# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **International Day of the Girl** |
| **DATE** | **11 October 2024** |
| **BY** | **Jane Hutt MS, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip** |

October 11 is the International Day of the Girl, in which we recognise girls’ rights and the unique challenges girls face around the world. The theme this year is ‘Girls’ vision for the future’.

Being a girl should not dictate your options, opportunities or aspirations. Unfortunately, for millions of girls globally, this is still the harsh reality. Too many still face challenges which deny girls their rights, confine their choices and curtail their potential.

According to the UN, there are more than 1.1 billion girls across the globe. But nearly 4 in 10 girls are not completing upper-secondary school. Around 90 per cent of adolescent girls and young women do not use the internet in low-income countries while their male peers are twice as likely to be online, and girls aged 5-14 spend 160 million more hours every day on unpaid care and domestic work than boys of the same age ([https://www.un.org/en/observances/girl-child-day](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.un.org%2Fen%2Fobservances%2Fgirl-child-day&data=05%7C02%7CSian.Lewis2%40gov.wales%7C964458e507d44064371c08dce7999cde%7Ca2cc36c592804ae78887d06dab89216b%7C0%7C0%7C638639894159593712%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=lC4UM5Tb5xSDFBdZ6OCvC%2F43%2B1w17fAcSKwegrHmp%2BY%3D&reserved=0)).

Wales has led the way on children’s rights, enshrining the UN Convention on Rights of a Child (UNCRC) in law through *The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011*; the first country in the UK to do so. Wales has also appointed a dedicated Minister for Children and Social Care, with responsibility for children’s rights, signals our commitment to create a Wales for all children, a place where children’s rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.

I want to outline some of the work we are doing across Welsh Government to help empower girls to fulfil their potential.

Girls should be safe in all aspects of their lives yet we know that harassment, abuse and violence are shockingly common. Plan International UK’s [State of Girls’ Rights Report 2024](https://plan-uk.org/state-of-girls-rights-report.pdf), based on the views and experiences of 3000 girls and young women aged 12 to 21 across the UK, shows that only 5% of girls and young women feel completely safe in public spaces, such as on public transport or on the street, whilst just 9% feel completely safe in online spaces, and only 11% feel completely safe in leisure settings. Misogyny and long-standing structural inequalities sit at the heart of much of this.

We continue to work in partnership with Policing in Wales through the Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Blueprint, along with specialist services and wider public sector partners to raise awareness of the inequality and safety issues faced by women and girls, and to end all forms of VAWDASV. Work on delivering our [Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence: Strategy 2022 to 2026](https://www.gov.wales/violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-strategy-2022-2026-html) is aligned with our Programme for Government, with workstreams focusing on priorities such as addressing gender-based harassment in all public spaces and the needs of children and young people.

Preventing gender-based violence requires a whole-system approach. We have a commitment across Welsh Government to raise awareness amongst children and young people on matters such as equality, respect and consent. This is crucial if we are to stop the abuse. We want to ensure all children and young people have access to developmentally appropriate, high-quality learning that responds to their needs and experiences. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a statutory requirement in the Curriculum for Wales Framework and is mandatory for all learners.

Online safety is an ever evolving and complex issue and educating young people on how to safely engage with social media is a cross-curricular issue.

We recognise the importance of positive role models in young people’s lives and have worked with the Football Association of Wales (FAW) to develop dedicated resources for schools to tackle [online misogyny](https://hwb.gov.wales/news/articles/ea28f9ad-ea0a-4e01-9f05-4501cd8df7be).  We also developed supporting [campaigns](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fhwb.gov.wales%2Fnews%2Farticles%2F035e6e4b-01f1-46b9-b69c-b89675a53d24&data=05%7C02%7CSian.Lewis2%40gov.wales%7C837b5a4b24344309b47008dce2d712db%7Ca2cc36c592804ae78887d06dab89216b%7C0%7C0%7C638634660566226790%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=nkqHvr%2BhSgHYA6ofe1pB2vpa8rDxx18l2novJJKS8bE%3D&reserved=0) featuring international players that raise awareness about the impact of toxic masculinity online and the importance of both boys and men calling out harassment aimed at girls and women.

We are empowering girls voices to be heard through the new ‘Keeping Safe Online Youth Group’ that is being established which will offer us valuable insight into their experiences.

We continue to provide support for girls and young women into Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM). We want Wales to be a nation where there are no barriers to accessing STEM opportunities at all levels of education.

In 2024-25, our grant funding for the delivery of science and STEM initiatives totalled £1.6m, with a strong focus on encouraging girls to select related qualifications and career pathways. This includes initiatives such as Engineering Education Schemes Wales’ “Girls into STEM” and Institute of Physics’ “Whole School Inclusion and Equity”. Female learners get the opportunity to engage with universities and local businesses, introducing them to the careers that they can pursue after their years in education.

Congratulations to Pacha Pritchard from Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Edern who was named UK Young Engineer of the Year 2024 in June.  Pacha received the award for her Portable Pollution Monitor project - an innovative tool that uses emojis to communicate pollution levels to the public. Pacha is determined to encourage more girls into STEM and I am sure she will go on to have a successful STEM career, here in Wales.

We also provide non-grant-funded support to the likes of National Cyber Security Centre’s ‘CyberFirst Wales’ programme. They have had a positive impact on gender diversity in Computing through their [CyberFirst girls’ competition](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ncsc.gov.uk%2Fcyberfirst%2Fgirls-competition&data=05%7C02%7CCurtis.ArmsWilliams%40gov.wales%7C59fc1141e5ef4e87373208dce12fc036%7Ca2cc36c592804ae78887d06dab89216b%7C0%7C0%7C638632842407933813%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=yUL1b1mQBsSYj%2FZ0lmTE6AUHl1hnX25295%2Bl1pveBQ8%3D&reserved=0), which saw Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School win the Wales branch of the competition in 2024.

The Seren Academy is a fully funded programme to support the aspirations and ambitions of the most able learners, helping to widen their horizons, develop a passion for their chosen field of study, and fulfil their potential at the highest level. Seren currently supports learners from Y8 – Y13, across all schools and Further Education colleges in Wales, through a super-curricular experience. 57% of learners in the Seren Academy are female. The programme has been designed to ignite curiosity, empower choice and advance potential to increase learner participation in higher education at leading universities.

In 2022/23, there were 27,565 female undergraduates studying science subjects in Wales, which represents 44% of all female undergraduates studying in Wales (Higher Education Statistics Agency: [Figure 13](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.hesa.ac.uk%2Fdata-and-analysis%2Fsb269%2Ffigure-13&data=05%7C02%7CSian.Lewis2%40gov.wales%7C5a9887badbee4d50b9c508dce6de4c82%7Ca2cc36c592804ae78887d06dab89216b%7C0%7C0%7C638639089642911956%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=UeWAyxlsGIk5GtUFhJYSQUQWGwYZEbzE0%2FJyFnWekeo%3D&reserved=0); [Figure 14](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.hesa.ac.uk%2Fdata-and-analysis%2Fsb269%2Ffigure-14&data=05%7C02%7CSian.Lewis2%40gov.wales%7C5a9887badbee4d50b9c508dce6de4c82%7Ca2cc36c592804ae78887d06dab89216b%7C0%7C0%7C638639089642938446%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=EMKg985CO19RKf2sEnxHmT3KihKTQaMPtjnwMa1seXk%3D&reserved=0)).

Participation in sport can help break down gender stereotypes, boost self-esteem and contribute to the development of leadership skills. Sadly, we know from the [Sport Wales Annual Report 2023-2024](https://senedd.wales/media/x5vdruw0/gen-ld16711-e.pdf) that girls’ participation in sport is 3.1 percentage points below the overall average, and has dropped by 9.3 percentage points since 2018. The report indicates that this change in behaviour is likely to have been heavily impacted by events linked to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our investment through Sport Wales is targeted at a range of projects and initiatives aimed at supporting girls in sport. These include ‘glow in the dark sessions’, a creative solution to break down barriers for girls and women who don’t like being watched when they take part in sport activities.

Role models are also hugely important in sport. Wales consistently excels on the international sporting stage, and we’ve seen this most recently at the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris across a range of sports through the performances of girls and young women such as Anna Hursey, Ruby Evans, Funmi Oduwaiye and Emma Finucane.

We will continue to pursue objectives that enable women and girls to enjoy the health, social and wellbeing benefits of a lifelong enjoyment of sport.

In May, a series of Period Proud roundtable events were held to gather insight on the impact of periods on women and girls and their participation in sport. Some of the key themes which emerged from the discussions included improving education, access to resources, making facilities more accessible to everyone and access to products.

We are already taking action in these areas through our [Period Proud Wales Action Plan](https://www.gov.wales/period-proud-wales-action-plan) which outlines how we aim to tackle period poverty and ensure nobody misses school, work or sport due to access to period products. Our total Period Dignity annual grant now totals over £3.2 million. Local authorities are working hard to ensure that, in addition to ensuring products are in every school and college in Wales, products are widely available across a range of community venues, including food banks and pantries, libraries, youth centres and community hubs.

Menstrual well-being and learning about the menstrual cycle is mandatory within the new Curriculum for Wales. This will help remove the stigma of talking about periods, improve the understanding of them and dispel the taboos and myths around them.

Recently published [2021 Census results](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ons.gov.uk%2Fpeoplepopulationandcommunity%2Fhealthandsocialcare%2Fsocialcare%2Farticles%2Funpaidcarebyagesexanddeprivationenglandandwales%2Fcensus2021%2Frelateddata&data=05%7C02%7CSian.Lewis2%40gov.wales%7Cd135ab360c4b49608d2a08dce7a69146%7Ca2cc36c592804ae78887d06dab89216b%7C0%7C0%7C638639949798464331%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=YS6LscmWFb5Anj5VesLzrPecLomDGgtvL3cQiO5UNhg%3D&reserved=0) show that the numbers of young carers and young adult carers in Wales up to age 24 have decreased since 2011 from around 30,000 to 22,000. There are 8,230 young carers aged 5–17 years, more females are young carers and more live in areas of high deprivation.

We are working with Carers Trust Wales to identify how we can best support awareness, recognition and support of young carers in school and college settings. We will run a promotion this autumn to increase understanding of young carers.

We supported the third annual young carers festival which was held in August and well received by the 300 young carers who attended, 65% of whom were female.

When girls are safe, empowered and fulfil their potential, we all benefit. Welsh Government will continue to help support every girl in Wales to aspire, inspire and achieve.