

To: Merched Cymru and  
LGB Alliance

Dear Merched Cymru and LBG Alliance,

Via email only

Thank you for your open letter dated April 2021.

22 April 2021

I share your distress at the testimonies and harassment that have been shared online as part of Soma Sara's 'Everyone's Invited' project. I am also humbled by the courage of young people who are speaking out about their experiences and calling for cultural change.

In your letter you ask what specific actions my office will take to deal with sexism, sexual harassment and sexual abuse in education settings, and there are three particularly relevant areas of my current work in relation to this:

- My Investigation and Advice Service;
- The ongoing work of my office in the development of Relationships and Sexuality Education in Wales;
- My ongoing programme of participation.

I explain each of these areas below.

### **Investigation and Advice Service**

You may already be aware of my Investigation and Advice casework service, and I have included details of this at the end of this letter. This confidential and free service has always been part of the work of the Children's Commissioner for Wales – indeed, the legislation underpinning the office sets out specific powers of intervention around individual cases, and my office is also a prescribed person for whistle-blowing, as set out under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.

This function of the Children's Commissioner has served an important role throughout the history of the office in ensuring children and young people can disclose sexual harassment and abuse. I urge you to share details of this service with your networks, to raise awareness that this service is there to can support young people and professionals if these experiences occur. We take forward any cases related to this both to ensure action is taken to uphold the rights of individual children affected in the case, but also to assess whether broader legislative, policy and practice changes are needed. Indeed it is an invaluable tool in bringing to light these areas. Examples of statutory reviews



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related to this area include the [Clwyd Inquiry](#) and my recently published [Review of the Welsh Government's functions in relation to home education and independent schools](#).

## Relationships and Sexuality Education

I have long been calling for the development of effective and holistic Relationships and Sexuality Education in Wales, and have been publically supportive of the Government in the recent legislative changes in this area brought about by the Curriculum and Assessment Bill. This has been in line with the 2017 European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) position statement on Comprehensive Relationship and Sexuality Education<sup>1</sup>, which states that all children and young people have the right to high quality, holistic and inclusive education about sexuality and relationships. My calls have also echoed the 2016 Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.<sup>2</sup> In response to the Committee's concerns about the variability of relationships and sexuality education, and the lack of accurate information for young people (Section 63b) the Committee recommends State Parties ensure education around relationships and sexuality is mandatory within the school curriculum (Section 64b).

My office will continue to scrutinise policy, guidance and professional learning as they develop in this area, to ensure that the rights of all children and young people are upheld as a central element. Young people have been consistent that this is needed during my term as Commissioner and, if implemented well, high-quality RSE has the potential to bring about a much needed step-change in young people's experiences in Wales.

## Participation of Young People in the work of my office

Importantly, I will also be listening to young people directly about their experiences. My Advisory Panel of young people will be discussing this with me this week in a peer-led panel discussion. As always I will be open to their suggestions and ideas about possible actions that my office could undertake.

My ongoing programme of participation also enables children and young people to regularly share experiences with me across all areas of their life, and my office will respond to priorities raised through our ongoing policy

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<sup>1</sup> <http://enoc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ENOC-position-statement-on-CRSE.pdf> 2

<sup>2</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, CRC/C/GBR/CO/5, 03/06/16, available at: [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CRC/Shared%20Documents/GBR/CRC\\_C\\_GBR\\_CO\\_5\\_24195\\_E.docx](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CRC/Shared%20Documents/GBR/CRC_C_GBR_CO_5_24195_E.docx)



work. At less frequent intervals, my office also undertakes nationwide consultations to shape the three-year work plan of the Commissioner.

### **Aims, outcomes, timescales and evaluation**

Your additional questions focussed on aims, outcomes, timescales and evaluation plans of the work of my office.

As outlined, my ongoing scrutiny of this area of young people's lives will be through the policy, participation and casework functions of my office. My office undertakes ongoing monitoring and evaluation of each of these functions of my office, to assess how well our interventions and work ensure the human rights of all young people in Wales and to highlight areas for improvement, or where further work is needed.

As you are aware, in some policy areas, creating national change is a result of many years of persistent policy work. My ongoing policy work in education with the incoming Government in Wales will be informed by a wide-evidence base and this will include the testimony of the Everyone's Invited Project, which will be particularly valuable in informing my consultation response to the forthcoming Relationships and Sexuality Guidance.

The work-plan of my office is also created through a participatory process with young people and informed by case-work service. It may be that this participatory process highlights a specific role for my office in undertaking project work related to this area in the future, and should this be the case then young people's experiences would be key in informing the project aims and outcomes of this work.

As previously, I urge you to share details of my Investigation and Advice Service so that my office can support any young person in Wales who experiences sexism, sexual abuse or sexual harassment in an education setting in Wales. These are included below.

Yours sincerely,



Sally

Sally Holland  
Comisiynydd Plant Cymru  
Children's Commissioner for Wales

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Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a gwladau a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd cysylltu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi | We welcome receiving correspondence and calls in Welsh. We will respond to correspondence and calls in Welsh, and contacting us in Welsh will not lead to delay.

