Scottish Women's Convention response to the Scottish Parliament's Consultation on:

Restricting Mobile Phones in Scotland's Schools



17th November 2026

Premise

The Scottish Government's *Restricting Mobile Phone's in* Scotland's *Schools* consultation is considering how proposed legislation can be used to restrict the use of mobile phones in Scottish schools. The consultation aims to address concerns around disruption to learning, cyberbullying, online harassment, exposure to harmful content and the wider impact of mobile phone use on young people's wellbeing.

From our previous work on violence against women and girls (VAWG), we believe that the consultation is particularly relevant given concerns about online misogyny, sexual harassment, image-based abuse and the exposure of young people to harmful gender stereotypes and attitudes that normalise this behaviour from an early age.

Restricting mobile phone use during the school day could help reduce opportunities for online harassment, intimidation and the non-consensual sharing of images, whilst contributing to safer and more inclusive learning environments for girls and young women.

However, restrictions alone will not address the underlying attitudes and behaviours that contribute to gender-based violence. It is therefore important that any proposed legislation is accompanied by education on healthy relationships, consent, digital safety and gender equality, alongside appropriate support for those experiencing abuse.

This consultation response therefore draws from these findings and will help to ensure that the experiences, safety and voices of girls and young women are considered in the development of national policy.

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women across Scotland to ensure that their views are represented in policy and decision-making processes. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at Scottish, UK and international levels. The SWC gathers information using different methods, including roadshows, thematic conferences, surveys, and both in-person and online roundtable events. This submission presents the views of a range of women, reflecting their opinions, ideas and lived experience. Working together with many other equalities organisations and community groups, we use our broad network to ensure that women from a range of backgrounds are heard and acknowledged. We are continually reviewing innovative ways of engaging with women and developing our trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice to support vital contributions from as many women as possible.

Scottish Women's Convention

1. The Scottish Government has committed to restricting the use of mobile phones in schools. To what extent do you agree?

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) supports a proportionate and carefully applied approach to restricting mobile phone use in schools, particularly where this contributes to improved learning, pupils' wellbeing and safety.

From a women's and girls' equality perspective, there are particular concerns about the ways in which mobile phones can enable sexual harassment, non-consensual photography and filming, image-sharing, online bullying and exposure to misogynistic content.

The SWC has consistently highlighted the relationship between online misogyny and girls' experiences within education. Our work clearly demonstrates that online abuse does not remain separate from school life and can affect girls' confidence, wellbeing and their ability to fully participate in the classroom and wider education.

"Social media and messaging platforms are regularly used as part of patterns of misogynistic bullying. Seeing 'incel' pick-up artists and similar influencers online can motivate bad behaviour."[1]

However, mobile phones also have legitimate uses, including for medical needs, disability-related support, caring responsibilities, learning, travel and personal safety.

Any restriction should therefore be proportionate, applied consistently and supported by clear exceptions. It should also form part of a wider approach to improving school culture and tackling harmful behaviour, rather than just being regarded as a solution in itself.

2. What is your knowledge of how phones are being used in schools at the moment?

Mobile phones are used in schools for a wide range of purposes. These include communicating with family and friends, accessing educational materials, checking travel information, making payments, listening to music, social media use, messaging, photography, video and gaming.

Some of these uses can be beneficial, particularly for pupils with disabilities, additional support needs, health conditions or caring responsibilities.

However, concerns arise where phones are used to record others without their consent, to share images or videos, engage in bullying or harassment or to circulate sexualised content.

Research carried out by the SWC has highlighted that girls have encountered sexual harassment and sexist bullying within education, including examples where online behaviour has had a direct impact on their experiences at school.[2]

In addition to this, the SWC's work has also drawn attention to examples of sexualised images of schoolgirls being shared online alongside identifying information. This underlines the

[1] Scottish Women's Convention, Misogyny in Education
https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/resources/misogyny-in-education.pdf
[2] Ibid

importance of consent, privacy and safeguarding when considering the use of personal devices in schools.

"Our school had a 'slags page' on Instagram where photos of girls nearly naked…would be posted with their name and caption."[3]

3. Think about the different things young people might use their phone for in school. If restrictions on mobile phones in schools were introduced, what do you think the positive impacts might be?

Potential positive impacts include improved concentration, reduced classroom disruption and greater opportunities for face-to-face interaction.

Restrictions may also create protected time away from social media and reduce the expectation that young people should remain continuously connected during the school day.

From a women's and girls' perspective, restrictions could reduce opportunities for harmful behaviour involving personal devices during school hours, contributing to a safer and more focused learning environment.

As previously indicated, SWC research has shown that misogyny and sexual harassment can affect girls' confidence, wellbeing and willingness to participate in classroom discussion. Reducing opportunities for such behaviour may help girls feel more comfortable and able to engage in their education.[4]

There are also growing concerns regarding AI-generated sexual images and deepfakes, which create significant risks to the privacy, dignity and safety of girls and young women.

"[Girls'] safety is at particular risk from the fact that anyone can steal your image from anywhere on the internet and turn it into a sexually explicit video that humiliates and ruins your life."[5]

While restrictions cannot eliminate these risks, they may help limit opportunities for harmful content to be created or circulated during the school day.

4. Thinking again about the different things young people might use their phone for in school, if restrictions on mobile phones in schools were introduced, what do you think the negative impacts might be?

Restrictions may have unintended consequences if they are too rigidly applied.

[3] Scottish Women's Convention, Programme for Government Evidence
https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/resources/pfg-brochure-23-24-final.pdf
[4] Scottish Women's Convention, Misogyny in Scotland
https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/resources/misogyny-report-june-2023-final.pdf
[5] Scottish Women's Convention, Safer Internet Day 2026
https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/blogs-saferinternet-2026/

Some pupils require access to a mobile phone because of a medical condition, disability, additional support needs or caring responsibility. Any policy must make appropriate provision for these circumstances.[6]

There are also safeguarding considerations. Some girls may rely on their phone to contact a trusted adult, arrange safe travel or to seek help if they feel threatened or unsafe.

Digital inequality should also be considered. Where personal devices are currently used for educational purposes, schools should ensure that pupils are not disadvantaged if access to their own devices are restricted.

The SWC has highlighted wider concerns about digital exclusion and the importance of ensuring that women and girls are not left behind as education, services and communication become increasingly digital.

"Investment in digital inclusion to ensure no woman is left behind."[7]

There is also a need to ensure that restrictions are enforced both consistently and fairly. Monitoring should identify whether particular groups of pupils are more likely to face sanctions or confiscation.

Finally, there is a risk that any restrictions may address the use of devices without tackling the underlying causes of harmful behaviour. Schools must therefore ensure that wider preventative and educational measures remain in place.

5. If restrictions on mobile phones in schools were introduced, there would be exceptions to allow certain children and young people to use their phones if they have an important need to do so. This would mean those children and young people would have access to their phones only for the purpose of using them for their specific need. To what extent do you agree with the following potential exceptions to restrictions on mobile phones in schools?

The SWC would support clear and accessible exceptions for pupils who require mobile phones because of:

- medical conditions;
- disability or additional support needs;
- caring responsibilities;
- agreed educational needs; and
- individual safeguarding concerns.

Exceptions should be straightforward to access and should not require pupils to repeatedly disclose sensitive or personal information.

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[6] Scottish Government, Restricting Mobile Phones in Scotland's Schools
https://www.gov.scot/publications/restricting-mobile-phones-scotlands-schools/
[7] Scottish Women's Convention, Manifesto 2026
https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/resources/manifesto-2026.pdf

From a women's and girls' perspective, safeguarding should be explicitly recognised. A pupil experiencing domestic abuse, stalking, harassment or another identified risk may need agreed access to a phone or trusted adult as part of an individual safety plan.

The SWC has also consistently highlighted the importance of recognising caring responsibilities and the impact they can have on women and girls and this may also have to be considered.

Overall, schools should ensure that decisions about exceptions are made sensitively, with appropriate involvement from pupils, parents or carers and relevant support staff, while respecting individual circumstances and confidentiality.

6. Legislation on restricting the use of mobile phones in schools will reduce parents' direct contact with their children during the school day. Schools which have introduced restrictions on mobile phones currently ask parents to contact the school office if they require to communicate with their child. Is there anything about this approach that you would like to comment on?

Using the school office as the main route for routine communications between 'parent' and child is reasonable, provided that the system is reliable, accessible and able to deal quickly with urgent situations.

Parents and carers may have complex work, childcare and caring responsibilities. Schools should therefore recognise that changes in circumstances or emergencies can arise at short notice.

There should be a clear and well-communicated process for urgent messages, including information on how emergencies will be handled and how quickly pupils can be contacted.

The SWC has highlighted the significant pressures women can face in balancing employment, childcare and unpaid caring responsibilities.[8]

The school-office approach should therefore be designed around the practical realities of family life. It should not place additional and unnecessary burdens on parents and carers or create delays in communication whereby a pupil's wellbeing is potentially at stake.

7. Do you agree that national restrictions on the use of mobile phones should apply to independent and grant-aided schools in addition to schools run by education authorities?

If national restrictions are introduced, the same core principles of safeguarding, equality and pupil wellbeing should apply across all school sectors.

Girls should have comparable protection from harassment, non-consensual recordings, image-sharing and other mobile-phone-related harms regardless of the type of school they attend.

[8] Scottish Women's Convention, Manifesto 2026
https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/resources/manifesto-2026.pdf

At the same time, schools must retain sufficient flexibility to make reasonable adjustments for pupils with disabilities, health conditions and additional support needs.

This is particularly important in grant-aided additional needs schools, where communication and accessibility needs may be more significant.

Evidence from recent work carried out by the SWC demonstrates that misogyny and gender-based harassment are wider educational issues and are not limited to one school sector.[9]

A clear and consistent national approach would help establish expectations whilst allowing schools to respond appropriately to the needs of their pupils.

8. Should restrictions on mobile phones also apply to wearable digital devices, such as smartwatches with notifications enabled?

Restrictions should focus on the functions of a device rather than simply its format.

Where a smartwatch or other wearable device can send messages, receive notifications, access social media, record audio or images, or create similar distractions to a mobile phone, it is reasonable for comparable restrictions to apply.

However, exceptions should remain where wearable technology is used for medical monitoring, disability, accessibility or another agreed support need.

A function-based approach would also make the policy more adaptable as technology develops, ensuring that the rules remain relevant without unnecessarily restricting devices that provide essential support.

9. Which other issues would you like us to be aware of?

The gendered impact of mobile phone restrictions should be explicitly considered as part of all relevant implementation and evaluation.

Particular attention should be given to the increasing use of technology to facilitate gender-based abuse, including intimate image-sharing, AI-generated sexual images and deepfakes. These developments demonstrate the need for schools to remain responsive to emerging forms of online harm.

Any restriction should sit within a broader whole-school approach. This should include effective education on consent, respectful relationships, online misogyny, image-sharing, pornography, AI-generated content and responsible digital behaviour.

Clear, confidential and trusted reporting routes are also essential. Girls should be confident that reports of sexual harassment, bullying, image-based abuse or misogyny will be taken seriously and dealt with appropriately.

[9] Scottish Women's Convention, Misogyny in Education
https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/resources/misogyny-in-education.pdf

SWC research indicates that girls can be reluctant to report incidents where they believe their concerns may be minimised or dismissed.[10]

The success of any policy should therefore be assessed not only in terms of classroom behaviour or attainment, but also by whether girls report feeling safer, more confident and better able to participate in school life.

Girls and young women should be directly involved in the implementation and review of any policy. This should include the voices of disabled girls, young carers and girls who have experienced harassment, abuse or other forms of gender-based violence.

Meaningful consultation with pupils will be essential to understanding whether restrictions are achieving their intended outcomes and identifying any unintended consequences.

10. Are you a child or young person, parent or carer, member of school staff, or other?

Other - voluntary sector organisation

Conclusion

The SWC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's consultation on Restricting Mobile Phone's in Scotland's Schools.

As an organisation, we will continue to work with women from across Scotland to gather voices and experiences relating to this topic and its effects on women's equality.



[10] Scottish Women's Convention, Misogyny in Education
https://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/resources/misogyny-in-education.pdf



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