



# Barnardo's Cymru Consultation Response

## Welsh Government Draft Guidance on Relationships and Sexuality Education

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  - This response is on behalf of Barnardo's Cymru
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Barnardo's Cymru has been working with children, young people and families in Wales for over 100 years and is one of the largest children's charities working in the country. We currently run 86 diverse services across Wales, working in partnership with 16 of the 22 local authorities. Last year we worked with over 7,000 children, young people and family members.

Although our services are diverse in nature, they each work with children and young people with added vulnerabilities. We have heard from children and young people we support, that too often the sex and relationship education they received was inadequate, did not represent them, or they were excluded from lessons. We have also been made aware of the considerable inconsistencies in the provision of this education across Wales, where often poor provision has led to a lack of engagement. In our view, this leaves too many children and young people vulnerable to potential exploitation and cannot continue. Boys are made particularly vulnerable, due to professional responses they receive in this area, where their overt behaviour is often taken at face value rather than investigated for the causes of their distress.<sup>1</sup>

The focus on health and wellbeing including relationships and sexuality education within the new curriculum, placing it on an equal footing with other parts of the curriculum, is an important step to empowering and supporting the wellbeing of children and young people across Wales.

As a member of the Sex and Relationships Education Expert Panel, we endorse all of the recommendations within the report to Welsh Government on the Future of Sex and Relationships Education Curriculum in Wales. We look forward to the final guidance offering more clarity as to how those recommendations will be implemented.

### **Definition**

Barnardo's Cymru welcomes the rationale behind the new guidance as well as the name change. Our organisation recognises the importance of positive relationships of all kinds to the wellbeing of children, young people and families we work with, so the prominence of relationships within the document is welcomed.

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<sup>1</sup> Beech, A et al. Development of tools and resources to better identify and engage young males at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Sexual Abuse. Barnardo's Cymru

Many of the young people we support have expressed to us that they have felt that the biological and heteronormative relationships education they have received does not represent them as individuals or the relationships they might enter into. We are pleased to see that sexuality is central to this element of the curriculum, a change which will hopefully ensure a more inclusive, meaningful and broad approach to relationships education.

### **Legal Obligations**

As this guidance will not change the current statutory underpinnings of the provision of relationships and sexuality education, we remain concerned that the inconsistencies in this area will continue in the short term at least. Certain schools are not currently required by law to educate children on relationships and sexuality therefore may de-prioritise it for other areas of the current curriculum which they are regularly assessed on.

Additionally many children and young people we work with have been excluded from this element of their education because of behavioural difficulties or additional learning needs. This is of particular concern, due to the additional vulnerabilities these children and young people can experience, when entering into relationships or developing sexually.

It is fundamental to the rights of disabled people that they have access to education which enables them to participate fully in society and live a life which is full and in which they can interact safely. It is not clear within the proposed guidance what provision special schools and primary schools are statutorily required to provide, or what policies should be in place to ensure that all learners within mainstream schools can access this provision.

We believe that the guidance document could offer a greater opportunity to create positive change now, in anticipation of the new curriculum, if it was more comprehensive in terms of how schools can change their approach to align with the ethos behind it. Whilst appreciating the need for autonomy of teachers and schools, and therefore not to be too prescriptive, there is a requirement, as stated within the structural proposals of the curriculum, to outline how aspects of the curriculum should be embedded using what matters

statements and rationales, planning support and descriptions of learning.<sup>2</sup> This element of the guidance appears to be missing.

We believe that strengthening the following elements of the guidance; will help to ensure that the transition for schools to the new curriculum will be less problematic, and that the current offer of relationships and sexuality education is strengthened.

### **Whole school approach**

As an organisation, we fully support a whole school approach to relationships and sexuality education. It is well evidenced that this approach leads to greater wellbeing outcomes for children as well as consolidation of knowledge. We would recommend more guidance to schools on developing this approach, as has been laid out in the Good Practice Guide in relation to Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence for example.

### **Training**

Teacher learning and development is crucial to ensure the successful implementation of a whole school approach to relationships and sexuality education. Research we have conducted,<sup>3 4</sup> alongside that of other organisations has identified a gap in training for teachers on this vital element of the curriculum.<sup>5</sup> Teachers have told us that this gap has led to a lack of confidence and at times confusion, around how to approach this topic within the classroom. We would expect therefore, that a well-resourced training and professional development programme will be provided to teachers to support the guidance.

### **Outcomes and monitoring**

Outcomes and monitoring is essential to the meaningful roll out of relationships and sexuality education. The guidance should contain more contemporary information on what is to be statutorily expected of schools, to ensure that there is more consistency and clarity around what education children and young people should receive and what they should be achieving through their learning.

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<sup>2</sup> Welsh Government Consultation Document. "Our National Mission: A Transformational Curriculum. Proposals for a new legislative framework."

<sup>3</sup> IBID

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.barnardos.org.uk/17595\\_bs\\_i\\_never\\_spoke\\_about\\_it\\_cse\\_report\\_e.pdf](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/17595_bs_i_never_spoke_about_it_cse_report_e.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/the-future-of-the-sex-and-relationships-education-curriculum-in-wales.pdf>

The anticipated characteristics of learners could be laid out within the guidance, as stated within the proposals for a new legal framework around the curriculum, and could also ensure that the monitoring of this provision is in place, before the curriculum is launched.

We are encouraged by the developments in assessment arrangements to be introduced with the new curriculum. That assessments will focus on the individual learner, whilst also providing consistency and coherence across Wales is promising. However, details of assessment do not appear to be referenced within the guidance.

### **Funding**

Considering the financial pressures many schools in Wales are experiencing, it is imperative that the improvements required to embed relationships and sexuality education successfully are adequately funded. Proper funding of this element of the curriculum we believe will lead to a stronger, more consistent approach and without it; there is a risk that the inadequacies of the current provision could continue. Proper investment in relationship and sexuality education is likely to reduce the call on future services, and inevitably lead to greater wellbeing outcomes for future generations.