



## Education Reform Survey: 5th December 2022

<https://consult.gov.scot/learning-directorate/national-discussion-on-education/consultation/intro/>

### **1. What kind of education will be needed by children and young people in Scotland in the future?**

Zero Tolerance is an organisation that focuses on the primary prevention of men's violence against women and girls (VAWG) by tackling its root cause: gender inequality. We have several strands of work focused on children and young people, including co-chairing the Scottish Government's Gender Based Violence in Schools Working Group and sitting on the Gender Equality Taskforce for Education and Learning. VAWG is a cause and consequence of gender inequality, and unequal power relations between men and women are its root cause (Hester and Westmarland, 2005). Embedding gender equality into everyday practice within schools, modelling the gender equal world we want to see, and building on the Scottish Government's existing work to achieve gender equality is a central component of primary prevention of VAWG. Children and young people desperately need a gender equal education now and in the future. This is an approach which will support Equally Safe (Scotland's strategy for ending violence against women and girls), and UNCRC.

Gender inequality is having an impact on children and young people within our education system now. More girls than boys attained at high levels at SCQF Level 5 and above (Scottish Government, 2021), with more young men leaving education without any qualifications (Scottish Government, 2022). Meanwhile, 64% of girls and young women aged 13-21 had experienced sexual harassment at school in the past year (Girlguiding, 2017), and very few women occupy positions of leadership and power in government or business (Engender, 2020). Girls in Scotland are the least likely in the UK

to say they are happy with their lives (Girlguiding, 2022: 10) - we are failing girls in terms of the Scottish Government's ambition to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up.

Gender inequality interacts with other systems of oppression, such as racism, homophobia, transphobia, and prejudice about disabled people. Girls and young women who face multiple marginalisations (black girls, black queer girls, black queer disabled girls, and so on) therefore experience specific challenges in education and beyond. For example, the 2022 Girls' Attitudes Survey found that girls and young women of colour were more likely than white girls to believe that the Covid-19 pandemic has negatively impacted their education (Girlguiding, 2022: 6). 1 in 5 girls believe that gender stereotypes hold them back in education; but this rises to 2 in 5 for LGBTQ+ girls (Girlguiding, 2022: 8). Considering aspirations to leadership, disabled girls and girls of colour were more likely than white, enabled girls to be put off pursuing careers such as politics because of the harassment women leaders face online (Girlguiding, 2022: 9). Therefore, gender inequality cannot be tackled in isolation, but must align with an anti-racist, anti-poverty, enabling, LGBTQ+ inclusive approach.

It is essential to ensure that changes to Scottish education now ensure its sustainability and relevance for the future. Crucial to this is tackling gender inequality to create a Scotland free from violence where everyone is safe.

The long-term impacts of VAWG cost the Scottish public purse £6.6 billion per year (Oliver et al. 2019 Scottish Government, 2014) [1]. Primary prevention is, therefore, a more effective use of resources than only tackling the impacts of VAWG. As well as saving money, a primary prevention approach which achieves gender equality will create economic, environmental, social and health benefits, which have been well-evidenced (Bell and Butcher, 2015; EIGE 2017a; EIGE 2017b; IMF 2018; UN Women, 2018; Our Watch, 2021).

Multiply marginalised women and girls also face higher rates of violence. Girls living in deprived areas are more likely to say that fear of sexual harassment holds them back at

school (Girlguiding, 2022: 8), and girls of colour are significantly less likely to feel safe at school compared to white girls (Girlguiding, 2022: 9). 83% of transgender women have experienced a hate crime at some point in their lives (Equality Network and Scottish Trans, 2017). SafeLives finds that disabled women remained in abusive relationships for a year longer than their enabled counterparts before receiving support to leave (SafeLives, 2017). Therefore, racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia and poverty must be tackled alongside gender inequality.

Against the backdrop of global conflict, the climate crisis, and rising of poverty, it is vital that we give all children and young people the best start so that they have equal opportunities. Gender stereotypes limit children's aspirations, for example preventing girls from pursuing STEM careers and boys from considering careers in childcare (Girlguiding, 2022: 8). Further, the long-term impacts of violence, ranging from trauma to low confidence to prevents women and girls from accessing leadership (Girlguiding, 2022: 9; Close the Gap, 2019: 3). This is detrimental to Scotland because diverse teams create innovative solutions (Diaz-Garcia et al., 2013; Accenture, 2019), which are essential to solving these large-scale problems. Therefore, for Scotland to meet the challenge of creating a sustainable, wellbeing economy during the climate crisis, a gender equal education is a vital step. Future-proofing Scottish education means tackling gender inequality to create a Scotland free of violence where everyone has access to safety, leadership and innovation.

*'Schools are themselves important sites where gender inequality is normalised unless it is challenged' (Griffin et al., 2021: 2).*

Evidence shows that the most effective way to embed gender equality into the education system is to take a whole school approach, whereby the focus on gender and intersecting equalities is embedded in every aspect of what the school does (Henderson and Tilbury, 2004; Ellis and Thiara, 2014). Hunt and King (2015) highlight 5 key elements for effective delivery of whole school approaches:

- embedding activities for the initiative in all areas of the school (curriculum, staff training and extra-curricular activities);
- involving a range of stakeholders;
- relating work to the wider vision or ethos of the school;
- having strong leadership support for what is being promoted;
- and integrating interventions into existing school practices.

It follows that to embed gender, race, disability, class, and LGBTQ+ equality into education across Scotland a whole-system approach must be taken. Creating an equal education system means:

- Starting from a foundation of children's rights;
- Building governance systems where power is shared, a diverse range of women are equally represented at all levels and inequality is challenged;
- Developing curricula with gender equality and rights at their core;
- Ensuring all children and young people can learn about healthy relationships;
- Nurturing school cultures which model equality and the realisation of rights.

[1] This figure was established using the same approach used in the Scottish Government (2009) Safer Lives – Change Lives: A Shared Approach to Tackling Violence Against Women in Scotland. Accessed 17/11/22. Available at: <https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20150219114440/http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2009/06/02153519/5>. Using information provided in Oliver, R., Alexander, B., Roe, S., and Wlasny, M. (2019) The economic and social costs of domestic abuse. Accessed 17/11/22. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/918897/horr107.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/918897/horr107.pdf)

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## **2. How do we make that a reality?**

Approaches to creating a gender equal education system cannot be one-off, nor focus on certification: often when schools pursue certificates, they do so for merit rather than to make transformational change (Mogren et al., 2019). As above, creating an equal education system means taking a whole-school, whole-system approach by:

- Starting from a foundation of children's rights;
- Building governance systems where power is shared, and patriarchy is challenged;
- Developing curricula with gender equality and rights at their core;
- Ensuring all children and young people can learn about healthy relationships;
- Nurturing school cultures which model gender equality and realisation of rights.

### **Children's Rights**

A children's rights-based approach is a strong foundation from which to develop a gender equal education system which serves to prevent VAWG. The UNCRC, which the Scottish Government has already committed to incorporating, stipulates that children have the right to:

- Non-discrimination (Article 2);
- To express their views and be listened to (Article 12);
- Protection from violence (Article 19);
- Education (Article 28) (UNICEF, 2019).

As these rights intersect with one another and are mutually supporting, it is therefore clear that a gender equal education system where children and young people are



listened to is a vital component of meeting Scotland's existing commitment to realising children's rights. Further, Article 12 requires that school governance systems listen to children and young people. This would require an approach where power is shared with and questioned by children and young people.

Moreover, Article 29 states that:

*'Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child's respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment.'* (UNICEF, 2019)

Children's rights and gender equality are mutually supporting. Boys and girls have different experiences of which of their talents are encouraged, and do not have equal opportunities to develop all their abilities. For example, in early years, more girls spend time role playing and developing social skills, and more boys spend time playing with blocks and learning about three-dimensional space (Weisgram and Dinella, 2018; Fawcett Society, 2020) This is because of gender stereotypes about what boys and girls 'should' do, and what they are praised for (being quiet and kind versus bold and brave) (Weisgram and Dinella, 2018; Fawcett Society, 2020).

The development or lack thereof of these core, foundational skills go on to impact confidence and career choices, with fewer women going into STEM and fewer men going into childcare (Weisgram and Dinella, 2018; Fawcett Society, 2020). As discussed, the impact of this inequality is bad for health, the economy, and innovation. Moreover, societies which are unequal in terms of gender allow VAWG to thrive. Not only will allowing children of all genders to develop diverse skillsets allow improved innovation and economic outcomes, but also serve to prevent VAWG. This is supported by the UN Commission on the Status of Women who in a report on 'Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls' found that educational and teaching materials should be developed 'in order to modify the social and cultural patterns men

and women of all ages (...) for the development of respectful relationships based on gender and equality human rights ' (CSW57a, 2013: 10).

## **Governance**

In order to create a truly gender equal experience of the education system, we must question the ways in which the school system as a whole promotes – or can be used to challenge – racism, classism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia and gender inequality. Typical school governance systems, where the school is led by the head teacher and other teaching staff, are very top-down with adults holding the power and children being taught to do as they are told. Children are often reprimanded for questioning the decisions of adults in power. This teaches them not to think critically, and not to question authority. The outcome of this is that fewer children develop the critical thinking skills necessary for active citizenship, leadership and innovation. Governance structures within schools must share power with children and young people and encourage them to question decision making. This approach aligns well with UNCRC which, as discussed, stipulates that children's voices must be listened to.

## **Curricula**

Education Reform presents an opportunity to reconsider the curricular content of education in Scotland. As it stands, the Curriculum for Excellence does not recommend or require gender equal curricular content, nor content which is anti-racist, LGBTQ+ or disability inclusive (Scottish Government, 2008). In practice, this means that some young people will have access to progressive learning, where many others do not. Access to a curriculum which emphasises equality and rights must not be available to all.

The most basic consideration for developing a gender equal curriculum is reviewing who is represented. In nurseries this might mean ensuring that story books have strong and varied girl characters, boy characters who model empathy, characters of colour, disabled characters, a mix of types of families, and so on. Primary schools could

consider who children are told about as role models to look up to. In secondary schools, the scientific, historical and political achievements of women, BME people, and women of colour must have an equal place in the curriculum to those of men, for example.

Beyond the obvious, it is important to consider the subliminal messages which curriculum materials might be sending. For example, modern language textbooks which draw on examples of heterosexual families with typical gender roles, or maths questions which have women buying apples and men counting darts scores. These messages all serve to re-entrench gender stereotypes, which encourage children to limit themselves and others.

As gender roles limit children's ideas of what they might be capable of, specific action needs to be taken on subject choice. It is not enough to have all subjects open to children of all genders. Due to gender stereotypes, girls may not believe they are good enough at STEM, and boys may not feel able to choose subjects like Home Economics. Free choice is not free when one's ideas of what is possible are limited by stereotypes. Therefore, children may need extra encouragement to take subjects which are currently dominated by another gender.

## **Healthy Relationships**

One component of a broader approach to primary prevention and gender equal education is educating children and young people on healthy relationships and consent. In 2017, 64% of girls and young women aged 13-21 had experienced sexual harassment at school in the past year (Girlguiding, 2017). Gendered power relationships dominate the lives of children and young people, and there is a clear persistence of the deeply rooted assumption that young women's bodies are the property of boys and men. Many teachers do not feel empowered to take action in situations of violence and harassment (UK Feminista, 2017). Therefore, they must be supported by a whole school approach to ending violence, which includes a strong emphasis on creating equitable relationships between girls and boys (UK Feminista, 2017: 25).

The majority of younger girls (83% of those aged 7-10) are learning about respect and healthy relationships at school, but as girls grow older only 40% of girls and young women aged 11-21 in Scotland learn about respect and healthy relationships (Girlguiding, 2022: 9). This is lower than the UK average of 57% (Girlguiding, 2022: 9). Indeed, only 3 in 10 girls in Scotland can remember ever learning about sexual harassment at school – which is also lower than the UK average of 2 in 5 girls (Girlguiding, 2022: 9).

From the early years, we should be teaching children through modelling to ask for consent for a hug or high five and showing them that their consent matters by listening to their answer. As young people reach puberty, we must have more explicit conversations about respect, healthy relationships, consent, and gender-based violence. When discussing rape and domestic abuse, the ways in which this kind of violence is *gender-based* must be explained explicitly. However, education programmes must not just focus on crisis, but rather prevention. This means educating children of all ages about the importance of gender equality, respect and consent. We must provide young people with models and scripts for healthy relationships rather than just pointing out the flaws in toxic ones.

Whilst it is vital that education now and in the future covers gender equality and healthy relationships; one-off awareness raising interventions do not work on their own to prevent men's VAWG (Kerr-Wilson et al., 2020; Jewkes et al., 2020; Jewkes et al., 2021). There must be a coherent curriculum of information and skills about healthy relationships taught consistently from age 3-18. Moreover, this curriculum is only effective as part of a whole-school, whole-system approach to gender equality in education, which emphasises children's rights, collective governance, and positive school cultures. This is because whilst young people absolutely need an understanding of healthy relationships and consent, the root cause of VAWG is gender inequality (Savage, 2015), and thus these lessons can only form one part of a whole-school and whole-system approach to ending gender inequality and VAWG.

## **School Cultures**

Evidence shows that children and young people learn most not from what they are directly or intentionally taught, but rather from what they experience and what is modelled to them (Fawcett Society, 2020). Indeed, Griffin (2021) argues that there is a 'hidden curriculum' which works to counteract the explicit goals an education system might have, meaning that school cultures are vital to making change. Actions speak louder than words, meaning that lessons and assemblies on gender equality are quickly undermined if children and young people are experiencing gender inequality from each other, their teachers, in the curricular content they encounter, or in the school's policies and practices. This means that there must be a whole-school approach to developing cultures of gender equality and non-violence. Having a whole-school approach means that every aspect of what the school does – its recruitment and induction of teachers; its policies; the way it treats its pupils – is done in a way which aims to support gender equality.

### **Implementation: supporting teachers**

Delivering a culture shift is a significant and long-term undertaking, which teaching staff will necessarily be at the frontline of achieving. In order to facilitate success in the reformed education system, teachers must be valued, well rewarded, supported, respected and allowed the work-life balance necessary to be effective in their roles. Education reform is an opportunity for a sea-change in how we view teaching in Scotland, and the Scottish Government must lead on this.

Related to this, in order for all teachers to be able to confidently challenge sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and classism, and deliver an equality-focused education, they must receive adequate training, leadership and support. All teachers must be absolutely clear of their responsibilities relating to this, but also that the leadership within their school, local authorities, and the Scottish Government are there to support action they take to end inequality and violence. Regular, high-quality

training on gender and intersecting equalities designed by expert organisations must be mandatory for all teachers – pre-qualification and throughout their careers.

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### **3. How can every child and young person's individual needs be supported and addressed in the future?**

An important part of ensuring that every child and young person's individual needs are supported and addressed now and in the future is taking a gender-sensitive approach. This means considering the specific needs that children and young people of specific genders might have, without making assumptions based on stereotypes. For example, girls may need specific encouragement to try out STEM subjects, and boys may need specific encouragement to take on nurturing roles during games. This is not to say that we should only encourage children to do things typically associated with another gender, but rather that specific effort is needed to counteract a society and culture which strongly encourages gender roles, through role modelling, film, TV, books, et cetera. Linking to our overall theme of changing cultures within schools, Griffin (2021) cites evidence from the Institute of Physics which finds that school cultures inform gendered subject choices. Therefore, as well as individual encouragement, structures must be changed to help build gender equal cultures within schools. As more children make non-gendered choices, culture will change to make these choices easier for those that come after, and as one aspect of a broader approach this will inform wider cultural change within the school.

Play is a highly valued part of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (Education Scotland, 2020), *Active Learning in the Early Years* (Scottish Executive, 2007) recognised the need to ensure uninterrupted play. This approach seems to stem from a children's rights perspective, which is positive. However, while agency is a right, so is the opportunity to develop a range of skills and talents (UNICEF, 2019). In practice, uninterrupted play can be understood as leaving children to play in gendered ways and learn gender roles. They do this not because of 'natural' differences between boys and girls, but because of the toys which are promoted to each gender and the gendered roles children see characters and adults playing (Fawcett Society, 2020). Therefore, an education system which



supports every child's individual needs would empower practitioners with tools to question and disrupt gendered play. This does not mean forbidding girls from the home corner or boys from playing with blocks but finding innovative ways to challenge stereotypes young children have already absorbed and support them to develop a range of skills, from understanding three-dimensional space to developing empathy.

Many organisations will rightly answer this question in terms of what support should be available for children with additional support needs – or indeed how the education system can be reformed to be more accessible for every child. Gender matters when it comes to additional support. For example, autistic girls are far less likely to be identified due to diagnosis being based on autistic traits typically displayed by boys, and the way that girls are socialised differently (Ratto et al., 2018; Dean et al.; 2014). Therefore, approaches to inclusion and access must consider gender and dis/ability, as well as other systems of oppression, together.

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#### **4. What is one thing that needs to stay and why?**

There are a number of teams and working groups who are already considering how we can make education in Scotland more gender equal, such as the Gender Equality Taskforce on Education and Learning, the Improving Gender Balance and Equality group, and equalities teams within Education Scotland and the SQA. This focus must not be lost as we move from one set of institutions to another. Moreover, the capacity and impact of these teams must be increased, so that equalities work focusing on gender, race, class, disability, LGBT, et cetera can be mainstreamed across all education work happening within institutions in Scotland.

#### **5. What are the most important priorities for a future Scottish education system?**

As discussed, equal access to learning, skills development, and non-violence is central to developing an education system which supports innovation. This means embedding equality in terms of gender, race, class, dis/ability, LGBT+, and when these factors intersect, is the most key priority for the future of education in Scotland. Without a

foundation of equality and rights the priorities others will highlight – high achievement, closing the attainment gap, developing skills for future economies – are not achievable. This will take fundamental change of systems and culture. The UK Race Equality Charter includes the principle that '[in] developing solutions to racial inequalities, it is important that they are aimed at achieving long-term institutional culture change, avoiding a deficit model where solutions are aimed at changing the individual' (Equality Challenge Unit, 2019). This principle must equally apply to education in Scotland – we must emphasise long term system change instead of focusing on the individual such that systemic inequalities are routinely ignored.

Moreover, as mentioned above, tackling gender inequality and working to prevent VAWG is an effective use of resources. Not only does gender inequality cause VAWG (and the associated costs of its impacts), but places limitations on the success of our economy (Close the Gap and Engender, 2020; Close the Gap 2021). Therefore, to meet the broader social aims which we may wish our education system to serve, we must take gender equality as the most important priority for the re-development of our education system.

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## **6. How can we ensure that everyone involved in education in Scotland has a say in future decisions and actions?**

As discussed, an important part of building a gender equal education system is realising children's rights by ensuring that they have an equal role in the governance of the school and are encouraged to question the decisions of those in power. This means that as well as the current consultation process, children must continue to be involved in decisions about education in Scotland at all levels – from deciding individual classroom topics to the design of national exams.

As well as children and young people, the women's sector in Scotland is a source of decades of expertise on building gender equality into systems and practices. We must continue to be invited to share this expertise with groups working on gender equality and violence prevention in education, but invitations for expertise must also be extended when it comes to 'generic' education policy. This response will have made clear that embedding gender equality only works when it is embedded in the 'generic,' showing that our expertise is useful for all working on education. In order to do this work capacity is essential, and so the Scottish Government must commit to increased and sustainable funding for the women's sector in Scotland.

## **7. How can children and young people be cared for and supported in the future? (i.e. physical and mental wellbeing)**

Primary prevention of VAWG creates better wellbeing outcomes in childhood and beyond. Children who experience men's violence against women and girls – be that domestic abuse, sexual violence, female genital mutilation, or other forms of violence – have worse outcomes in terms of physical and mental health (Nelson, 2016; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). Their trauma can cause anxiety, depression, low confidence, and physical ill-health in childhood and beyond, with the impacts of VAWG lasting a long time (Nelson, 2016; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). This has both a cost to the individual and to the community, with coping with the impacts of

VAWG costing Scotland £6.6 billion per year (Scottish Government, 2009) [2]. Therefore, a primary prevention approach to re-building the education system is vital to caring for and supporting children and young people now and in the future. We must support them when VAWG has happened – but work even harder to try and prevent it from happening in the first place. Primary prevention means achieving gender equality, as unequal power between men and women is its root cause (Hester and Westmarland, 2005). A gender equal education will improve wellbeing outcomes for children and young people, now and in the future.

[2] This figure was established using the same approach used in the Scottish Government (2009) *Safer Lives – Change Lives: A Shared Approach to Tackling Violence Against Women in Scotland*. Available at: <https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20150219114440/http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2009/06/02153519/5> [Accessed 17/11/22]. Using information provided in Oliver, R., Alexander, B., Roe, S., and Wlasny, M. (2019) *The economic and social costs of domestic abuse*. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/918897/horr107.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/918897/horr107.pdf) [Accessed 17/11/22]

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## **8. How can the right of every child and young person to have opportunities to develop their full potential be achieved in future?**

An important part of ensuring that every child and young person's individual needs are supported and addressed now and in the future is taking a gender-sensitive approach. This means considering the specific needs that children and young people of specific genders might have, without making assumptions based on stereotypes. For example, girls may need specific encouragement to try out STEM subjects, and boys may need specific encouragement to take on nurturing roles during games. This is not to say that we should only encourage children to do things typically associated with another gender, but rather that specific effort is needed to counteract a society and culture which strongly encourages gender roles, through role modelling, film, TV, books, et cetera.

Much of the current approach to early learning focuses on child-led play (Scottish Executive, 2007, Education Scotland (2020)). This approach seems to stem from a children's rights perspective, which is positive. However, while agency is a right, so is the opportunity to develop a range of skills and talents (UNICEF, 2019). In practice, uninterrupted play can be understood as leaving children to play in gendered ways and learn gender roles. They do this not because of 'natural' differences between boys and girls, but because of the toys which are promoted to each gender and the gendered

roles children see characters and adults playing (Fawcett Society, 2020). Therefore, an education system which supports every child's individual needs would empower practitioners with tools to question and disrupt gendered play. This does not mean forbidding girls from the home corner or boys from playing with blocks but finding innovative ways to challenge stereotypes young children have already absorbed and support them to develop a range of skills, from understanding three-dimensional space to developing empathy.

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## **9. How can children and young people be helped to learn about our changing world, so they feel able to positively contribute?**

Gender inequality and VAWG has been a problem for generations, but it continues to evolve with society. The Covid-19 pandemic saw a regression for women's equality, with

women bearing the brunt of domestic labour and childcare, women-dominated sectors having disproportionate exposure to the virus, and many women and children being trapped at home with abusers (Engender, 2020; Engender, 2022). The rise of digital culture has seen the development of online so-called 'Incel' communities, which radicalise boys as young as 11 using misogyny, and actively encourage VAWG, including rape and femicide (Bates, 2021).

Now more than ever we must ensure that children and young people are not only taught the importance of gender equality and healthy relationships, but also experience it in practice throughout their schooling. This requires a whole-system approach, where a foundation of children's rights is used to develop systems of collective governance and curricula which explicitly and implicitly counteract gender stereotypes and attitudes which allow VAWG to thrive. We must utilise whole-school approaches to VAWG prevention, whereby children and young people learn through their experiences and the behaviours modelled to them that they are not limited by gender, that they have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, and that they have a duty to treat others with the same respect. The education system is uniquely placed to access almost all children and young people in Scotland with this message and create the gender equal Scotland free of men's VAWG we all want to see.

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**10. Do you have any other comments that you would like to provide about a vision for the future of Scottish Education?**