

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg ynghylch aflonyddu rhywiol rhwng cyfoedion ymysg dysgwyr](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry into Peer on peer sexual harassment among learners](#)

PPSH 13

Ymateb gan: Undeb Addysg Cenedlaethol (NEU)

Response from: National Education Union (NEU)

Nodwch eich barn mewn perthynas â chylch gorchwyl yr ymchwiliad, sydd wedi'u

grwpio'n 5 thema: | Record your views against the inquiry's terms of reference, which have been grouped into 5 themes:

1. Maint | Scale
2. Effaith | Impact
3. Effeithiolrwydd ymyriadau | Effectiveness of interventions
4. Y cyd-destun ehangach | Wider context
5. Arall | Other

1. Maint | Scale

NEU's research with UK Feminista "**It's Just Everywhere**"¹ sets out the scale and nature of sexism in schools:

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is highly prevalent in schools. It is also gendered, overwhelmingly involving boys targeting girls.

Over a third (37%) of female students at mixed-sex schools have personally experienced some form of sexual harassment at school.

¹ <https://neu.org.uk/advice/its-just-everywhere-sexism-schools>



Almost a quarter (24%) of female students at mixed-sex schools have been subjected to unwanted physical touching of a sexual nature while at school.

Almost one in three (32%) teachers in mixed-sex secondary schools witness sexual harassment in their school on at least a weekly basis. A further 36% say they witness it on a termly basis.

Sexist language

The use of misogynist language is commonplace in schools.

66% of female students and 37% of male students in mixed-sex sixth forms have experienced or witnessed the use of sexist language in school.

64% of teachers in mixed-sex secondary schools hear sexist language in school on at least a weekly basis. Over a quarter of teachers (29%) report that sexist language is a daily occurrence.

Sexist stereotypes and behaviour

Gender stereotyping is a typical feature of school culture, often reinforced through mundane, 'everyday' actions.

A quarter of all secondary school teachers say they witness gender stereotyping and discrimination in their school on a daily basis, and a further quarter say they witness it on a weekly basis.

Over a third (34%) of primary school teachers say they witness gender stereotyping in their school on at least a weekly basis. Over half (54%) say they witness it on at least a termly basis.

36% of female students in mixed-sex schools say they have personally been treated differently on account of their gender, compared to 15% of male students.

Online Sexual Harassment

Online trolling and sharing sexual images are examples of specific concerns. In 2022, Girlguiding found that over three-quarters of girls and young women aged 13 to 21 had experienced some form of harmful content online in the last year, including sexist comments, harassment and cyberflashing. This includes sexist comments (35%), cyberflashing (22%), sexual harassment (20%), catfishing (20%), pressure to share nude pictures (16%) and cyberstalking (13%).²

² Girlguiding (2022) [Girlguiding policy briefing: Online harms](#), online



We would welcome the Welsh Government taking action to support changes online, and believe training needs to be explicit about sexual harassment and how it can be recorded and dealt with accordingly.

Reporting and responding to sexism in schools

The following extract from NEU's "It's Just Everywhere" report in 2018 shows that local reporting is a problem.

The reporting of incidents of sexism and sexual harassment is crucial to providing support to those who experience it, establishing the scale of the problem, and preventing it from occurring in the future. To enable this, students need to know how and who to report incidents to, and be confident that they will be taken seriously and the report acted upon. While there are some schools doing excellent work to identify and respond to sexism, our research findings indicate that the majority of schools are not.

The main reason students give for not reporting incidents of sexism and sexual harassment is how common it is: **it is seen as an everyday part of students' lives.**

"I wasn't aware that these incidents could be reported, no students have ever been told it is wrong to act in this way, it's not discouraged or punished for it" – Female student

There is a vicious cycle of under-reporting of sexism in schools. Even when an incident occurs that students clearly recognise as harmful and unwanted, students are currently unlikely to report it. They do not believe the teacher would take reports of sexism and sexual harassment seriously, and anticipate that they would be viewed as being difficult and oversensitive.

Underreporting contributes to a view among school leaders that sexism is not a problem requiring action - so the issue is not raised with students. This institutional silence on the matter fuels the perception (or recognition) among students that sexism and sexual harassment is considered to be 'normal' and unimportant, which in turn fuels a reluctance among students to report it.

The findings also reveal that many teachers acknowledge that even in a scenario in which they are aware of a sexist incident having taken place, they would be unclear about how to respond

"It is never taken seriously. No one cares if it does not affect them. You suffer in silence and get told to move on" – Male student



2. Effaith | Impact

Girlguiding's 2022 research not only found that a large number of girls had experienced some form of harmful content online, but also identified that they are **feeling anxious, scared and less confident** because of it. 94% said they experienced negative emotions as a result with 76% saying it made them feel anxious, angry, scared, depressed or less confident in themselves. Only 15% think social media a safe place for them.³

In our It's Just Everywhere research⁴ we found that "less than a quarter (22%) of female students at mixed-sex schools think their school **takes sexism seriously** enough."

Good quality RSE works to build pupils **self-worth and self-esteem**. The NEU also works to challenge gender stereotypes. Work to achieve these goals will be hindered by pupils feeling intimidated and harassed due to sexual harassment.

Educators want to see change. In May this year NEU Women's Organising Forum will hold an action event to address sexism and sexual harassment, but schools and educators need support.

3. Effeithiolrwydd ymyriadau | Effectiveness of interventions

The Estyn report "We don't tell our teachers" clearly shows there is more to do in Wales.

Welsh Government needs to be explicit and ensure that training is not just about bullying, but tackles the issues of sexism and sexual harassment.

Recent Welsh Government research⁵ showed that 67% of practitioners and leaders believed they needed "additional support or resources" to get ready for roll out of the curriculum from September 2022.

It is clear from the Estyn review that more support is needed here in Wales to ensure the education workforce can be equipped to tackle sexual harassment and support young people – including high quality RSE which includes prevention work.

It is possible to change the culture of a school and meaningfully address sexism and sexual harassment. The NEU recommends a 'Whole school approach' to address this. The approach includes working with staff, leadership, student voice and it is about

³ Girlguiding (2022) [Girlguiding policy briefing: Online harms](#), online

⁴ NEU and UK Feminista (2017) [It's Just Everywhere: A study on sexism in schools and how we tackle it](#), UK

⁵ <https://gov.wales/practitioners-preparations-roll-out-curriculum-wales-final-report>



making a visible commitment to change and ensuring that is dispersed across a broad curriculum.

Research shows that a whole school approach is essential for ensuring that sexual harassment and sexual violence are addressed.

A whole school approach ensures a consistent environment and ethos are created towards preventing and not tolerating sexual harassment and other forms of harassment, abuse and violence. For example, prevention education messages are amplified across the curriculum, through assemblies, school displays, extra curriculum activities and supported by pastoral systems, policies, procedures that are driven by leadership.

Studies also highlight how work to address sexual harassment should be ongoing in order to foster permanent and long-term outcomes for children and young people. In other words, taking forward age- appropriate programmes of work that are sequenced over multiple years rather than one-off events. It should take a holistic approach that includes addressing staff rights, language use, cross curriculum work, uniforms and more

4. Y cyd-destun ehangach | Wider context

The UK Government is currently proposing an **Online Harms Bill** but the approach is very concerning as it does not address gender and violence against women. The Welsh Government recognised the gendered nature of abuse in the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015.

As Refuge says: The draft Bill makes no references to women or VAWG, yet our research has shown that more than one in three UK women (equivalent to 11 million women) have experienced online abuse on social media or another online platform rising to a staggering 62% of young women.⁶ Similarly Girlguiding have said that they “believe that the Online Safety Bill must protect girls and young women online. In its drafted form, it does not go far enough. We recommend that the Online Safety Bill recognises the disproportionate impact online harms has on girls and young women, especially girls of colour, LGBTQ+ girls, and disabled girls.”

The Welsh Government has the opportunity to provide comprehensive guidance which sets out how schools should talk about, record and tackle harmful behaviour in Wales. This needs to ensure that characteristics of everyone involved are recorded, in order that any patterns can be recognised and dealt with accordingly. Intersectionality

⁶ Refuge (24th Jan 2022) [Refuge responds to Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport \(DCMS\) Select Committee report on the draft Online Safety Bill. Online](#)



between, for example, targeting someone for their gender and race or disability must be supported.

If specific abuse targets a certain group, then young people need to see that is being tackled appropriately, and that their teachers and other members of the education workforce know how to target this effectively.

5. Arall | Other

Our response

NEU Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the CYPE Committee inquiry on this vital issue.

Much of our response is drawn from the the NEU report “It’s Just Everywhere”⁷ – sexism in schools, which looked at sexual harassment across England and Wales. Whilst this was written in 2018, Estyn’s recent report “We don’t tell our teachers” reflects many of the same challenges, thus we feel the NEU report is still relevant here.

Overall, we believe the new curriculum offers the opportunity for better awareness amongst young people about sexism and avoiding harmful behaviour, through the Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) curriculum. However, this will need to be supported by the right resources and training for the education workforce.

We support the use of the “Agenda” resources, created in partnership with Cardiff University: <https://agenda.wales/>

The situation in schools currently means much work is needed to prepare for the new curriculum. Supply staff shortages mean teachers cannot take time to attend training, or undertake preparation for the new curriculum, as they are needed in the classroom. This situation is largely caused by high levels of staff absence caused by Covid-19 and a lack of supply teachers – driven by poor terms and conditions for those undertaking supply work.

We have answered the Committee’s specific questions.

⁷ <https://neu.org.uk/advice/its-just-everywhere-sexism-schools>

