



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

Peer-on-peer sexual harassment among 16 to 18 year old learners in further education (FE) colleges across Wales

What we plan to do in response to Estyn's report. It evaluates the incidence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment.

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Report details

This review was commissioned by the Further Education and Apprenticeships Division on behalf of the Minister for Education and Welsh Language to evaluate the incidence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and review the culture and processes that help protect and support 16 to 18 year old learners in Welsh colleges. It follows Estyn's '[we don't tell our teachers](#)', a similar review of secondary schools, published in 2021.

Summary of main findings

Overall, peer-on-peer sexual harassment among 16 to 18 year old college learners is complex and widely underreported.

FE learners recognise many examples of sexual harassment as behaviour they have witnessed or experienced themselves. Unwanted sexual comments, remarks, jokes (either in-person or online) or nasty comments about someone's body, gender, sexuality or looks to cause humiliation, distress, or alarm, are the most common forms. Female and LGBTQ+ learners often receive unwanted comments about their appearance or looks.

The report shares that sexual harassment is most commonly perpetrated by groups where a chauvinist culture has formed, often seen within male dominated vocational or curriculum areas, sports teams, and social groups. The most serious incidents take place in social settings outside of college where drinking and substance use takes place.

Staff members at many colleges report that on the whole, behaviour has been worse since the COVID-19 pandemic, due to learners missing out on social development and interaction during periods of lockdown and social distancing.

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Since COVID-19, an increasing number of learners have presented with mental health difficulties resulting in additional, previously unrecognised instances of sexual harassment being disclosed.

Generally, college leaders do not have a clear picture of the extent of sexual harassment among learners. They struggle to accurately gauge the size of the problem due to low rates of reporting and a lack of clarity among staff members, and particularly learners, about the definition of sexual harassment. Many learners tend not to report incidents of sexual harassment for a variety of reasons. These include feeling that these behaviours have become normalised, fear of embarrassment, lack of confidence that incidents would be taken seriously or worries about potential isolation from current friendship groups.

Overall, colleges do not provide sufficient professional learning opportunities about healthy relationships, sexual harassment and misogyny.

Recommendations

Recommendations 1 to 5

Further education colleges should:

Recommendation 1

Ensure that all learners benefit from opportunities to take part in learning activities and discussions about forming and maintaining healthy relationships.

Recommendation 2

Develop strategies to prevent and tackle misogynistic attitudes and cultures developing among groups of learners.

Recommendation 3

Ensure all relevant staff members undertake professional learning that enables them to confidently recognise and respond to sexual harassment as well as help learners develop their understanding of healthy relationships.

Recommendation 4

Ensure that all learners feel safe and comfortable in all areas of college buildings, grounds, virtual spaces, and transport.

Recommendation 5

Record, categorise and analyse instances of sexual harassment, assault and abuse in a consistent way that enables leaders to identify trends and take appropriate measures in response.

Response to recommendations 1 to 5

The Welsh Government supports recommendations 1 to 5 for colleges as set out in the Estyn thematic review report.

Cardiff and Vale College, with funding from the Welsh Government, is currently leading on a collaborative project that will enable all Welsh colleges to fully

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explore the issues of peer-on-peer sexual harassment, deliver training, evaluate the impact of that training, review guidance and develop appropriate methods of reporting abuse and sexual harassment for learners.

Estyn's recommendations will shape the collaborative project over the next two years. The Welsh Government will work with the project leads to ensure that the recommendations are addressed, identify gaps in delivery and provide support in the development of new guidance, resources and training initiatives to support implementation.

Recommendation 6

The Welsh Government should:

Make clear which aspects of Welsh Government education guidance relating to sexual harassment apply to further education colleges and clarify any differences between requirements in schools and further education colleges.

Response to recommendation 6

The Welsh Government accepts this recommendation as set out on the Estyn thematic review report.

The Welsh Government, with stakeholders, is developing an action plan outlining the actions the Welsh Government and partners will undertake to tackle the issue of peer-on-peer sexual harassment in education settings. The recommendations arisen from this review will inform the plan. This will include supporting the collaborative work by the further education sector to develop resources, professional learning and research to ensure a consistent approach to tackling sexual harassment in colleges. The action plan is scheduled for publication in autumn 2023.

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The review of the Keeping Learners Safe guidance will identify where more specific guidance is required for further education.

Work is already being progressed to address the differences in delivery of training required for further education and the Welsh Government has recently commissioned sector-led work to create safeguarding training modules specifically for FE staff. The modules created will align with the Keeping Learners Safe 283/2022 guidance, the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and the All Wales Safeguarding Procedures and All Wales Practice guides.

Modules will be available for use within the FE sector from September 2023.

Recommendation 7

Provide appropriate guidance to colleges to help them adopt a co-ordinated and consistent approach to recording and categorising instances of sexual harassment.

Response to recommendation 7

The Welsh Government supports these recommendations for colleges as set out in the Estyn thematic review report.

Ongoing discussions are taking place with the Welsh Government and sector stakeholders to identify and further develop recording and monitoring processes linked with recommendation 5. Officials will work with the partner colleges involved in the collaborative project outlined above, to identify the level and type of guidance that would be most useful to help establish a more consistent approach.

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Publication details

The report is scheduled to be published on Estyn's website on 7 June 2023.

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