

August 21st 2026

Re: Call for views on School Uniform (Trousers) Bill

Dear Ad hoc Committee,

The Women's Resource and Development Agency entirely supports the intention of this Bill. WRDA has consistently recommended that two principles should guide policy development in relation to school uniforms.

- 1) **School uniform policy should centre the agency of the student not the control of the school.** To ensure dignity and equality, school uniforms must allow students the flexibility to dress for school in a comfortable manner. The right for all students to choose to wear trousers is an important part of this.
- 2) **End gender specific uniform policies.** Gendered uniform policies reinforce patriarchal hierarchies and gender stereotypes, which cause real harm to students.¹ We are emphatic in pushing for statutory requirements that compel schools to offer a range of uniform options to students of all genders. While this is particularly important for affirming trans and gender nonconforming students, cisgender male and female students must also be offered multiple options to break down harmful gender stereotypes.

Combatting gender stereotypes from a young age is both a legal requirement following the passing of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019² which incorporated text from the CEDAW Report

¹ Wolfe, M. (2024) 'School uniforms that hurt: an Australian perspective on gendered mattering' The Australian Educational Researcher. Vol: 51 pp. 909-927; Bragg, S & Ringrose, J. (2023) 'Intervening in School Uniform Debates: Making Equity Matter in England' in Shanks, R., Ovington, J., Cross, B., Carnarvon, A. (eds) School Uniforms. The Cultural and Social Foundations of Education. Palgrave Macmillan. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-32939-5_4; Let Clothes be Clothes (2021) 'Dressing Girls to Fail' Report for the Department of Education.

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2019/22>

of 2018³, and a key recommendation of the Expert Panel Report for the Gender Equality Strategy (2020)⁴. This legislation represents a step towards achieving this goal.

The WRDA would like to stress that a school uniform policy which allows all children to wear trousers should not be controversial. Women and girls currently wear trousers in all aspects of life. It is commonplace and there are no reasonable objections to the implementation of this Bill. It should have been standard school policy in Northern Ireland decades ago. The implementation of this Bill will not have any adverse impacts on students or any financial impacts on students and it has WRDA's full support.

For any questions or queries relating to this submission, please contact:

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³ Report of the Inquiry concerning the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW/C/OP.8/GBR/1) published on 6 March 2018 Available at: file:///C:/Users/ElaineCrory/Downloads/CEDAW_C_OP-8_GBR_1-EN.pdf

⁴ Expert Panel Report for the Gender Equality Strategy (2020) <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/dfc-social-inclusion-strategy-gender-expert-advisory-panel-report.pdf>