

# Peer on peer sexual harassment among learners

## Engagement findings

April 2022

As part of the Children, Young People and Education Committee's inquiry into Peer on peer sexual harassment among learners, the Citizen Engagement Team proposed a consultation to gather the views of children and young people through an online survey.

### 1. Engagement

1. The Citizen Engagement Team ran an online survey between 18<sup>th</sup> March and 1<sup>st</sup> April. The qualitative survey questions targeted young people aged 11 to 18 and asked how they thought the issue of peer on peer sexual harassment could be combatted, both within and outside schools and colleges.
2. To compile this summary an analysis of a complete data set was conducted; all data can be sourced to individual responses and further analysis can be undertaken upon request.

### Participants

3. Participants were sourced through a call to action on social media channels and through the Committee's stakeholders.
  4. The consultation received 106 responses from participants aged between 12 and 18.
  5. Responses were received from across 12 local authority areas.
  6. 6 responses were received from those studying in a college, 95 from secondary schools.
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7. The Citizen Engagement Team would like to thank all those who contributed to the programme of engagement.

## Methodology

8. The Citizen Engagement Team's consultation touched on one of the inquiry's specific terms of reference ("The effectiveness of existing policies and guidance and the identification of potential solutions and improvements").
9. It also ensured a focus on the Committee's Sixth Senedd Strategy vision (to "focus on whether policy and legislation is being delivered: whether it is making a difference to the lives of children and young people").
10. Finally, it empowered young people to suggest how best to combat this issue from their perspective.
11. Along with questions on age, local authority and study status, participants were asked the following 4 open questions:
  - I. Tell us how you think that the people who make decisions that impact young people can combat the problem of peer on peer sexual harassment in a learning environment such as a school or college?
  - II. Tell us how you think that the people who make decisions that impact young people can combat the problem of peer on peer sexual harassment outside of a learning environment such as when you are at home or spending time with your friends outside of school or college?
  - III. Do you think there are any barriers to your suggestions? For example would it cost money or take time to happen? Do you have any ideas to overcome these barriers?
  - IV. Do you have any other ideas or comments about this topic that you'd like to share with the Committee?

*Responses to question IV have been included within the summaries of the first 3 questions based on the relevant themes.*

12. Participants were asked not to share personal experiences of sexual harassment. Instead, they were asked to focus their answers on solutions to the problem of peer on peer sexual harassment.
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## 2. Engagement findings: combatting the problem

Below are the themes emerging from the consultation's first two questions, on how to combat the problem of peer on peer sexual harassment, both in and out of a learning environment.

### **Educating young people**

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- 13.** Education was a recurring theme in the responses, with calls for more education about what constitutes sexual harassment, what consent entails and how to report an incident. 41% of respondents talked about educating young people in their responses.
- 14.** Some responses talked about more education within the school and college timetable. Others suggested getting external partners, such as the police, to deliver talks.

*"Educate pupils on the consequences that come from these actions. Give lessons."*

*"Better education about what sexual harassment is and how and who to report it to."*

*"Educating young people on what peer on peer sexual harassment is and state that this is not acceptable behaviour. Talk about consent, teach about what consent is and isn't.."*

*"We need young people to be informed about sexual harassment, without it being sugar coated, actually tell them the truth of how it affects people, give real statistics on the matter, teach about consent."*

- 15.** Education was also a strong theme when asked about combatting the problem outside of the learning environment. Many felt that education in school or college would also translate to solutions outside.
- 16.** As well as educating on the nature of sexual harassment and consent, respondents suggested more awareness about the consequences of harassing a peer and the impact that harassment can have.

*"I think starting within education system would combat the problem in and outside of a learning environment. - perhaps... raising awareness about what peer on peer sexual harassment is would benefit the solution."*

*"teach young people that its wrong, actually give an informative educational understanding of what sexual harassment is, how it can affect people, what will happen if the harasser gets caught."*

*"More extensive education on consent as well. It is presented as very black and white in school, and so a lot of people are left confused when they enter a grey area. We need to teach consent as people are more likely to experience it - very few people are assaulted in the violent way shown in school."*

*"education on the topic, a safe space in order to talk, a route in which you are able to take to seek further action through the school."*

## **Clearer discipline**

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**17.** 16% of respondents talked about discipline in their responses.

**18.** Within the education system, some respondents felt there needed to be more punishment for incidents of sexual harassment and an improvement in how complaints are escalated.

*"Get schools to take more action against harassment. Some schools don't do anything, and the victims are forced to move schools or figure it out themselves."*

*"I believe that the people in charge of sexual harassment reports need to do more to punish the offender, and this isn't meant by just giving them detention and then calling them home. I am referring to taking away things they enjoy and privileges inside of the school, an example of this would be participating in extracurricular activities."*

*"Punishing peers who make sexual harassing comments or actions. Having CCTV operating in every room apart from bathrooms in order to keep a watchful eye."*

*"Detention doesn't do anything nor does suspension because they just come back and do it to another girl/ individual."*

**19.** Outside the education system, suggestions included more input from parents, the police and the local authority.

**20.** Some responses also suggested better laws against harassment on social media.

*"Stricter rules against sexual harassment."*

*"Report it. It could be considered a crime so it wouldn't be something you should just forget about."*

*"The government and social media sites to make more laws, make it more difficult for these things to happen."*

*"Police, parents, warnings etc. If they do it outside of school, especially to another individual from the same school or someone else reports it to the school they should have a sanction."*

### **Taking it seriously**

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**21.** 16% of responses talked about needing to take sexual harassment more seriously in their school or college.

**22.** Some felt that teachers are too quick to excuse the behaviour, rather than take action. Others felt there should be more awareness among teachers of the sexual harassment taking place.

*"Teachers to take sexual harassment seriously and issue appropriate punishment. Teachers to be more alert at identifying harassment and addressing it."*

*"I think a lot of teachers and some students turn a blind eye to sexual harassment. They don't take it as seriously as they should."*

*"From my experience of teachers especially within comprehensive years, they pass off situations like this as just 'messaging around' when I feel like this should be taken more seriously. However, I feel like in a college environment, accusations are taken far more seriously."*

*"When you're told about or have seen sexual harassment, make sure you do something about it, don't excuse it. Take it as seriously as racism. Support girls to tackle sexual abusive behaviour and harassment."*

*"... I do believe adults/teachers need to be more aware of what children/students are doing and to stop ignoring some of the signs that something concerning might be going on."*

*"To treat the subject with the seriousness it deserves. Often, teachers/lecturers etc are not aware of sexual harassment and it can be often said that sexual harassment has occurred because of an argument, for example, or some 'banter' - this is not true and does not address the roots of sexual harassment; we simply kick the can down the road by saying this..."*

## **Support services**

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**23.** 16% of responses talked about the support available for victims of sexual harassment. Many suggested a need for more support and more awareness of how to access the support that is currently available. This applied to both in and outside of the learning environment.

*"Make sure they know where to go for more advice such as websites, doctors, pharmacy so they know they can do it in confidentiality if they needed to."*

*"Creating a safe space for victims to talk about their experiences, taking students who complain seriously."*

*"Create an environment where people are able to talk about harassment/ assault without the pressure to come forward about it. A lot of students can feel isolated when trying to speak to someone as they often think a teacher will push them to take further action/ write statements/ go to the police/ tell other teachers etc. Students need a place to talk about what has happened without feeling scared of any of these outcomes. We need more informal settings where people feel comfortable to do this. Isolation and not talking only leads to more serious consequences."*

*"Make it more evident that people are trying to help the victims and not protect the perpetrator/harasser. .... Help students become aware of what sexual harassment is, what their rights are after the fact, and what consequences the harassed may face, and it may help prevent the harassment in the first place."*

*"Make young people in the community have a sense of trust for the adults who are supposed to be taking care of them. Maybe it could be a person working with the police to report any incidents or concerns."*

*"Assign specific members of staff, who are trusted by students, to the role. Have a man assigned for the boys and a woman assigned to the girls."*

## **Safety awareness**

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**24.** Outside the learning environment, a small number of respondents talked about more awareness for safety.

*"You could avoid quiet places where no one goes and try to go to places where there are adults present."*

*"CCTV in popular and unpopular places such as parks and alleys so it's easy to monitor sexual harassment."*

*"Be careful of your whereabouts and make sure your friends with the right people."*

### 3. Engagement findings: Barriers

Below are the themes that emerged from the consultation's third question on barriers to the ideas proposed.

#### Money

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- 25.** 14% of respondents thought the suggestions they had made, such as more training, resources and support would cost money. But most felt that the solutions were needed despite this barrier.

*"Of course it would cost money, but it's a problem that money needs to be spent on."*

*"Training may be required to support teachers which could cost money and take time."*

*"The main barriers is money, school can't provide everything and can't fund or find extra time to educate students on it."*

#### Time

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- 26.** 18% of respondents thought it would take time to implement the changes they had suggested, but again, most felt it would be time well spent.

*"Yes it would take time but it is certainly worth the time as education on this topic is very important to create a safer environment."*

*"It will take time and possibly money to train teachers on how to deal with it but I think it should be a priority considering the importance and severity."*

*"It would take time, but that could easily be overcome by taking time out of a lesson at some point or teaching it in reg class."*



## Reluctance to talk

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**27.** Some responses talked about it being difficult for young people to talk about their experiences.

*"Young people discussing their mental health, for example, takes huge amounts of courage and effort, which needs to be recognised."*

**28.** Others felt it could be difficult from the adult's perspective too.

*"Teachers could be uncomfortable talking about relationships. Training could resolve this issue."*

## Lack of support from adults

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**29.** A number of responses talked about the lack of support from adults as a barrier to any change.

*"The main barrier is that it hasn't been important enough, in the minds of people in power. Women and girls have put up with this for too long."*

*"People not listening."*

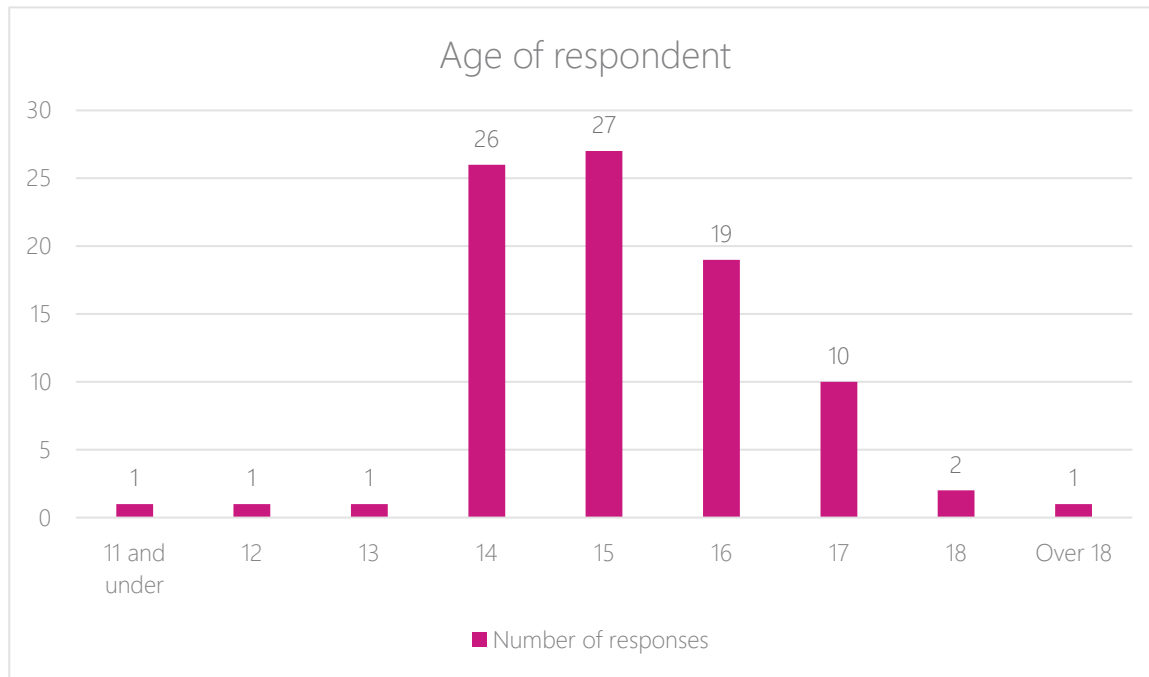
*"Reluctancy from teachers and parents is the biggest barrier. They think just because someone is a student means they can be let off for harassment..."*

## 4. Editorial board

- 30.** In addition to the online survey, the Citizen Engagement Team approached a number of organisations to establish an editorial board of children and young people. The purpose of the editorial board was to analyse the data received from the survey and to discuss their understanding of the issues, solutions and potential improvements and then feedback to the Committee.
- 31.** Contact was made with students at Coleg Cambria in Deeside. The Citizen Engagement Team ran a workshop with the group of 5 Film and Media students, where we explored the responses to the survey and discussed the potential solutions to the problem of sexual harassment among learners.
- 32.** The students prioritised the key themes, choosing the quotes that illustrated these best and then discussed how best to present the findings to the Committee.
- 33.** They prioritised the main messages into 4 recommendations for the Committee to consider:
- Recommendation 1:** We think there needs to be more education in schools and colleges on what constitutes sexual harassment
- Recommendation 2:** We think there should be more guidance for teachers on how to tackle accusations of sexual harassment
- Recommendation 3:** We think there should be clearer guidance on discipline for those who sexually harass others
- Recommendation 4:** We think there should be more support available for victims of sexual harassment
- 34.** The editorial board's findings were turned into a video, which will be presented to the Committee.

## Annex 1

### Age of survey respondents



### Study status of survey respondents

