



# Evaluation of Ask and Act

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## Executive Summary

### 1. Research aims and methodology

- 1.1 The National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) 2016-2021 sets out a commitment to train relevant professionals to provide effective, timely and appropriate responses to victims and survivors. An example of this type of training is Ask and Act, which is a process of targeted enquiry to be practiced across the Public Service to identify violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.
- 1.2 The aims of the evaluation of Ask and Act were:
  - to explore the effectiveness of the implementation of the training to date
  - to explore the impact of the Ask and Act training on individuals and consequently to assess how successful it is in meeting the aims of Ask and Act
  - to explore how effectively the training is contributing to the objectives of the National Strategy on Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV).
- 1.3 A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods were used to address the evaluation aims and comprised both secondary data analysis and primary data collection. Key research activities included a half-day online workshop with Ask and Act trainers, an online survey for trainers and learners (which received 382 responses) and 52 interviews with regional co-ordinators, trainers, learners and colleagues from Welsh Women's Aid and Welsh Government.

### 2. Key findings

- 2.1 This section summarises the key findings from the evaluation and how they address each of the research questions (RQs) and how these contribute to the relevant National Strategy objectives.

#### Process evaluation

*RQ1: How effective is the delivery of Ask and Act across the relevant authorities?*

- 2.2 Delivery of Ask and Act is complex and common challenges to effective delivery were observed across relevant authorities, particularly relating to capacity and funding.
- 2.3 There were widespread challenges relating to the capacity of staff to attend the Train the Trainer course, complete the assessment and deliver Awareness training. Staff were often expected to carry out these roles in addition to their already heavy workloads. This meant that not all of those attending Train the Trainer courses went on to become active trainers.
- 2.4 The staged rollout of Train the Trainer courses region-by-region also posed challenges. Some organisations found it difficult to establish and maintain a pool of active trainers due to staff turnover

and not having adequate opportunities to train new trainers, highlighting the need for more flexibility in the rollout schedule.

- 2.5 The process of allocation of the Ask and Act Subsidy Grant was also a barrier to delivery. The grant is often under-utilised which is reportedly the result of relevant authorities being uncertain of the level of funding they would be receiving and not receiving confirmation in time to incorporate it into their training plans. Organisations / local authorities were also often delivering more training than the grant covered, which put pressure on local budgets and resources, despite high levels of support and demand for the training within organisations.
- 2.6 However, some enabling factors which supported effective delivery were also identified. Business and administration support in coordinating the training was valued, but communication of the aims and objectives of Ask and Act to staff at all levels of involvement to assist coordination was highlighted as an area for improvement.
- 2.7 Group 3 Awareness training had not commenced in most areas and additional direction and guidance regarding the rollout, roles and responsibilities of Group 3 'Champions' would be beneficial. Some reported that they may struggle with capacity and resourcing of 'Champions' whilst others felt that Group 2 trainers would essentially become 'Champions' through experience of delivering Awareness training.
- 2.8 Co-delivery with third sector specialists was highly valued by non-specialist trainers, who appreciated the expertise and experience around VAWDASV that these trainers brought. Collaboration worked best where ongoing partnerships were developed and trainers agreed together how best to deliver the sessions. Delivering in this way also helped organisations to build networks. However, it was challenging in terms of capacity and resource for some smaller third sector organisations to commit to delivering training.

*RQ2: To what extent does Ask and Act support, complement or enhance existing approaches to supporting survivors of VAWDASV?*

- 2.9 There was overwhelming agreement about the need for Ask and Act. Putting VAWDASV on the agenda within organisations was felt to be a priority and many saw Ask and Act as an effective way of achieving this. Respondents recognised the gap in training that Ask and Act was filling in terms of developing skills in 'asking and acting' and early intervention. Ask and Act was felt to fit in well alongside VAWDASV training and the consistency that the approach would bring across Wales was felt to be valuable.
- 2.10 The delivery model was generally supported, with respondents feeling that the Train the Trainer approach gave some local ownership, which promoted investment from staff, and an ongoing point of contact in the organisation.
- 2.11 Regions tended to interpret the National Training Framework on priority staff groups for Ask and Act training loosely. Whilst selecting professionals in frontline positions who are likely to come into contact with survivors, they often extended beyond the suggested groups, and so allowed staff to self-select. Many respondents highlighted the relevance of Ask and Act to everyone as justification for this approach, however difficulties emerged in ensuring these staff had received Group 1 training, the ability of certain staff to 'ask and act', and the need for prioritisation where resourcing was a challenge.
- 2.12 Respondents highlighted the importance of continued funding for Ask and Act, along with increases to the Subsidy Grant and ongoing support from Welsh Government to maintain the delivery of Ask and Act.

*RQ3: What forms of monitoring and evaluation have been / could be useful for the programme?*

- 2.13 Monitoring and evaluation via pre- and post-training questionnaires is challenging and has become even more so following the move to online training, as it is more difficult to ensure these questionnaires are completed. Although Welsh Women's Aid receive feedback via the Ask and Act

steering group which they find helpful, they would benefit from more feedback once Awareness training has started being rolled out locally to help in reviewing the programme.

- 2.14 Trainers reported that they would also benefit from reviewing and reflecting on feedback from learners, to help them to improve and develop Awareness training. Currently, feedback tends to be collated by business support colleagues before being sent to regional leads and Welsh Government.
- 2.15 There is a need for the development of processes and systems to enable consistent and ongoing monitoring of the medium to longer term impacts of Ask and Act. Enabling better data collection locally, whilst minimising the burden on professionals is important.

## **Outcomes evaluation**

### *RQ4: To what extent is the training programme contributing to the aims of Ask and Act?*

- 2.16 The training is contributing to the aims of Ask and Act very well. Respondents were very positive about the impacts of Ask and Act with most reporting that the training had increased their knowledge and awareness of the signs and symptoms of VAWDASV and different forms of VAWDASV. It is likely that this is particularly the case for those who do not work in social work or safeguarding roles.
- 2.17 Confidence in 'asking and acting' was also improved following training. A lack of confidence was highlighted as one of the biggest barriers to addressing VAWDASV so this is a particularly important outcome. Although some participants still did not feel fully confident about these issues after training, many felt that their confidence had been boosted. An increased focus on the 'asking and acting' elements in the courses would be beneficial.
- 2.18 Learners gave very positive feedback on Awareness training sessions in terms of the relevance of the course to their roles and organisations, and the clarity of information delivered. They found information on 'asking and acting' particularly useful as well as information on VAWDASV and support services available.
- 2.19 Crucially, significant numbers of respondents reported that they had provided direct support for survivors or potential survivors following their training through 'asking and acting', and a small number had been able to disclose VAWDASV that they themselves had experienced.
- 2.20 The impacts of Ask and Act also extended beyond the workplace with some applying their training in their personal lives with friends and family. Those who had received the training felt they were more able to support others to external agencies and support.

### *RQ5: To what extent has Act and Act influenced the culture relating to VAWDASV in organisations where staff have received the training?*

- 2.21 Ask and Act is influencing the culture relating to VAWDASV in organisations where staff have received the training, but there is still further to go. Many respondents felt that Ask and Act was helping them to support more survivors and ensure survivors have a more positive experience when disclosing VAWDASV. Although, some participants felt that greater focus needed to be placed on cultural change within organisations (for example, in terms of training for senior managers to support their staff), a number of organisation-level impacts were reported. Respondents highlighted increased awareness and a more supportive and open culture around VAWDASV in their organisation. Respondents felt better able to offer appropriate support, that disclosures are better supported and facilitated, and that links with organisations providing specialist support have improved.
- 2.22 Additionally, survivors of VAWDASV who had received the training reported positive impacts in terms of how they think their colleagues and organisation would respond to disclosures of VAWDASV and how supported they felt as a survivor.

*RQ6: How effective is Ask and Act? How could the Ask and Act training be improved?*

- 2.23 Overall, Ask and Act is fairly effective, however participants did identify ways in which the training could be improved in order to improve their knowledge and confidence in delivering or implementing Ask and Act.
- 2.24 There was recognition amongst participants that the Ask and Act Train the Trainer course faced a challenge in the need to cater to two audience types – those in training roles and those with specialist VAWDASV knowledge. Striking a balance between the needs of these two audiences frequently left participants feeling that the course should have covered different areas, however these were often in contrast to each other. For example, whilst some participants felt that the course should focus more on how to deliver training, others felt there should be more focus on VAWDASV and how to deal with disclosures.
- 2.25 Some gaps in training content (related to different forms of VAWDASV) were identified but the continuous development approach taken by Welsh Women’s Aid was acknowledged as helping with the development of the training.
- 2.26 Although many respondents gave positive feedback on the Train the Trainer course itself and went away feeling confident about delivering the training, a substantial minority did not feel adequately equipped and felt nervous about delivering training, particularly given its sensitive nature. With this in mind, the importance and value of delivering training alongside third sector specialists was highlighted.
- 2.27 The ability to adapt the training package was helpful and preferable to being required to deliver an overly rigid model, affording trainers a sense of ownership and autonomy over the content. However, there was uncertainty in some regions about the extent to which they were permitted to make changes.

*RQ7: How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected identification and disclosures of VAWDASV? What implications has this had on the delivery of training and impact of Ask and Act?*

- 2.28 Wider research suggests that Covid-19 has had an impact on identification and disclosures of VAWDASV in complex and uneven ways and has affected the ways in which organisations can support survivors, and this was reflected in evidence from this evaluation. However, detailed evidence on this part of the question was beyond the scope of the evaluation. The key focus within this research question was on the impact of Covid-19 on the delivery and impact of Ask and Act.
- 2.29 The Covid-19 pandemic has had a considerable impact on the rollout of Ask and Act training. It resulted in delays to the start of Awareness training, whilst organisations adjusted to online platforms and adapted Ask and Act for online delivery.
- 2.30 Although adapting the training did create barriers initially, most adapted well and were able to continue delivery throughout the pandemic with many meeting their targets. However, some barriers have remained, with interaction and engagement with the training content reportedly lower due to the remote nature of the sessions. Delivery of the training online was also a concern in terms of the sensitivity of the subject. Trainers had aimed to mitigate any additional risks for attendees by putting in place additional health and wellbeing support. Staff capacity was also affected by the pandemic as some were redeployed elsewhere.
- 2.31 On the other hand, there were advantages to online delivery. In particular, this made the training more widely accessible, removing travel time and expenses, and being more convenient and less resource intensive for individuals and organisations. This meant in some cases that sign-up and attendance at Awareness sessions were improved.

## **Contribution of Ask and Act to the National Strategy**

2.32 Ask and Act is particularly relevant to Objectives 1, 4 and 5 of the National Strategy on VAWDASV (Welsh Government, 2016).

*Objective 1: Increase awareness and challenge attitudes of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence across the Welsh Population*

2.33 The findings from this evaluation indicate that awareness of VAWDASV is being increased by Ask and Act training. Further and ongoing research will be required to assess the extent to which longer term impacts of increasing awareness and challenging attitudes to VAWDASV more widely across the Welsh population are addressed through Ask and Act.

*Objective 4: Make early intervention and prevention a priority*

2.34 Many participants highlighted the importance of making support for survivors of VAWDASV a priority within their organisations and saw Ask and Act as an effective way of achieving this. Respondents reported a clear need for Ask and Act and recognised the gap in training that it is filling in terms of developing skills in 'asking and acting' and early intervention.

*Objective 5: Relevant professionals are trained to provide effective, timely and appropriate responses to victims and survivors*

2.35 The ongoing rollout of Ask and Act is ensuring that professionals in relevant authorities are trained to provide effective, timely and appropriate responses to victims and survivors through 'asking and acting'. Continued support and investment in the rollout of Ask and Act across Wales is needed to ensure that all relevant professionals receive this training.

## **3. Conclusions and recommendations**

3.1 Ask and Act is seen as an important and valuable programme which is having an impact across Wales for those participating, both individually and at an organisational / sector level. There is wide recognition of the need for Ask and Act and broad support for the aims of the programme and the Train the Trainer model is felt to be the most appropriate method for delivering and disseminating the training.

3.2 However, in order to ensure the sustainability and positive impact of Ask and Act going forward, a number of issues need to be considered and addressed. Recommendations draw on the findings from each stage of the evaluation, where several key themes and areas for action and development have emerged.

### *Delivery and rollout*

3.3 Recommendation 1: Continued and additional support and funding from Welsh Government for relevant authorities to enable organisations to allocate greater resources (staff time for trainers and administration) to the programme and secure support from specialist partners.

3.4 Recommendation 2: Earlier communication from Welsh Government of allocations of the Subsidy Grant to allow more effective planning of resources in relevant authorities.

3.5 Recommendation 3: More flexibility for relevant authorities in accessing Ask and Act training in response to specific relevant authorities' level of demand / capacity to deliver and/or need to train additional trainers. For example, providing a rolling training programme allowing relevant authorities to book individuals onto training outside of the scheduled training programme rollout to ensure organisations can maintain a pool of active trainers.

3.6 Recommendation 4: Continuation of some online training sessions to enable greater flexibility and remove geographical barriers to attendance.

- 3.7 Recommendation 5: Providing online refresher courses (including Group 1) to ensure staff knowledge and confidence is maintained.
- 3.8 Recommendation 6: Sharing and dissemination of findings from this evaluation and ongoing monitoring with relevant authorities. Focusing on highlighting the value and importance of the programme to sectors / organisations to encourage commitment to supporting staff with accessing Ask and Act training and delivering (e.g. providing additional resource / time).
- 3.9 Recommendation 7: Mechanisms to allow trainers (non-specialist and third sector specialists) to review evaluation forms on a regular basis to support them with continuously developing Awareness training.
- 3.10 Recommendation 8: Provision of additional support mechanisms giving staff involved in Ask and Act at all levels opportunities to share learning and experiences, raise issues and ask questions (peer-to-peer and with Welsh Government).

### *Course content and training materials*

- 3.11 Recommendation 9: Changes to the content of the Ask and Act Train the Trainer and Awareness courses, including:
  - a. more practical examples and case studies for discussion
  - b. a greater focus on how to ask questions, have conversations about VAWDASV, and deal with disclosures ('asking and acting')
  - c. inclusion of workplace scenarios.
- 3.12 Recommendation 10: Changes to the microteach element of the Train the Trainer courses including:
  - a) asking attendees to present a part of the course they will be delivering rather than an element of VAWDASV
  - b) asking attendees to focus on an area covered in the first session
  - c) allocating more time for attendees to prepare for the presentation.
- 3.13 Recommendation 11: Provision of additional supplementary materials to support the delivery of Ask and Act and improve take-up including:
  - a) creation of 'role profiles' for Group 2 trainers and Group 3 'Champions' to support regional coordinators and training leads in 'recruiting' staff to those roles
  - b) creation of short 'information leaflets' and email templates to succinctly communicate the aims, objectives and format of Ask and Act to staff at all levels to increase understanding and awareness of the programme
  - c) more specific materials or modules for the training courses tailored to each sector / type of organisation covered by the National Training Framework.
- 3.14 Recommendation 12: Consultation and involvement of relevant authorities in developing supplementary materials (described in Recommendation 11) to support the delivery of Ask and Act.

### *Evaluation*

- 3.15 Recommendation 13: Ongoing monitoring and evaluation nationally to monitor longer-term outcomes, including through development of template data collection tools (e.g. a shorter version of the survey used in this evaluation) to enable more consistent data collection and inclusion of Ask and Act on national indicators which local authorities are required to report on.

- 3.16 Recommendation 14: Establishing consistent processes within Welsh Government and across regions to enable better data collection within organisations, whilst minimising the burden on professionals. Improved joined-up working between relevant authorities and third sector (referral) organisations to monitor whether referrals have come through as a result of Ask and Act (e.g. adding Ask and Act as an option on ‘where did you hear about us?’ forms)
- 3.17 Recommendation 15: Further research with:
- a) relevant authorities to identify additional priority groups who may benefit from the training
  - b) specialists to monitor numbers of referrals and identify ways of tracking referrals via Ask and Act (for impact measurement)
  - c) survivors to explore and monitor the impact of Ask and Act on the experience of survivors as the programme is rolled out.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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