

**Criminal Justice Committee:
Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill
15 September 2025**

The NASUWT welcomes the Criminal Justice Committee's call for views on the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill.

NASUWT is the Teachers' Union, representing teachers and school leaders in all sectors of education and across all 32 local authorities in Scotland.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

1. The Union response is focused on the following section of the bill:

'Require schools to provide education on domestic abuse and healthy relationships as part of the curriculum.'

2. NASUWT agrees that schools can play a key role in providing education around gender based violence and healthy relationships but there needs to also be recognition that schools cannot address all of society's ills and there are significant workload barriers to implementing new initiatives within the current policy-dense education environment.

3. The proposed refreshed Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RHSP) guidance stalled for a long time and the Union campaigned vigorously

to ensure the review can now progress at pace. The guidance, after all, is just the beginning of the change needed. Schools need to be supported to go further and take proactive action to create a culture in which girls are safe and can thrive. What is needed is a whole-school approach that is appropriately financed and resourced and which will include a key focus on appropriate PSE delivery and implementation.

4. Once updated, the RHSP guidance would sit alongside national whole school approaches such as Equally Safe at School and the Gender-Based Violence in Schools Framework. This suite of documents, backed by proper funding and resources, could go some way towards providing a broad relationships and sexual health education for children and young people, with a focus on gender equality, consent and healthy relationships.

5. The supporting paperwork to the bill sets out that domestic abuse education is to *'raise understanding and awareness of domestic abuse and facilitate a longer-term cultural shift necessary to prevent domestic abuse in Scotland'*. This aim requires to be refocused: rather than educating children and young people about the existence of domestic abuse, it should be framed around prevention. Government must prioritise facilitating culture changes to prevent domestic abuse: we cannot place the responsibility on young women and girls to learn about domestic violence in order to protect themselves from it.

6. On a practical level, as well as having appropriate national guidance available, teachers must have the opportunity to engage with that guidance, along with the support and resources they need to teach and embed these programmes effectively. This support should include access to relevant training and development opportunities.

7. All education-based approaches must sit in the context of a holistic prevention strategy. The first step to tackling the issue of domestic abuse is to recognise that violence against women and girls is a cause and consequence of gender inequality. A key part of this work will be ensuring the education

system applies a gendered lens to all discussions, from school behaviour to the curriculum, ensuring the voices of those with lived experience are at the heart of decision making. The Union would prefer the bill provided a commitment to educate children and young people and school staff on the importance of gender equality and to address the causes and impact of gender based violence.

8. It is also important that all children and young people are able to benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum, including specialist provision for ASN pupils which appears to be excluded from the current proposals.

9. The curricular proposal is currently too narrowly framed and the Union believes that national discourse around domestic abuse needs to shift to consider the wider social structures, culture and attitudes which are the drivers. Domestic Abuse results from gender inequality: tackling the wider system of gender inequality in Scotland should be the main priority.

10. Finally, it may be of interest to consider some of the recommendations NASUWT shared in our MSP Briefing '*Behaviour in Schools: Misogyny and Online Spaces*' which was issued on 26 March 2025: this briefing sets out some of our key campaign asks in relation to tackling gender based violence which include:

- *Visible and strong leadership from the Scottish Government. The Gender Equality Taskforce in Education and Learning (GETEL) must move at pace to achieve a gender-competent experience of education and learning for all girls by:*
 - a. *being taught by education professionals who are well-supported, confident and effective at promoting women and girls' equality and rights, in settings steered by gender competent leaders, and where gender barriers in the profession have been broken down*
 - b. *not experiencing sexism, sexual harassment or gender based violence in the classroom or other educational setting; and*

c. *freely choosing subjects and areas of study from a gender transformative curriculum, including those traditionally dominated by boys and men.*

- *A commitment to educate children and young people and school staff on the importance of gender equality and to address the causes and impact of sexual harassment. Schools should explicitly teach students about misogyny and misogynistic attitudes and national equality aims should be woven throughout the national curricular review process. SQA and Education Scotland must not miss the current opportunity to include intersectional equality issues, practices and content in the development of new or adapted course specifications, and other relevant national guidance.*
- *The creation and promotion of national guidance for schools on behaviour, such as the National Action Plan Relationships and behaviour in schools and Preventing and responding to gender based violence: a whole school framework, which sensitively considers the impact of gender based violence. Current behaviour approaches in schools take little cognisance of prejudice-based abuse, in particular the use of restorative approaches and the impact of these on staff who have been abused. Any national framework or guidance must be supported by appropriate resources.*
- *Many schools are not equipped with effective reporting and monitoring procedures for staff to report incidents of sexual harassment and violence. Women members primarily have told us that they are not confident that reporting incidents will be taken seriously and, further, that this is a barrier to reporting. Robust policies for tackling sexual and other forms of harassment and violence, whether physical or verbal, must include effective reporting and monitoring procedures.*
- *National campaigns must promote to parents and carers an awareness of school behaviour management policies, including the role that pupils and parents/carers play in creating a positive school environment. Consistency of expectations by schools and parents/carers is essential, as is the need for effective liaison between the home and the school in*

tackling pupil behaviour, including misogyny and gender based violence.

- Effective school leadership, especially working in partnership with staff and trade unions, is essential and should be supported by tailored professional learning on gender based violence.*
- Schools should be supported to assess their behaviour management policies to ensure they are non-discriminatory in their scope and operation, including on the grounds of ethnic or national origin, culture, religion, gender, disability or sexuality. Schools should collect and regularly review data on behaviour to ensure that their behaviour management policy is operating fairly and equitably.*
- Every teacher should have access to professional supervision as well as fully-funded mental health and wellbeing programmes.*
- Schools should be able to readily access external advice and support, and specialist provision.*
- Greater national promotion should be given to the Digital Discourse Initiative, which is a collaborative project with ISG Global and TIE. This free online professional learning course is now available to equip teachers with the knowledge and tools to address issues like online disinformation and hate. The Scottish Government should invest further in a national campaign programme which will enable this online training programme to be delivered in person and to further support direct engagement and learning opportunities in schools.*
- Education and schools should remain a central plank of the Equally Safe Strategy, which sets out a vision to address violence against women and girls nationally. There are a number of existing and successful partnerships undertaken nationally but it isn't as widespread as we would like. The Equally Safe in Schools and Mentors in Violence Prevention initiatives have only reached a proportion of schools so far. While the national GBV framework was a great step forward, what is missing is a targeted, systemic national dissemination approach, including resourcing, to tackle head-on the current patchwork of implementation.*

- *Schools need earlier support and education on hate speech from primary school level, recognising that, by secondary school, many pupils may already have been exposed to far-right narratives. Tailored curricular advice and support should be provided for primary schools.*

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