

STUC Response
Enhancing Sexual Wellbeing in Scotland
A Sexual Health and Relationship Strategy

March 2004

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The STUC is Scotland's Trade Union Centre. Its purpose is to co-ordinate, develop and articulate the views and policies of the Trade Union Movement in Scotland and, through the creation of real social partnership, to promote trade unionism, equality and social justice, the creation and maintenance of high quality jobs and the public sector delivery of services.
- 1.2 The STUC represents around 630,000 working people and their families throughout Scotland. It speaks for trade union members in and out of work, in the community and in the workplace. Our affiliated organisations have interests in all sectors of the economy. Our representative structures are constructed to take account of the specific views of women members, young members, black/minority ethnic members, LGBT members, and members with a disability, as well as retired and unemployed workers.
- 1.3 The STUC Women's Committee was in particular asked to provide views for the STUC response to this consultation document.

2 General Comments

- 2.1 The STUC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Executive consultation document "Enhancing Sexual Wellbeing in Scotland – A Sexual Health and Relationship Strategy".
- 2.2 The open, positive and sensitive tone of the consultation is most welcome, along with the recognition of the complex and diverse, personal, social, emotional, ethical and health aspects of developing a successful sexual health and relationships strategy. We appreciate the attempts to

address Scotland's sexual health problems and support the proposals for a national strategy. The ministerial role within this is an indication of the Scottish Executive's commitment to the issues.

- 2.3 The STUC is concerned that there is no clear commitment within the consultation document to provide the additional resources that will be required to fully implement this strategy.
- 2.4 Along with resources the STUC would also like to see a specific timetable for the implementation of the strategy, which has a national strategy for improving sexual health.
- 2.5 The STUC welcomes the comments contained in the opening section of the document referring to the negative impact on the sexual well being of children and young people by ignorance, intolerance, prejudice and stereotyping. The STUC recognises the importance of adhering to the principles of mainstreaming equality in this proposed strategy.

3 Leadership of the Strategy

- 3.1 As noted in our general comments, we support the establishment of a national strategy on sexual health and relationships. The creation of a Minister-led Sexual Health Advisory Committee to oversee the implementation of the strategy is helpful to indicate the Executive's commitment to tackling sexual health issues.
- 3.2 However, to be implemented effectively and successfully the strategy will require additional resources. The STUC is concerned that there is no specific commitment to additional funding. Nor are there clear priorities outlined or proposed timescales for the implementation of the strategy. Without such timescales and priorities it would be easy to lose focus on the issues affecting sexual health in Scotland.
- 3.3 The strategy has resource implications for local authorities and the NHS. At a time when current sexual health services are under pressure, the STUC wants to see a commitment

from the Executive to additional funding to implement the proposals effectively.

- 3.4** It is important to have national standards of care between service providers at all service levels, to ensure that everyone has access to the same level of care in relation to sexual health.

4 The role of schools

- 4.1 School based 'Sex and Relationships Education' (SRE) should be delivered by highly trained professionals in a consistent way that supports parents and carers of children and young people. Many schools deliver SRE successfully and sensitively with teachers and other professionals working in partnership to provide the most appropriate curriculum and setting for children. The reference in the document to a high level of support for teachers is welcome.
- 4.2 The STUC recognises the importance of the views of parents and consultation with parents about the delivery of SRE. It also recognises that teachers and other workers may be placed in a sensitive position when asked for advice by children and young people whose parents may hold specific views based on religious beliefs and/or cultural backgrounds. There may be tensions between the rights of the child to education and the rights of parents. The STUC believes that teachers along with other professionals should be trained to deal with such circumstances and that the level of consultation and support is such staff do not feel vulnerable.
- 4.3 While there are many examples of successful multi-agency delivery of SRE, the STUC is aware of the resource implications of such an approach. As noted above, we believe that the Executive needs to provide additional resources to ensure that all elements of the strategy can be put in place. We welcome the commitment to ensuring that all children and young people will be provided with access to SRE and that it will be delivered by highly trained professionals.

5 Sexual and Reproductive Health Services

- 5.1 The STUC agrees that lifelong learning about relationships and sexual health must be complemented by accessible, confidential and appropriate clinical services.
- 5.2 Our women members tell us that currently “Well Women Clinics” can provide excellent services to women of varying ages and ethnic backgrounds. A welcoming atmosphere can be found within this environment with confidentiality and trust being paramount to the service.
- 5.3 However, as noted above, the STUC has concerns that sexual health services are currently under pressure, and has evidence of reductions in service provision in parts of Scotland. Cuts to budgets has meant reductions in successful “well women clinics” where accessibility and flexibility of opening times and services had been welcomed by women. Our women members emphasise the importance of flexible opening times so as they can attend in lunch hours, after work and in the evening, something not always possible with GPs’ surgeries.
- 5.4 The STUC believes it is essential for the Scottish Executive to provide the resources required to meet the whole range of needs of women, men, young people and families across Scotland to ensure that a successful and responsive sexual health service is delivered.

6 HIV/AIDS

- 6.1 Whilst supportive of the Scottish Executive strategy to reduce Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) the STUC is clear that workers should not suffer discrimination because they have an STI such as HIV/AIDs. Workers should not be forced to take HIV tests. Confidentiality should be kept where a worker does disclose HIV, and reasonable adjustments made to accommodate workers with any disability resulting from HIV or other STI.