Reported to Behaviour Support but there is rarely any assistance available*
- Photos of injuries are sent to county as far as I know!
- *Yes, told to ignore behaviour and use team teach to prevent attacks. However, this is almost impossible due to the speed of the children and violent behaviour towards us.*
- No, other than discussing it. Such discussions imply that we must 'just get on with it'.

- *We have received Team Teach training which focused on how to safely remove a pupil from a situation, but I do not feel that is enough to help us in knowing how to deescalate situations or cope with the physical harm and emotional stress these instances cause to staff.*
- Exclusions - however staff have dealt with way too many incidents before this happens and then children are being allowed back, leaving staff feeling scared of a recurrence. Staff are being physically and verbally abused on an hourly basis, daily - behaviour has a significant negative affect on the learning of the rest of the children who aren't getting an education they deserve as a result.
- *Most children have individual plans, with positive handling protocols and triggers/diffusers etc. However not all staff are given these documents.*
- No. Staff don't feel enough is done, regularly there are incidents that staff feel warrant permanent exclusion but the council/challenge adviser apparently make this incredibly difficult. We'll be a news story before long, knives will be next but sadly until something truly awful and "newsworthy" occurs we're just expected to carry on.

Q14. Respondents were asked what else could be done to tackle the problem of violence against staff in their school and to make staff feel better supported? Only a sample is given below. Each bullet-point denotes a different respondent.

- Tougher sanctions against perpetrators
- *Give clear consequences, helping by removing the child from the situation so that staff that have been shown violence don't have to work with the child again straight after the incident. Quicker referrals & diagnosis, more staff to share to load & teachers stepping in to help instead of leaving low paid TAs to be punching bags. Not expecting TAs to do break and lunch duty with the child all the time as this feels isolating & you don't have time to debrief or seek emotional support & reassurance from other staff.*
- More support for staff's well-being. Better communication between all staff following an incident & for it to be constant across the school. Better support for special support officers who are with the pupils every moment of the day apart from 30 minute break
- *To have an experienced staff team with the most challenging pupils.*
- Giving us a good amount of trained staff and a good line manager and better pay

- *To know that the child and parents will be dealt with appropriately instead of going for a cup of tea and a break from class with the head then returned to class half hour later.*
- Time for staff to recover after an assault, rather than made to go straight back to pupil with no consequence for child. Parents made aware of violent attacks, consider what other provisions are needed for violent children.
- *Being able to talk openly about it with a line manager and a plan put into place to help cope with these situations*
- Appropriate training. A clear plan of how certain young people are to be managed so that all members of staff are on the same page. Regular check in meetings with line managers to express staff concerns. To be listened to and out feelings and thoughts to be taken notice of.
- *More staff employed and more assistance from the LA*
- More training and specialist senior management responsibilities, as it often feels that TA's (the poorest paid) are left to deal with issues. It's understandable that teachers have to remain in class as there is often a full class of children that need supervision and sometimes maybe upset too, however there needs to be a designated, specialist trained member of senior management available at all times, who is called upon as a matter of standard policy (as this takes the responsibility to make that call off TA's) when a pupil is behaving violently.
- *More and more children are being refused 1:1 support in school when they clearly need it. I believe that this would greatly decrease the amount of violent situations as there would be a designated person for the child who would be able to intervene and potentially stop the situation from escalating*
- There should be a clear plan in place for behaviour and it should be followed consistently for every child and for every member of staff abused, staff should also be listened to, we should have the right to go to work and not be stressed about what we are going to have to face. My setting is mainstream but our SLT (Senior Leadership Team) seem to think that if a child is ALN or has an autism diagnosis that it is okay for them to attack you and you shouldn't complain as it is your job.
- *More consequences for violence, suitable staffing levels*
- There is a need for more funding or staff to work with children who require such support. Currently, teachers and support staff are constantly supporting these children on a daily basis alongside the class. Where most situations, 2 members of staff are required to help regulate and support children. This leaves the other children without the support they need, resulting in many cancelled interventions, lesson activities and daily support. Also the staff members are drained from the daily (in our case) behaviours.
- *There needs to be more TAs for support. We deserve better pay. The risks and demands do not fit the pay we get.*

- To be included in the process moving forward and be updated on any reports that are submitted. Head teacher at times does nothing.

Q15. Have you ever experienced sexual harassment at work?

"Sexual harassment, as defined by the Equality Act 2010, is when a person engages in unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature, whether verbal, non-verbal or physical, that creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive working environment."

- 87% said 'no' (184 people)
- 11% said 'yes' (24 people)
- 1% said 'don't know' (3 people)

Q16. What form of sexual harassment have you experienced at work? Please tick all that apply

- Physical (for example unwelcome touching, hugging, invasion of personal space) – 11 people
- Verbal (for example inappropriate jokes, comments about your appearance, invitations on a date, questions about your private life) – 19 people
- Visual (for example, sexual gestures, staring, winking) – 6 people
- Sexual assault (for example unwanted kissing, sexual touching, performing a sexual act) – 2 people
- Cyber (for example inappropriate emails, texts or phone calls) – 2 people

Q18. When was the last time you experienced sexual harassment at work?

- 31% of those who had experienced sexual harassment said 'in the last month'
- 8% of those who had experienced sexual harassment said 'in the last school term'

Q19. Who was the perpetrator of the sexual harassment at work?

- 18 people said pupil or learner
- 6 people said a colleague
- 3 people said a manager or supervisor

Q20. Did you report the sexual harassment to your employer or to another body?

- 69% said 'yes'
- 31% said 'no'

Q21. *Was this appropriately dealt with?*

- 72% said 'yes'
- 28% said 'no'

Q22. *Have you ever witnessed a colleague being sexually harassed at work?*

- 15% said 'yes'
- 3% said 'don't know'

Q23. *If you were sexually harassed at work in the future, would you feel confident reporting it to your employer?*

- 14% said 'no'
- 19% said 'don't know'

**Violence towards teaching/classroom
assistants in mainstream UK schools**

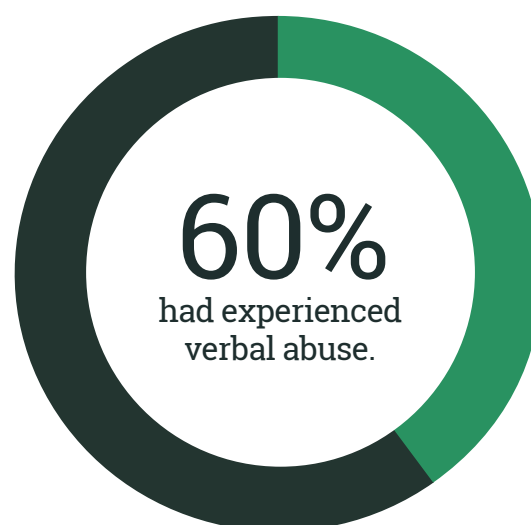
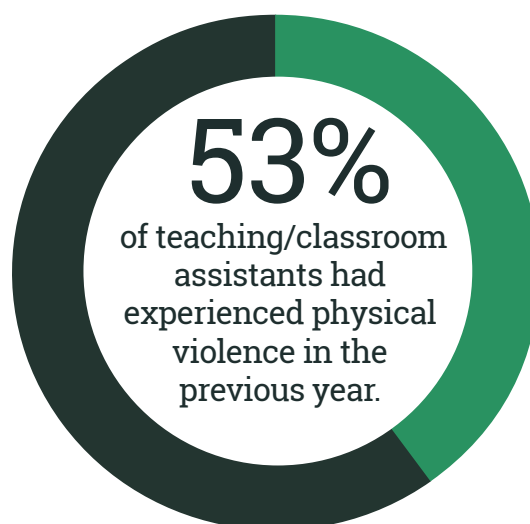
Research findings and recommendations

A. The Research Project

This is the first academic research project in the UK to explore how teaching and classroom assistants have experienced aggressive, violent, and/or abusive behaviour from students while working in mainstream schools.

While there is an important and well-developed body of research on school violence, particularly pupil-on-pupil violence and aggression towards teachers and senior management, there is little knowledge about violence towards school support staff and, in particular, towards teaching/classroom assistants. This is despite research suggesting that it is a much more significant problem for teaching and classroom assistants than for other school staff. For example, a survey by NASUWT (2021)¹ found that six percent of teachers had experienced physical violence from students in the past year, 10 percent had experienced threats of physical violence, and 38 percent had experienced verbal abuse. In contrast, a survey by Unison (2016)² of 14,500 support staff across England, Wales and Northern Ireland found 20 percent had experienced physical violence from students in the past year, 20 percent had experienced verbal threats, and 27 percent had experienced other verbal abuse. In terms of specific roles, the same survey found that 53 percent of teaching/classroom assistants had experienced physical violence in the previous year, 53 percent had experienced verbal threats, and 60 percent had experienced other forms of verbal abuse.

Such surveys are important in highlighting the extent of the problem. However, to understand the nature of the aggression, its context, and how it is experienced and responded to, we need to listen to the words of those who have experienced it. This kind of research can help us to develop meaningful recommendations for how mainstream schools can respond more effectively in supporting their staff as well as their students. This study aimed to address this knowledge gap.



1. See FE News (2021) | 2. See Unison (2016).

Methods

The project centred on 16 in-depth interviews with teaching and classroom assistants from mainstream schools across England, Scotland and Wales. Participants were recruited through social media (e.g. Twitter) and via Unison, who distributed the request for research participants through its networks. The criteria for participation was to have experienced physical violence or aggression from students on two or more occasions while working at a mainstream school. The interviews took place remotely (via video conference or telephone) and the open-ended questions concerned the nature of the aggression/violence, its impacts, its perceived causes, and how the school responded to it. With consent, the interviews were recorded and transcribed and the data was then subject to thematic analysis to identify common themes. The project was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Research Integrity and Ethics Committee. All names in this report are pseudonyms.

Participants

Of the 16 participants interviewed, twelve were women and four were men, and their age ranged from 28 to 62 (average age=43years). Twelve participants worked in primary schools and four worked in secondary schools, and they had worked in schools from between two and 28 years. Twelve participants were on permanent contracts and four were on fixed-term contracts. Eight of the schools they worked in were academies and eight were managed by the local authority (LA).

“

I was getting bruised on a regular basis, so I was having my face hit, punched ... kicked, spat at, bitten ... shouted at in my face.”

(Joanna)

B. Key findings

In this section, we outline the findings of the research in terms of the teaching/classroom assistants' experiences of i) the nature and the context of the violence from students, ii) the impacts of the violence, iii) the school responses to the violence, and iv) experiences of using restraint techniques during violent encounters.

i) What were the teaching/classroom assistants' experiences of violence from students?

I was getting bruised on a regular basis, so I was having my face hit, punched ... kicked, spat at, bitten ... shouted at in my face. (Joanna)

The aggression experienced by the participants was regular in its frequency and wide-ranging in its nature. It included **verbal abuse** (including being shouted out, called derogatory names), **threats** (including, in several cases, threats to kill), and **physical violence** (including being spat at, kicked, punched, slapped and having objects thrown at them).

Many participants described experiencing aggression from a number of students over the course of their careers. In cases where participants worked one-to-one with students, they sometimes described intense daily aggression from the same student, which escalated over time:

He is quite aggressive, and most of it was directed towards me because I was the closest adult to him, so although I was worried about the other children, that would have been secondary really. All of his anger was directed towards myself. And he's very physical. (Maggie)

While sexual aggression was rarely mentioned, one female participant disclosed an incident of 'inappropriate touching'. Furthermore, some of the dynamics reflected how we understand gender-based violence to operate, with female participants describing having to face violence from teenage boys who were 'bigger and taller' than them which was 'intimidating'.

Participants said that while sometimes there were triggers that preceded the violence, at other times there were not. This made it very difficult to deal with, particularly as there were expectations from senior managers that the participant should have identified the trigger and should have prevented the violence before it started:

[following a violent incident] The actual Deputy said, "Well, what happened to trigger him?" And there's not always triggers with him, sometimes he just does it. And I said there was absolutely nothing, no excuse whatsoever for him to have done what he did. He just all of a sudden went into a rage. But it was almost like, "Well, you must have set him off, you must have..." Do you know what I mean? (Andrea)

In terms of the wider context of violence, a number of explanations were given by participants. Sometimes these perceived causes related to the student themselves, such as aggression as a reaction to distress (sometimes in response to learning environments that did not adequately support children with SEND or other additional needs). Sometimes the causes related to the students' home life and family (such as growing up with domestic abuse and/or in other adverse environments). However, the most common explanations related to institutional factors that facilitated the violence and aggression. Examples included:

- The size of the school and its impact on pupil behaviour (one school was described as 'organised chaos')
- Poor management and leadership (for example, new interim heads coming and going, and the continual upheaval this created caused stress and anxiety for staff which then impacted children)
- Financial constraints, cost-cutting and, in particular, a reduction in teaching/classroom assistants (which increased the risk of harm for those who stayed on)
- Policy change, particularly in relation to processes of academisation where restorative practices such as nurture groups were replaced with strict behaviour policies and the introduction of restraint techniques.

ii) What were the impacts of the violence?

All of the participants disclosed that they had experienced physical injuries as a result of the aggression – examples included bleeding, a black eye, a dislocated thumb, a ripped ligament, and a broken finger. In many cases, the injuries sustained were serious, with some participants requiring ongoing medical treatment such as injections, cauterisation and physiotherapy. Some participants reported continued chronic pain or reduced mobility as a result of their injuries.

Aside from the **physical injuries**, the psychological impacts were profound. All of the participants described experiencing stress, anxiety and/or depression as a result of the ongoing violence, and two participants had been diagnosed with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) following a specific incident. Some participants had been authorised medical leave by their GP as a result of an incident and one participant had to leave work entirely:

It started to have a really bad impact on my mental health and my physical health because unfortunately I didn't have any support at work. And I had to stop going to work because I couldn't sleep at night time...[...] Obviously I spoke to my managers before reaching this point and they didn't really put anything in place, so I had to stop going to work to look after myself. I came to the conclusion that the best thing for me was just to leave because I didn't want to put myself in that situation anymore (Melissa)

There were other impacts: for example, time taken off work as a result of the physical and psychological injuries resulted in reduced income, often exacerbating an already-precarious financial situation. It also impacted home and family life, as participants felt increasingly pre-occupied and stressed at home which negatively impacted their family relationships, particularly with their own children.

The experiences also started to ebb away at the participants' professional confidence, as they started to doubt whether they could perform their job properly. Indeed, the participants felt that, although it had not been explicitly stated as such, it was their responsibility to control the violence – not only towards themselves, but towards the other

children and towards other staff members. The weight of this responsibility added to feelings of stress and anxiety in the workplace. It also meant that, for some participants who felt they had no support, the safest course of action was to allow themselves to become the school punchbag:

I worry about him hitting the other staff. If he hits me, I tend to just let him hit me because I find that not reacting to him works better than reacting to him. So eventually if he punches and kicks me a few times, well, if he realises he's not getting a reaction he'll stop because I'm not reacting to him. (Carl).

iii) How did teaching/classroom assistants experience the school response?

Participants described a number of strategies they used to try to manage the violence. Examples included keeping a 'behaviour diary' each day to identify techniques that worked (and those that didn't work). Some attended courses (e.g. anger management, nurture groups, complex needs training), although sometimes the cost of the courses prevented them from attending as many as they felt they needed.

Despite the seriousness of the aggression and violence experienced, the participants often felt that the school did not respond appropriately. Participants recognised that criminalising the child would not be helpful, but participants had nevertheless considered contacting the police (and one did) because of the failure of school managers to take the incident seriously.

Violent incidents were not always logged in incident report systems as they should be (e.g. My Concern or CPOMS). Furthermore, although participants described other teaching/classroom assistants as supportive, they experienced less support from teachers and senior managers. For example, Paul described an incident where a student was hitting him in a classroom and '...the teacher carried on with the class...and he carried on hammering away at me...'. Similarly, Carol described being hit across the back by a bottle full of sand in the playground and '...the other staff that were on the playground didn't react at all, which I was a bit surprised at'.

Such passive bystander responses contributed to participants feeling that the violence directed towards them was not considered to be important and that colleagues were unconcerned about their safety. Indeed, one participant felt like his only value was as a 'bouncer':

They don't trust your judgement because you're a teaching assistant, that's how it feels a lot of the time. And not all, some staff are lovely, but you always feel like, Well you want me when the shit hits the fan. ...There's been a few times where a student will kick off and nobody else will deal with it because they're too scared so they call me down and ... sometimes it's kind of ... that's not my job, I have a degree, you know? I'm not ... obviously I will help my colleagues and I will protect students, but sometimes you felt like you're used as a bouncer (Mark)

The implicit message conveyed to the participants was that it was their job to manage student violence and, combined with their low professional status within the school hierarchy, this enabled the normalisation of student violence towards them. For example, Maggie's experience is indicative of many of the stories we were told:

*He came over and punched me in the face. And my colleague was like, "Whoa, that is totally unacceptable", went off to get the SENCO, who came back and took him away and that was it. I just sort of like ... because we'd got other children in the room, I was trying to protect them from him and ... you know, I just went back to work as normal. And then a little while later, the SENCO came back with the boy and said, "You owe Ms. **** an apology" and he just looked at me and went "Sorry". And that was it, I was given the boy back and carried on working for the rest of the day (Maggie)*

Participants noted that the students often faced no sanctions following a violent incident towards them, and yet sanctions would be put in place if a teacher or senior manager had been assaulted. This discrepancy made participants feel unsupported and un-valued, and raised concerns about the message this would send to students about the acceptability of such violence, particularly towards a staff group who were pre-dominantly female, low paid and experienced low professional status³. If any sanctions were applied – for example, through

3. In 2021, 93% of teaching/classroom assistants in England were female (Department for Education, 2022). The average actual pay per annum for teaching assistants is approx. £12,000 (TES, 2019).

a fixed-term exclusion – the participants were rarely involved in this decision-making process, and were often not informed of the outcome.

iv) What are teaching/classroom assistants' experiences of using restraint techniques?

If a teacher said, "Oh I'm not able to control this child", they would send me in there... But, then again, there's that whole borderline of, OK, if I'm holding this child and I'm restricting them, it could lead to bruises, it could lead to ... you know what I mean? And then, because it's just me and that child, then everything was going towards me, so I'd try and hold them and they'd be scratching or trying to kick and bite and spit and trying to do everything they can to get away, and we don't really know why they reacted in that way. You try and do the best you can, and basically you just don't want to do it anymore. It just gets you and it makes you think, why am I even here? No one wants to do this, you know? (Brian)

Participants spoke at length about the use of restraint techniques as a method of dealing with student violence and aggression, and had very mixed feelings about it. Not all of the participants were trained in restraint: a minority had said that they had requested restraint training to help them manage the violence, but this had been refused due to costs. Others did not want to be trained, but were given no choice. For example, Judy, who was in her 60s, explained that she '...tried to refuse because of my age, and I've got a bit of arthritis, so I didn't really feel it was appropriate for me to be restraining children on the floor'. Yet her headteacher insisted that she train and be given the role as 'first responder' in cases of student violence.

“

The training's fine, but when you're not looking and you turn and get a punch in the face, you haven't got time to react.”

(Jane)

Those participants who were trained in restraint techniques (or 'positive handling strategies'), described the process as physically and emotionally tiring for both them and the student. They were concerned that they might inadvertently hurt the student, and/or face accusations or an investigation as a consequence. Some voiced concerns that they were less protected against disciplinary action than teachers would be in the same situation.

Some participants commented that the guidance for using restraint techniques was very ambiguous, and this exacerbated their concerns:

Our headteacher said we can't afford to put anybody else on the training, so just follow the Government guidelines, which are if you're in danger, somebody else in danger or the student is in danger, you are allowed to restrain them. But in the same sentence it said, but we do not want you putting your hands on the kids (Mark).

Participants explained that the use of restraint was not always brief: one participant said that it could last 'for up to an hour and a half' and the threat may not necessarily be reduced once the restraint is removed. Participants also noted that appropriate follow-up, which should include a debriefing and discussion with senior management, was not always implemented. Furthermore, restraint was not easy to implement in cases of sudden violence:

The training's fine, but when you're not looking and you turn and get a punch in the face, you haven't got time to react (Jane)

Ultimately the participants recognised that restraint achieves nothing in the long-term, and that much more fundamental change is required in schools to both prevent student violence and aggression and to protect and support school support staff from victimisation.

C. Recommendations for schools

In this research project, the participants described some very disturbing incidents which suggest that both they and other students were at risk of harm. All of the teaching and classroom assistants interviewed experienced a combination of physical violence, verbal abuse, and psychological aggression from students in their school, often on a daily basis. The impact of this was far-reaching – it impacted their physical and emotional health, their family relationships, their income and their professional confidence. Despite the seriousness of what they faced, they did not feel appropriately supported by their school. The participants felt under-valued and that their primary role was to deal with the aggression that other staff members were not able to, or did not want to, deal with. The situations described, including school responses, also sounded distressing and potentially trauma-inducing for the student displaying the aggression.

This research specifically focused on the experiences of teaching and classroom assistants who face such violence. Clearly, a lot more work needs to be done with students to prevent such violence, including a serious consideration of whether the support needs of children with SEND and those facing adverse childhood experiences are being adequately met in school environments. However, based on these research findings, we make some key recommendations for how schools could better support their teaching/classroom assistants. First, we make recommendations for good practice following a violent incident, and second, we make recommendations for wider institutional change.



All of the teaching and classroom assistants interviewed experienced a combination of physical violence, verbal abuse, and psychological aggression from students in their school, often on a daily basis.”

Recommendations for good practice following a violent incident

- 1) Every incident of student violence or aggression towards school staff should be reported and logged, with time given to staff within their working hours to do this. Staff members should always be given a copy of the report form.
- 2) The student should be immediately separated from the staff member, who should be given a safe space (or sent home) to recover. Staff members should not be expected to continue working with the student until an appropriate resolution process has been completed satisfactorily.
- 3) Staff members should be encouraged to seek a medical check-up following a violent incident.
- 4) Statements should be taken from the staff member, the student, and any witnesses and an investigation should be undertaken (by an independent party), with the outcome decision reported in a timely manner.
- 5) Care should be taken to avoid making blaming or accusatory comments towards the victimised staff member, particularly prior to the conclusion of any investigation.
- 6) Restorative practice should be implemented where appropriate to enable both the staff member and the student to experience closure. A meeting based on restorative principles will enable both sides to communicate their feelings about the incident, facilitate mutual understanding and allow for learning to take place.
- 7) Psychological/counselling support should be made available to any staff member who experiences a violent incident.
- 8) Staff members should be encouraged to take leave on full pay if they are experiencing physical or psychological injuries as a result of a violent incident.

Wider institutional changes

- 9) Schools should invest in and value the important role that teaching/classroom assistants do, and reflect this in their pay and in providing ongoing CPD and training opportunities (particularly when requested).
- 10) Schools should establish a specific support fund for training/course attendance for support staff to help keep themselves safe.
- 11) Support staff should be enfranchised in processes for both preventing violence (e.g. contributing to risk assessments) and following an incident (e.g. contributing to the decision-making process of how the school should best respond).
- 12) There needs to be a culture change that addresses current 'us and them' divisions between teaching staff and support staff, which is damaging to an inclusive school ethos.
- 13) Schools should provide regular whole-school training on how to respond to student aggression and violence towards all staff members (regardless of staff role/status)
- 14) Schools should develop a clear and unambiguous whole-school policy on student violence that is produced in collaboration with all stakeholders: Headteachers, HR, teachers, support staff, governors and unions. This should be reviewed regularly.
- 15) It is questionable whether restraint techniques are appropriate or effective in many of the situations we heard about as part of this research. However, if restraint techniques are to be used in a school, then the whole school should be trained in using them, with opt-outs available for staff members on health or other grounds (e.g. risk of re-traumatisation)

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Agenda Item 7

By virtue of paragraph(s) vi of Standing Order 17.42

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