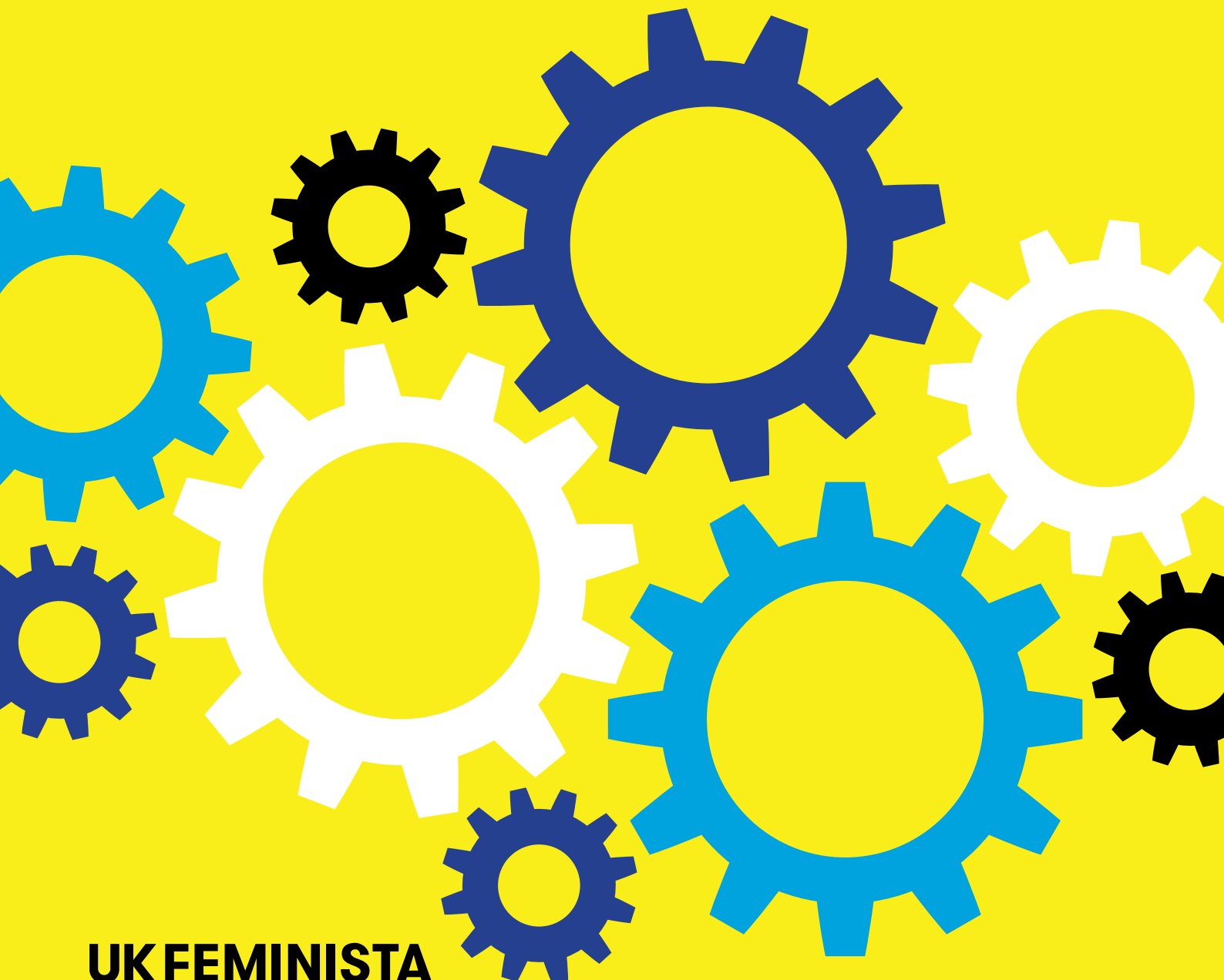


System Change

**Why a whole school approach to preventing
sexism and sexual harassment is needed
— and how to make it work**



UK FEMINISTA

March 2026

This report presents the key learning from UK Feminista's Whole School Approach Development Scheme and sets out recommendations for policy and practice. It is designed to support policymakers, education bodies and practitioners to implement robust and effective whole school or college approaches to prevent sexism and sexual harassment.

UK Feminista is a charitable organisation working for a society free from sexism and violence against women and girls.

www.ukfeminista.org.uk

Terminology:

'Whole school approach': A whole school approach to tackling sexism and sexual harassment means action is not restricted to one-off workshops, single lessons or time-limited initiatives – but instead involves 'system change': transforming the institutional policies, practices and culture across the education setting to prevent sexual harassment and sexist behaviours from occurring. It is a comprehensive, long-term approach involving all members of the community.

In this report, the terms 'whole school approaches' and 'whole college approaches' are both used. Throughout, these should be understood as referring collectively to schools and colleges, recognising the full range of education settings discussed.

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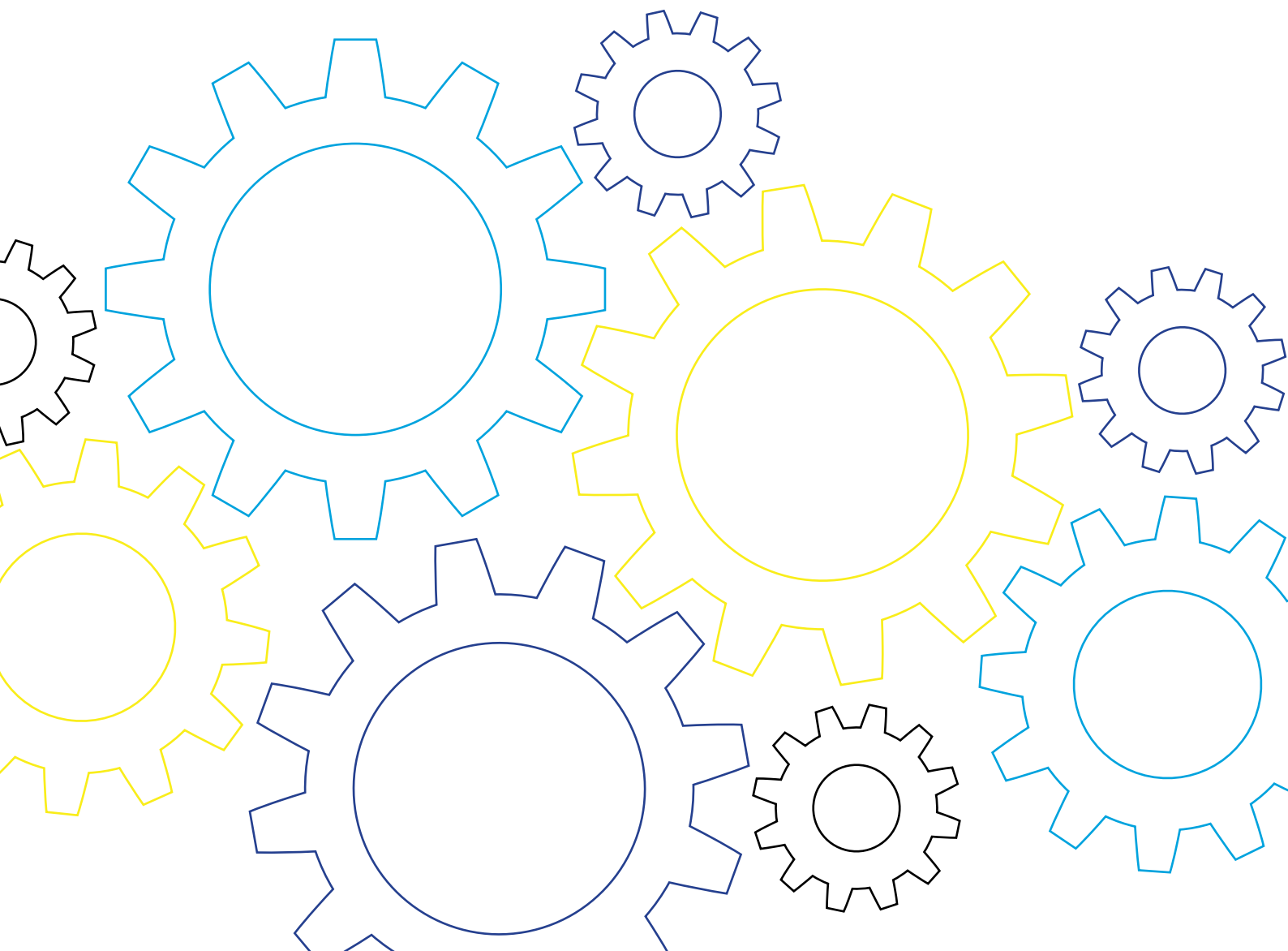
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Foreword

Sexism and sexual harassment in schools and colleges is a national crisis, inflicting profound harm on girls and women learning and working in education settings - with far reaching consequences for society as a whole. This is a systemic problem, now being exacerbated by the widespread proliferation and influence of online pornography and misogyny in today's society.

While there is a growing official recognition of the need to prevent sexism and sexual harassment through a whole school approach - a systemic response long advocated for by UK Feminista - **the political will necessary to embed and sustain a whole school approach in every school and college across the UK has been lacking.** Education staff are working in challenging contexts and continue to lack the support needed to implement robust whole school approaches. Efforts to address sexism and sexual harassment are further hindered by the lack of effective tools to measure the problem, including tools to capture experiences of women and girls facing intersecting inequalities - such as those from ethnically minoritised groups or with disabilities - and track progress in overcoming the problem.

A whole school approach is built upon three central pillars: establishing an institutional framework, training and equipping staff, and supporting students to be change makers. Since 2017, UK Feminista has been supporting schools and colleges to implement whole school approaches through training and resources. Thanks to the invaluable support of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, **between 2022 and 2025, UK Feminista delivered the Whole School Approach Development Scheme - an initiative providing direct, sustained and tailored support to a cohort of schools and colleges across the country.** This report is based on invaluable evidence obtained from the Whole School Approach Development Scheme, revealing what it takes to implement an effective whole school or college approach to combatting sexism and sexual harassment and how challenges can be overcome in diverse education setting types - from Alternative Provision to Further Education. **The findings provide a crucial evidence base that can be utilised by policy makers and education practitioners across the UK.**

We are deeply grateful to all those who partnered with us in the Whole School Approach Development Scheme to build the evidence base on effective strategies. This includes our Reference Group members, the independent evaluator The Social Innovation Partnership (TSIP), and - most importantly - the staff and students leading action in the schools and colleges we collaborated with.

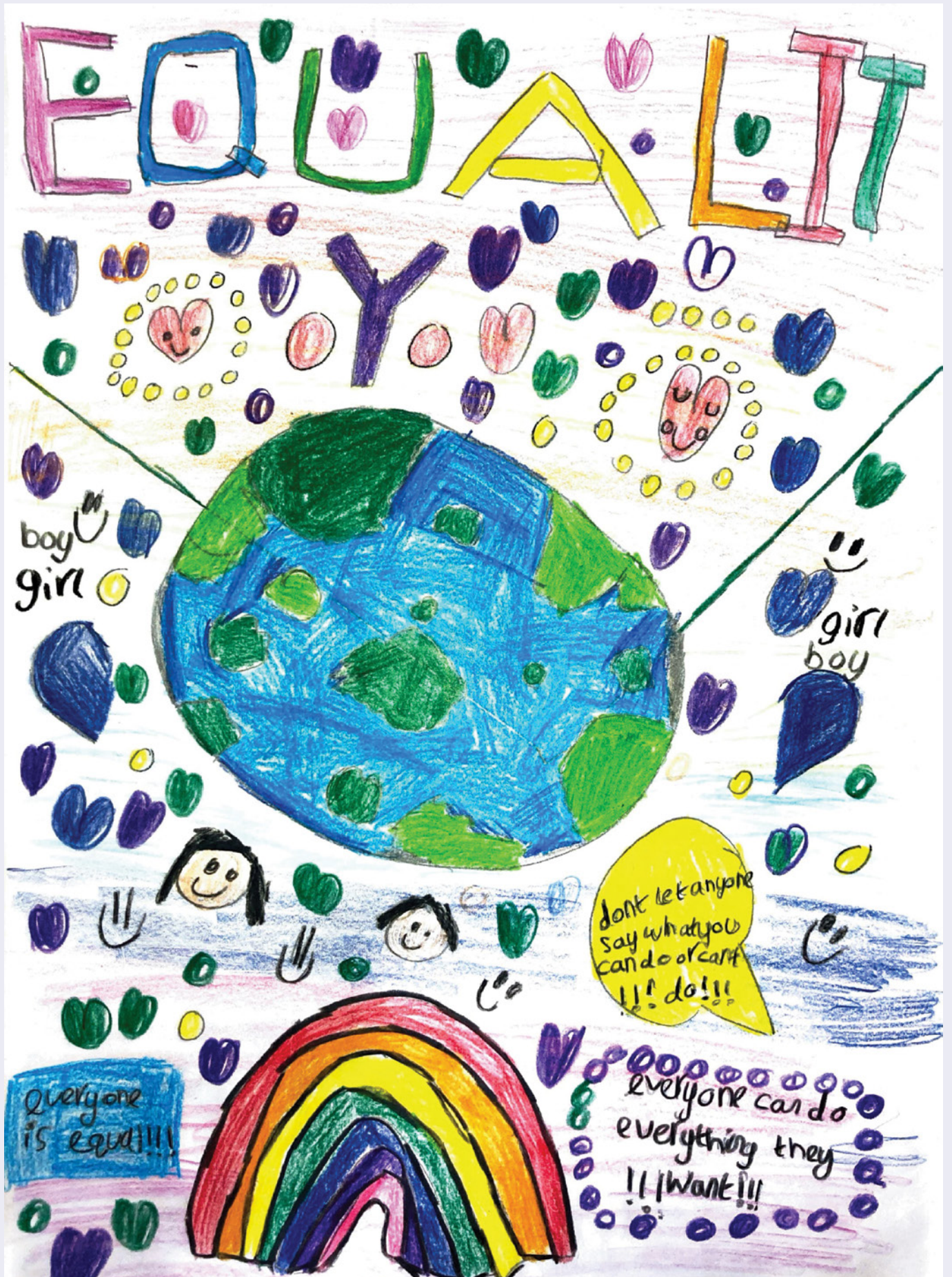
Our recommendations set out the urgent action required from Government, inspectorates, and schools and colleges themselves to implement successful whole school approaches: from providing support and funding, to implementing systems that effectively track the problem and ensure accountability.

The need for systemic, long-term change could not be more urgent. Sexism and sexual harassment must be prevented - paving the way for lasting generational change, where education settings are safe for women and girls. We urge the Government to ensure that our recommendations are embedded within the implementation of the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy prevention and early intervention work, so that it can meet its goal of halving violence against women and girls in the next decade.

Nina Humphries
Director

UK FEMINISTA





Designed by Natalia, age 8 – winner of UK Feminista's 15 Year Anniversary Student Poster Competition (Primary School Category).

Summary

Key Factors for Success

A whole school or college approach must be sustained on a long-term basis

A whole school or college approach must be sustained on a long-term basis, with core activities set out in the Whole School or College Approach Action Plan regularly reviewed and updated to ensure consistent, sustainable progress in tackling sexism and sexual harassment.

Equip the community to take effective action

For whole school or college approach action to achieve meaningful impact, it must be implemented collectively. Whole school or college action requires the involvement and support of everyone in the school or college community, including all staff (including the Senior Leadership Team, support and business staff), the governing body, pupils, parents and carers. There should be regular opportunities for collaboration and learning exchange between staff members, as well as ongoing learning and action opportunities for students and parents, supported by the governing body.

Integrate visible, leadership-driven action into existing systems

The whole school or college approach to combatting sexism and sexual harassment should remain visible to everyone in the school or college community, clearly spearheaded by the Senior Leadership Team and integrated into existing systems. Commitment and political leadership from the Senior Leadership Team is essential to motivate staff, deliver accountability and model best practice in challenging sexist attitudes and sexual harassment. It also signals to students that the institution recognises the seriousness of the issue and is committed to meaningful action. Integrating and clearly communicating strengthened reporting systems, explicit policies, and curriculum improvements into existing systems ensures the approach is embedded and visible across daily practice.

Summary

Challenges to Implementing a Whole School or College Approach

Inadequate measurement and tracking

A key challenge for schools and colleges relates to the collection of accurate, representative data about the prevalence of sexism and sexual harassment within the institution. This data collection is crucial to track the scale and nature of the problem, measure the impact of interventions and inform future prevention action. However, accurate data relies on high quality incident reporting and recording systems, and effective delivery of student and staff experience surveys. Common obstacles for education settings include low or uneven survey uptake, inconsistencies caused by reworded questions in follow up surveys, difficulties experienced by students in completing surveys, and inaccurate or under-reporting of incidents of sexual harassment via ongoing reporting systems.

Different education settings face distinct challenges

Sexist attitudes and behaviours exist in all types of education settings - but strategies needed to address them can vary significantly. Each school or college comprises its own unique community, meaning there is no 'one-size-fits-all' when it comes to implementing a whole school or college approach. An effective measure in a mainstream secondary school may be ineffective or inappropriate in an Alternative Provision setting, primary school, boys' school or Further Education College. For whole school or college approaches to have the necessary impact, schools and colleges must tailor action to the needs of their setting. While certain core activities - such as developing a Whole School or College Action Plan - should underpin every whole school or college approach, activities must be adapted to address the individual challenges faced by each setting, ensuring action is inclusive, visible and relevant to all students and staff.

Education staff face new challenges and ongoing resource pressures

Teachers and school and college staff in the UK are working in a landscape shaped by deep-rooted, normalised societal sexism, intensified by the growing influence of misogynistic online influences. Structural pressures - including staffing shortages, high staff turnover, stretched budgets and timetable constraints - add an additional layer of challenge. In this context, consistent, collaborative action to combat sexism and sexual harassment, engaging all members of the school or college community, is more crucial than ever. Actions that prevent responsibility for combatting this serious safeguarding problem falling on the shoulders of one staff member are essential for success, such as the establishment of a working group to embed shared responsibility and accountability in the overall Whole School or College Approach Action Plan, and integrating learning across the entire curriculum.

Summary

Recommendations

Provide support

- **The UK Government** should provide practical support and resources for all education settings - including Alternative Provision, Further Education, SEND and primary schools - to enable effective implementation of whole school approaches.
- **The UK Government** should ringfence funding for specialist organisations to deliver tailored support and training to schools and colleges on taking a whole school or college approach.
- **The UK Government** should require mandatory training on whole school or college approach prevention of sexism and sexual harassment for all staff and governors as part of safeguarding training - ensuring that every member of the school or college community understands their role within this prevention framework.

Track and measure progress

- **The UK Government** should establish a centralised data recording system where schools and colleges are required to log the number of reported cases of sexual harassment and abuse experienced by students and staff. This data should be published by the Government annually. Anonymised demographic data should be recorded to enable intersectional analysis and identification of patterns. All data should remain anonymous and used solely to build a national picture of the prevalence of sexual harassment and abuse in schools.
- **The UK Government** should conduct an annual survey of students and staff to measure the scale of sexual harassment and abuse in education, including uncovering the impact of online misogyny in education settings and intersectional experiences. Results should be published so progress in reducing the problem can be tracked.
- **The UK Government** should commission independent research to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of whole school approaches. This is necessary for fostering innovation, sharing best practice and tracking progress.

Build in accountability

- **Inspectorates** should ensure all school and college inspectors across every devolved nation receive mandatory training on how schools and colleges should prevent and respond to sexual harassment and abuse through a whole school approach.
- **Inspectorates** should require schools and colleges to publish details of their whole school approach to tackling sexism and sexual harassment. This must be accessible on the institution's website and assessed during inspections. This should initially be introduced as recommended best practice, transitioning into an inspection requirement within two years, thereby allowing institutions sufficient time and support to implement meaningful action.
- **Inspectorates** should require Initial Teacher Training providers to make training on tackling sexism and sexual harassment, and implementing whole school or college prevention action, a core part of their training curriculum.

This report features **extensive learning and recommendations** for schools and colleges on how to combat sexism and sexual harassment with a whole school or college approach – highlighted throughout the document. Additional guidance, resources and training on taking a whole school approach is available on UK Feminista's website: www.ukfeminista.org.uk

Introduction

The scale of the problem

UK Feminista's schools programme works to combat sexism and sexual harassment in education. Launched in 2017, the programme was developed in response to UK Feminista and the National Education Union's joint research report, 'It's Just Everywhere'¹, which revealed that sexual harassment, sexist language and gender stereotyping are widespread in schools across the country. The research found that over a third (37%) of female students in mixed-sex secondary schools had been sexually harassed while at school. Over a quarter (29%) of teachers in mixed-sex secondary schools said they hear sexist language in school on a daily basis, and a quarter (25%) of secondary school teachers said they witness gender stereotyping and discrimination in their school on a daily basis.

“Boys often lift skirts up and whistle and treat girls in a sexual manner and nothing gets done about it.”

— Female student, cited in “It's just everywhere” report by UK Feminista and the National Education Union

The research also found that many teachers feel unsupported and ill-equipped to address sexism and sexual harassment, with just 22% of secondary school teachers having received Continuing Professional Development training in recognising and tackling sexism. The report made a range of recommendations, including that all schools adopt a 'whole school approach' to combat sexism and sexual harassment - the gold standard for achieving long-term, sustainable change. A 'whole school approach' means action to promote equality and combat sexual harassment is supported by an over-arching framework and involves all members of the school community. **This approach recognises that sexual**

harassment and sexism are so prevalent and deep-rooted that one lesson, or a single teacher, cannot solve the problem alone. It requires long-term, systemic action involving the whole school community.

A whole school approach has three core components, which can then be built upon:

1. Establish an institutional framework to tackle sexism and sexual harassment. The framework should be underpinned by a strategy, supported by school policy, and driven by leadership. This institutional architecture enables schools and colleges to prioritise actions and ensure a consistent, cohesive approach to securing change.
2. Train and equip all school and college staff with the knowledge, resources and confidence to tackle sexism and sexual harassment.
3. Support students to learn about sexism and sexual harassment, report incidents and to take positive action for equality.

The need for a comprehensive whole school approach is as clear as ever – with students and staff facing sexism and sexual harassment in education on an endemic scale, and no evidence the situation has improved. In 2024, UK Feminista and Unison's joint survey² found that 1 in 10 female school support staff had experienced sexual harassment, largely from male students but also from colleagues. One female Learning Support Assistant reported an experience involving “Inappropriate

1. “It's Just Everywhere”: A study on sexism in schools – and how we tackle it, UK Feminista and the NEU, 2017.
2. UK Feminista and Unison survey highlights school support staff experiences of sexual harassment and sexism, UK Feminista, 18 June 2024. Available at: <https://ukfeminista.org.uk/news/ukfeminista-and-unison-survey/>

sexual comments and physical advances from a male pupil, including attempting to kiss me, and pushing my head towards his genitals while I was sat down in front of him”.

There are widespread concerns that **online misogyny and pornography are having a growing impact on attitudes and behaviours in schools**. The Women and Equalities Committee’s 2023 report³ on attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings concluded that access to online pornography is leaving children, particularly boys, with a misguided representation of women, men and sexual relationships, and teachers are reporting concerns about the “toxic influence of social media and some of the purported ‘influencers’ who use it to broadcast misogyny to boys and young men”. Furthermore, in its 2023 inquiry on pornography⁴, the UK Parliament’s All-Party Parliamentary Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation found extensive evidence that young peoples’ exposure to pornography fuels deeply harmful attitudes and behaviours. While the Online Safety Act introduces long-overdue obligations on pornography websites to prevent children accessing their content, the harm experienced by many young people today has already been done. Most recently, the rise of ‘nudification’ AI tools has resulted in a growing number of students and teachers being victims of nude ‘deepfake’ images and videos being created of them⁵, with policy and practice lagging behind the rapid evolution of this emerging form of violence against women and girls.

Obligations to take a whole school approach

There is long-standing official recognition of the need for education institutions to implement whole school approaches to prevent sexism and sexual harassment. As far back as 2016, the **Women and Equalities Committee** concluded⁶: “Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools will only be reduced through a whole school approach. This must involve all staff, students, governors and parents, in addition to local child safeguarding bodies, police and specialist third sector organisations.” Similarly, in 2016 the **Department for Education** stated⁷: “We believe that such an approach with prevention at its core, promotes an environment of inclusion and respect, where pupils and staff are educated and empowered to recognise and challenge abuse of any kind.”

Following its 2021 review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges, England’s school and college inspectorate, **Ofsted**, brought in new obligations that require schools to take a whole school approach to prevent sexual harassment. Ofsted’s ‘State-funded school inspection toolkit’ (2025)⁸ outlines that inspectors will consider the extent to which “leaders ensure that the school has a culture in which staff are trained and empowered to deal with child-on-child violence; they assume it happens in the community and, potentially, in school, even in the absence of specific reports, so establish a whole-school approach to tackle it”. Furthermore, the **UK Government** recommends a whole school approach in its ‘Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education’ guidance (2025)⁹ advises a whole school approach: “The curriculum is best delivered as part of a whole school approach to wellbeing and positive relationships, supported by other school policies, including behaviour and safeguarding policies.”

The Welsh school and college inspectorate, **Estyn**, requires schools to embed a whole school approach. Its 2021 thematic report¹⁰ on sexual harassment concluded that secondary schools should “Recognise that peer-on-peer sexual harassment is highly prevalent in the lives of young pupils and adopt a whole-

3. Attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings, Women and Equalities Committee, UK Parliament, 2023.

4. Pornography regulation: The case for Parliamentary reform, APPG on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, 2023.

5. The rise of deepfake pornography in schools: ‘One girl was so horrified she vomited’, The Guardian, 2 December 2025. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/ng-interactive/2025/dec/02/the-rise-of-deepfake-pornography-in-schools>

6. Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, Women and Equalities Committee, UK Parliament, 2016.

7. Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools: Government response to the Committee’s Third Report of Session 2016–17, Women and Equalities Committee, UK Parliament, 2016.

8. State-funded school inspection toolkit, Ofsted, 2025.

9. Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education: Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, and teachers, Department for Education, UK Government, 2025.

10. Keeping children safe in education 2025: Statutory guidance for schools and colleges, Department for Education, UK Government, 2025.

school preventative and proactive approach to dealing with it. This importantly includes providing pupils with assurance that school staff will take every incidence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment seriously and work in partnership with parents and external agencies.” The **Welsh Government’s** ‘Peer on peer sexual harassment in education settings: action plan’ (2024)¹¹ further reinforced this, highlighting the need for education settings to “adopt a whole-system approach to create safe learning environments to prevent peer-on-peer sexual harassment before it occurs”.

“A whole school or college approach to safeguarding, a culture that makes clear that there is a zero-tolerance approach to sexual violence and sexual harassment and that both are never acceptable, and it will not be tolerated, and a strong preventative education programme will help create an environment in which all children at the school or college are supportive and respectful of their peers when reports of sexual violence or sexual harassment are made.”

– ‘Keeping children safe in education’ 2025, Department for Education.¹²

The **Scottish Government’s** framework, ‘Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence (GBV): A Whole School Framework’ (2024)¹³, states: “A whole-school approach aims to positively influence the school culture by fostering a shared, consistent approach tackling the underlying gender inequalities that underpin GBV. Everyone in a school community should promote a healthy and constructive understanding around gender and gender roles and challenge views held by people both in schools and across society which normalise GBV”.

The **Northern Ireland Executive Office’s** End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy¹⁴ states that a particular area of focus is “introducing whole school approaches to developing healthy and respectful relationships, within a wider safeguarding framework and culture, including policies and interventions that equip and support young people to address harmful attitudes and behaviours”.

UK Feminista’s Whole School Approach Development Scheme

UK Feminista provides a wide range of training and resources to support schools and colleges to implement a whole school approach to preventing sexism and sexual harassment. **Our online resources have been downloaded over 30,000 times, and over 15,000 teachers and trainee teachers have taken part in our training.** Complementing this work, the UK Feminista Action Award scheme recognises schools and colleges that demonstrate outstanding action against sexism and sexual harassment.

In 2022, UK Feminista launched the Whole School Approach Development Scheme - a time-limited initiative offering sustained, bespoke support to a diverse range of education settings. Through this initiative, participating institutions received expert guidance, coaching, training and resources to embed a whole school approach and assess its impact. The scheme had three strategic objectives for participating institutions:

1. Reduce the prevalence of sexual harassment, sexist language and gender stereotyping.
2. Increase the reporting rate of, and confidence in reporting, sexual harassment and abuse.
3. Increase understanding among students and school staff, and challenge harmful attitudes, in relation to sexual harassment, sexist language, and gender stereotyping.

11. Peer-on-peer sexual harassment in education settings: action plan, Welsh Government, 2024.

12. “We don’t tell our teachers”: Experiences of peer-on-peer sexual harassment among secondary school pupils in Wales, Estyn, 2021.

13. Preventing and responding to gender based violence: a whole school framework, Learning Directorate, Scottish Government, 2024.

14. End Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024-31, Northern Ireland Executive, 2024.

The scheme was also designed to build an evidence base of what works to combat sexism and sexual harassment, what the challenges are, and how learning can be upscaled to institutions across the UK. Support was initially offered to participating schools and colleges for one year; but in many cases, it was significantly extended to reflect the support needs of schools and colleges, and ensure schools could deliver meaningful change.

Participating schools and colleges received the following support and resources from UK Feminista:

1. A site visit from a UK Feminista staff member, which included the following activities:
 - Planning meeting with the school or college's lead staff member for the Whole School Approach Development Scheme
 - 1.5-hour training session on how to tackle sexism and sexual harassment, open to all staff and governors
2. Regular online coaching and review meetings
3. Consultancy and support on an ad hoc basis
4. Access to a suite of resources, including training films, classroom activities and strategic guidance
5. Opportunity to participate in a learning exchange meeting with other schools and colleges participating in the Whole School Approach Development Scheme

A diverse cohort of education settings participated, and we are grateful for their commitment to addressing sexism and sexual harassment, as well as their willingness to share key findings and outcomes with UK Feminista. The participating institutions were:

- a mixed-sex state secondary academy
- a mixed-sex state primary school
- a boys' secondary grammar school with mixed-sex sixth form
- a multi-site Further Education college
- a mixed-sex KS1-4 Alternative Provision school
- a mixed-sex independent school with boarding

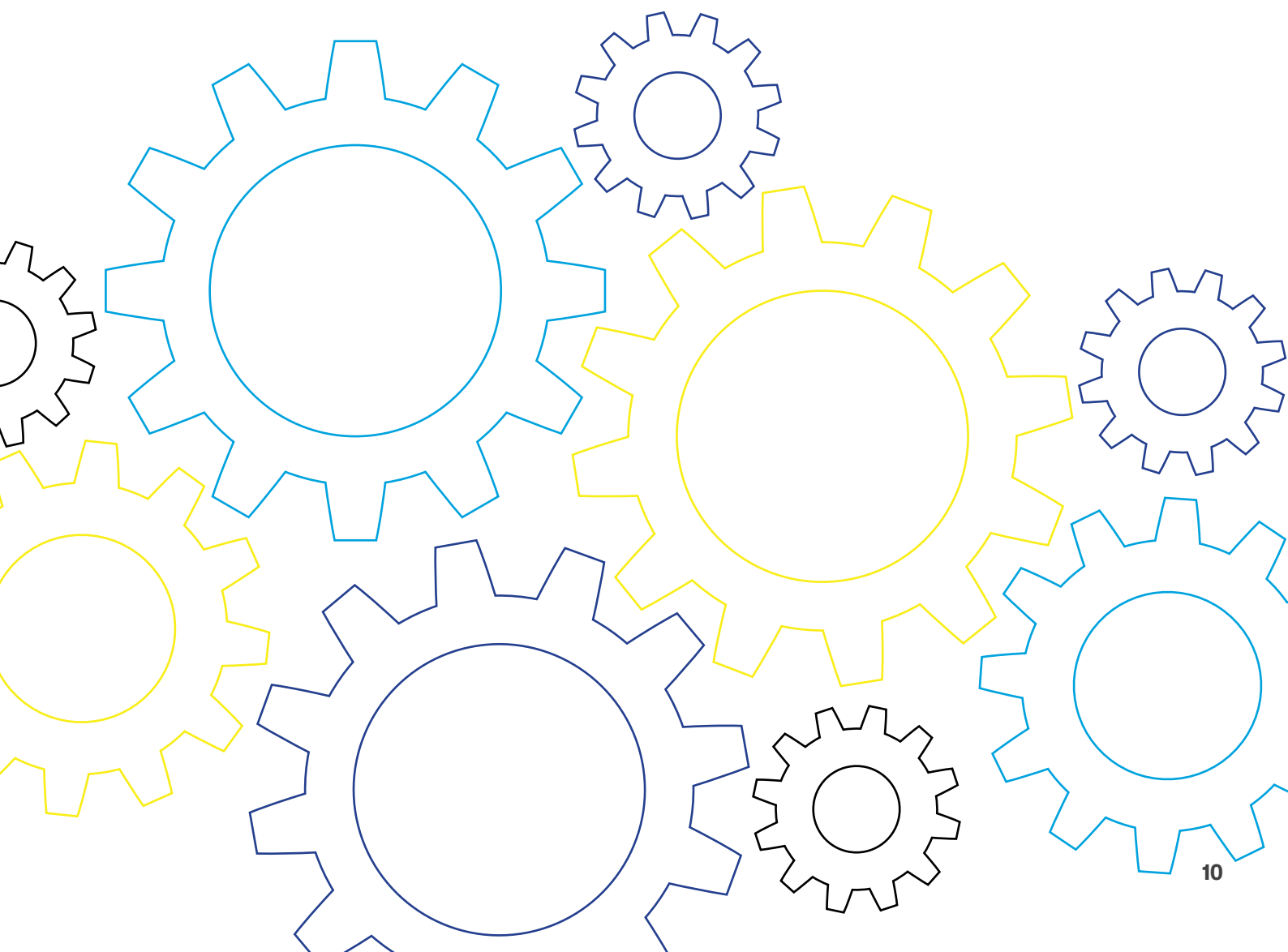
We are also grateful to the Whole School Approach Development Scheme Reference Group who supported the development of the scheme in its initial stages, with membership including representatives from the NAHT, teaching staff, school governors and safeguarding experts.

“Through this analysis, it is clear that UK Feminista’s Whole School Approach Development Scheme has been vital to schools and colleges’ aims to combat the presence of sexism and sexual harassment within their ecosystems. The programme provides both flexibility and structure, as well as an important third-party perspective and voice that has been crucial in enabling schools and colleges to adopt the approach and ensure its credibility... The programme is designed to be flexible, allowing each school/college to tailor the approach to its specific needs and context. It also provides a clear structure through an action plan, enabling schools and colleges to monitor progress effectively. This combination supports consistent delivery while accommodating individual institutional requirements. By working with UK Feminista, staff have reported that the programme has been implemented more effectively than previous attempts and that by using an external organisation, there has been increased credibility to the implementation and purpose of the programme.”

– The Social Innovation Partnership (TSIP), independent evaluators of UK Feminista’s scheme

UK Feminista's Whole School Approach Development Scheme was independently evaluated by The Social Innovation Partnership (TSIP). TSIP took a mixed-methods approach, using both quantitative and qualitative data to understand the impact of the whole school approach in three of the schools and colleges that participated in the scheme. Findings used to analyse the programme included staff and student survey results, monitoring logs, Whole School Approach Action Plans and interviews with staff and students conducted by TSIP. Excerpts from TSIP's evaluation are featured in this report.

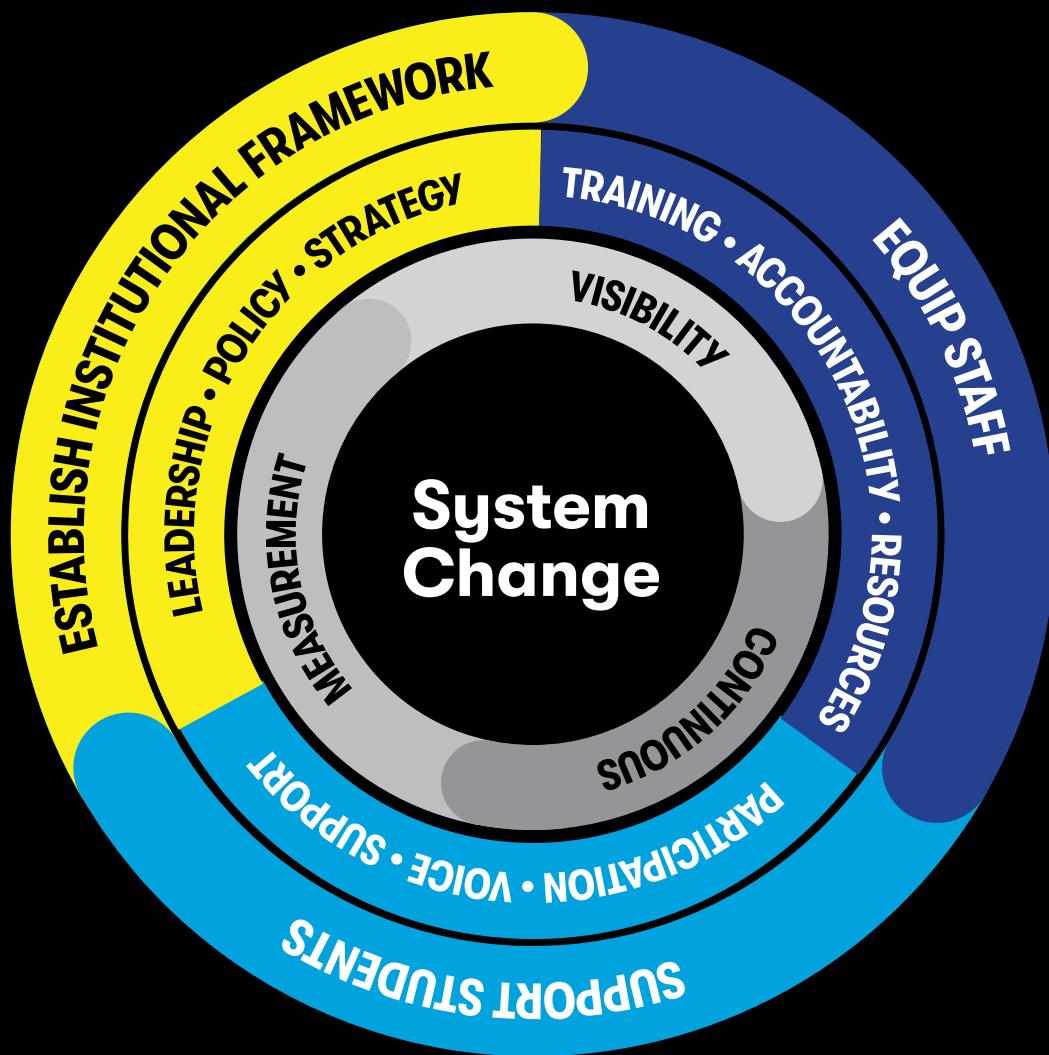
Findings from UK Feminista's Whole School Approach Development Scheme is crucial evidence for policymakers, schools, colleges and education bodies on how to implement robust whole school approaches to prevent and combat sexism and sexual harassment.



Core components of a whole school approach

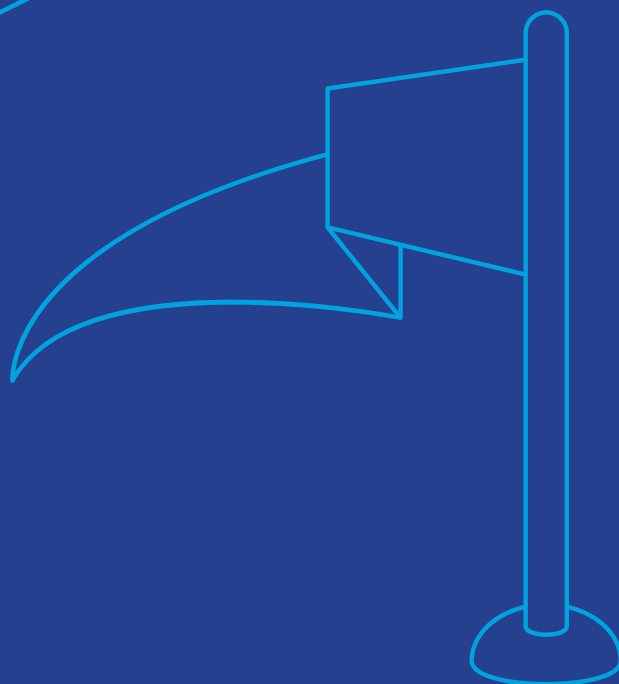
A 3-step process for schools and colleges

1. Establish an institutional framework to tackle sexism and sexual harassment. The framework should be underpinned by a strategy, supported by school policy, and driven by leadership. This institutional architecture enables schools and colleges to prioritise actions and ensure a consistent, cohesive approach to securing change.
2. Train and equip all school and college staff with the knowledge, resources and confidence to tackle sexism and sexual harassment.
3. Support students to learn about sexism and sexual harassment, report incidents and to take positive action for equality.



Key Factors for Success

This section highlights key factors that influenced how successfully schools and colleges in UK Feminista's Whole School Approach Development Scheme were able to implement a whole school or college approach to combatting sexism and sexual harassment, drawing on examples of activities and outcomes from participating institutions.





Key factors for success

A whole school or college approach must be sustained on a long-term basis

Summary

A whole school or college approach must be sustained on a long-term basis, with core activities set out in the Whole School or College Approach Action Plan regularly reviewed and updated to ensure consistent, sustainable progress in tackling sexism and sexual harassment.

Core actions

A key element of implementing whole school or college approaches is the development of a Whole School or College Approach Action Plan. Developed at the outset, the Action Plan should drive coordinated action and be reviewed and updated regularly in conjunction with robust monitoring data, to ensure it is being effectively and consistently implemented and having the intended impact.

Staff need regular opportunities to refresh their knowledge and understanding of how to combat sexism and sexual harassment. There must be repeated learning opportunities to ensure each new cohort receives a consistent message about the school or college's commitment to ending sexism and sexual harassment.

“When reflecting on consistency of implementation, staff that we spoke to during our evaluation drew on the fact that through using the framework that UK Feminista provided they were able to ensure that the work wasn't seen as a tickbox exercise, which once completed, they would then move on to the next focus - but that the work was seen with a long term focus and implemented consistently.”

– The Social Innovation Partnership, independent evaluators of UK Feminista's scheme

1

Key learning

Embedding a whole school or college approach is a long-term process. An Action Plan - which details objectives, activities, responsibilities and tracking tools - plays a vital role in

ensuring action is strategic, coordinated and consistent. However, the Action Plan must be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure sustained commitment and ongoing work beyond the first year of focus.

How schools and colleges put learning into practice

In multiple settings, the Whole School or College Approach Action Plan was reviewed after one year, leading to an extension of UK Feminista's support to ensure the Action Plan was fully embedded. Many settings identified further actions to continue driving forward outstanding priorities once their collaboration with UK Feminista ended. For example, two settings reported making a strong start with embedding their Whole School Approach Action Plans but highlighted engagement with parents and carers as a key focus for the following year.

2

Key learning

Regular, ongoing Continuing Professional Development opportunities for staff are essential for ensuring the Whole School or College Approach Action Plan is put into practice. With staffing changes and new student cohorts each year, regular training ensures the issue remains a priority and that all personnel have the requisite skills and knowledge to combat sexism and sexual harassment.

How schools and colleges put learning into practice

Some institutions held refresher staff INSET days at the beginning of the spring and summer term, to reiterate their commitment to combatting sexism and sexual harassment and maintain momentum around implementing the Action Plan. These sessions incorporated findings from student and staff surveys on sexism and sexual harassment, ensuring training was relevant and targeted. This also ensured that all staff, including new starters throughout the year, were aware of the Whole School Approach Action Plan and their role in delivering it.

3

Key learning

Reporting systems, including staff and student surveys and incident reporting systems, reveal important patterns and insights when used consistently over time.

When schools or colleges start taking setting-wide action against sexism and sexual harassment, there may be an initial rise in reported incidents as awareness, understanding and confidence in reporting increases. This reinforces the importance of sustained monitoring to identify patterns over the medium and long term.

How schools and colleges put learning into practice

Multiple settings updated their incident reporting systems to improve accuracy and utility of data collected. They found that patterns take time to emerge, and new systems must be supported by staff training to ensure consistent use.

A primary school found that, when comparing staff survey data carried out at the beginning of the scheme with staff survey data collected after one year, there was a rise in staff who reported having witnessed gender stereotyping in school. This was echoed in the student surveys, which revealed a rise in students reporting they had heard someone saying they couldn't do something because they are a girl or a boy. This school took several actions in response to the findings, including using UK Feminista's classroom resources on gender stereotypes, developing a permanent whole school 'Anti-Sexism' display to spotlight issues around sexism in school, and planning to continue tracking data to measure progress over the long term. To understand the problem and track progress in reducing it, data must be collected consistently over time.



Key factors for success

Equip the community to take effective action

Summary

For whole school or college approach action to achieve meaningful impact, it must be implemented collectively. Whole school or college action requires the involvement and support of everyone in the school or college community, including all staff (including the Senior Leadership Team, support and business staff), the governing body, pupils, parents and carers. There should be regular opportunities for collaboration and learning exchange between staff members, as well as ongoing learning and action opportunities for students and parents, supported by the governing body.

Core actions

Setting up a staff working party allows for a collaborative approach to whole school or college approach action, with the opportunity for different staff members to lead on aspects of the Action Plan. The working party should include a range of staff members, including members from the Senior Leadership Team, class teachers and support staff, allowing representation from across the staff body. Establishing complimentary student groups enables meaningful student-led action. Governors play a crucial role in supporting policy change and should hold senior leadership accountable for fully implementing the whole school or college approach. Actively gathering parent and carer feedback and involving them in the process extends the reach of the whole school or college approach into the home environment and fosters support from parents and carers.

“The whole school approach action plan, which focused on student-led assemblies, staff training, and parent engagement, has helped embed shared responsibility for equality across the community. ... [The school] has laid firm foundations for a respectful, inclusive culture. By keeping conversations active and empowering students as role models, the college is moving beyond compliance to lasting cultural change.”

– The Social Innovation Partnership, independent evaluators of UK Feminista’s scheme, summarising one school’s experience of engaging the whole school community.

A core component of a whole school approach is the delivery of staff training, to ensure staff have clear knowledge and understanding of why a whole school or college approach is needed and how to implement it. It is vital that all staff, including support staff and governors, receive this training, to enable a consistent approach and ensure staff understand their role in implementing the Whole School or College Approach Action Plan. Parents and carers should be provided with information about the problem of sexism and sexual harassment nationally and within the setting, as well as the work that is taking place to combat it through the Whole School or College Approach Action Plan. There should be a collaborative approach when designing, amending and implementing policies and recording systems, which should be made visible to the whole school or college community to ensure effectiveness.

“UK Feminista visited each of the college’s sites to deliver training - this was well received and was crucial to onboarding staff and giving credibility to the training.”

– The Social Innovation Partnership, independent evaluators of UK Feminista’s scheme, on the importance of UK Feminista’s training being delivered across all campuses in a multi-site institution.

Student input is a vital part of ensuring whole school or college approach action is relevant, targeted and effective, securing ownership and ‘buy in’. Student voice should be considered at every stage of embedding the Whole School or College Approach Action Plan. Schools and colleges should create meaningful opportunities for students to lead action by establishing student groups or utilising school council meetings. These groups can design awareness campaigns, contribute to reviews of reporting policy and practice, carry out gender stereotyping audits or lead peer-to-peer education sessions, ensuring the approach resonates with the wider student body. Providing resources to these groups and creating space for student collaboration helps empower students to shape initiatives within their school or college community.

“Campaigns like “Speak Up,” [an incident reporting system used in one setting] peer-mentoring, and student run assemblies give students ownership and visibility, reinforcing a culture that rejects sexism.”

– The Social Innovation Partnership, independent evaluators of UK Feminista’s scheme

1

Key learning

Securing commitment from all staff in the Whole School or College Approach Action Plan requires delivery of training to all governors and staff, including support staff and site staff. Schools and colleges benefit from making use of high-quality training from external providers, as well as training delivered internally by key staff members.

How schools and colleges put learning into practice

All education settings in the scheme began their whole school or college approach activities by receiving UK Feminista’s training on tackling sexism and sexual harassment.

One multi-site setting found that implementing the training as mandatory for all staff across every site significantly enhanced engagement and commitment to the initiative. Another school made training compulsory for all staff, including non-teaching staff such as porters and gardeners, fostering a shared understanding of the initiative's importance and encouraging consistent practice.

In one setting, after all staff and governors attended UK Feminista's training at the start of the year, the scheme lead developed further sessions using UK Feminista resources to provide ongoing professional development opportunities and support policy development. Utilising UK Feminista's downloadable resources and training videos provided further opportunities to strengthen staff understanding and embed best practice. Another setting provided additional ongoing training for targeted key staff members acting as Mental Health First-Aiders, Designated Safeguarding Leads and pastoral staff to promote and support work to increase confidence in reporting sexual harassment. The institution also found that complementing UK Feminista's training with follow-up training delivered internally provided further reinforcement of key messages.

2

Key learning

Securing 'buy in' and support from all parents and carers requires clear communication on the importance of tackling sexism and sexual harassment – both nationally and within the school or college. Sharing student survey results can help demonstrate the need for action.

Specific action relating to parental engagement should be included in the Whole School or College Approach Action Plan. Keeping parents and carers informed and updated on action to combat sexism and sexual harassment enables them to engage in supportive discussions at home with their children.

How schools and colleges put learning into practice

Many schools found that maintaining regular contact with parents and carers enabled them to engage more confidently in conversations about sexism and sexual harassment. One school provided information about its whole school approach by sending letters to all parents and carers and sharing UK Feminista's video for parents and carers. Another school shared fortnightly leaflets with parents and carers to provide information about emerging issues such as 'sextortion' and 'body shaming', alongside weekly email bulletins highlighting upcoming learning on topics such as misogyny.

One school carried out a parent survey, after surveying students and identifying a need to gather data on attitudes towards sexism and sexual harassment at home, which is detailed on page 19.

For multiple settings, utilising parents' evenings proved an effective way to engage in person with large numbers of parents and carers in relation to the Whole School Approach Action Plan. One participating primary school used their parents' coffee morning as an opportunity to share information about the school's whole school approach. Another school shared information about their whole school approach during parents' evenings and dedicated parent seminars, which continued to raise the profile of the problem of sexism and of the school's action against it.

3

Key learning

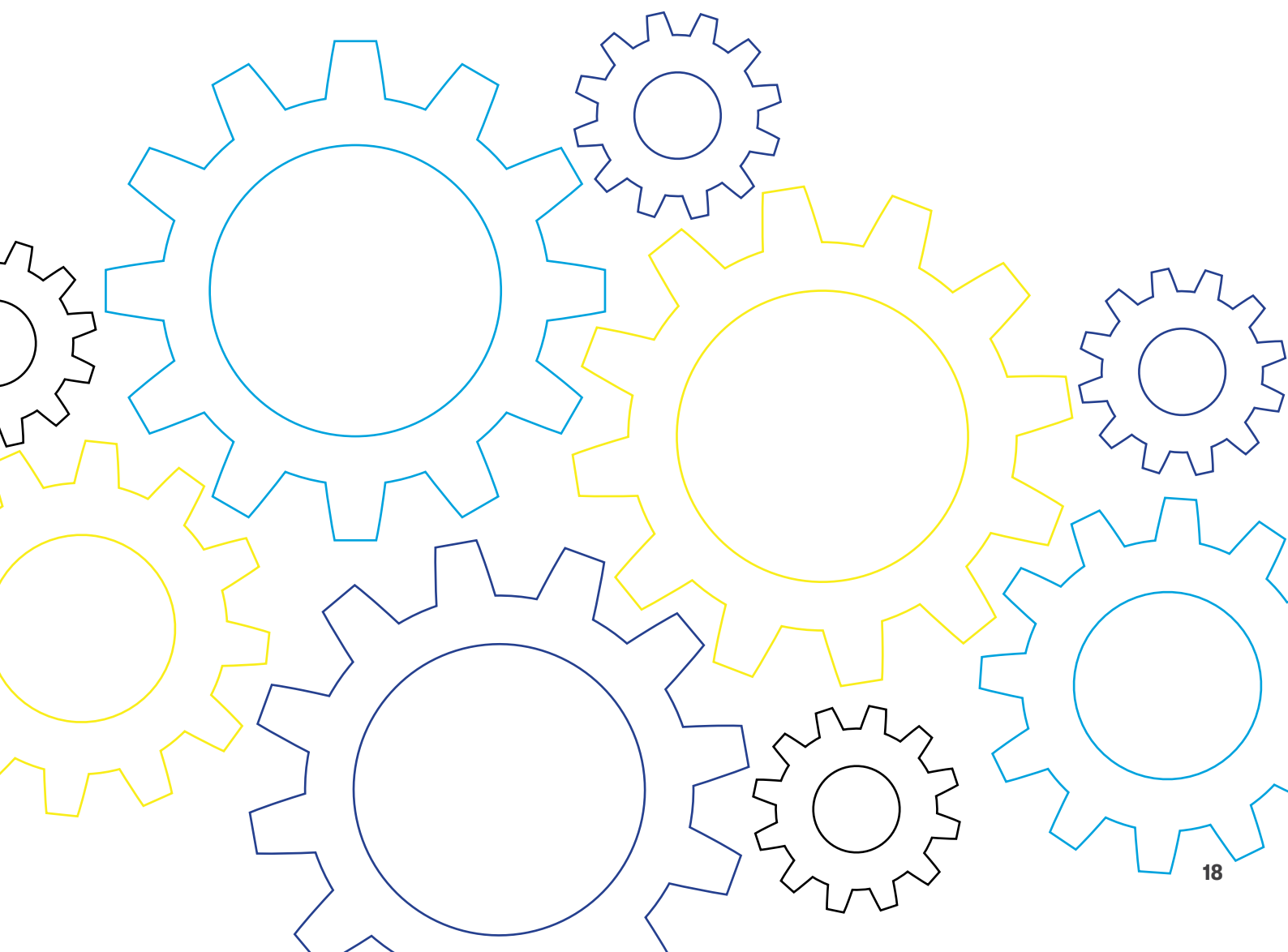
Peer-led initiatives, and collaborating with students when devising the Whole School or College Approach Action Plan, supports students to engage with and feel ownership over action to combat sexism and sexual harassment.

How schools and colleges put learning into practice

At one school, the student-led equalities group delivered whole school assemblies on what sexism and sexual harassment is and how to report it.

In another school, sixth form students in the student equalities group planned initiatives on positive male role models, led peer-to-peer assemblies, held weekly meetings, created and distributed posters and provided input into the design of the student survey on sexism and sexual harassment disseminated by the school.

One school collected student feedback after hosting International Day of Women and Girls in Science and International Women's Day events in order to gain insights about how the learning inspired them and what could be improved in future. The school also utilised half-termly student council meetings to collect pupil feedback relating to the whole school approach, as well as creating a permanent school notice board display on combatting sexism. This display featured student quotes on the issue, alongside the school's clear anti-sexism messaging.





Using parent and carer perspectives to inform change

Carrying out a parent and carer survey provided invaluable insights for one school participating in the scheme. The school sought to gather information about parental attitudes to sexism and sexual harassment, as well as provide further information on their children's experiences at school. Parents also answered questions about how well they felt the school dealt with incidents of sexism and sexual harassment.

The responses revealed concerns about gender stereotypes influencing students' school experiences in areas such as careers, sports and extracurricular clubs. For example, a parent reported that their daughter was discouraged from joining the business club by male peers. The parent said, **"When my daughter wanted to join the business club the boys did their best to put her off and said that she would just be a 'token'"**. Sexist views relating to behaviour were also reported, including dismissive attitudes toward boys' aggression. One parent reported being told **"boys will be boys"** by a staff member following an incident they considered to be serious bullying. Furthermore, comments implying male superiority were reported as common and seen as part of everyday language at school. One parent said, **"Comments to the tune of boys being better than girls have been quoted on multiple occasions. It seems this is part of general conversations in the school"**.

Surveying parents and carers enabled the school to gain deeper understanding around the problem of sexism and sexual harassment in school, providing valuable external insight of student experience and reporting confidence, as well as capturing experiences that may not have been captured elsewhere. These findings were used to design targeted interventions to combat the issues raised. The findings from the survey and action planned in response were shared with parents and carers alongside updates to the Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum at a parent information evening, and further engagement with parents around these issues remains an ongoing focus for the school.



Key factors for success

Integrate visible, leadership -driven action into existing systems

Summary

The whole school or college approach to combatting sexism and sexual harassment should remain visible to everyone in the school or college community, clearly spearheaded by the Senior Leadership Team and integrated into existing systems. Commitment and political leadership from the Senior Leadership Team is essential to motivate staff, deliver accountability and model best practice in challenging sexism and sexual harassment. It also signals to students and staff that the institution recognises the seriousness of the issue and is committed to meaningful action. Integrating and clearly communicating strengthened reporting systems, explicit policies, and curriculum improvements into existing systems ensures the approach is embedded and visible across daily practice.

Core actions

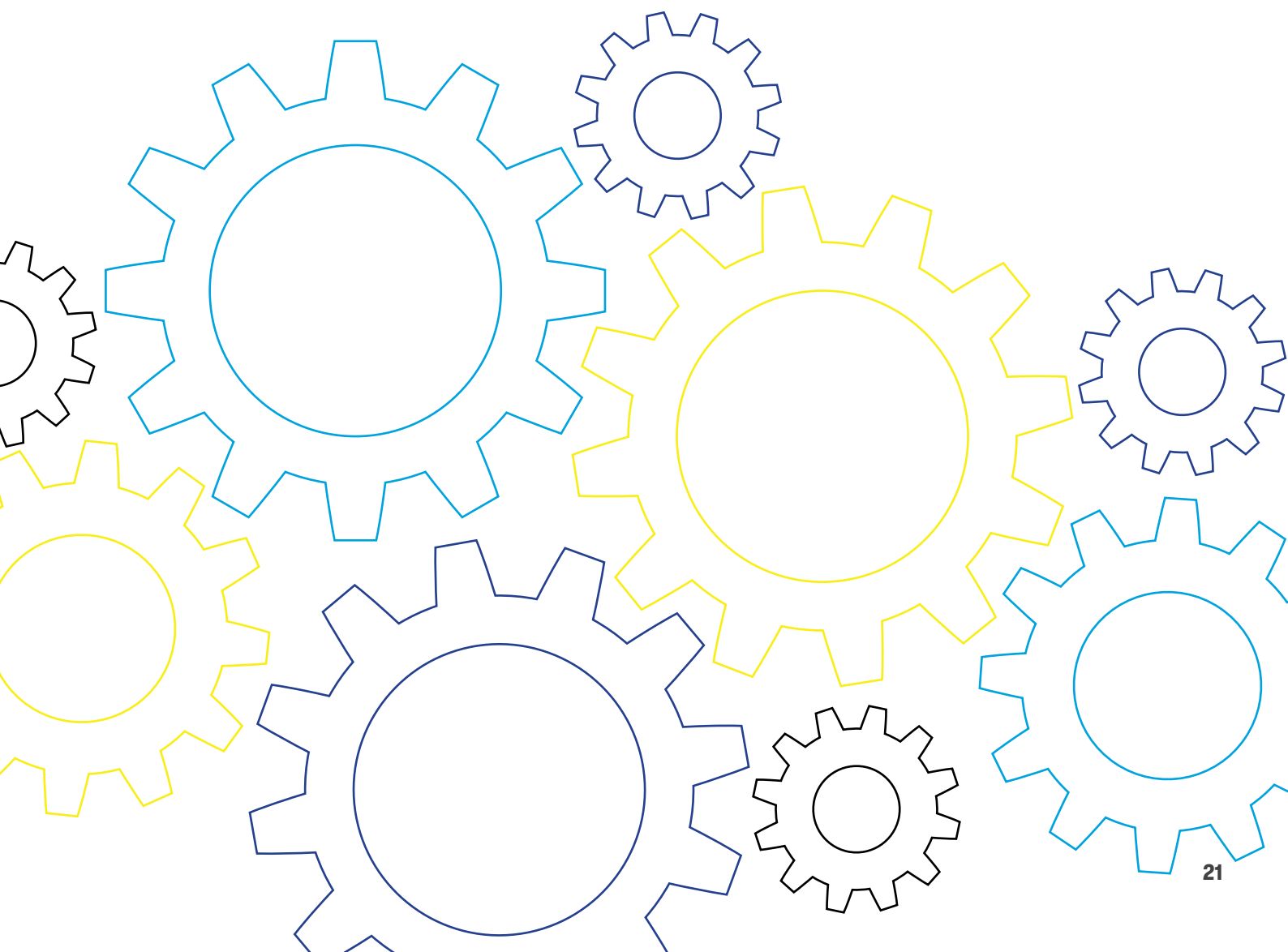
The Senior Leadership Team should drive key messages relating to whole school or college action 'from the top', setting clear expectations for the entire school or college community. Their visible presence in working groups, assemblies and during policy and system reviews reinforces the importance of taking action.

Schools and colleges should begin by auditing existing systems to assess how effectively current policies, reporting mechanisms and the curriculum prevent and respond to sexism and sexual harassment. These audits should inform the Whole School or College Action Plan. Existing policy should be updated, and developing an additional standalone sexism and sexual harassment policy can further signal the school's commitment to addressing it. In addition, surveying students and staff about their experiences provides vital insights for planning and monitoring, while keeping the Senior Leadership Team informed about the realities and challenges on the ground. A staff working group, including senior leaders and governors, should lead implementation and track progress.

Crucially, the work carried out as part of the Whole School or College Approach Action Plan should be shared throughout the process with students, staff, governors, parents and carers to maintain visibility of the initiative. All staff must receive ongoing Continuing Professional Development on updated policies and reporting procedures, while students should be regularly informed about work related to the Action Plan and how to access policies and reporting systems. Challenging sexism should be embedded throughout the curriculum and the initiative should remain highly visible through displays, assemblies, and communications so that messages about tackling sexism and sexual harassment remain prominent.

“[The college] established a working group to oversee the Whole College Approach action plan. This is key to ensure that there is consistency rooted in the approach and that there was senior level buy-in to the programme”

– The Social Innovation Partnership, independent evaluators of UK Feminista’s scheme





A collaborative approach to system change

One education setting showed how a collaborative approach to redesigning reporting systems and increasing visibility can be highly effective. By working with both staff and students to redevelop and relaunch reporting processes, the institution encouraged greater reporting of sexism and sexual harassment. The campaign was made highly visible across all sites through student designed posters, which helped raise awareness of the updated system among the whole community. Tutorial sessions were delivered to all students to reinforce the institution's zero tolerance stance on sexual harassment and to explain how to use the new reporting process. The institution also changed the name of the reporting system to help reduce stigma around experiencing or reporting incidents of sexual harassment.

There are indications that the re-developed reporting system is having a positive impact on both staff and student confidence in reporting. The number of staff who had experienced and subsequently reported sexual harassment at work went from 28% in the first staff survey to 35% in the second staff survey. In the first student survey, of the 6% of students who said they had experienced unwanted physical contact of a sexual nature, 14% of those reported the incident to a staff member. This rose to 26% of students in the second student survey. Of the staff who said they had experienced sexual harassment at work in the first staff survey, 22% said that they would 'definitely' report future incidents. Again, this increased in the second staff survey, with 35% selecting that they would 'definitely' report future incidents. These increases suggest an increase in confidence in reporting and increased awareness of how to report.

“All three case studies show schools or colleges embedding anti-sexism content in policies, tutorials, assemblies, and staff training, ensuring it becomes a consistent and visible part of the school’s ethos and daily operations. Clear action plans have allowed schools to embrace a true “whole school or college approach”... Staff and students increasingly recognise and challenge gendered or sexist language. There has been increased awareness in each case study, challenging harmful norms and behaviours.”

– The Social Innovation Partnership, independent evaluators of UK Feminista’s scheme

1

Key learning

Schools and colleges need to build a robust evidence base on the scale and nature of sexism and sexual harassment within their institution to inform an effective response. Reporting and recording systems that are fully integrated into wider procedures, and that capture incidents comprehensively and accurately, are essential to this. Relying on broad or generic reporting categories that subsume different forms of harmful sexual behaviour or safeguarding concerns is insufficient, as it prevents the issue from being accurately identified and tracked.

Easy to use and clearly communicated staff and student reporting systems are important for increasing the reporting rate of incidents of sexism and sexual harassment and ensuring that students can access the support they need. Schools and colleges must work to strengthen awareness and confidence among students about reporting incidents of sexism and sexual harassment. Whilst anonymous reporting systems can support in building an accurate picture of the problem, it is crucial to ensure non-anonymous reporting is also available to ensure support can be provided.

All reporting and recording systems should be regularly reviewed and allow for flexible adaptation to enable the collection of data specific to incidents of sexism and sexual harassment that match the ever-changing landscape of abuse, including incidents which have taken place online.

How schools and colleges put learning into practice

Multiple settings adapted existing reporting systems or introduced new ones to include additional sub-categories explicitly relating to sexism and sexual harassment towards students and staff. These changes enabled more accurate reporting, improved monitoring and recording, and made it possible to identify specific trends over time.

At one school, the Senior Leadership Team collaborated with the staff working party (established to drive action forward relating to the Whole School Approach Action Plan) to develop a reporting system for sexism and sexual harassment, which allowed students to disclose incidents anonymously if they wished. The system aimed to encourage students to report incidents and was promoted on posters which included a direct link to the reporting system via use of a QR code.

2

Key learning

Sexism and sexual harassment should be explicitly addressed in all relevant institutional policies. Subsuming this work solely under the issue of safeguarding, for example, without an explicit policy focus on sexism and sexual harassment limits progress.

Developing policies that are sensitive to the specific context of a school or college ensures alignment with the needs of both staff and students.

How schools and colleges put learning into practice

One school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy included sections on Sexual Violence, Sexual Harassment and Harmful Sexual Behaviour. An addendum policy was developed to support the Promoting Positive Behaviour Policy, which provided more information specifically regarding identifying and combatting sexist language.

In another school, sexist and misogynistic language had become highly normalised towards both students and staff. To address this, the school introduced a policy that explicitly addressed body shaming, aiming to discourage this particularly prevalent form of sexist language within the setting.

Another setting amended several of their policies (including Safeguarding and Child Protection, College Rules, and Rewards and Sanctions) to reflect the strategic priority of preventing sexism and sexual harassment. The Senior Leadership Team collaborated with the staff working party to develop policies and guidance on sanctions and behaviour.

3

Key learning

Embedding teaching on sexism and sexual harassment across the existing curriculum is an essential part of a whole school or college approach. When these topics are fully integrated into multiple programmes of study, it sends a clear, consistent message that tackling sexism and sexual harassment is a priority for the whole institution. This prominence ensures the work is - and is recognised as - meaningful and sustained, rather than a one-off or 'tick-box' exercise, and demonstrates to students, staff, and the wider community that the school is committed to combatting sexism and sexual harassment.

How schools and colleges put learning into practice

One school adapted their programmes of study, building in additional lessons and activities on sexism and sexual harassment. Delivering a wide range of student-facing activities and classroom discussions enabled students to engage in learning about violence against women and girls, feminism, gender stereotyping and online misogynistic influencers. Integrating the issues into the wider curriculum provided opportunities to learn about the problem; for example, exploring misogyny through a core text in English, and creating posters about sexism inspired by the work of a feminist artist in Art.

Another school utilised UK Feminista's classroom resources on gender stereotypes and included opportunities to celebrate the achievements of women within the existing programmes of study. Dedicated lessons were taught to coincide with International Women's Day and the International Day of Women and Girls in Science.

4

Key learning

The existing curriculum may not provide adequate opportunities for specific learning about topics relating to sexism and sexual harassment in school or may not provide fair and equal opportunities for girls and boys.

Auditing curriculum provision ensures that all statutory points of study relating to sexism and sexual harassment are included, whilst highlighting opportunities for building in enriched learning. It also enables staff to identify whether provision is fair and equal for boys and girls.

How schools and colleges put learning into practice

In a boys' school with a mixed-sex sixth form, carrying out additional surveys to gather data relating to girls' sport provision in school led to significant changes to respond to their needs

and concerns. This included the implementation of 'girls only' gym sessions and work to celebrate girls' sport during Women's History Month, where the school had their first girls' rugby team participating. This success was shared widely through the school community, such as in assemblies.

In another setting, take up of extra-curricular clubs was reviewed to ensure that provision offered was equal for girls and boys.

5

Key learning

Senior leaders, including the head teacher, must provide strong, consistent and visible leadership for the whole school or college approach.

Sharing messages collectively, for example, in assembly, ensures wide reach and consistency in messaging.

How schools and colleges put learning into practice

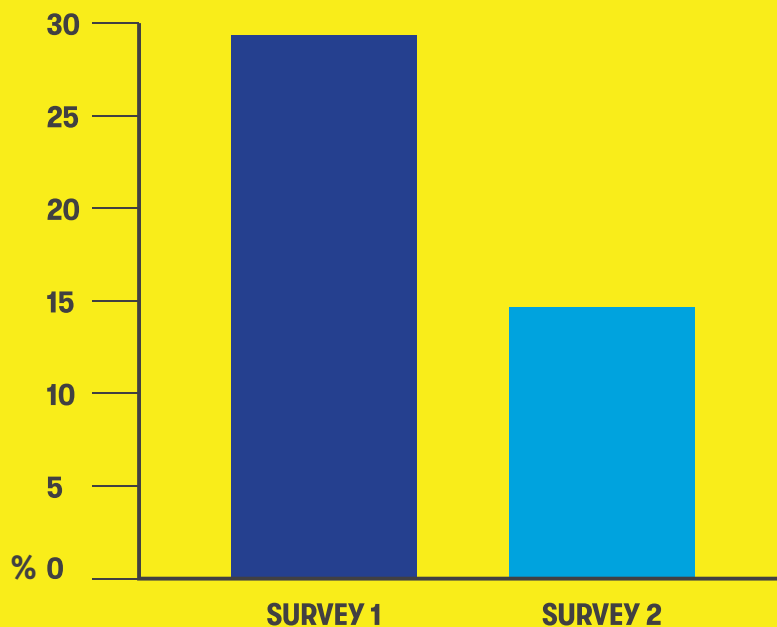
At one school, the head teacher played a key role in delivering core messages in relation to the Whole School Approach Action Plan by leading assemblies on sexual harassment across all year groups. In these assemblies, the head teacher provided reminders of how to use the phone-based reporting system, shared reporting data and provided information on action that would be taken in response to reports.

At another school, the head teacher spoke to students collectively about body shaming and the particular impact this behaviour had on female students, sending a strong message about behaviour the school will not tolerate.

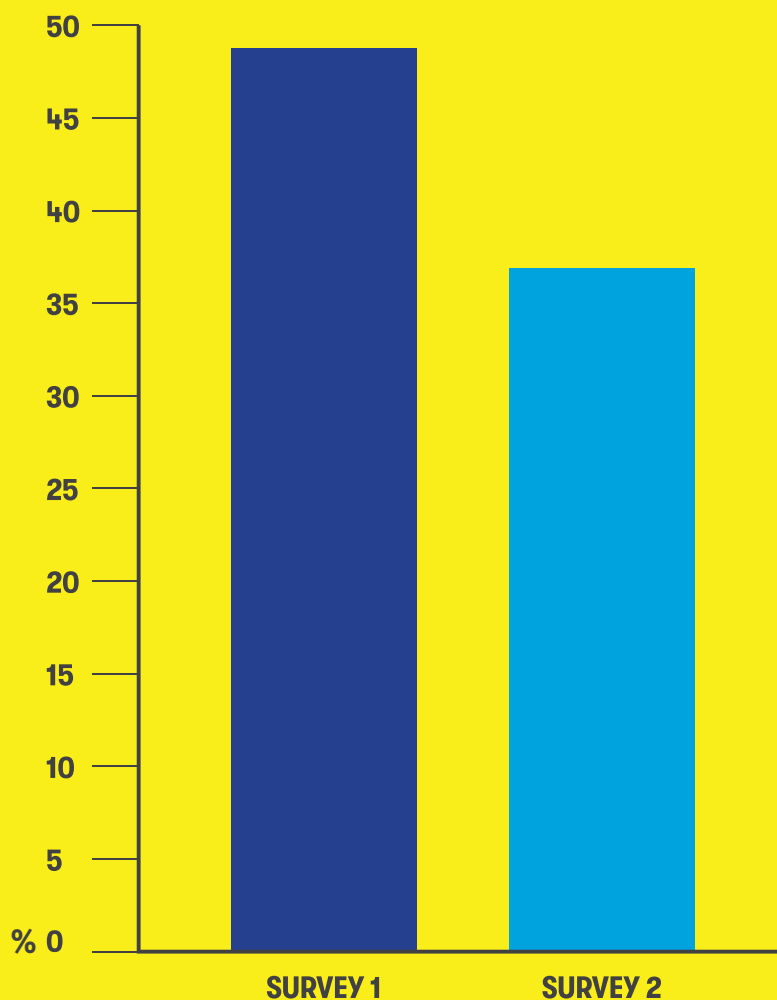
In another setting, a pupil-led Gender Equality Group was established with a broad range of pupils represented, which led on the delivery of focus groups in school houses to gather student experiences. The Senior Leadership Team supported the focus groups by promoting them in every assembly. A Senior Leadership Team representative was present to record discussions in each focus group and the findings were fed back to the staff working party and shared with students in assemblies.

UK Feminista's Whole School Approach Development Scheme: The Results

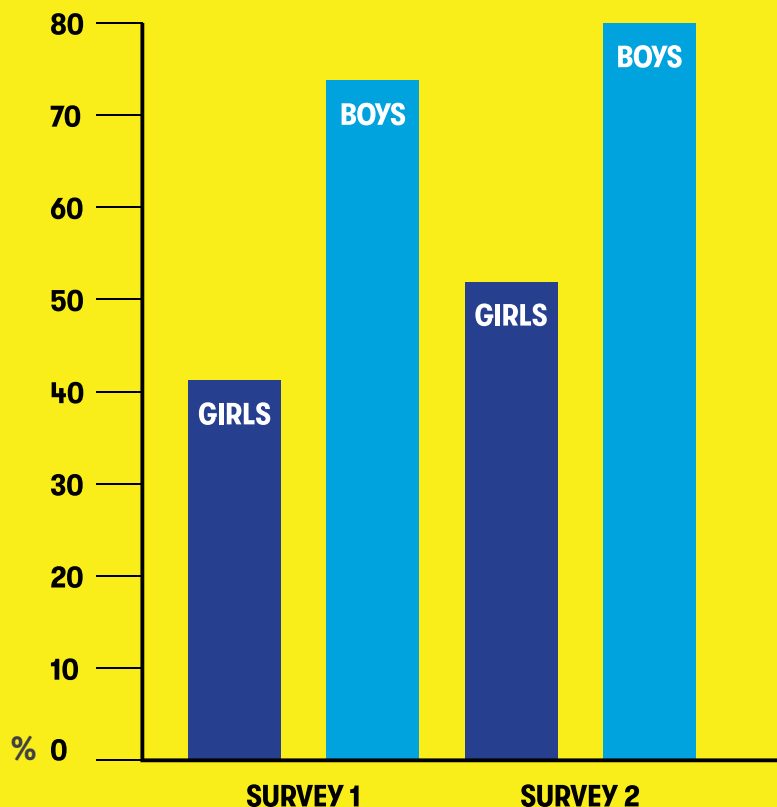
In a mixed-sex state secondary academy, there was a reduction in staff witnessing sexual harassment in school between the surveys conducted at the start and end of their participation in UK Feminista's Whole School Approach Development Scheme.



In a mixed-sex independent secondary school, there was a reduction in students who witnessed gender stereotyping in school between the surveys conducted at the start and end of their participation in UK Feminista's Whole School Approach Development Scheme.



In a mixed-sex independent secondary school, there was an increase in students who agreed with the statement “Sexism at school is taken seriously enough” between the surveys conducted at the start and end of their participation in UK Feminista’s Whole School Approach Development Scheme. The statistics disaggregated by sex are presented here, underscoring the importance of collecting data separately for girls and boys, as their responses often differ in the context of this gendered issue.

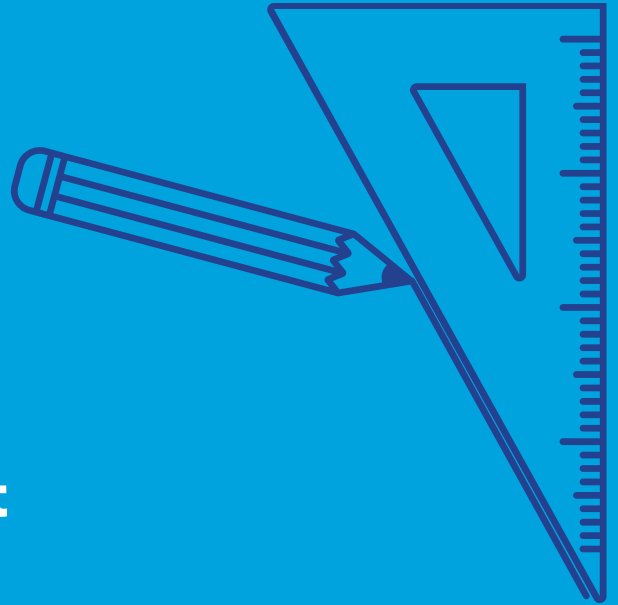




Challenges to Implementing a Whole School or College Approach

This section outlines the key challenges that schools and colleges in UK Feminista's Whole School Approach Development Scheme encountered while embedding a whole school or college approach to address sexism and sexual harassment. It draws on insights and experiences from participating institutions to illustrate where barriers arose and offers strategies to help overcome them.





Challenges

Inadequate measurement and tracking

Summary

A key challenge for schools and colleges relates to the collection of accurate, representative data about the prevalence of sexism and sexual harassment within the institution. This data collection is crucial to track the scale and nature of the problem, measure the impact of interventions and inform future prevention action. However, accurate data relies on high quality incident reporting and recording systems, and effective delivery of student and staff experience surveys. Common obstacles for education settings include low or uneven survey uptake, inconsistencies caused by reworded questions in follow up surveys, difficulties experienced by students in completing surveys, and inaccurate or under-reporting of incidents of sexual harassment via ongoing reporting systems.

Core actions

Distributing student and staff surveys on a regular basis provides the opportunity to gather experiences and views on sexism and sexual harassment at the school or college. The first survey provides baseline evidence about the institution's context to inform its Whole School or College Approach Action Plan. Repeating surveys on a regular basis enables the school or college to track the problem and progress in combatting it, whilst also helping to identify future areas of focus. Alongside surveys, student and staff incident reporting systems should be adapted to ensure they effectively track and measure incidents of sexism and sexual harassment.

“Through its partnership with UK Feminista, [the school] has made meaningful progress in fostering a culture free from sexism and sexual harassment. The scheme has strengthened awareness, encouraged open dialogue, and improved systems for reporting and responding to incidents. Awareness of sexism and sexual harassment increased among both staff and pupils, and open discussions about equality and inappropriate language became more common. When asked: “Have you witnessed any gender stereotyping at school?” between the two surveys, there was an 11% increase in older students being able to identify gender stereotyping that they have witnessed.”

– The Social Innovation Partnership, independent evaluators of UK Feminista's scheme

1

Challenge

Existing staff-facing incident reporting systems in schools and colleges often do not enable the prevalence of sexism and sexual harassment to be effectively established and monitored, undermining effective responses. As outlined in the previous section in further detail, five institutions taking part in UK Feminista's Whole School Approach Development Scheme recognised limitations to their current incident reporting systems and consequently reviewed and updated them to enable more specific recording of incidents of sexism and sexual harassment.

Recommended actions

Update incident recording systems to include subcategories specifically for sexual harassment and sexism. Ensure recording systems allow patterns and trends to be identified by, for example, the sex of victims and perpetrators, cases where staff are victims, and instances of repeat behaviour by individual students. This is vital for designing effective responses and prevention initiatives.

It is also essential that systems clearly specify the type of behaviour recorded, rather than subsuming all sexism or sexual harassment under a broad label such as "harmful sexual behaviour", which can obscure the nature of the problem and the power dynamics driving it.

2

Challenge

Many incidents of sexual harassment go unreported, meaning students fail to receive the support they need, individuals perpetrating this behaviour are not challenged, and prevention initiatives are not informed by data on the full scale and nature of the problem.

One setting observed that the incident reporting figures appeared to be disproportionately low compared to anecdotal information, with figures failing to accurately reflect the number of incidents of sexual harassment taking place in reality.

Another school identified that there appeared to be a noticeable gap in reporting during lunchtime periods, a time otherwise historically associated with a higher frequency of behavioural issues. This underreporting was partly attributed by the school to limited engagement with the initiative by lunchtime supervisors, who had not received training on taking a whole school approach as it took place outside of their contracted working hours.

Recommended actions

Identify the barriers to reporting faced by students and staff and work to address them. Including a question within the survey about reporting barriers and raising it as a discussion point within student voice groups could provide opportunities to gain understanding around the barriers to victims of sexism and sexual harassment reporting incidents.

Actively promote incident reporting systems throughout the school or college for staff and students, including how to report and why it is important. This includes delivering training on incident reporting to all staff, including part-time and temporary staff, such as lunchtime supervisors.

3

Challenge

Student and staff surveys on sexism and sexual harassment are vital for establishing the scale and nature of the problem and identifying effective solutions. However, survey uptake was sometimes low, with responses unevenly distributed across year groups. Schools also experienced uneven rates of completion between female and male students and staff, preventing important patterns in the data from being reliably identified.

One school that carried out surveys as part of their whole school approach found that both student surveys received a response rate of less than 20%. Responses were uneven across year groups. In one survey, for example, over half the participants were from Year 8 while none were from Year 11. There was also an imbalance in the number of boys and girls taking part. Therefore, the survey findings were unlikely to fully represent the experiences of the student population as a whole.

Recommended actions

Allocate dedicated time to complete surveys during form periods or staff meetings to increase completion rates. Consider making surveys mandatory, while retaining the option to 'opt out' of specific questions or the survey as a whole. Ensure that students and staff understand the purpose of collecting the data, how it will be used to inform action and what support is available if issues are raised. Analyse survey data by sex to capture gendered experiences accurately.

4

Challenge

Problems in survey design can impact the usefulness of the resulting data. Altering survey questions between initial and follow-up surveys makes it difficult to draw comparisons between data and track progress in reducing the problem. One school reworded a question on the second student survey, inviting students to share their experiences of any type of discriminatory language, whereas the first survey included a dedicated question on sexist language. This broader framing made it unclear what the nature of the discriminatory language was.

Recommended actions

Ensure consistent wording across surveys to improve comparability between data sets and enable patterns to be identified. Survey questions should specifically ask about sexism and sexual harassment to allow precise tracking of the problem. Asking about other forms of discrimination separately, and also allowing students to highlight how they interact, can support intersectional analysis - such as analysing the specific experiences of sexism faced by disabled girls.

5

Challenge

Some students face barriers to completing a survey. In an Alternative Provision setting, surveying students was challenging due to literacy barriers, past trauma and formal language feeling inaccessible or lacking relevancy. The school adapted their method of surveying students and provided additional support to students to enable them to participate.

Recommended actions

Tailor surveys to the needs of the learners, for example, by simplifying language, carrying out surveys in paper format as opposed to an online form, or exploring other options to gather student views and experiences. It may be necessary to consider what is known about individual student vulnerabilities and contexts. Clearly signpost support to students and staff before and after completing the survey. Allow participants to opt out of the survey if desired.



Challenges

Different education settings face distinct challenges

Summary

Sexist attitudes and behaviours exist in all types of education settings - but strategies needed to address them can vary significantly. Each school or college comprises its own unique community, meaning there is no 'one-size-fits-all' when it comes to implementing a whole school or college approach. An effective measure in a mainstream secondary school may be ineffective or inappropriate in an Alternative Provision setting, primary school, boys' school or Further Education College. For whole school or college approaches to have the necessary impact, schools and colleges must tailor action to the needs of their setting. While certain core activities - such as developing a Whole School or College Action Plan - should underpin every whole school or college approach, activities must be adapted to address the individual challenges faced by each setting, ensuring action is inclusive, visible and relevant to all students and staff.

Core actions

The Whole School or College Approach Action Plan must be tailored to the needs of the school or college community, with actions designed for the particular context of the setting. Whole school or college approach action should carefully consider the individual needs and backgrounds of the particular student body. To ensure that the scheme is impactful, actions should be inclusive of the whole school or college community, with deliberate attention to the experiences of groups particularly affected and to the distinct needs of different year groups.

“UK Feminista worked with [the college] to carefully tailor their action plan to their unique setup as a further education college across many sites... [The college’s] action plan embedded activities that drove commitment across the college, including fresh inductions for each student cohort and regular awareness campaigns to sustain the impact of the work.”

– The Social Innovation Partnership, independent evaluators of UK Feminista’s scheme

1

Challenge

One setting, a boys' secondary school which admits girls into its sixth form, reflected that its male dominated student composition contributed to the prevalence of sexist attitudes and

misogynistic language. During its participation in the scheme, the school had approximately 1000 pupils on roll, of whom around 100 were girls. The school identified a need to improve the culture and inclusivity of the learning environment for female students.

Recommended actions

Provide opportunities for girls to meet as a single-sex group, supported by school leaders, to talk about their experiences of sexism and sexual harassment and the action needed. It is vital that girls are given the space and confidence, particularly within a male-dominated environment, to share their experiences and access support. Girls must be given the opportunity to input suggestions and perspectives on tackling sexism within the school; however, it should never be inferred that it is the girls' 'responsibility' to solve this problem.

2

Challenge

A mixed-sex Alternative Provision setting reported a distinct set of challenges. The student cohort is fluid, with students enrolled for differing time periods. Many students have complex home or care situations, adverse childhood experiences, special educational needs and safeguarding concerns, requiring careful planning for student-facing interventions. Building strong home-school links and engaging parents and carers has proved challenging. Teachers reported that, in this particular setting type, the problem can be especially acute, with many of the school's students having been exposed to misogynistic online content with little supervision from parents and carers. Teachers also reported that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had heightened pre-existing vulnerabilities for many. Use of sexist language was highly normalised and often directed at staff.

Recommended actions

Recognise the individual needs of students and treat incidents on a case-by-case basis to ensure sensitivity to the student's context and home circumstances. Link discussions about sexism and misogyny within the context of the school values as a way of starting conversations with students, parents and carers. Ensure teaching resources about sexism and sexual harassment suit the specific learning needs of students. Use UK Feminista's classroom resource, 'Understanding Sexual Harassment', designed specifically for use in Alternative Provision settings. This resource was developed from our collaboration with this Alternative Provision setting.

3

Challenge

A large Further Education college took part in the scheme which had multiple sites and a large student body, with over 11,000 students and 900 staff. Large, multi-site settings present logistical challenges in sharing key messages on whole college approach action with staff and students.

The large size of the college, as well as the varied timetabling, restricted opportunities to share information collectively and allow students and staff the chance to take collaborative action.

Recommended actions

Utilise multiple communication methods to disseminate information about the whole college approach. Utilise student tutorial sessions, the website, newsletters and poster campaigns to share key work and messages to staff, students, governors, parents and carers. Ensure all staff across all sites attend mandatory training to ensure messaging and approaches are consistent. Establish staff and student working groups with cross-site representation to drive action on the whole college approach and monitor progress.



Challenges

Education staff face new challenges and ongoing resource pressures

Summary

Teachers and school and college staff in the UK are working in a landscape shaped by deep-rooted, normalised societal sexism, intensified by the growing influence of misogynistic online influences. Structural pressures - including staffing shortages, high staff turnover, stretched budgets and timetable constraints - add an additional layer of challenge. In this context, consistent, collaborative action to combat sexism and sexual harassment, engaging all members of the school or college community, is more crucial than ever. Actions that prevent responsibility for combatting this serious safeguarding problem falling on the shoulders of one staff member are essential for success, such as the establishment of a working group to embed shared responsibility and accountability in the overall Whole School or College Approach Action Plan, and integrating learning across the entire curriculum.

Core actions

Schools and colleges should use the Whole School or College Approach Action Plan to delegate tasks and share workload, led by a working party, in order to make implementation of a whole school or college approach manageable and collaborative. Curriculum audits are essential for assessing how well topics such as sexism and sexual harassment are currently covered and enable opportunities to strengthen learning and ensure the representation of women across subjects, rather than simply relying on PSHE to address sexism. Equally important is fostering a culture of respect and openness within the education setting so that students and staff feel confident to discuss sensitive issues and challenge harmful attitudes. When there is resistance, schools and colleges should lean on evidence - such as national data, institution-level data and student and staff feedback - to demonstrate the scale and impact of sexism and sexual harassment, reinforcing the need for action and helping staff feel confident that this work is both necessary and effective.

1

Challenge

Teachers and staff can face resistance from students and staff when addressing sexism and sexual harassment. Sexist attitudes are deeply entrenched and increasingly reinforced by online content, including misogynistic influencers and pornography, which promote harmful

attitudes that spill into the classroom. At one school, parents raised serious concerns about incidents involving boys rating girls' appearance, the sharing of pornographic material and intimate image abuse. Staff at the same school reported that some boys pushed back against discussions on sexism, saying they felt "targeted" because girls were identified as the majority of victims and boys as the majority of perpetrators. Staff believed the popularity of online misogynistic influencers among students intensified this resistance.

Recommended actions

Engage students within the school or college's survey data and national data to evidence the gendered nature of the issue, alongside conversations about how gender stereotypes harm everyone. Ensure the Whole School or College Approach Action Plan includes specific action to target and address the impact of misogynistic online influences including pornography and influencers. Use UK Feminista's suite of resources, 'Online Influencers and Misogyny', which includes classroom activities and guidance for staff to support addressing the impact of misogynistic online influencers.

2

Challenge

Staff are often expected to wear multiple 'hats' in school, frequently holding multiple areas of responsibility, often in an unpaid capacity. Funding is not always available to pay staff for extra hours to carry out any additional duties relating to the Whole School or College Approach Action Plan. Changes in staffing, including staff leaving mid-year, can destabilise the school or college's action, causing it to lose momentum.

Recommended actions

Create staff working parties at the start of the year, which could include subgroups for different areas of focus, to drive forward implementation of the Whole School or College Approach Action Plan and ensure responsibility is shared. Delegate actions to a wider group of staff and students to share the load and encourage ownership and engagement. Liaise with other schools and colleges to share good practice, motivate and provide a supportive environment to share successes and challenges; for example, by attending learning exchange meetings. Allocate time in team meetings for staff to raise issues relating to sexism and sexual harassment with their colleagues.

Ensure the actions included in the Whole School or College Approach Action Plan are targeted, realistic and time-bound, with the view that taking a whole school or college approach to tackling sexism and sexual harassment must be ongoing.

3

Challenge

School and college timetables are increasingly stretched, making it difficult to allocate teaching time focused on sexism and sexual harassment.

One school observed that PSHE - often the subject sexism and sexual harassment is addressed in - was not treated with the same 'seriousness' as other subjects, whilst another found that there was too much content to cover in the limited time available for PSHE lessons in order to have the desired impact.

Recommended actions

Review the entire curriculum - beyond PSHE - to assess how sexism and sexual harassment can be integrated into all subject areas. Consult students to understand the profile and impact of existing provision, including gathering feedback on their attitudes towards PSHE and their ideas on how to integrate learning about sexism and sexual harassment into the curriculum.

Insights from one school showed that PSHE content on these issues needed to be more deeply integrated into everyday school life to be effective.

Explore opportunities to reinforce key messages throughout the school year by using short, regular time slots such as tutor periods, registration and assemblies. Utilising these slots in the timetable can help maintain the visibility of whole school or college action for both staff and students.

The UK Government's Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education statutory guidance (2025)¹⁵ emphasises the importance of schools teaching about misogyny, violence against women and girls, and respectful relationships as part of safeguarding. While this guidance is not yet statutory for post-16 learners, addressing sexism and sexual harassment remains within schools' legal duties to protect students from harm, reinforcing that this content must be integrated.

15. Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education: Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, and teachers, Department for Education, UK Government, 2025.

Recommendations

Provide support

Education staff are working in challenging contexts with a lack of capacity, support and resources to implement effective whole school approaches. Different education settings face distinct challenges, requiring tailored support and guidance to overcome specific barriers.

- **The UK Government** should provide practical support and resources for all education settings - including Alternative Provision, Further Education, SEND and primary schools - to enable effective implementation of whole school approaches.
- **The UK Government** should ringfence funding for specialist organisations to deliver tailored support and training to schools and colleges on taking a whole school or college approach.
- **The UK Government** should require mandatory training on whole school or college approach prevention of sexism and sexual harassment for all staff and governors as part of safeguarding training - ensuring that every member of the school or college community understands their role within this prevention framework.

Track and measure progress

Without robust data on the scale, nature, and impact of the problem - and how different groups are affected - it is impossible to assess whether progress is being made in reducing sexual harassment and abuse or identify the action needed. Monitoring the national implementation of whole school approach recommendations would enable the Government to track progress, identify effective practice, and understand the challenges that require further action - supporting the Government to meet its mission to halve violence against women and girls in a decade.

- **The UK Government** should establish a centralised data recording system where schools and colleges are required to log the number of reported cases of sexual harassment and abuse experienced by students and staff. This data should be published by the Government annually. Anonymised demographic data should be recorded to enable intersectional analysis and identification of patterns. All data should remain anonymous and used solely to build a national picture of the prevalence of sexual harassment and abuse in schools.
- **The UK Government** should conduct an annual survey of students and staff to measure the scale of sexual harassment and abuse in education, including uncovering the impact of online misogyny in education settings and intersectional experiences. Results should be published so progress in reducing the problem can be tracked.
- **The UK Government** should commission independent research to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of whole school approaches. This is necessary for fostering innovation, sharing best practice and tracking progress.

Build in accountability

It is essential that schools and colleges are held accountable for implementing effective and robust whole school approaches, and that inspectors are trained to assess this effectively. Crucially, Initial Teacher Training providers must ensure trainee teachers are equipped with the tools and confidence to prevent and respond to sexism and sexual harassment as a core and compulsory component of training programmes.

- **Inspectorates** should ensure all school and college inspectors across every devolved nation receive mandatory training on how schools and colleges should prevent and respond to sexual harassment and abuse through a whole school approach.
- **Inspectorates** should require schools and colleges to publish details of their whole school approach to tackling sexism and sexual harassment. This must be accessible on the institution's website and assessed during inspections. This should initially be introduced as recommended best practice, transitioning into an inspection requirement within two years, thereby allowing institutions sufficient time and support to implement meaningful action.
- **Inspectorates** should require Initial Teacher Training providers to make training on tackling sexism and sexual harassment, and implementing whole school or college prevention action, a core part of their training curriculum.

Recommendations for schools and colleges

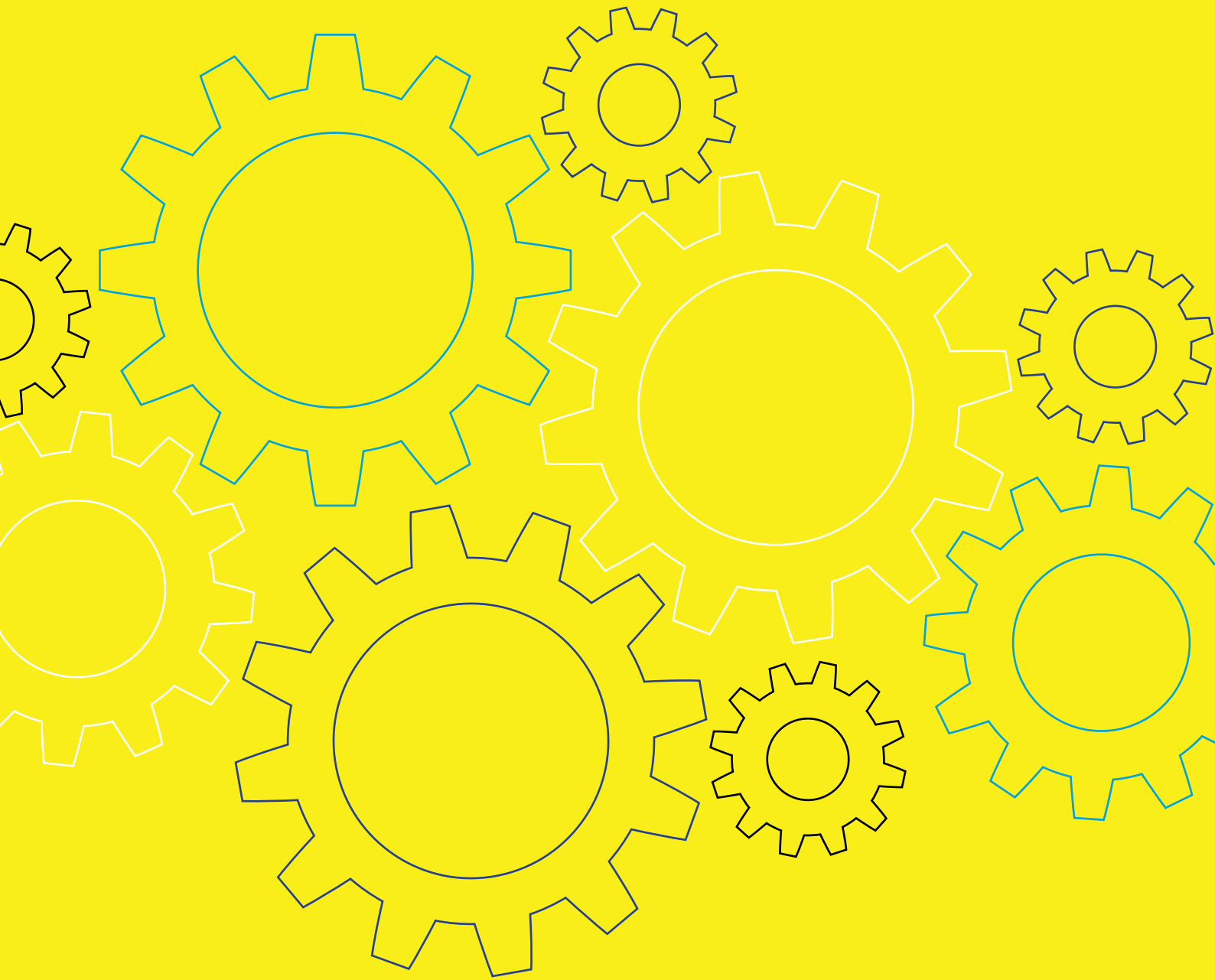
This report features extensive learning and recommendations for schools and colleges on how to combat sexism and sexual harassment with a whole school or college approach – highlighted throughout the document. Additional guidance, resources and training on taking a whole school approach is available on UK Feminista's website: www.ukfeminista.org.uk



Designed by Eva, age 15 – winner of UK Feminista’s 15 Year Anniversary Student Poster Competition (Secondary Schools and Colleges Category)

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