

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: Attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings, HC 331

Wednesday 12 October 2022

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Members present: Kim Johnson (in the Chair); Elliot Colburn; Dame Caroline Dinenage, Carolyn Harris; Bell Ribeiro-Addy.

Questions 65 - 106

Witnesses

I: Yvette Stanley, National Director for Social Care, Ofsted; Andrew Cook, Regional Director for North West and West Midlands, Ofsted; and Susan Lapworth, Chief Executive, Office for Students.

II: Andrea Jenkyns MP, Minister for Skills, Department for Education; Kelly Tolhurst MP, Minister for Schools and Childhood, Department for Education; Kate Dixon, Director of Pupil Wellbeing and Safety, the Department for Education; and Emma Davies, Deputy Director in the Higher Education Quality, Access and Student Experience Directorate, Department for Education.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Yvette Stanley, Andrew Cook and Susan Lapworth.

Q65 **Chair:** Good afternoon. This is the Women and Equalities Committee's final oral evidence session in our inquiry into attitudes towards women and girls in educational settings. Those watching online and in the room may find the subject matter and some of the issues discussed distressing.

We have two panels of witnesses today, all appearing in person. I will ask the panel to introduce themselves. Let me know if you are happy to be addressed by your first name or something else. Thank you.

Susan Lapworth: I am the chief executive of the Office for Students, and Susan is fine.

Yvette Stanley: I am Ofsted's national director for regulation and social care. I am happy to be called Yvette.

Andrew Cook: I am happy to be called Andrew. I am the regional director for Ofsted in the north-west and the west midlands and I led on our sexual abuse review.

Q66 **Chair:** Thank you, panel. We have 45 minutes and a number of questions in this session. Each member will direct their questions to a specific panel member and if other members want to contribute, please raise your hand and I will bring you in. Carolyn Harris has the first set of questions.

Carolyn Harris: The subject matter of the Everyone's Invited website would not have been strange to anyone. We read it in our papers every day and see it on TV, so why did it take that study for there to be an official recognition of the level of abuse in schools?

Andrew Cook: We knew that children were experiencing it and we have always taken safeguarding very seriously in Ofsted. We have always looked at how children have been treated and how they feel and looked at any bullying that may have had links to either sexual harassment or other stuff. While we recognised it was happening, the Everyone's Invited website and what came out of it prompted us to think about the level of it and how much of it was out there. We had been doing things but as we look back we have sharpened our focus on this area of work. As a result, we have very successfully identified more. We have raised the profile of this very important issue and through our inspection, we are beginning to see what inspectors are finding, but also more importantly what education settings are doing, and that everybody is responding much more in response to these particular issues.

Q67 **Carolyn Harris:** Back in a previous life I was a dinner lady and I can remember us having conversations in the schoolyard when we would look around and say we know that one in three, one in four, one in five children are going to be victims of abuse. We know. We used to look around and think, "Exactly how many of these kids are suffering?" Why did it take so long to put it on an official standing and talk about it the



way we are now?

Andrew Cook: Ofsted has always looked at safeguarding and how schools create a culture to keep children safe and happy in school. Some of the things that you are describing would have been picked up by inspectors. I think the language that we use now around this area is much more specific but I do not think we have ever stopped trying to find out how well schools and colleges keep children safe and happy in schools.

Yvette Stanley: I can add a little bit to that. Our inspections cover a lot of things; they are very broad in a reasonably tight envelope. This was a very specific commission to look at peer-on-peer abuse, and it gave our teams the space and the opportunity to talk to a much larger number of young people and we did that in single-sex groups.

Children told us that they very rarely raised the issue of peer-on-peer abuse. They would talk about other things but were not raising this specific issue. The adults, while conscious of the general safeguarding issues for children, just did not understand. As adults, we did not understand how pervasive and how awful this is.

I have been in this world for 25 years at least but the content of some of the pornography and the invidious nature of the exploitation among peers was something that none of us saw in as much depth as we did on those school visits. Hats off to the young people who took the opportunity to share their experiences with us.

It was news to the teachers that it was as pervasive as it was. They had assumed that the young people would escalate it to them. The young people knew how to escalate a safeguarding matter but they weren't escalating peer on peer abuse. It is a point well made. We had the opportunity to do something deeper and I am retrospectively grateful for Everyone's Invited for lifting the lid on what is a very important issue.

Q68 **Carolyn Harris:** If I can just go off script a minute, Chair, and throw a bit of a curveball in here—at one point I worked in special needs and those children were not able to articulate if they were victims or were experiencing any kind of harm. How are you monitoring that situation where we know it happens but the young person is unable to share? I can think of several children who were very highly sexed for young children because they were seeing it and they were experiencing it, but we could not prove it. How do you keep an eye on that situation?

Yvette Stanley: We are very conscious of the continuum of special needs. Andrew may want to come in a bit on mainstream schools where they are conscious that some of the children with special needs may have additional vulnerabilities.

I think the children you are talking about would be at the more complex end and we absolutely look in our special schools, not only at the curriculum but how children access it, and those really important things—



the safeguards around their care and personal space. Like you, I have worked in that environment with young people who may have learning difficulties and I am remembering several children with Down syndrome who wanted to have relationships where one had to do some very careful work around issues of consent.

We are looking at consent, we are looking at good PSHE and we are looking at an individual child-centred approach, where children have more complex needs so the right support is given at the right time.

Andrew Cook: I think you are right to say it is a real challenge in mainstream schools. I go back to what Yvette said. One of the important things about our sexual abuse review is that we listened to 900 young people. We spoke to 900 young people. It was a very important part of the whole review and took into account 800 questionnaires that they completed as well.

It comes back to the broader issue that young people are telling us—that it is very difficult for them to tell an adult. It is difficult for them to tell their parents. It is really difficult even sometimes to tell their peers and that is compounded when there are communication challenges in there. What we have done with the review is highlight the fact that this is commonplace. Very sadly, this is what normal life is for some young people and children in schools. Schools are beginning to think much more about how they communicate and how they engage with pupils to understand what they are experiencing. Inspectors are doing that and we have done that as well, as we have seen the inspections that have come out of the sexual abuse review. Inspectors are spending much more time with single-sex groups, with young people—questioning them in a very sensitive way, including those with special educational needs. This is an issue that affects all children.

Q69 **Carolyn Harris:** What barriers are stopping a school from addressing these issues?

Andrew Cook: The biggest barrier that our review found was that school leaders, governors and staff just did not think it was an issue. They did not think it was a problem. "It did not happen here", and "It does not happen here", is the big story that comes out of a review. Yes, it does and you should start thinking that it is happening in your school and about what should you do about it.

There are a lot of other things in there in the sense of the complexity of where it happens and who has responsibility? Schools need to do their bit but inevitably this area covers what happens outside of school as well as inside. You have the challenge of how children and young people find it very difficult to talk to adults about this; that is one of the big things that children and young people told us in the review. They said, "We can't trust an adult when we tell them we're worried about what might happen. It takes the whole situation out of our control".



If you start from a point where you do not think it is happening then you are not going to do much about it. The big shift has been in schools taking what we have said—that it is happening, it is normal and very sadly it has been normalised, and now you need to do something about it. We have seen a good response to that. For me the best responses were where educators have gone to the young people—the students, the pupils in their school—and have started to talk to them about what they are experiencing, and working with them to try to combat some of the awful behaviour and some of the awful things that we found out about.

- Q70 **Carolyn Harris:** Having been a dinner lady, I have been in many schools when we have had the dreaded Ofsted inspectors come along. I know that—let's be honest about it—they put a show on. When you were turning up, they put a show on. How confident do you feel that teachers are equipped to be able to cope with disclosure and with what they need to do to support these kids outside of when there is an Ofsted report coming in? They need a nice bit of paper that says, "You need to see this, this is exactly what we do".

Andrew Cook: My mother was a dinner lady as well and she wasn't sure when I joined Ofsted whether I was doing the right thing, but I think I convinced her in the end.

I am an inspector; I have been to many schools and inspected. You can tell whether or not a school is putting on a show or whether or not it is the practice that has been there for some time. First of all, children and young people tell you straightaway.

One of the things we picked up from the review was that staff were saying, "We do find this difficult". One of our recommendations was that more staff needed to be trained to understand sexual harassment, sexual abuse and also in how to respond. It is not just about the designated safeguarding lead; it is about the whole staff and those responsible for governance.

Young people would often tell us that if there was just one person that they had to go and tell, that wasn't necessarily the person they trusted most. It might have been somebody who worked as a dinner staff member or colleague from the school. It is very important that all staff understand how to identify, how to support and how to respond to children and young people if they disclose.

- Q71 **Carolyn Harris:** You talk about training. How do you control the kinds of material and the kinds of training that teachers, dinner ladies, school governors do? How do you know the quality of that training is of the right standard?

Andrew Cook: Inspectors would look at that and talk to staff about the training that they have received and then try to identify the impact of that training. That is the most important thing. We could all be trained but what do you do with that training?



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Another thing that we brought out from the review was about how safeguarding partners support designated safeguarding leads, and I think we have seen a good response from local safeguarding partners about how they need to do more to support schools and to be aware of these issues.

Yvette Stanley: Unsurprisingly with young people not wanting to talk about it, headteachers were less aware than they are now, and local safeguarding partnerships weren't sighted on the peer-on-peer abuse issue as one of the many strands of safeguarding. Schools were a bit confused about their role in working together, to be honest, but that has been strengthened and is ready to be welcomed.

We have obviously done our inspections of local areas' children's services and they have shown us evidence of schools coming together in local partnerships, doing common training, understanding the thresholds and how to access social care, and also making sure that the experts they are bringing in around peer-on-peer abuse are tried and trusted, the best people. The DfE has also hosted a range of workshops that have been garnering what is going on—things such as designated leads coming together once a month, and having an education safeguarding newsletter that highlights key issues, including peer-on-peer abuse—but we are seeing much more energy, engagement and common purpose in those safeguarding partnerships around the issue.

Q72 Carolyn Harris: Are the agencies that you encourage schools to use all statutory agencies or do you encourage them to go to the third sector? For example, there is something that you may or may not have heard of called Operation Encompass. It is primarily a domestic violence response. There is communication between the police and the schools so if the child's not in school, or the child turns up dishevelled or hungry, they may well use this system to understand why the child is the way they are. Do you encourage—

Yvette Stanley: We do not vet any of that from the centre. It wouldn't be part of our role. However, we would expect local safeguarding partnerships to have a strong relationship with those third-sector organisations and together make sure they are accessing the right people. Very often it is the third-sector organisations that are embedded in the communities and they have that trust and that very specialist expertise.

Q73 Carolyn Harris: If you know that there is history in the family of some kind of abuse or some kind of exploitation—call it what you want—do you encourage schools to proactively monitor children from that family or children from that area if it's a geographical issue?

Andrew Cook: We would want to be talking to the school about how they keep their children safe and understand the child's situation, and making sure that they liaise with local authorities' children's services if they need to is all part and package of that. We are trying to look at



whether systems are in place. We may do some case reviews while we are there, but we would not dig down too much in lots of children's case reviews. We are trying to look at examples of how that school keeps children safe.

Q74 Chair: Panel, you are picking up on some issues about safeguarding. The Headteachers' Roundtable has called for schools to receive separate annual safeguarding audits. Given the findings of the Ofsted review, are you confident that the current approach to and the frequency of safeguarding inspections is sufficient? Yvette?

Yvette Stanley: We will probably do a double act on it. We are passionate that you cannot disaggregate safeguarding from the cultural leadership of the school. On safeguarding and other issues, there is a complex Venn diagram. It is important that schools have an appropriate behaviour policy.

Aspects of that feed into safeguarding. Going back to what Carolyn Harris was saying about identifying, managing and safeguarding those pupils, we do not think that it is right to separate those two things and do them in two separate places. It could end up with a competition of inspectorates and judgments, and add a burden.

We would say that our inspection regime for school is relatively light touch. Our schools would argue against that, but we do not forensically do an end-to-end audit, compliance audit and everything to do with safeguarding. As a previous DCS, I offered my schools a service, a respected education professional and a safeguarding lead who came in and did that compliance audit. Many schools do that. We look at the impact of that in our inspection, and then we also assure ourselves that the policies and compliance are there. We will look at some cases. We are assessing the school as its own continuous improver and looking at their assurance system.

Andrew Cook: It is very important to tell you about the journey, because we have used the word "culture" a lot in our review and since. We want to make sure that schools understand that this is something to do with leadership so it is about leadership having that right attitude, about knowing that it exists. It is to do with personal development. It is to do with behaviour. It is to do with the curriculum, as well as RSHE. There are lots of bits of the jigsaw that you have put together to understand the culture of the school. A separate safeguarding audit would just not pick up the same thing. We are very sure about how to understand the culture of keeping children safe in terms of professional development, curriculum, behaviour and attitudes, and the work of leadership and management is key.

Q75 Chair: I will pick up on a comment you made earlier where you said that some schools have the attitude of, "It doesn't happen here"—kind of burying their head in the sand syndrome. How prevalent would you say that still is in a lot of schools?



Andrew Cook: When we did the review, we realised that most schools were not submitting records and analysis of sexual harassment and sexual abuse, which is one of the things that they're asked to do when they are told that we are going to inspect them. When we have been doing dip sampling of inspection outcomes since, that has completely shifted. I think our sexual abuse review has made people realise that it is commonplace—that very sadly it has become normal—and they have started to respond to that. We are going to do a much broader and deeper retrieval of our inspection evidence later on in this term, but when we have dip sampled since the sexual abuse review we have seen really good signs that schools are taking this seriously. I think things are shifting.

Q76 **Elliot Colburn:** Thank you for coming in, panel. Just picking up on that point, are you noticing a difference in attitudes between schools, depending on their makeup, whether it is mixed, all-female or all-male? From the evidence that you have collected, does that gender element to schooling appear to have an impact on the way they respond?

Andrew Cook: We have dip sampled, so I am not sure I could comment completely on the difference between boys' and girls' schools, but what we are seeing generally is that it has been much more positive. I think in our review we did look at boys' schools and girls' schools and identified some of the issues that came out. We have heard since then that some boys' schools and girls' schools that are in some way linked have been working together to train staff to address stuff and to hear the pupil voice about this.

I think the review has, in a sense, triggered a good positive response. It comes back to school leaders, staff, listening to what pupils are saying, what their children and young people are saying.

Yvette Stanley: I was just going to add on the boys' front that we did have boys coming forward through the review who said that they were deeply uncomfortable with what was going on and what some of their peer boys were doing and that they wanted support to be able to challenge that. The best schools are working on how you explore those difficult issues with boys.

Q77 **Chair:** How reliable is existing data on the prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual violence for children and students with protected characteristics?

Susan Lapworth: We cannot answer that question well enough for universities just now. We do have some patchy data. The Committee has heard evidence to that effect previously. We know the crime survey for England and Wales, when it was last run, shows that full-time students in England and Wales are three times more likely than any other occupational group to experience sexual assault. We know that the numbers are higher for women than for men in that context.



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We think there is probably quite a small pool of students represented in that survey because it is looking at the whole population. We have some other evidence from other surveys, and work that the NUS campaign groups such as Revolt Sexual Assault have done. We have talked about Everyone's Invited giving us a feel for quite an alarming scale of conduct and incidents that would concern us.

Those latter surveys that talk about higher education in particular give us a flavour of the impact on students with particular characteristics. I have referred to women being more affected than men. We can see that disabled women are more affected than women who are not disabled. We can see a greater impact on women from some ethnic groups than others. You can start to see that pattern.

I do not think those surveys are good enough for our purposes. They are capturing people who are self-reporting and so are not reliable in the way that a whole sector prevalence survey might be. We think that the absence of prevalence data is a real problem in higher education. We are not persuaded by the arguments that you do not need prevalence data for higher education, because we know it is a problem. We agree it is a problem but we do not agree that the absence of prevalence data is okay, because that data is necessary to tell us who this is happening to, exactly as you have just described—the different kinds of students it is happening to but also who the perpetrators are, where it is happening and when it is happening, so the context wherein this is taking place.

I can tell you today that we have begun work to design and deliver the first prevalence survey for higher education. We think that is a very important step forward. We want to draw on the learning from other countries that have run higher education prevalence surveys and the research evidence and we think that will help universities to understand the patterns in their institution, target their interventions and then evaluate whether those interventions are working or not. We think that is a huge step forward and something that is now important to do.

Q78 Chair: Thanks for sharing that, Susan. It is a great step forward that the Office for Students is taking. Can you say a little more about how much you think it might cost?

Susan Lapworth: Difficult to say. There are different ways to construct a survey. You could do a whole student population survey that is similar to other sorts of surveys that run in the higher education sector. That would be very expensive. There are ways to do a carefully constructed sampling approach across the sector. What is important is that we want to do what I have just described, and understand the sorts of students this is happening to and the context. That means we have to be quite careful in how we construct that survey and how we make sure that the data that comes from it are going to give us that intelligence so that we can intervene where we need to. There is more work to do but we are committed now to getting on with that work.



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Chair: Thank you. Does Andrew or Yvette have any further information about the prevalence of data on those with protected characteristics?

Andrew Cook: We do not collect data like that. All I would say is that obviously we can go back to our review, we can realise that it was girls who were telling us that they were by far the ones that were at the receiving end of what was happening. We can read from DfE data that if you are a child with SEND you are more likely to experience sexual harassment and sexual abuse. One of the things that we very much focused on was that sadly this was an issue or problem for all children.

Chair: You mentioned children with SEND but if you are disabled or if you are black, I think you are at higher risk of harassment as has been pointed out in the UCU report. Thank you, panel.

Q79 **Elliot Colburn:** Susan, can I focus on the Office for Students' condition of registration? Would you be able to provide us with an update on progress that the office is making in that space in order to help universities tackle sexual harassment and violence?

Susan Lapworth: Yes, I can. I think you know that we published a voluntary statement of expectation about 18 months or so ago now. We tried to be very clear with universities about what we expected them to do and invited them to get on and grip those issues, and deal with them.

We have commissioned an independent evaluation of the impact of that statement of expectations. We are expecting the final evaluation imminently and I can write to the Committee when we have it. I can tell you that we have had an early read-out of the evaluation and I think it is telling us some important things. We know from the evaluation of universities themselves saying what they had done in response to that statement of expectations that they are reporting that they have taken a range of actions, that they have improved their systems and processes, that they have done some work to make reporting easier and that they have done some work on training of one kind or another—so some positive self-reporting.

The second part of the evaluation asked students what they thought. Had students noticed the impact that we would want to see from that activity from universities? I think the conclusions are that while there has been progress, it has been patchy and it is too slow and we are not seeing the impact that we would have expected.

We signalled to the sector when we published the statement of expectations that if that did not do the trick, if that did not drive the progress, we were going to return and look again at imposing a condition of registration, which has sharper mandatory requirements set into it. I can tell you today that we plan to move forward with that work. We are working on a condition of registration that we would consult on, early in the new year I think, and subject to the consultation, that would put this area of work on a sharper regulatory footing. It would put in place



mandatory requirements and allow us to intervene where we saw concerns in a particular university.

Q80 Elliot Colburn: Fantastic. You were talking early in the new year for consultation. Would you be aiming to get it in place by the start of the new university year in September?

Susan Lapworth: Yes, that is the plan—consultation early in the new year. Of course we have to be open-minded about the outcome of the consultation but if we were then to proceed, we would aim to have a final condition in place in good time for universities to know that it was a requirement for the start of the year. I mentioned the prevalence survey earlier; we will run that in parallel so those two things come together.

Q81 Elliot Colburn: Fantastic. I know you will want to take scope of that survey response and the consultation but could you give us a bit of a steer about what monitoring and enforcement will look like, and how compliance will be monitored as part of this condition? I know some of the specifics will need to be built up, but what is the direction of travel?

Susan Lapworth: It is obviously subject to consultation but I will give you a flavour of our thinking.

We think it is possible to write a condition of registration that puts quite sharp requirements. One of the things we have seen from the evaluation that is just completing is that there has been a lot of effort to put in place systems and processes, policy documents and so on. That does not necessarily translate into change in the real world. We do not want to set a regulatory requirement that says, "Do more work on systems and processes", we want a regulatory requirement that says, "You have to do what is necessary to resolve these issues for students".

The prevalence survey is a good part of the answer to your second question. If we can collect prevalence data that gives us a picture across the sector as a whole and an understanding of which kinds of students in which context are affected by this, and if we can then see that for individual universities, that lets us target our interventions. A university with high prevalence and low reporting would perhaps raise concerns and we would want to then understand in detail what was going on there and that would allow us to focus our effort.

Q82 Elliot Colburn: That is really reassuring. It is one of the things that we hear quite a lot about in our evidence gathering. Of course no school or university would ever say that they condone such behaviour and they say they have very strict policies in place, but then you hear of the levels of prevalence directly from students and children and you wonder how have those words managed to still allow that culture to continue.

I will ask you another question about the condition of registration. Will it require quality proper bystander protection programmes to be put in place as part of it? Will that be part of the consultation?



Susan Lapworth: Yes, that is an important feature here—something we are thinking about quite carefully. The Committee heard evidence from Dr Fenton in September that I think was very persuasive in terms of the importance of bystander training and credible training that is properly evaluated so that we know it has an impact in the real world. I am less persuaded by training that is a quick hour here or a bit on the web, or that you do if you fancy it. We will try to frame in that consultation what we think credible is in that context. Our focus will be on credible training that is effective because it has been evaluated and we know that it works.

Q83 **Chair:** I want to go back to some issues that were picked up on or touched on slightly by Carolyn earlier.

How does Ofsted ensure that teachers are accessing safe and high-quality external organisations' learning materials for the delivery of RSE? We know there is a plethora of information out there and we know from previous inquiries that teachers are often not confident about delivering RSE. How does Ofsted ensure that teachers are doing the job and that the materials they are using are of high quality?

Andrew Cook: It comes back to this whole thing around how we look at the culture. We look at how RSHE is being taught. We know that the DfE has brought out guidance and will bring out further guidance, so we will look at that. It is not up to us to say you should or should not be using a particular resource; it is about whether or not that resource is being used effectively.

I go back to when we have dip sampling of what has been happening on inspections. It is very clear that inspectors have picked up on it and had some conversations with those responsible for RSHE, but also with young people who are receiving that teaching. They seem to be all going in the right direction. We have had some very positive outcomes from what we found. For us, it is about whether the curriculum for RSHE is sequenced: is the school using whatever resources they are using effectively and is it having the impact that it should have? That is primarily very much so with inspectors talking to young people to know whether or not they understand more and learn more. One of the things they were telling us was that it did not resonate with their life experiences—that what they were being taught was not really about what they were experiencing—but we are beginning to see that is much more in tune.

Q84 **Chair:** While you have been inspecting and looking at the standard of training and teaching of the subject, how have you found it, Andrew?

Andrew Cook: One of the things we have picked up is staff telling us, "We don't feel trained enough to be able to do this. We don't feel this area has been given enough time". It will take schools some time to change some curriculum, but what we are seeing is early signs of better training, more thinking around what the curriculum should look like and how it should be sequenced.



All schools are on a journey on this. I think we have seen a really good reaction, a positive reaction, to our review and now we are beginning to see that curricular change when we go out there and talk to teachers and look at what they are teaching.

Q85 **Chair:** Is this part of the teaching modules for teachers in training?

Andrew Cook: We are beginning to see that. I think there is much more that has been said and done in this area. It has been a bit of a journey for schools and some of them are further on than others.

Chair: Thank you, Andrew. Thank you, panel, for contributing to our inquiry today. We are very grateful. We will end there and bring in our second panel. Thank you so much.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Andrea Jenkyns MP, Kelly Tolhurst MP, Kate Dixon and Emma Davies.

Q86 **Chair:** Welcome to our second panel. I would like you to introduce yourselves and let me know how you would like to be addressed—whether you are okay with your first names or anything else, such as Minister.

Kelly Tolhurst: Thank you, Chair. I am the new Minister of State for Schools and Childhood. You are very welcome to call me Kelly.

Andrea Jenkyns: I am newly appointed in the last few months as Under-Secretary of State for Skills. This is my first Select Committee so I hope you will be gentle with me. Please call me Andrea.

Emma Davies: I am deputy director for higher education quality and regulation, and you are welcome to call me Emma.

Kate Dixon: You are very welcome to call me Kate. I am a civil servant at the DfE, and I work on pupil wellbeing and safety.

Chair: Thank you very much.

As for our first panel, we have a number of questions in this session and each member will direct their question to a particular panel member. If other members want to contribute, please raise your hand and I will bring you in.

Q87 **Elliot Colburn:** Thank you for coming along, panel.

Kelly and Andrea, I will start with you both. Kelly, I will come to you first. As you are both new in post, could you just start off by talking us through the work that you are hoping to do to carry on the work of your predecessors to tackle sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools and universities?



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Kelly Tolhurst: I am in post and making sure that I understand the breadth of some of the challenges that are presented within this area in schools and education settings. Anyone who has had any involvement with children and schools understands that, particularly if you have young children and girls in particular, it is an important area of work for everyone, and particularly for me because of my interest in the work I have done in the past with looked-after children and some of the challenges there.

I am quite keen to hear from Committee and I am looking forward, as I am new in post, to getting your feedback and the report from your inquiry as we move forward. I think we have done quite a lot in this space. I am quite keen to evaluate what we have done, to make sure we are going as far as we can and are able to implement the advice and guidance, and to make sure that we provide parents and school settings with confidence and a clear direction in this area. I am sure you will ask me some more direct questions about the specific things that we are working on, but in general I am quite keen to make sure that we are following this path.

I know you had Ofsted in before us. I did not see that piece of evidence, but coming new into the post what really struck me was the work that Ofsted did with regards to the testimony that they got and some of the figures around what is happening in schools, particularly. I will quote that 92% of girls and 74% of boys found that name calling, sexist name calling, was the norm and quite regular and 90% of girls and 50% of boys were having explicit pictures sent to them. For me, that was very worrying. Also what was particularly worrying was the knowledge—I can understand it when we think about it more deeply—of the professionals and teachers within that setting, as not recognising the significance of the problem.

I am just getting under the work that has been done already but it is something that we have to keep a sharp focus on and go as far as we can with. I hope that gives you an overview but I am happy to come back on it.

Elliot Colburn: Thank you, Kelly. Andrea, same question.

Andrea Jenkyns: I would like to start by telling you about a close relative of mine who was raped when she was 17. I was nine at the time and I saw even then the mental health problems that she still has today. Please realise that you have my full commitment with any kind of sexual harassment, sexual abuse. I have seen it in my family and decades later it is horrific.

For me, gathering data is so important because we know often victims of these types of crimes do not always speak up. I think it is about encouraging victims to speak up but also ensuring that they are fully supported. I meet stakeholders all the time—I say “all the time”; I have



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been in post three months. I meet vice-chancellors, and the OfS understands my commitment to this.

I would like 100% of universities in England to sign up to not using NDAs.

We have a lot of work to do. We are in a better place. We have started gathering a lot more information than there was a few years ago, so we are going in the right direction but I think we can do more as well.

Q88 Elliot Colburn: Thank you both very much. A general point—we will get into some more of the specifics around strategy as we go through the panel—there is no doubt the DfE has an incredible workload and a lot to do, not to mention everyone is concerned about the cost of living right now and that obviously will occupy a lot of the Government's time. How much of a priority is this for the Department? Is it still very much front and centre of the DfE's work as we tackle these things? What assurances can you offer that, despite all the other challenges we are facing, this is not going to fall victim to circumstance or time constraints?

Kelly Tolhurst: Yes, of course, we have a lot of work to do, particularly in my portfolio. We are looking at some huge tasks in children's social care reform and the SEND—huge pieces of work. However, this is still a priority, this is not coming off the agenda at all, despite all the challenges and things that we need to do as a department. This is so important because it is happening now. We need to make sure that we do keep ahead of it, we are acting when we can and we do keep a sharp focus on it, because this is affecting children and young people in settings today.

All of us in the room want things to happen quickly—yesterday rather than today. Keeping young people safe, particularly within schools has to be a priority. From a political point of view, from my end, it is definitely not falling off the agenda or being deprioritised.

Andrea Jenkyns: I completely agree with Kelly. In my time in the Department, I have not seen any foot taken off the gas on this. We published the guidance from the spiking working group in time for freshers' week so students and universities could be more aware, which is very important. We have been working closely with stakeholders such as the OfS, UUK and other stakeholders. Let us not forget the £4.7 million we are investing into the OfS to fund university safeguarding projects. Yes, what you will hear from Kelly and me is true. We are fully committed at DfE to tackling this.

Q89 Chair: Kelly, how will you monitor whether all schools are complying with the updated statutory guidance on sexual harassment and sexual violence? I know you have only been in post very briefly.

Kelly Tolhurst: The guidance became statutory during the pandemic and we know that, with the number of settings in schools across the country, there will be variability in the delivery. We are doing a number of pieces of work with schools to strengthen some of the outcomes from the Ofsted report when that was implemented. One key thing is we have



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commissioned the national implementation evaluation of how it is being implemented throughout our school system. The team would probably say that is due to report in January 2024. It is a period of time in which that work is ongoing. It has started, as I understand, so there will be learnings that will be feeding in from that.

It is important to do a proper evaluation because while I talked about speed in my earlier comments, we do need to understand how it is being implemented in schools, if it is being successful. There will be learning from that evaluation and it will also inform what other support we need to implement as a department to schools, teachers, staff and even parents about what they would expect to see and what happens going forward. We are very keen to make sure that happens.

My concern, and that of a lot of other people, is that it came into play during the pandemic and because of the issues the pandemic gave us, we are keen to make sure schools are moving forward as well as they can. That is why we continue to offer the resources we have on the government website, and we have been encouraging schools to make sure their inset days are used to discuss the implementation and any other challenges or barriers to that. It is an ongoing piece of work and my initial reaction on coming in is that the teams at the DfE are quite keen to make sure we are leading this as quickly as we can and taking action when we are getting feedback from stakeholders.

Q90 Chair: Thanks, Kelly. You mentioned earlier that a lot of girls and boys are desensitised to a lot of these issues, so it is about what training and information is required to enable young people to recognise sexual harassment and abuse so they are in a position to report it and have some action taken against it.

Kelly Tolhurst: Yes, that is right. We extended the pilot for the training for the designated safeguarding leads within schools, and get some advice and guidance from social workers particularly around sexual abuse and harassment. In general, from the work we have done, well over 4,000 schools have already been impacted by some of that investment in the work we are doing with that pilot.

It is really tricky. I am 44 and I have young nieces currently in the school system and while no politician ever wants to admit to being out of touch, some of the social media worlds have completely changed. We all recognise that in my age group some of it is hard to understand so we have to keep up with the learning.

We worked with the University of Surrey to do further work so we understand some of the drivers and some of the work, and what we need to do to be skilling up, teaching or training our professionals who work with children every day and who have to manage these situations at the coal face.



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Also, I understand schools are such important places for our children and young people and so are teachers. I feel quite strongly in this space about making sure we also support teachers in the right way to keep children safe. They want to do that and I want to make sure we can support the profession to do the best job they possibly can.

Kate Dixon: I wanted to make two more points—first, on the statutory guidance, “Keeping children safe in education”, and the supplementary chapter that is particularly on peer-on-peer abuse. You heard from Ofsted earlier about how, given that evidence, the focus Ofsted now pays in their inspections has increased. That is another avenue where we get some information about how it is going.

Secondly, I want to mention the Children’s Commissioner. She did her Big Ask survey, and a number of these issues came up through it, but she also has much more direct contact with children and young people, both on a casework basis and through the forums she runs. We are working very closely with her and her office on these issues.

Chair: It is good to hear that officers are working closely together on these issues.

Q91 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** Andrea, are you supportive of strengthening the powers of the Office for Students so that it can regulate universities on tackling harassment and sexual misconduct?

Andrea Jenkyns: First, I look forward to the statement of expectations evaluation on sexual misconduct that is due in the autumn; I think we need to look at that first. I will do anything within my power as a Minister to ensure the stakeholders, including universities, the OfS and so on have the powers to tackle this. We should have a zero-tolerance approach to this. What will that look like at the moment? I will wait to see the evaluation. I support 100% the OfS registration condition in it to protect women from sexual harassment on campus, and we have made it clear as a Department that we support that as well.

Q92 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** How much power do you think the OfS should have to sanction universities when they do not meet their obligations to students?

Andrea Jenkyns: It is important that we wait for this evaluation. It is very hard to come from this place. It is chicken and egg. We want to see what the problem is first, and then we will tackle it. Please rest assured that once this evaluation comes out, we will be all out to strengthen support to make sure we have zero tolerance for any form of assault in universities.

Emma Davies: If it becomes a condition of registration that the OfS has to hold universities to account, that will give them access to the full suite of powers they have in enforcing any condition of registration. It will be for the OfS to work out how best to use that.



Q93 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: The follow-up question to that is what extent should those powers have? How far should they be able to go? Even if it was not the OfS, once this review is over, whoever is determined to be the one policing and making sure universities are meeting their obligations, how far should they be allowed to go in ensuring no more students have to go through this?

Andrea Jenkyns: The OfS is not the court system or the police so we do not want to stray into that territory but we need a robust approach. Clearly, if there are examples of universities not following the guidance as a result of the statement of expectations, then there need to be consequences. What that could look like we will have to wait and see. Does it mean universities are no longer part of the OfS? There are several things but I do not want to jump the gun and we need to wait for this report.

Emma Davies: The OfS is an independent regulator and we have to make sure that we maintain that, so it will be for the OfS to determine. If they see a university in breach of a condition of the registration and if that comes into play, it will be up to them to decide what the appropriate response is. The office has a full, wide-ranging set of powers but which one is the right one to use will depend on exactly what is happening in the circumstances.

Andrea Jenkyns: Individual cases, I completely agree.

Q94 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Kelly, what further programme of support or training and funding would be provided within the next financial year so all schools could deliver quality RSE?

Kelly Tolhurst: There is the £3 million programme that has already gone into schools. In longer-term actions, we are running webinars to support teachers, particularly around domestic violence and online harms. We have a programme that we need to keep moving forward with. We have developed our online hub for safeguarding leads, further guidance, advice and resources, and we will keep evaluating it. A key point is that there are a lot of different opinions. Ever since I have been in post I have heard anecdotally from schools and parents about their views on what is being taught within schools. We need to do as much as we can with Ofsted's support so when they do their inspections they are feeding back anything that will help inform that.

We do need to wait for that evaluation process but my view is that we are reacting, and I say reacting because with all these things it is not until you start implementing them that you are able to refine some of the methods, resource the materials and that is an ongoing piece of work. Funding over the three financial years for delivery is there. We will look in the future for further resources for what is needed and that will be tied to a delivery package.

Q95 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Following on from something you said earlier about



technological advances, all the different ways people can engage in sexual and non-sexual relationships—we are seeing a rise in these new interactions that we would not have thought of a decade ago—how is DfE training adapting to ensure that teachers are equipped to educate young people on issues like sexting and online harassment, and the different things that arise due to new technology?

Kelly Tolhurst: A lot of this is technology based. Maybe I am wrong but when I was at school, a long time ago now, we did not have those technologies so it is slightly different. The issues we experienced were different. In my view—being new to the post I am using a lot of personal experience—and from what I have seen so far, particularly with my nieces in school, and seeing what is happening online and the different methods of communicating, technology is a key part and we need to make sure the guidance stays ahead of it and keeps pace with it.

In regards to specifically how we are training teachers, I do not know some of the detail, because I have not got into exactly what we are doing. However, I was having a conversation with the Children's Commissioner about online harms last week, the exposure that young people had, how that is working in schools, and the work she has been doing and working with us on. Kate Dixon can go into more detail about that.

Kate Dixon: Kelly Tolhurst mentioned some things earlier, for example the webinars we have done for staff on online pornography, which was an area that staff in schools told us they were not confident enough in and were behind the children and young people on.

We have not given you any information about the curriculum. Outside of relationships, health and sex education, the focus on the computing curriculum gives another avenue for upskilling teachers and pupils on the dangers of cyber. There are stories about children logging in on their friends' phones and sending messages and not realising the seriousness of that, and some of them are criminal offences. Both the life skills curriculum and relationships, health and sex education give an opportunity to talk seriously about aspects of the curriculum, particularly in computing. As the Minister said, the online world and the offline world are the same for children and young people, which it was not when we were at school.

Kelly Tolhurst: To add to that, I feel quite strongly about how we are educating parents via what is going on at school. For example, if I had children and not just nieces I might be a bit more up on Snapchat and all these other online tools. A key element for me is how schools communicate with parents and how well parents are aligned to this and what they can do with the schools and young people to make sure we are keeping them safe. Ultimately that is the objective of all this. It is about giving children guidance, advice and teaching to help them keep themselves safe and make sure we as professionals, parents and everyone look after our children. I am quite keen to look further at that



communication, how we work with parents and how schools are integrated as we move through the evaluation and implementation process.

Q96 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: How do teachers access the information? As of July 2021, only a fifth of schools in England have accessed the Department for Education's train the trainer programme, so how do we know the programme has worked?

Kelly Tolhurst: That is why we are doing the implementation evaluation to make sure the national implementation review, to see if it has worked. That is the point. We want to evaluate it. We have to evaluate it because if it is not working, we have to change it or modify it or think about other policies to support that work. We need it to work, but because of the timeframe, and because we have implemented it during the pandemic and in different educational settings—large schools, large primaries, small primaries, large secondaries, small secondaries—there are lots of variable factors in schools and how they do things and who is leading. We need strong leadership, which is why we are doing this. We have extended the pilot on the safeguarding leads to make sure those leads within those schools are skilled up to disseminate the information and their learnings.

Schools are under a legal duty to be mindful of the strengthening of the "Keeping children safe in education" guidance. We recommend that all school staff should have an induction where this guidance is covered, so we are asking schools to be very mindful of following that. The evaluation of the implementation will be key but if we feel we need to go further in the meantime, I will be championing trying to deliver it.

Q97 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Are there any plans for the Government to support initial teacher training providers to train new teachers in how to teach RSHE and talk about sensitive topics like pornography and consent? Do we know how many have accessed the Government's training modules?

Kate Dixon: There are two levels. There are some things we want all staff in schools to know and be aware of, and Ofsted's evidence challenged the culture in a school where it has become commonplace to banter and so on. There is a level there but that does not mean every teacher might access the particular training materials for relationships, health and sex education because that is often taught by a specific teacher. We have had feedback that even the teacher who is teaching it does not necessarily have the right level of confidence—hence, the plethora of resources we are putting together.

As well as surveying teachers to find out about their confidence, and we are working with the Children's Commissioner on this, we want to ask children and young people if they are getting what they need and having those discussions and feeling more confident in themselves. As Ofsted says, it is about impact. Is this doing the job for children and young people? We want to take it from both lenses.



Q98 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: I want to come back to children and young people, but before I do that, I want to ask Kelly if the implementation review would cover relationships and sex education.

Kelly Tolhurst: Yes, it covers the whole—relationships and the whole piece. That is the review. There are differences with primary and secondary, age appropriateness and the different resources, but yes.

Kate Dixon: We have two things coming up. First, hopefully by the end of this financial year we will have produced some non-statutory guidance to support the statutory guidance on relationships, health and sex education. The aim is to assess what has gone on and give a little bit more detail where perhaps people have been asking for that. That is non-statutory advice.

Secondly, we have committed to updating the statutory guidance, so the implementation review will feed into that. At the moment our timetable for doing that is 2024, because we want to give it a little time to run, but if it is glaringly obvious that we need to do it before then, we will.

Q99 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: I want to go back to how young people view it because it is for them and if they are not feeling they are getting anything out of it, it causes a problem in itself. There was a survey from the sex education forum last year that said the percentage of young people aged 16 to 17 who rated the quality of RHSE as good or very good dropped about 6% between 2019 and 2021. What assessment have you made of this drop? What do you think could have led to it, and what steps might be taken to improve the quality of RSE from the perspective of young people?

Kelly Tolhurst: First, I am not aware of those stats but my feeling is there may be a number of reasons for it, particularly because of the disruption—if we are talking about 2019 to now, the disruption in school with regard to Covid-19, we cannot deny that was disruptive for children and schools and much of what was taught. We know that. That is factual. I imagine it has definitely been a factor.

Also, that is a statistic. I would be interested to know what might be missing within it because we need to ask those questions of young people. How do they want things delivered? Why do they not feel they are getting what they want out of it? It is research I have not yet looked at, so I apologise for not being able to give you full details. These are the questions I would be asking. These are the questions I will be asking our team about young people, and why they would feel it is not meeting their criteria or expectations.

The point you make is the right one. Ultimately, this is about them. It is not about us. We need to come up with the guidance, help and support that will work. The implementation evaluation is so important but what Kate said and what I have committed to is that, if it is not working and



there are other things we could do, this will feed into us strengthening what we are putting forward and making modifications.

Q100 Dame Caroline Dineneage: Welcome both of you to your new roles. I want to move on to talk about how we engage boys and young men. The Ofsted review highlighted that there seems to be a discord between how boys and girls view sexual harassment. Girls often thought things like sexist or sexualised language, and things like being asked to share inappropriate images, all happened quite regularly, but quite often the boys did not see this as an issue. Bell has already mentioned that a lot of the children and young people were not wildly positive about the RSHE they were getting. It was too little, too late, and not covering the bases they felt needed to be covered or supplying them with the information they required.

With all that in mind, to what extent do you think the Government should do more to encourage and support schools to engage more with boys and young men about their attitude, language and behaviour towards women and girls?

Kelly Tolhurst: As Government we have made progress, particularly in bringing in the relationships, sex and health education but there is no quick fix. We know that what young people are being exposed to now—sometimes outside our control—is having a direct impact on stereotypes and the way people behave. It is the same for boys and girls. Patterns of behaviour have changed. We need to understand that more as adults as well. We need to make sure we keep up with our understanding, and devising policy to make sure we can help and support young people and parents to manage.

There is no straightforward answer. This has been happening over a period of time and maybe a bit like the young people have said—a little too late. Sometimes maybe we have been slow in general society to recognise these challenges. It started in a small way and it has become more challenging, but we need to keep reviewing what we are doing. Coming in at this stage we need to do more of the same, making sure that the resources that are out there are the right resources and that guidance is there, and making sure teachers are able to have those conversations. Teachers feeling comfortable about being able to have those conversations with boys and girls has been mentioned a number of times. We need to support the profession. They have come into the teaching profession to teach on a topic and they are having to walk a minefield of different things that maybe they have not had any experience of themselves. I don't think there is an easy answer, but it is something that I believe Government and the public are very aware of. I think people will be expecting Government to go as far as we can to support young people and keep them safe and also recognise the difference in approach needed for girls and boys.

Q101 Dame Caroline Dineneage: I will move to universities. The lad culture that was around when I was at university in the 1990s still seems to be



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quite a thing, and with the advent of digital so much in our everyday lives, it is something that can be all the more pervasive. To what extent and level do you think the Government can or should intervene to help universities tackle lad culture and misogyny for a start?

Andrea Jenkyns: First, we need to look at and review what platforms young people use. It is different from when you and I were at that age. On social media, the Department needs to look at an information campaign to reach these young people so they realise what is right and what is wrong and what they should not tolerate. That is one aspect.

It is also about ensuring that universities have the right knowledge and an open culture. As we have seen, there is a great lack of evidence because victims find it very hard to come forward. We need to encourage work with stakeholders, including universities, colleges, UUK, OfS and all the other groups to foster this open culture because we will not get the data otherwise. If we do not have the data, it is very hard to have specific consequences, but I think the message should be zero tolerance. We also need to engage with student unions. I think the biggest thing has to be an information campaign. That is how we are going to have to tackle this, looking at the platforms young people use, which are very different from what we might use.

Kelly Tolhurst: I will just come back to Andrea's point about the universities. One of the most important things is that young people—particularly if they are being exposed to things or things are happening to them within the setting—are able to tell a professional, and that they will be taken seriously and that it will be understood. Then it is about how we are able to support the profession—I say "the profession"; I mean teachers, our staff—to be able to deal with that so students feel empowered to raise it with the right person, and can feel in being empowered to report it or go and talk to someone about it, and that it is not a waste of time and their concerns will be dealt with in an appropriate way. In school settings, a lot of the guidance is focused on just enabling teachers. You might often hear the anecdotal evidence, "I'm frightened, I don't want to raise it to my teacher because they will not take me seriously". That is a barrier.

Also, there is the question of the threshold—whether it falls into criminal activity and whether there is a time when it cannot be managed just within the school when the school needs to involve other authorities that can deal with some of those challenges. It is a difficult landscape to traverse, but it is a massively important part of what we are trying to do in regard to the work we are doing with schools. Sorry.

Andrea Jenkyns: I have couple more points, Caroline, on this. We also need to look at what support is available for students on campus, and ramp that up and foster this between students, because students talk to students and they can be part of a culture change, a zero-tolerance approach and also work with other Departments such as Home Office and



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Justice, to make sure there is a place of consequence when there is harassment on campus.

As I said earlier before you arrived, Caroline, we have already said to the OfS that we would fully support a statement of expectations regarding sexual harassment as a condition of being part of the OfS organisation for universities. We would fully support that. I do think zero tolerance means there is a place of consequence if sexual harassment is going on.

Q102 Dame Caroline Dinenage: On that note, there is growing evidence that the bystander prevention training programme seems to be one of the most effective ways of educating university students, but several witnesses have told us that universities in England aren't wild about taking this up or taking it very seriously. Do the Government have any thoughts on that? Do they have any views on this training and whether universities should be focusing more on it?

Andrea Jenkyns: There are some great examples of best practice that I would like to share with the Committee, but the bystander training—Emma, would you mind picking up on that?

Emma Davies: We heard evidence earlier from our OfS colleagues, who are very much thinking about this question on bystander action and the importance of creating that culture as a core part of its statement of expectation, and what it would expect universities to be enforcing. It commented earlier on how it would build that into the way things are taken forward. Exactly what would happen is for the OfS to be taking it forward as part of its work, but absolutely we share its views, that thinking about how you build a culture—not just among the victims and the perpetrators but the entire community—is a very important part of how we make sure there is a zero-tolerance approach.

Q103 Dame Caroline Dinenage: Before I move back to the Minister, would you ever see a scenario under which that sort of bystander training would be made compulsory for first-year students?

Emma Davies: That is a question for the OfS as part of its consideration about how it takes these things forward. That is the regulator's role

Andrea Jenkyns: There is some amazing work, best practice, and I always believe in learning, from those who are doing great things and spreading that message. If you don't mind, I would not mind name-checking a few universities and informing you of some of this stuff. You have probably already covered it on the Committee, but Nottingham Trent University has a consent coalition. It is a partnership group with voluntary organisations, tackling spiking and sexual violence. It offers bystander intervention training, safe spaces overnight and safer taxi schemes, which I think is fabulous. Again, it is very sad that we have to have these types of schemes. We shouldn't have to do this. It is incredibly sad and we should not be in this place.



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The University of Nottingham has established a support service for students who have experienced sexual violence, which is so important because we all know that sexual violence leaves a lasting effect if there is no full support. The university has a dedicated qualified team of sexual violence liaison officers.

The University of Exeter has been leading a partnership to tackle crimes against women, which was awarded £72,000 from the Home Office and has allocated this funding to bolster women's safety in the city centre, particularly at night when women are trying to get home; it is to help the safe passage home.

I notice our Chair is a northern MP like myself, so I have a couple of northern universities here. Durham University does comprehensive training for staff and students, which I think is important, on roles and responsibilities, under its sexual misconduct and violence policy.

The University of Manchester has trained harassment support advisers, who provide information on issues related to bullying and harassment, sexual harassment and discrimination. As I said earlier, it is about that information campaign getting out to students—what is right and wrong.

Finally, York—which is not far from me, being a Yorkshire woman—has a number of initiatives, including the introduction of responding to disclosure of sexual violence training, and equipping staff to sensitively support students, which is important because it is such a delicate matter. The university is preparing new student arrivals and introducing consent matters training. I think that is so important, especially for young people going to university. It is a new situation and some are feeling vulnerable, as they are away from home, so that consent training is so important. The university has also established a new sexual violence steering group, which is developing an action plan involving students, specialist staff and third-sector partners, so it is real collaborative working. It is not only across Government, but across country, across the third sector, across universities—partnership working is vital for tackling this.

Dame Caroline Dinenage: Very good. Thank you for all the examples.

Kelly Tolhurst: On that, it is great that Andrea and I are both here speaking about our respective areas, but the work that we do and get right in school settings will help our higher education sector. Hopefully we will start to see some of that training and good learning move through the whole system. As Andrea said, it is sad that we are in this place, but we do need to get it right so we are committed to it.

Elliot Colburn: Do you mind if I just cut in very quickly, Caroline?

Dame Caroline Dinenage: No, not at all.

Q104 **Elliot Colburn:** A very quick question to both of you. Obviously quite a lot of this will be devolved. What sort of conversations do you have with



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the devolved Administrations and your counterparts about ensuring that we see this best practice spread across all four corners of the UK, not just in England? Andrea, could I come to you first and then to Kelly?

Andrea Jenkyns: I have said in a lot of speeches recently that there has to be a lot more joined-up thinking and better collaboration with the devolved Administrations, especially on the whole skills agenda. As a working-class lass from the north, I want to make sure that the skills agenda reaches every inch and corner of the country, but at the same time, this is a vital aspect.

I have not had conversations with the devolved Administrations yet. I will hand over to Emma to find out what the civil servants have done in this area so far, but I am committed to getting around the country and ensuring that we are all on the same page with this, because that is the only way we are going to tackle it.

Emma Davies: We regularly talk to our colleagues in the devolved Administrations about a range of issues in the education arena. Obviously whenever there are initiatives in this area, we will be talking to them about what we are doing and how we share best practice.

I would also highlight the UUK reports on changing the culture. It has done a series over the years. UUK is an organisation that works across the UK, so that is very much drawing on best practice and sharing those thoughts across the nations. For example, we have had some very good conversations about the “Can’t Buy My Silence” campaign with both Welsh and Scottish colleagues, about how they are going to approach the questions of NDAs—and pushing that because that is very much a common cause.

Kelly Tolhurst: I have not met the devolved Administrations in my role as Minister of State, but of course I will. Just to repeat what has been said by Emma and Andrea, nobody has a monopoly on good practice. If people are doing good things in different parts of the country, nobody has a monopoly on ideas either, so it is important that we are having those conversations across the United Kingdom.

Kate Dixon: Yes, I would say pretty much the same. We look at good practice from the devolved Administrations and other places and we will continue to do so. Also the third sector has been mentioned, hasn't it?

Kelly Tolhurst: That is right. We talk about talking to our devolved Administrations, but the United Kingdom will not be different from many other countries in how these young people are experiencing social media and some of the drivers that have changed behaviour and are influencing behaviour. One of the things that I am always keen on is looking at what other countries do, so I am sure that is something I will be getting under as I progress, as I slowly get my feet under the table in my role.



Andrea Jenkyns: As I briefly mentioned earlier on the piece about non-disclosure agreements, I am fully behind that. Another member of my family was forced to sign one when she worked in education—this was to do with a case of a sexual nature—and it was horrific. It shouldn't exist. We have already seen 71 universities, which in England means 1.5 million of the 2 million students are covered by this commitment of universities signing up to no longer supporting NDAs, but I want to see that across all four nations of the UK. It is important that we work with the devolved authorities because whichever part of the UK it is, these NDAs are clearly not acceptable.

Q105 **Dame Caroline Dinenage:** I have one last question. It is slightly broader, but I am keen to hear your thoughts on it. It is about gender stereotyping and how that leads to gender inequalities. Bear with me here. When you look at the gender pay gap, quite often it is because way back in time there was a sort of focus on the fact that there were some jobs that were girls' jobs and some jobs that were boys' jobs. That is why we have historically seen more men go into engineering and more women go into hairdressing.

I would like to think that that was no longer a thing, yet if you look back even just to 2017, a report into sexist behaviour in schools found that gender stereotyping—albeit unconsciously in many cases—is still a typical feature of school culture. Some 34% of primary school teachers and 25% of secondary school teachers said they witnessed gender stereotyping in their school at least weekly, so there is still some subliminal thinking that there are girl subjects and boy subjects at school, which then leads to the concept that are girls' jobs and boys' jobs—it seems unimaginable to me in this modern world—and that then presumably floats through into university education as well. It is quite a philosophical question to end on, Chair, but I would like the panel's thoughts on what the Government are doing more broadly to look at gender stereotyping of both boys and girls—the fact that boys shouldn't go into childcare or nursing could also be an issue—to reduce gender inequalities in education.

Andrea Jenkyns: I was very lucky because my dad, with three girls, used to say, "Dream big and dare to fail. It doesn't matter where you come from in life; it's what you do in life that matters". I wish every home was like that across the country for support. We never found any barriers, so I think it has to start in the home. I think there has to be a big information campaign. At school, it is very important because it is going to be a generational change. It is not something that is going to happen overnight, which is sad, and we have to put that pressure back on parents as well, that girls are as good as boys, so to speak. I think that it helps that we are on our third female Prime Minister as well. Having a third female prime minister is a good thing as a role model and it is important not only in schools, and in homes, but also in the whole educational landscape that we have good role models in both.

We also know about the issues with white working-class boys, who are more likely to go to prison and have mental health problems and so on,



and how they don't achieve academically as well as a lot of other groups. We need to make sure that our policies are right for everybody and that everybody feels valued.

Just going off on a side note before I hand over to Kelly, what I am trying to do with my brief is ensure it is a whole skills brief. It is about parity of esteem in education. I want to push that vocational and technical qualifications are equally as important as academic qualifications. That is a starting point because we know, as you said, that certain job roles attract certain genders and we want to make sure that possibilities are open to everybody, so this parity of esteem is going to be a big important theme for me.

Kelly Tolhurst: I agree with Andrea. I am the daughter of a boat builder with two girls, but I can change lightbulbs, do a bit of woodwork and don't fear anything that would be traditionally stereotyping now. I was brought up with my father, who didn't see my gender as a barrier to doing anything. I agree with Andrea about how we view roles in the home and also in the workplace. We have come a long way. When I wanted to join the Navy, I tried to go to the careers office and they told me, "Well, you couldn't be a bosun, you couldn't go on submarines". That has all changed. When I qualified as a marine surveyor there were hardly any females—and women are damned good at surveying—but again, we have come a long way and I think we are seeing more young women going into what would have traditionally been called male roles. That is obviously societal and the work that has gone on by our predecessors and the way we judge things. As you know, it is something that the Government very much care about and removing those gender stereotypes is a priority.

I am coming from a marine surveyor background. While I am not an engineer, there were principles within my work that came from engineering, so when we talk about STEM and what we are doing in that work, one of the things that I was very pleased about with this large package is that we are investing £84 million into computers—the take-up of computing and tech for GCSEs and A-levels. We are also, as a Department, investing in research to look at what some of the issues are with getting particularly girls into some of these subjects. It is down to us to continue that work. Although we are not where we want to be, I truly believe things have changed.

This is my personal opinion: I think things have changed dramatically in the last 10 years, especially opportunities for women and the acceptability of women in roles. I can only say that from my own experience and probably what I have experienced personally, but we do have a long way to go. This is not against guys, but we have we two women in this role, who have probably had very similar backgrounds in that respect, and we are determined to do what we can to strengthen the work that Government are going to do.



Q106 Dame Caroline Dinenage: I agree with you. I personally feel that there has been a sea change in recent years, which is why I was surprised by the information that came out of this school survey. Do you think any more could be done within education? It is the unconscious bias that I am concerned about.

Kelly Tolhurst: I am sorry to come in front of the Committee when it is one of the areas that I am not quite under yet in my role, but one of the things I feel is a key element is how we implement careers advice at school because it is one of those things—the opportunities that are there for young people. I am interested in a lot of things, but I remember maths was my favourite subject at school. I said, “I would love to be a physicist” and my teacher laughed. All right, probably I was never going to be a physicist, but what I am saying is that it was not an option.

I think the way we deliver careers advice and skill the people that are advising our young people about the opportunities there are after school—whether that be through higher education or apprenticeships—is a key thing. There is some debate to be had in that: who are the best people to deliver it; how should we be delivering it; what should be the outcomes? The Department may have already done work on that, so apologies that it is just something I haven’t looked at yet, but it is something that I feel very strongly about.

Chair: Thank you, Caroline. That is a very important point, Kelly, because I sit on the Education Committee and we are looking at those issues at the moment. It is very important to start young as well.

Kelly Tolhurst: Absolutely.

Chair: Does anybody have any comments to make before we close? If there is any information that you think would be useful to the inquiry, you can write to us, and maybe you could send us some of the universities that you mentioned, Andrea.

Andrea Jenkyns: Happy to do that, yes. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you for your evidence and contributions. I conclude the evidence session.