



Creating a Gendered Education Strategy for Scotland

Summary of a roundtable discussion held by Engender on 1 December 2016

INTRODUCTION

As part of developing our Gender Matters Roadmap, in December 2016 Engender held a roundtable to discuss gendered education strategies for Scotland. The roundtable brought together a small group of expert participants and practitioners to think creatively about some of the gender equality challenges in the Scottish school system, and to collaboratively develop specific policy measures.

Key themes that emerged from the discussion included:

- Addressing a pervasive culture of misogyny and harassment in schools and countering gender stereotyping
- Addressing gender equality and violence against women and girls in teacher training
- The need to look at school strategy, leadership, aims and management through a gendered lens and the importance of taking a 'whole school' approach
- The need for better data gathering on incidents of sexism and misogyny in schools, and better reporting frameworks on progressing gender equality

SESSION 1: Key Issues and the long-term vision

The first session began with discussions on how to tackle gender inequalities, discrimination and sexual harassment in school settings¹, including challenging assumptions by children, parents and teachers about what is appropriate for women and girls.

In schools, there is both visible gender discrimination and, below this, unseen, 'normalised' prejudices, which feed into many things beyond education, for example into occupational segregation and violence against women in wider society. It's extremely important to work on both of these levels. The Status of Young Women in Scotland report² showed that gender inequalities have become so normalised that many young women aged between 16 and 30 didn't realise that they had experienced it.

There's a project in Sweden that looked at how safe boys and girls feel at school and why boys performed less well³. The project found that boys and girls seek status differently: boys disregard teachers and are 'noncompliant' as a way to achieve status in peer groups, whereas girls were taught that compliance is the way to achieve status. They also found links between boys' performance of masculinity and levels to which girls felt safe in the classroom. When schools taught them about gender roles (and that they don't need to perform these roles) attainment for boys was seen to improve. UNESCO have also done global research looking at gender inequality and learning achievement.⁴ Despite the fact that this kind of research has existed for over 20 years, it is still not being taken seriously or making its way into policy agendas.

The relationship between occupational segregation and subject choice by girls at school was discussed, as was the need to make government aware of cyclical nature of low female incomes - girls go into lower paid jobs and can't

¹ Engender (2016), *Submission to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee (EHRC) for scoping session on bullying and harassment of children and young people in schools* <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engender-submission-on-bullying-and-harassment-in-schools.pdf>

² YWCA Scotland (2015), *Status of Young Women in Scotland 2015* <http://www.ywcascotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Status-of-Young-Women-In-Scotland.pdf>

³ Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (2008) *Active work for Gender Equality – a challenge for municipalities and county councils* <http://webbutik.skl.se/bilder/artiklar/pdf/7164-469-5.pdf>

⁴ UNESCO (2016) *Gender inequality in learning achievement in primary education* <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002443/244349e.pdf>

work their way out of poverty, which then increases the chances of their children growing up in poverty.

Inequalities experienced by young women and girls at school, as in most contexts, are worse for BME and disabled girls and women. Disabled girls are six times as likely to leave school with no qualifications; half as likely to leave school with one or more SVQs at level 7. Poverty is also a huge factor in how well children do at school, and disabled children much more likely to be living in poverty – often because they are children of single parents. In terms of bullying, there is a concern that figures don't match with reality – less than one disability related bullying incident is reported per local authority in Scotland, yet figures from England suggest disabled children are twice as likely to experience long term bullying. One participant mentioned a case where a disabled girl moved schools three times due to disablist bullying – yet each time she was each time was told the bullying was “just banter”. Disabled girls are also much more likely to suffer sexual abuse.

Islamophobia is also having an exacerbating impact on the experiences of girls and young women in schools, particularly around body hair shame.

One of the challenges is to help teachers and parents have a full understanding of the bigger or ‘whole’ picture around gender inequality. One participant who works with teachers noted that either teachers comprehend gender issues on an individual level but not on a structural level, or just don't think about sexism at all as it is so normalised. With huge pressures on teaching staff, it is hard to find the time and space to discuss the nuances of the issue, or to give the teachers more things to do. However, “by and large, teachers we speak to want to know how to challenge gender inequality, and are on board,” noted one participant, but there are further questions to be asked around how to influence senior management, or parents, “Often parents wouldn't encourage daughters into engineering, and would baulk even more at encouraging sons into care.” It was also thought that parents would react negatively if they perceived they were being told how to parent.

Initial teacher training currently takes a very broad equalities approach and doesn't focus on specifics for protected characteristics. ‘Social justice’ interpreted on a very individual level, and you won't hear words like sexism or racism or classism or capitalism. If people equate social justice to a

depoliticised idea of inclusion, it becomes very watered down and it is important to ensure that the initial teacher education system doesn't neutralise and depoliticise equality.

A further key challenge is around data gathering. Schools have a role in proactively setting out what is not acceptable and why, but also need a clear and supportive means of reporting. There needs to be confidence that reporting misogyny and sexist incidences will be taken seriously. After the MacPherson Inquiry report of 1999 there was an acknowledgement that institutional racism was a problem that needed to be addressed, and racism in schools became a red flag: people know it will be taken seriously. But sexism still seems to be a non-word and a non-concept. Current reported figures of sexism and misogyny don't reflect reality, this is likely to be a result of normalisation of sexism in our culture combined with mechanisms that are not fit for purpose.

At a policy-making level, there is a lack of specificity about gender in schools, and references to gender can be very tokenistic, often reflecting the tension between need to take a joined up approach to equalities and the continued requirement for specificity. The recent bullying and harassment scoping session by the Equality and Human Rights Commission is an example of this. When equality in schools is discussed in policy circles it is primarily focused on closing the attainment gap (primarily how to get working class children to perform better) and is gender neutral. There is a feeling that gender is assumed to be implicit in government strategies – for example strategies around developing the young workforce – but it's not, and schools seem to be picking and choosing recommendations. The career education standard and work experience standard noted gender at all the levels to begin with, but later this was taken out completely.

On the other hand, it was noted, it is important not to lose sight of intersectionality: a gendered education strategy needs to be strong on the crossovers.

The Public Sector Equality Duty has had little impact in education so far. Local authorities have a small amount of data, but it is of limited use. 'Education authorities are specified separately from local authorities on the list of listed bodies, however their reporting has been subsumed into local authority

reporting. This has resulted in little or no outcomes or actions for education authorities, and no focus on how education authorities meet the duty.’

The group felt that individual school budgets would not work for addressing gender inequality, as this could prevent there being a strategy across schools. It is also not clear how this could impact teacher development and equalities. However, it is also important that budgets are not separated from equality – spending is often seen as gender neutral, which needs to be countered. There needs to be a strong overarching narrative on austerity: school budgets are shrinking, as are the budgets of partners and local authorities. It would be disingenuous of government to produce development plans that didn’t take this into account.

CASE STUDIES: GET IT RIGHT FOR GIRLS AND THE “WHOLE SCHOOLS” APPROACH

The Education Institute of Scotland published ‘Get it Right for Girls’⁵ in August 2016 in response to members’ concern about the levels of misogyny aimed at girls. The report looks at the everyday experiences of girls, as well as gender disaggregation of data, recommendations for whole school policy, and equality and diversity training for staff. EIS found that naming what was happening as ‘misogyny’ was exceptionally powerful, perhaps because the term ‘sexism’ has lost some of its punch and power, and the piece of work really resonated with EIS’s membership. It’s now being used as a tool by local authorities and NGOs.

Rape Crisis Scotland and Zero Tolerance are currently running a big project that takes a “whole school” approach to gender based violence⁶, building communities in which misogyny and gender inequality are not tolerated in any form, where school policies, including on bullying, safeguarding, equality, teacher training and school management, specifically address gender inequalities, sexist and sexual bullying and violence against women and girls. The project focuses on violence against women but is underpinned by notions of challenging gender inequality, and aims to create a framework to be tested in two schools in Scotland.

⁵ EIS (2016), *Get It Right For Girls* http://www.eis.org.uk/Gender_Equality/Get_Right_Girls.htm

⁶ Zero Tolerance (2016) ‘Why we are taking a ‘whole schools’ approach to prevention’ <http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/blog/why-we-are-taking-%E2%80%98whole-schools%E2%80%99-approach-prevention>

SESSION 2: Practical steps for decision-makers

During the second and final session, the discussants outlined a series of potential steps for decision-makers that could move Scotland towards having a gendered education strategy. The recommendations took a big-picture, “whole schools” approach, where gender inequality is addressed at all levels and across a wide range of school activities.⁷ A range of incentives – such as school managers being particularly motivated by frameworks that they have to report back on and potential partnerships were considered. It was recognised that there are a number of initiatives that could be strengthened or built on.

Recruitment, training and teaching standards

- Undertake an audit of teacher education for gender and equalities content.
- Build on commitments already made by the Scottish Funding Council, Education Scotland and the Scottish Teacher Education Council to work with providers of initial teacher education and childcare courses on gender issues and review initial teacher education.
- Ensure that trainee teachers are taught about the Equality Act and specifics around protected characteristics in their initial teacher education.
- Consider how the General Teaching Standards and the New Into Headship qualification for all new head teachers could incorporate gender equality reference points.
- Protect teachers’ professional development time and promote CPD on gender equality⁸ for teachers, management and pastoral staff.

Curriculum, testing and public awareness

- Stop standardised testing.
- Bring the gender equality toolkit into every subject (currently not being that well-used) and incorporating gender equality across the curricula.

⁸ Close the Gap will be publishing CPD on gender equality later in 2017

- Bring a fuller understanding of how gender relates to attainment as part of the government's attainment challenge, ensuring in particular that what is happening to improve boys' attainment won't disadvantage girls.
- High impact media campaign on subtle gender prejudices and stereotyping and their impact on young women and girls, aimed at making teachers, parents and the general public more aware of every day sexism in schools.

Data gathering, monitoring and reporting frameworks

- Identifying qualitative markers of progress on equalities (not just quantitative) that take into account the entire school environment.
- Ensure that Identification of problems and reporting of incidences by schools are not seen as negatives.
- Analyse all data by gender – schools should look at 'gender and'.
- Addressing the current lack of impact of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) on education, and putting measures in place to ensure that local authorities report. Education is a key area where PSED could make a real difference and support schools to deliver on outcomes, but currently educational authorities experience no repercussions for not reporting.
- Add specific references to protected characteristics to the inspection model, which currently talks about equality but with a very broad brush. Give HMI and Education Scotland the questions they need to ask, what they need to be looking for.
- Consider a schools version of the Athena Swan, a kite mark or badge linked to funding and reputation that requires schools to have a certain level of understanding principles, activities you have to adhere to, data, where your evidence base is and what you are going to do to tackle it.
- Use Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) as a driver for decision-making rather than an afterthought and to encourage joined up thinking.

Joined up working and coordinated strategies

- The Scottish Government needs to better link its strategies relating to gender inequality. For example, linking its VAWG prevention strategy 'Equally Safe' explicitly with its education strategy, as well as with its STEM strategy (currently up for consultation) and the child poverty bill.
- Undertake a refresh of the national approach to anti-bullying (currently on pause) and look specifically at protected characteristics.
- Ensure that the equalities organisations are working together and not in isolation, supporting one another's work and connecting with other organisations that are succeeding in what we are trying to do – i.e. LGBT Youth Scotland in schools.

ABOUT ENGENDER

Engender is Scotland's feminist membership organisation. We have a vision for a Scotland in which women and men have equal opportunities in life, equal access to resources and power, and are equally safe and secure from harm.

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