

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, HC 91

Tuesday 7 June 2016

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Against Violence and Abuse](#)
- [Big Talk Education Ltd](#)
- [Tender Education & Arts](#)
- [UK Feminista](#)

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Members present: Mrs Maria Miller (Chair); Ruth Cadbury; Maria Caulfield; Jo Churchill; Angela Crawley; Mims Davies; Mrs Flick Drummond; Ben Howlett; Jess Philips

Questions 101–142

Witness[es]: **Sophie Bennett**, Co-Director, UK Feminista, **Marai Larasi MBE**, Executive Director, Imkaan, **Susie McDonald**, Chief Executive Officer, Tender Education & Arts, **Jo Sharpen**, Policy Manager, Against Violence and Abuse (AVA), **Lynette Smith**, Managing Director and Founder, Big Talk Education, and **Dr Fiona Vera-Gray**, Research Fellow, Department of Law, Durham University, gave evidence.

Q101 Chair: This is our second evidence session for our report on sexual harassment and sexual assaults in schools. We are doing things slightly differently this morning. Because we wanted to get views from a large number of people, we are doing a slightly more informal meeting—just to make my life particularly challenging—and have asked you to sit as a body of the Committee so that we can have more of a conversation. Before we start, it would be useful for people to briefly introduce themselves.

Maria Caulfield: I am Maria Caulfield, the MP for Lewes.

Jo Churchill: I am Jo Churchill. I am the MP for Bury St Edmunds.

Marai Larasi: Marai Larasi from Imkaan and also from EVAW.

Lynette Smith: Lynette Smith from Big Talk Education

Susie McDonald: Susie McDonald from Tender Education & Arts.

Ben Howlett: Ben Howlett, the MP in Bath.

Mrs Drummond: Flick Drummond, the MP for Portsmouth South.

Chair: Maria Miller, MP for Basingstoke.

Jess Phillips: I am Jess Phillips, the MP for Birmingham Yardley.

Ruth Cadbury: Ruth Cadbury, MP for Brentwood and Isleworth.

Jo Sharpen: Jo Sharpen, policy manager from AVA.

Sophie Bennett: Sophie Bennett, co-director of UK Feminista.

Dr Vera-Gray: I am Dr Fiona Vera-Gray, the co-founder of the Centre for Gender Equal Media at Durham University.

Q102 Chair: Thank you all for giving your time. I know how much time it takes to prepare for a session like this. We are incredibly grateful for the time you have given up to be with us today. Joining us now is Angela Crawley, who is another member of the Committee. You will know that each member has a line of questioning that they want to put. Because we are in this more discussive style, please feel free to carefully interrupt in a constructive way. I will attempt to keep it moving forward because we have an hour and a half but we have quite a lot of questions to get through, so please excuse me if I appear somewhat abrupt when trying to move things along.

Members will be coming and going because of their obligations elsewhere in the House. It is not in any way a slight on the meeting; please do not take it that way. Also, at about 11.30, lots of bells start to ring. It is not a fire alarm; it is simply the House starting to sit, and then there are lots of bells again; we will not even go into why that happens. Jess, you are going to kick off for us.

Q103 Jess Phillips: Hello, everybody. In the written evidence that the Government have given to this Committee, it states that schools are safe spaces and that the data suggests we can only say with certainty that sexual bullying is common in around 5% of schools. How do you respond to this?

Dr Vera-Gray: I worked for about 10 years in Rape Crisis South London delivering sexual violence prevention work in schools, and that absolutely does not represent my experience. It may say something about what is recognised as being sexually harmful behaviour. It might be saying something about the normalisation and how routine it is, that only 5% is considered serious and the rest is just taken for granted as the way things are.

Sophie Bennett: UK Feminista supports young people and teachers to take action against sexism in schools across the country. The message that we hear time and time again is that sexual harassment is an everyday experience for many girls and young women across the country. Our work also allows us to observe the sense of powerlessness that characterises girls' responses to it.

Jo Sharpen: That is a very problematic figure. It certainly does not reflect the reality that we know of, and I would be concerned if the Department was basing its response on that

figure. Sometimes it is more to do with the lack of reporting and the lack of challenging: staff do not feel confident to recognise this abuse and challenge it, and young people do not feel confident to disclose it when it is happening.

Susie McDonald: Tender as an organisation has seen a real shift in how teachers and schools are talking about this. 13 years ago, we were knocking on doors trying to talk about healthy relationships and violence prevention, and teachers, particularly headteachers, did not really get it. There has been a seismic shift in how they understand what the problem is now. It is very welcome that they now understand that, but there is a fear about what it will do to them and their reputation as a school, in terms of both parents and Ofsted, if they are reporting on the kind of sexual violence that is happening

Q104 Chair: How widespread is that understanding, do you think? It might be okay if you have been into certain schools and talked to them, but how widespread is the understanding among teachers?

Susie McDonald: In terms of the information that we gathered, both for this and in terms of the conversations that we have with teachers, particularly in 400 or 500 schools across London, many teachers now understand and are talking about sexual violence as happening on a day-to-day basis.

Lynette Smith: My background is slightly different, because Big Talk has gone into some schools for over 15 years and, where we have built a culture of good sex education and awareness, we have come across it far less than some of my colleagues here. What does come as a massive shock to us is when we go into a new school for the first time. It has brought into sharp focus how very different it is among young people where there has not been that spiral curriculum of good-quality sex education.

Sophie Bennett: To give you an idea of the sorts of things that young people are telling us, girls tell us that you do not leave school as a girl without being called a slut; that to wear shorts under your skirt to prevent boys revealing your underwear in the playground is normal behaviour. There is that sense of a normalised culture of sexual harassment in schools where girls do not feel able to report it and, instead, often change their own behaviour, such as wearing shorts under their skirts.

Susie McDonald: We asked a group of students in a school in Hackney recently what would stop sexual violence in this school, and they all said it was girls being able to wear trousers. It is about behaviour changing among girls, rather than saying, “Boys, do not be touching the girls.”

Marai Larasi: One issue that we also need to be mindful of is that different groups of girls experience sexual harassment in different ways. BME girls are much more likely to be called names that are racialised—things like “black bitch”. One of the things about the Government’s information is that it does not pick up the very specific ways that different groups of girls might be subject to harm within the school environment and that girls are modifying behaviour as a response. Sometimes schools just do not know how to handle these particular issues. Girls are also aware—and we have heard of such cases—that reporting can mean consequences for them as girls, in terms of reprisals from other young men who may not have originally been involved in sexually harassing her but are now punishing her for reporting their friend.

Q105 Mrs Drummond: I have three questions, just to get some more evidence. Obviously we have a lot of written evidence, but while you are here we wanted to get some more evidence. What proportion of young people are getting sex and relationship education, in your view?

Lynette Smith: In my experience, it is very much hit and miss. I have been around since before the teenage pregnancy strategy, when the Government pumped millions into training up teachers. That only finished in 2011, but already we go into schools and it is almost bereft of people. Teachers move on; they move out of the profession. Especially in primary, it used to be somebody's job card. If they have moved on, sometimes schools can get to this time of the year and think, "Whoops, we have missed it." At this time of the year, we are absolutely inundated with demands: "Quickly, can you come and see year 6?" We say, "We do not really work like that." We prefer to do a whole-school approach involving parents and appropriate age-related education. It is incredibly hit and miss. I think other colleagues would agree.

Dr Vera-Gray: It is an important question, but there is also a question about the quality of the sex and relationships education that they are getting and whether, as you said, Lynette, it is just a one-off session or whether it is situated in a broader discussion around gender stereotypes, harmful images in the media, sexism in the media, pornography, online abuse, all of these things that we know about. EVAW, which Marai represents, did a document around the seven principles of high-quality sex and relationships education. That is what we need to be looking at. In terms of how many schools get input like that, it is very minimal.

Q106 Mrs Drummond: We have heard about the barrier that there might not be someone who is trained up. What other barriers are there in the schools that are preventing it from being effective?

Marai Larasi: Schools are operating under a huge amount of pressure and, in the absence of a clear structure that says, "You have to do this", you are then reliant on individual champions. We are effectively asking children and young people to be protected on the basis that somebody in the school or the school itself feels that this is important enough. The ad hoc nature of this work is a huge barrier. We know that the Government are able to mandate around particular things. If we look at what is happening with the Prevent agenda, for example, we have set a precedent around taking work out to schools or saying that they have to do this. Failure to make sure that this has happened has left it down to individual schools and individual champions within individual schools.

Lynette Smith: About five years ago, one of the biggest barriers we found in primary schools was that many schools were fearful of parents, and, because we work with parents as well, we realised that parents were also fearful of teachers. We thought, "Hang on a minute; it is no wonder we are not making progress" so we brought together what we call a whole-school approach, where we go in as the intermediaries. We can first train up the parents and raise their awareness. We deliberately sent out a letter that is ever so slightly provocative, because it gets them through the door. Then we can work with the parents and train the teachers while we are working with the children.

That seems to be the winning formula. Our return is enormous: 99% of schools book us straight away for the next year. It is to the extent that parents then bring pressure on senior

schools, saying, “Our children have had this right through primary; why are they not getting it in senior schools?”

Sophie Bennett: UK Feminista delivers teacher training and works closely with initial teacher training providers, including Teach First and the Institute of Education. One of the things we hear time and time again from teachers is that they do not feel equipped to have conversations about sexual harassment and sexism, let alone to teach any sort of lesson on it. It is important to note that, while SRE is hugely important, it is not a silver bullet and it needs to be part of a broader package of measures, including training for teachers, a whole-school approach and Department for Education national guidance on how to implement that. I could go on, and I am sure we will get to it later, but it is important to note that it needs to be part of a broader package.

Jo Sharpen: We did some research over five years, looking at how prevention work occurs in different types of schools, in different settings. Some schools do it year-on-year and children get it repeated every year. Some just do an assembly and think that is what they need to do. Teachers were telling us that they need the whole-school approach but also direction on how to do that. We developed our Prevention Platform, which has information on how to do that; it has sample policies, procedures and everything that they would need to be able to do it, because they really need that support. At the moment they are in the dark, not knowing how to do this work or where to go to get the support and information they need. That national Government guidance is crucial for them to be able to embed this in a more sustainable way.

Susie McDonald: I would echo that we are relying on teachers being champions of this issue, whereas we need schools to be champions of this issue. The other barrier is that, while teachers really relish the idea of working in partnership with specialist organisations, they simply do not have the budget. As many schools are moving into operating with deficit budgets, they simply cannot prioritise engaging with external organisations that would give them the confidence and the right skills. Many teachers are victim-blaming at the moment. They are looking at sexual harassment as horseplay or something going on in the corridors that they are not recognising as a problem. Until they are effectively trained to understand what is at the root of the issue, they will not be able to make the right judgments about how they can deliver training and education within their schools.

Q107 Mrs Drummond: Do those teachers, then, access training outside because it is not part of the teacher training? They do not; they just have to fumble their way through.

Lynette Smith: It is very difficult for teachers to get outside training.

Q108 Jess Phillips: You mentioned the teenage pregnancy strategy, which massively reduced teenage pregnancy. I was at school when it happened, and I waited until I was 20 to have a baby. Aside from what you are saying about money and resources going into it, do you feel that there is a similar onus that needs to go into this issue now? What was it that worked in the teenage pregnancy strategy?

Lynette Smith: The whole thing with the teenage pregnancy strategy was that it had four strands. In the authorities where it worked really well, we were all working together. I was a teenage pregnancy co-ordinator at that time, specialising in SRE. We really need to make sure that teachers are trained up, but also that they want to do it, because all too

often they are given the job card but, if they do not want to do it, they do not want to do it. It is not everybody's cup of tea.

Dr Vera-Gray: The landscape young people are operating in now is substantially different than it was even five years ago because of the internet and pornography and how easy it is to access and share images. It is important to look back at things that worked in the past, but we are in a very particular environment at the moment and we need to work out how we are going to combat that.

Q109 Ruth Cadbury: Going back to the issue of who is getting SRE and who is not, I notice there is a distinction in what is required of academies and free schools against maintained schools. Have you noticed a difference or is there not a lot of difference in the quality and the rate of SRE being part of the curriculum between the two types of school?

Susie McDonald: At Tender, there does not seem to be much difference. Take any headteacher, head of PSHE or head of drama, because we do use drama as a way of engaging young people. Whether those teachers come from academies, free schools or local authority schools, there does not seem to be any difference.

Sophie Bennett: I would say the same. In our experience, young people report that their sex education was non-existent or very poor, and that it often only taught them things like how to put a condom on a cucumber and very little more than that.

Q110 Mrs Drummond: The last, quick-fire question from me is: at what age should sex and relationship education start?

Dr Vera-Gray: It should start as soon as they are in any kind of educational institution, and be age appropriate, which is what you do. Absolutely, start talking to young children.

Mrs Drummond: So in reception?

Dr Vera-Gray: Yes.

Lynette Smith: In nursery.

Dr Vera-Gray: As soon as you can. There is another thing that is really important to think about. We were talking before about parents; some parents are going to be sexually abusing their children. Sometimes that is going to happen in the family unit outside of school, so we need to start talking to the kids as soon as we can, when they are very young, to give them the spaces to start talking about what they may be experiencing outside of school.

Lynette Smith: I echo that wholeheartedly. One of the biggest things is getting people to understand that sex and relationship education is not talking about having sex. That is what people in the media love to think of. Our approach is that, if a child is old enough to be abused, it is old enough to be educated, so nursery is exactly the time. We also go into children's centres and educate parents of children even younger than nursery age, so that as soon as they start changing the nappy, they are using the correct vocabulary. It cannot be too early.

Sophie Bennett: The evidence from UK Feminista's work with primary school teachers shows that sexism is experienced from a very early age. We need to provide, and young people deserve, access to information about healthy relationships.

Marai Larasi: There is something about how teachers at that point are also helping to shape children's minds. That "boys will be boys" attitude, for example, that you see does not help in terms of the messages we want to teach about who girls can be, who girls are, who boys are and what boys can be. If we do not get in there early, we are allowing the damage to be done. We are also allowing people who have a huge amount of influence, and are very often coming from a very good place, to shape the attitudes of children and young people with no intervention. It is really important that we start as early as possible.

Sophie Bennett: It is also really important that sexism is a core and compulsory part of initial teacher training. I was in a primary school and I heard a teacher say, "Let's have some big strong boys to help me lift, and the girls can help me tidy." That was not said with malicious intent, but the impact that it had was devastating on the young people and their perceptions of self. It is really important. It is just not the case at the moment that tackling sexism is a core and compulsory part of initial teacher training both for primary school teachers and for secondary school teachers, and that there are continued professional development opportunities for teachers as they progress through their careers.

Q111 Ben Howlett: Given the written evidence, we know that there is quite a large consensus around compulsory SRE, but not necessarily about what good SRE looks like. This best practice issue flows through every subject in society. I just wondered what good SRE looks like.

Jess Phillips: We should have a lesson.

Ben Howlett: Genuinely, it would be helpful. I had to put condoms on cucumbers, but I have never seen one that looks like a cucumber, certainly not a green one.

Susie McDonald: The focus is on the relationship rather than the sex, and it is about negotiation. The opportunity for children and young people to rehearse how they will negotiate as adults is important. You can rehearse a maths exam; you can practise doing all sorts of different things in school; you can learn to fail; and you can learn what negotiating in one way might look like and what the consequences of trying something might look like. It is okay for it to turn out differently. Therefore, it is about looking at those relationships and how young people can negotiate those, on the basis that they understand that there should be equality in that negotiation, because there is not at the moment.

Dr Vera-Gray: It has to have an understanding of the dynamics of gender at the foremost. I did research back in 2013 as part of the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit into young people's understanding of sexual consent, which we have submitted as well. What we found there was that that is how young people understand their lives, so we are missing a trick if we are not talking to them about the way that sexual violence is gendered. Boys are taught to experience and to demonstrate their masculinity and heterosexuality on the bodies of girls. Girls are not taught to have any sense of sexual agency or sexual subjectivity. They are taught that their value comes from whether or not men and boys can find them sexually desirable.

If we go in and we do not talk to them about that, but we try to talk to them about people hurting people or disrespecting each other, without making it a gendered reality, it is not reflecting the reality of their everyday lives, so they are not going to hear the message in the way that we need them to hear it. It needs to have input from the specialist sexual violence sector organisations, like Rape Crisis, that work with disclosures so understand on the ground what the impact and the harms are, so they can start to feed that back into the education.

Jo Sharpen: It needs to be mirrored throughout the school as well. Rather than just having good-quality SRE lessons, they need to see that mirrored among the staff, in policies. They need to be confident that, if they disclose something, it is going to be dealt with appropriately and sensitively. Young people need to be seen as the experts on this. Young people should be consulted on what they want and how these lessons should be run. It needs to be part of the whole-school approach, so that they see it embodied within the ethos of the school outside of those lessons.

Q112 Ben Howlett: I hope I am not going to enter into another person's question here, but, in terms of the Government question, before I come to Sophie, the Government recommend that schools and teachers look at the guidance. Do you think the guidance is fit for purpose enough? I think we know the answer.

Chair: I will point out that Hansard does record laughter.

Ben Howlett: Insert giggles here.

Lynette Smith: Bearing in mind it was written in 2000, it is completely out of date.

Jess Phillips: We were all still asking Jeeves things then.

Ben Howlett: I only just found Jeeves the other day.

Sophie Bennett: I would reiterate everything that has already been said. Also, effective SRE needs to be cross-curricular. It needs to link to other subjects. It needs to address the root causes of violence against women and girls, unpicking harmful gender stereotypes. It also needs to be responsive to the issues that are raised by young people themselves. Most importantly, we need to be addressing the harmful attitudes that underpin violence against women and girls, not only teaching girls to change their behaviour and equipping girls to deal with it.

Marai Larasi: From my perspective, we should have conversations about respect that are gendered, but we also need to talk about the different ways that groups of young people experience violence. As a young lesbian in a school, you might have a very different experience of sexual harassment from a young heterosexual woman, who might be targeted in a very specific way. That needs to be understood. We need to talk about issues such as sexuality and sexual orientation. We need to have conversations about race and disability as a routine part of sex and relationships education.

We also need to recognise the harm that is done—echoing exactly what Fiona said—by doing that thing of “people do this to people”; we need to note that this is really gendered and also, at different points in time, racialised. It needs to be reflective. Teachers need to

be trained and skilled enough to be able to look at what is working. If you are in a school environment, you are delivering SRE and young people are not responding, then you need to think about why that is not working. It really should be in partnership with specialist organisations. It also needs to be dynamic. The world looks very different now from five years ago. If you cannot have a conversation about things like Snapchat—it is not even Twitter—and how those structures might be used, then you are not up-to-date and you are likely to lose young people in those conversations. It needs to be current.

Lynette Smith: While I agree that it should be cross-curricular, some schools will say it is woven through everything so they can stand and say, “We are all doing it”, when in real life nobody is doing it; nobody is grasping that nettle. The other thing is that it is not a matter of having to go out and completely reinvent the wheel. The Sex Education Forum has done some really good stuff on what should be covered. The Ofsted report of 2012-13 also offers some really good guidance as to the shortcomings of what is currently out there.

Q113 Ben Howlett: If I may make one final point on this, if policymakers are ultimately trying to improve the quality of SRE, how do they facilitate that? How do they make SRE look good? Do you have any advice for the policymakers? There is a difficult question for you.

Dr Vera-Gray: There is already evidence about what high-quality SRE is. We have already done it. We have done it loads. Last year, we wrote teacher training guidance, with a series of six or seven sessions on it. We have the Prevention Platform of AVA, which has a whole bunch of information. It is there. It is not about us coming up with something new. It is about having that leadership that says this is important and it needs to start being done in schools.

Q114 Jess Phillips: I understand the voluntary sector—annoyingly, because the public sector never has to do this—has to provide outcomes data on literally everything that it does. Is there a before understanding and an after understanding in most of these programmes?

Jo Sharpen: In everything we do, we always do evidence-based work. We have to, to get funding.

Jess Phillips: I just wanted to get you to say it.

Jo Sharpen: Our most recent research found that, after we had done work in schools and we had trained up young people as peer educators themselves, 94% of them had improved wellbeing in terms mental health, and 88% of them had improved understanding about sexual violence and how to help a friend if they were in need. The figures are there and they are really good.

Marai Larasi: Our Government have funded work internationally focusing on preventing violence against women, and we have really good evidence coming out of the international space, which matches the work that is being done here that is not treated with the same priority.

Q115 Chair: Can I press this point a little bit further, though? How can we make sure that what schools actually deliver is the best stuff, as opposed to just what happens to be in the cupboard? That is pretty key.

Lynette Smith: One of the things that schools really pay attention to is if they know that they are going to be asked by Ofsted: “What are you doing? What are the results? What is there?” When we go in, we work out a package and we leave schools with a package that they have contributed to; the pupils have; the parents have. We say, “When Ofsted comes calling, that is your evidence.” Ofsted needs to be asking in every school: “What is the parental involvement? What are the results you are getting from young people? What are the questions that children are asking?” If schools know that they are going to be asked this and it is all part of safeguarding and wellbeing, it will happen.

Sophie Bennett: As it stands, sexual harassment is not listed alongside racist, disability and homophobic bullying in Ofsted’s inspection framework. The message that that sends out is that, really, sexual harassment is not a priority; you do not need to worry about it. It is hugely important that that changes. The Department for Education guidance on preventing and tackling bullying and prejudice does not include a single resource for tackling sexism or sexual harassment. Again, that sends out that same message that this is normal, we do not need to worry about it and it certainly is not a priority.

Marai Larasi: EVAW has also produced a *Schools Safe 4 Girls* guide, which, again, has quite a lot of information in it. There is a fact sheet around violence against women and girls. We have huge amounts of resources in the voluntary sector. It is just about those resources being taken seriously and us making sure that we put this on a statutory footing.

Dr Vera-Gray: There is also something about not just looking at schools in isolation, so thinking about how teachers in schools are also living in a world where victim-blaming is so prevalent. We have all these different things that are leading to the normalisation of sexual violence and harassment against adult women, so of course it is going to be difficult for them to challenge that, to find a space to deliver the kind of education that they need to to young people because they probably did not get the education. To fix what is going on in schools, we need to think more broadly about changing attitudes in the general population.

Q116 Ruth Cadbury: We have touched on the issue of pornography and particularly social media. How much impact is this growing access to pornography having on levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools? What should we be doing about it?

Marai Larasi: Very often, if people are not engaged with this work, they think of pornography and they think about *Playboy* or an online version of *Playboy*. Actually what has happened over the last few years is pornography that would have been considered hardcore pornography, which would have operated on the on the peripheries, is now the mainstream pornography. It is called gonzo porn. It involves the routine punishment of women’s bodies as entertainment. That creates these unrealistic ideas around what sex and intimacy look like. It also creates this construct of women asking to be harmed. That is the way that pornography completely distorts what happens on a day-to-day basis in a healthy respectful sexual relationship.

We need to think about what messages we are giving to young people about what acceptable behaviour looks like. If you are being taught that what a girl wants is to experience triple-anal, which is a common thing in it—sorry, I just need to be really honest about what the content looks like—and that that is what good sex looks like and that is how you are a real man, then what does that do to how you view women? If, as a

girl or a young woman, you are being taught that that is what is acceptable, you are also getting the message about your value.

The other thing about pornography is that it is incredibly racist. It constructs groups of young men as thugs and monsters, and constructs all women as sluts, as filth, basically. It also constructs particular groups of women as exotic, as asking for it, as beasts, as animals, et cetera. What does that mean to a young black woman in Hackney who is seeing herself represented in that way? What does it do to the young black man who sees himself represented as a thug? We need to tackle the pornography thing if we are going to do anything about this.

Q117 Ruth Cadbury: How?

Jo Sharpen: Young people, because they are not getting the quality of SRE that they need in schools, are looking to things like pornography to get that advice and education. It gives such unrealistic and harmful attitudes about gender, sex, consent. As part of the Home Office This is Abuse campaign, which was running from 2010 and is now Disrespect NoBody, myself at AVA and Respect used to moderate the online forum. I spoke to about 3,000 young people in six weeks and nearly all of them were completely confused about consent, what it meant; they were referencing pornography as their benchmark, had no understanding of what consent actually means, of what their rights are, even what sex is. They are really in the dark and they are having to look online and elsewhere to get the information that they should be getting in schools.

Marai Larasi: Pornography is literally calling our young people in. The language is very much: “If you are enough of a man, then you will engage with this material.” It is also incredibly difficult for a young person to ignore pornography and the access to it is not simply on your laptop. It is on your smartphone. I do not know a young person in my life right now who does not have a smartphone that is probably better than mine.

Dr Vera-Gray: It is not just on phones. It is also through gaming consoles, which a lot of parents and teachers do not know, so they think that their kid is just playing a game but actually they are accessing pornography through that. To back everything that Marai has said, pornography is so heavily implicated in sexual violence more broadly, but specifically in what is going on with young people. The fact that it is acting on women’s bodies means that it is teaching both boys and girls that women’s and girl’s bodies are there to be acted on but they are not there to be acted through. I have spoken to 16-year-old girls about their own ideas of sexual pleasure and asked, “Would girls masturbate?” “No, that is disgusting.” “Do boys masturbate?” “Of course boys masturbate.” We are bringing them up to be in this conducive context for sexual violence to occur and then for the slut-shaming stuff to happen if girls are able to experience some form of sexual agency.

The links between pornography and sexual harassment and online sexual harassment really need to be made. Very recently at the Reclaim the Internet event, there was some research from Demos talking about the use of “slut” and “whore” online that got reported as being about online misogyny. One of the things that was very interesting but did not get reported on was that about 50% of the usage of these terms was from pornography sites. They did not analyse that; they said that that is separate to the online abuse that women and girls are experiencing, but it is not. Pornography online is forming the

background of any interactions online. We need to start connecting how women are described in pornography to what then is used against women to punish them for experiencing any form of sexual agency.

In terms of what we do, we do absolutely everything that we can around age verification, education more broadly, some public awareness campaigns—that is all great. We need to do everything we can, because it is coming at them from everywhere.

Sophie Bennett: A starting point also has to be recognising what we are talking about when we are talking about porn. Some educational resources seem to suggest that pornography is fantasy and exists in some alternative reality. It is commercial sexual exploitation and a form of violence against women, and that has to be a clear starting point.

Q118 Mims Davies: I just wanted to pick up on the commercial side and exploitation in the more mainstream media as well, because there is quite a blurry line. What you see online is quite often very different to what you buy in shops. Obviously, celebrities exploit their bodies and their sexuality as a very normal way of behaving. Nobody would do that in their general workplace, but these people are making money through exploiting how they look and their sexuality. Is that playing into a generalised change of attitudes for how women are treated?

Dr Vera-Gray: Everyone is part of this. Women's value is around their sexual desirability and whether men find them sexually desirable; we need to start challenging that. That is when we get outside of sex and relationships education and into stuff like teaching feminism in schools, talking to kids about how women have changed history and women inventors, women mathematicians and women scientists, so they start to see girls and women as actually being people and not just being sexual objects.

Q119 Chair: You are talking about the content of pornography affecting young people's views on sex and relationships. Would one of your ways of dealing with this problem be changing the rules about what is legal in terms of what is shown in pornography? Obviously there are some sorts of pornography which are illegal in this country. Is that what you are calling for as well?

Dr Vera-Gray: We should do everything that we can possibly do. The thing about young people is they do not really care that much. They will find a way around whatever we do legally or regulation-wise, but it is about sending a very strong message. The law has impact in terms of what it does substantively but also symbolically. Changing the law around what is classified as extreme pornography, what is legal and not legal sends a very strong message that this is not how we want our society to see women; this is not how we expect our men and boys to behave; these are not the representations of race that we support as a culture.

Q120 Chair: Have other countries looked at that as a result of the problems that we are talking about today or not?

Dr Vera-Gray: Iceland banned pornography for a short period of time and they are high on the gender equality index. This is an opportunity for Government to really be at the forefront. All countries are trying to work out what to do and how we stop young people

being drawn into this. How do we get around it? It seems to be that every way we move pornographers are able to move in a different way to then draw young people in.

Q121 Chair: I understand that one of the measures that might be talked about in a forthcoming communications Bill would be better enforcement of the age restrictions around pornography. What are your views on that?

Lynette Smith: We are certainly very concerned because, by starting earlier, we are finding that a number of even year 2 and year 3 pupils—five, six and seven year olds—are disclosing in class that they have seen pornography. This is obviously a child protection issue, so that goes down that route. Another area where it is appearing is that we are having to educate parents about some of the games they are getting for their children, things like Grand Theft Auto, which makes reference to pornography, prostitution and things of that nature. There is a crossover in that children are getting confused because parents let them play age-18 games.

Q122 Chair: I was going to say there are clear marks on those games that are age-restricted.

Lynette Smith: Not a lot of parents actually take that on board, because they do not always understand what is in the games. They are often using the games as babysitting tools.

Dr Vera-Gray: We can use it, but we need to not think of that as being a panacea. When I was younger, I absolutely would have been able to get around any controls. Anyone who has worked with kids can talk to them and they can get around anything that we put on because they are digital natives. They have been brought up with the internet. They have been brought up with computers and technology. They can code; I do not know if anyone in this room can code, but some seven and eight year-olds can. This is a language that they are so familiar with, which is great.

Jo Sharpen: It is just popping up on their Facebook feeds as well. It is not even about accessing things that are age-appropriate or restricted. It is on their Facebook feeds. Try telling Facebook to take something inappropriate down; it is impossible.

Lynette Smith: What we are missing at the moment is something to counter-balance it. As we are all agreeing, there is so much out there and it is making such an impact, but we have nothing that is giving the alternative arguments, which is completely what we are saying about gender studies, for young women to feel so much better about themselves, to counterbalance it in some way. That has to be statutory.

Q123 Ben Howlett: With apps like Snapchat, I know there is a specific issue in relation to Snapchat, in that the person who has ended up screenshotting something is notified that that has been screenshotted, but still it enables the photo or the video to automatically be deleted after 10 seconds. Have you found a specific issue in relation to Snapchat?

Dr Vera-Gray: We did a couple of years ago, but even thinking about Snapchat is too late, to be honest. That has been and gone. It is now on to something else, but, a couple of years ago, yes. Before, Snapchat were not sending notifications for people when it had been screenshotted. We were having to talk to young people, saying, “You do understand that somebody can screenshot this and then send it around.”

Q124 Ben Howlett: If a child is sending a photograph of themselves, even if it does not get screenshotted, that is still sending a photograph or a video of themselves doing something, and there is virtually no way of knowing, because there is no record of it, that that is happening at all. The child, who might feel that that photograph is going out among friends and all the rest, is unaware of the potential consequences of that. Sorry to bring up Snapchat, but it is one that has come up time and time again at my surgeries as a main concern. I wonder if you have a specific message to that particular app that would end up stopping it from being used for those purposes.

Dr Vera-Gray: We need to take a step back and think why and how women and girls are creating these images. It is happening a lot through coercive, constant bullying and targeting to send these images. If we target the platform but not the behaviour, they are just going to find a different platform.

Marai Larasi: The tech provides the mechanism and the structure. The tech is not the thing that is actually causing this. We need to see the tech as facilitating. Yes, we can create structures to challenge how the tech is used, but we have to deal with the broader issues around what we need to do as a society to make sure we address how that boy is behaving so that he is not putting that young woman under pressure, and we actually look at the context in which a young woman feels that her only value is by sending that kind of image.

Q125 Chair: A couple of colleagues want to come in here but I just want to clarify that point. If we think back 15 years, before we had these items sitting right in front of us as part of our everyday lives, what would life for a 12 or 13 year-old have been like then? It was not a zero problem, but the problem was different. Characterise how it was different and how it is different today because of technology.

Marai Larasi: It is the relentless nature of streaming and access, et cetera. Most of us who are over a particular age can remember when somebody had to phone our homes to get access to us. After a particular point in the evening, our parents may not have allowed them to speak to us, or whatever the thing is. Now, you have constant access. Young women are reporting that sometimes, even going home, they are not able to get a good night's sleep because of the stuff that is coming through.

The ability to distribute an image certainly has made a difference. If you send something of yourself or somebody takes an image of you, that can be sent through to so many people in the space of a click. That definitely makes a difference. There is something about access and facilitation that we need to think about, and just the fact that young people do not very often have a space of reprieve. When somebody says, "Just turn it off", what they are saying to that young person is, "Turn off a part of your life", because for young people the virtual world is as real as the face-to-face world that we are operating in. It is not that way for every single young person but it is certainly much more of a reality for people under a particular age. Mind you, I use my tech a lot and I know a lot of older people who are using their tech, but we have not set up the structures to safeguard our young people in the ways that are needed.

Q126 Chair: We have not set up the structures and the technology augments what otherwise would have been something that people could more readily walk away from.

Marai Larasi: Yes. The violence was always there; the sexual harassment was always there. It has provided a mechanism for that to be amplified.

Q127 Jo Churchill: That is largely the answer to my question. One thing that worries me here is, having been a school governor for many years, and having four children in that 19-23 bracket, we are almost talking after the curve, because this was coming up at governors meetings being an issue in the early days of Facebook, and then we walked through WhatsApp and Twitter and so on. I wondered about your opinion, taking Lynette's point that it should be whole-school, of the approach that actually there is the broader thing in order to educate here about enabling people. You would not invite that bully into your home, and essentially you are when you open your phone, so there is that broader thing. If we are not careful, we are designing rules for today and, taking Fiona's point, we are already moving into tomorrow's sphere. I do not know what you think around the need to be flexible, because, if you are not careful, it is like trying to splat the rat.

Dr Vera-Gray: It is showing the need for urgent action, because we have been talking about this. I have been working in sexual violence prevention in England for 10 years. We have been talking about it for 10 years, but nothing has really changed. It has just been talking about it. Once we actually start doing some different things to see how we can shift it, then we will be in a better place. If we do not, we are just going to be back around the table in 10 years' time saying, "We were talking about this 20 years ago."

Sophie Bennett: It is really important to be clear that sexting and other forms of sexual harassment are not technology problems; they are sexism problems. The same attitudes drive online sexual harassment as drive offline. It is about tackling those attitudes that underpin violence against women and girls. That has to be our starting point.

Marai Larasi: It is important that we do not just problematise the tech, because, for a lot of us, the social space is quite important; and that we focus on how this is made and how this has put young people at risk, but we do not see this as a young person's problem. This is something that we are not addressing in our society more broadly. Older women are subject to sexual harassment routinely. We need to think about exactly what Sophie said: this is a problem about violence against women and girls.

Chair: It is, but I would interject there to say that we have always had pornography but we have had rules to limit access to it. Those rules—putting it on a top shelf or behind a counter—now do not work. There is a need to look at how you create a framework to handle the impact; I like your word "framework". That is key.

Q128 Angela Crawley: I wanted to respond to the point about the 24/7 accessibility and to highlight the work of Channel 4 and their *Cyberbully* film which tried to highlight that. It was probably more educational for parents than most young people, who could probably relate to it. The point I wanted to ask was: do you agree that the Government's response is simply going to take too long and is not innovative enough, for a start? Is it more reactive than proactive? Do think that there should be more of an onus on online forums like Facebook and Twitter, which are in that social media setting, rather than simply relying on teachers and schools?

Susie McDonald: It is about a joined-up approach from everybody. If we understand, as has been said multiple times now, that the root cause is gender inequality and sexism, and

if we all come from that one place, then everybody can play a part in shifting what is happening. It has to happen now. We are sitting on a ticking time bomb and we have to do something about it. Corporate organisations understand diversity and inclusion. They are looking at the language that their employees are using and how sexual violence can play a part in reducing their income and the wellbeing of their staff. We are not giving that priority to children and young people. Somebody recently said that within their organisation they have stopped calling young people “young people” and they have started calling them children, because anybody under 18 is a child and we must remember that we have a duty of care to safeguard them. Until we start looking at them as children, protecting them and not thinking about them so much as young adults where they are responsible for their own behaviours, we are not going to change anything else.

Jo Sharpen: The Government’s response needs to be a lot more joined-up as well. While you have the Home Office running a campaign nationally around teenage relationship abuse, the Department for Education is not backing that up by supporting that work in schools. Children are going to schools asking questions about that campaign and teachers are not sure how to respond appropriately. There needs to be a much more joined-up, cross-government response to this more generally.

Q129 Mims Davies: We recently touched briefly on the sexting issue and I found it interesting hearing that children—children we are calling them now, and not young people—could be online or doing something for three or four hours, and parents would not ask any questions, whereas, if they were at the precinct or hanging around with people that they did not know, then I certainly would naturally ask more questions. There is a feeling that there is a safe space out there. In terms of sexting and our kids being digital natives and creating a digital footprint in some ways, how much of that is a form of sexual harassment? What can be done about it? How much is that now a normal thing that you are expected to do as part of your sex education for yourself as you grow up, in essence, because everybody else is doing it?

Dr Vera-Gray: It is seen as being a normal thing because of all the things we are talking about it. Talking to girls about it, the way they get any sense of value is through how many boys are asking them for their pictures. Talking to boys about it, they are getting pressure from other boys about how many pictures they have. They are using it as a way to prove they are heterosexual, they are masculine and they are “the boy”, by getting as many pictures as they can. The harassment and pressure that they are getting they are then putting on to girls. Girls are growing up in a world where they are being told the only value they really have is how much men find them attractive, and so they are responding by sending images. Then, when the images are going viral or getting sent out through schools, we are having a response where teachers, parents, adults who are concerned come back to the girl and ask, “Why did you send the picture? This is your fault.”

The real problem with that is that it then connects. We know about the prevalence of sexual violence more broadly. Some 85,000 women and girls a year are raped in this country. As she grows up, if she experiences another form of sexual violence, she has learnt from a very early age that it is her fault; she did it; there must have been something about her behaviour. She is less likely to talk about it or to report it to the police. She is more likely to suffer long-term health and mental health impacts. That seems like quite a big run from an experience of sexting, but it is all feeding back to us putting responsibility

on girls for keeping themselves safe, rather than talking to men and boys about why they are feeling the need to prove their masculinity through the bodies of girls.

Susie McDonald: We have also heard from girls that they are using sexting as a way of not having to have sex. They feel that they are owning the right to their bodies by doing this thing instead of doing that thing. Often, hearing how young people use and take responsibility for things is really shocking. We need to be listening to young people about how they are building some resilience, they think, to dealing with certain issues.

Lynette Smith: I completely agree with what you are saying, to the extent that we now almost think, by the time they get to 14, 15 or 16, it is very difficult to re-educate because that is ingrained. That is almost on their hard drive. We spend a lot of time doing work in primaries on this, looking at the dangers of it and reality of what happens. That seems to be having a really good effect. We are getting in there before they can be drawn into that with older ones.

We are looking at this as a longitudinal study. We are trying to get Leeds University on board to come and look at what we are doing, because we are convinced that it is making a difference. Only time will tell with that, but it is very interesting.

Sophie Bennett: Sexting comes up time and time again in our workshops in schools. It is something that teachers feel completely ill-equipped to deal with. Often, they fall back on the question, “Why did you send that picture?” rather than asking, “Why did he pressurise you into doing so?”, as Fiona said. Making sure that that is covered as a core and compulsory element of teacher training is really important.

Jo Sharpen: We need to see the links between this and violence against women more broadly. So many of the young people I have worked with and counselled are threatened and coerced into sending these images, and then when they do they are threatened that they will be shared if they do not share more. They cannot just turn their phone off, like Marai said, because there is a consequence to that as well. This is just part of a broader continuum of different forms of violence against women and girls that they are subjected to daily.

Marai Larasi: It is also about understanding that, for some girls, there is a consequence of saying, “I do not want to send an image.” You can be slated publicly; you can be subject to further harassment; you can be physically harmed. Girls are experiencing different degrees and forms of pressure. You have the broader pressure of the school environment and the societal environment, but you can also have one-to-one pressure within a relationship or even within a friendship. That places girls in an incredibly vulnerable position, because they then get blamed for not complying or for complying. It always comes back down to, “Why did you do this and why have you failed to protect yourself?” as opposed to “Why have we not addressed why boys are behaving in that way?”

Q130 Mims Davies: I just wanted to pick up a couple of things that have come to me in surgeries as well. One of them is boys pressuring girls into sharing pictures because they have said that they are under pressure to collect those images or that they would harm themselves if they did not get pictures. It is the pressure that this person is vulnerable and would be even more vulnerable if I did not help them. That preys on the helping nature of girls and the impacts of that. The other thing is, going back to my previous point, where you

have celebrities sharing sexualised pictures and that being a normal way of showing themselves. In some ways, you are copying what seems to be a natural way to behave. That is not a helpful sphere for children to be growing up into. It must be adding to the normalisation of this: “Celebrities do it and get money for it so, why would I not want to do that when my friends are asking me to do it? Everybody does it and it is normal.” There are two prongs there.

Dr Vera-Gray: Pretty much exactly on that point, the media is then sharing those images, sometimes without consent, so, again, we focus back on the celebrities’ responsibility for creating those images. We are not tackling the broader society that is creating a demand for those images and is allowing the media to do this. Up-skirting and all those kinds of things are completely legal and completely fine. The messages that young people are getting are very mixed. We have to start thinking about how we are going to tell them that these things are wrong when they are operating in a world where they see that it is fine and acceptable as soon as you are past 18. We need to start challenging adult behaviour, as well as the behaviour of young people and children.

Marai Larasi: If we are going to have a go at Miley Cyrus, for example, which is one of the things that happened over the last few years, we have to think about how Miley got to that place. Why was it that she had a message that said that this is how you are valuable as a young woman? She had been routinely sexualised in the media from a really early age. There is something about the celebrities and responsibility for behaviour, but those celebrities are not operating in a vacuum. For example, young women who are operating in the music industry are under a huge amount of pressure to take it off. That is how you are seen. That is part of you creating yourself as a successful artist. Again, we have a broader societal issue around what value we place on girls’ lives and how we say, “As a woman, you are only valuable if you look a particular version of sexual”, because it is also very specific.

Q131 Chair: At a number of points, people have said tackling sexism is the root issue here, which is absolutely right, but, to change behaviour, sometimes you need to have consequences. We heard from young people two weeks ago who came in to talk to us about their experiences in this area. To what extent do you think there are real consequences there for people who engage in sexist behaviour, sexual harassment and sexual assaults in schools? How do we drive the behavioural change that we need to see there? Do we need to have more consequences? Obviously, one area of consequences is in the legal sphere. In the teaching that you do, do you need to be talking about the consequences of not treating people in the right way, as well as about empowering people, which is obviously the right way to do it?

It is interesting that, when we asked questions about racism, there was a real revulsion about the idea of people being racist in schools. Obviously, that may still happen but that was the young people’s reaction. There was not at all that reaction when we talked about sexist behaviour and sexual harassment. There are clear consequences for racism in schools: exclusion, permanent exclusion or whatever it might be. How do you feel about that in terms of the consequences for young people and talking to them about that, as well as the positive sides?

Marai Larasi: It is a really difficult comparison, because, when we put racism against sexism, that immediately excludes BME girls and their experiences of sexism, which are

generally racialised. I am the parent of a young black man and his experiences of racism were not necessarily dealt with particularly well by the school, so I understand why we do it, but it does not necessarily get to the heart of how victimisation and discrimination are still routine in our society. We still do not have the structures in place to deal with what is effectively the behaviour in schools of children. Those boys are also children and if we say, “We are going to criminalise you”, for example, we still have not dealt with the everyday micro-aggression and the routine nature of this sexual harassment.

Q132 Chair: It is consequences, is it not?

Marai Larasi: I am not saying it should not have consequences, but some of it has to be about intervening early enough and having conversations with young men that are sometimes about exclusion, yes, but also making sure that the consequences then do not lead to girls being re-victimised. It has to be really thought through, because we are dealing with children here and we have not developed our practices around sexually harmful behaviour appropriately in this country.

Susie McDonald: When we talk to young people about the fact that they could be found guilty of distributing child pornography if they send or distribute a sext, they are very shocked. The idea of being named a paedophile is shocking for them. There is that danger of criminalising children. What is the reality of that? Would a 15 year-old really end up in court and on that register? Perhaps, but it is not getting to the heart of the problem, which is preventing that distribution happening in the first place. Still, there will be people saying, “That girl, the victim, was to blame for what happened there, and that poor young man’s life has been destroyed because he received that image and sent it out.” It is not getting to the heart of the fact that the girl will be blamed for what happened originally.

Dr Vera-Gray: The connection between racism and what you are talking about is thinking about how those consequences may be meted out in racist ways. Young black boys might see that their sexual offending or sexual conduct could be seen as more dangerous and more serious, so they may be more likely to be excluded or to suffer the consequences than young white middle class boys, where it is seen as just a bit of banter or just something that boys do. We have to be mindful, when thinking about criminalisation or consequences, of how in the adult world it is not meted out in an equal way to sexual violence perpetrators. I would be particularly worried about that for young people.

Jo Sharpen: It is difficult to talk about consequences when we are not giving the young people the framework they need in the first place to understand why what they are doing is problematic, harmful, sexist and abusive in the first place. We need to join up that approach, rather than have the silos of the consequences without the information they need.

Marai Larasi: Another way of thinking about it is that there could be a consequence for schools for failing to do the right thing in terms of protecting children and young people, rather than the consequences always being down to the individuals. I am not saying you do not deal with individual behaviour, but we are doing this to our children and young people. Our boys are behaving in these ways because we have not intervened early enough and we have not helped to construct them as a different version of what a young

man could look like. We are culpable. Young people are simply acting in ways that we have taught them to act.

Q133 Jo Churchill: We are interested in how parents could be brought on board, because, in the evidence, they particularly referenced how they did not feel at all confident in the areas of internet and other things. Given the things you said, Lynette, about how important it is that this is collective and that it is all of us, how can parents be brought on board most effectively with strategies to tackle sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools? Could we just explore that for a little bit?

Lynette Smith: The best way to get parents involved is to start early. A few senior schools have tried to have parents evenings when we are bringing in an SRE programme and it is a total waste of time. By that time, teenagers do not want their parents going into school—heaven forbid. Especially in primary school, it is really easy to engage parents. They are more than willing to come along. They still see their children as vulnerable. Some parents will turn up wanting to protect their children from these horrible sex educators. It is a matter of getting them on board and them realising how society is going in terms of all this easy access to pornography.

It is quite an eye-opener for most parents. Look at the statistics for how many three to four year-olds now have their own tablets; 69% of five to seven year-olds have their own tablets, which you can lock down, but not many parents feel qualified to do that. When you get to the eight to 11 year-olds, 24% have their own smartphones, which are virtually impossible to lock down. Some parents say, “My children do not do this; they do not do that.” I say, “Well, have your children got friends?” “Yes.”

Q134 Jo Churchill: May I ask you an adjunct question, which sort of links into Ruth’s point from earlier? One thing that worries me with early years in particular is lack of school readiness. Very often, there is a loss of strength in young children’s hands, because they are given iPads and they do not have dextral skills with pens, pencils and so on. Is there some broader parental education that we perhaps need to be looking at here?

Lynette Smith: I do not know, really.

Jess Phillips: So many parents have told their kids, “Put the iPad down.” You are just not going to win, because you want peace and quiet. It is the truth.

Q135 Chair: Lynette, are parents aware of the issues that some children encounter around gaming? This has come up today, but it came up in the session with young people last week too.

Lynette Smith: A lot of them have no idea of the content.

Q136 Chair: I am not talking about content; I am talking about online gaming where they may come into contact with other individuals. There are supposed to be protections in place, but it seems that those protections can be circumvented.

Lynette Smith: Are you talking about age-appropriate games?

Chair: No, I am talking about if you are playing online with another individual who can then approach you.

Lynette Smith: That is what I am talking about as well. A lot of parents would perceive that as okay, because they are age-appropriate; it is five to eight or eight to 11. I remind parents that, just because they consider it age-appropriate, not everybody on that gaming site will be aged eight to 11 or five to eight. Wherever children gather, whether it is online or in the real world, paedophiles will gather. That is the way that it is. Even though it is in the media, parents are so unaware of this.

Dr Vera-Gray: Given the prevalence of sexual violence more broadly, parenting responsibilities still, unfortunately, a lot of the time, fall to women and the mothers, and a lot of women are dealing with domestic violence, with histories of childhood sexual abuse, with sexual violence, with sexual harassment themselves, so expecting them to then be able to respond and do something about it with their children is a little bit too much. It is about trying to engage, but also something coming from higher up in education around targeting kids that way.

Jo Sharpen: I was thinking about that, because schools are often the one place that women who are being abused are allowed to go without the perpetrator accompanying them. It is a safe space for them. It was in a school yesterday in London, working with them to develop a way to make their school more supportive for parents who are experiencing abuse, so that they can actually disclose their own experiences of abuse within the school. It has to be part and parcel of that. Another issue is the fact that parents are still able to opt their children out of these kinds of lessons when they do take place, which is really problematic and something we have been trying to challenge for a long time.

Q137 Jo Churchill: Is that something to do with the comment earlier about how it is perceived? Perhaps we should be talking about relationship and emotional, sexual education rather than sex relationship education.

Jo Sharpen: When you talk about relationships and things like that, schools and parents relax a little bit more. When you get them talking about sex and abuse, they freak out. They think it is opening a can of worms.

Lynette Smith: The one thing that really took me back when I started doing this volume of parents evenings—I do about three a week—is that, almost without exception, at every parents evening somebody will come up at the end of the evening, and that is somebody who has managed to get through the door, and say, “I hear what you are saying, but I really struggle with this because I myself was sexually abused.” It really takes the lid off how widespread this is. If we are expecting parents to take on board sex education with their children, and they have their own baggage and background to deal with, that is really a huge task. Like I say, it is probably one per meeting. I think of how many have not come to that meeting because they have seen the word “sex” on it. We are British. It scares us.

Q138 Maria Caulfield: You have touched on this already by talking about what the Government could do, but I just want to ask what one recommendation you would like this Committee to take forward in order to reduce the levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools.

Dr Vera-Gray: You cannot see these issues in isolation. That is a bit of a difficult question to ask, because the one thing is to stop seeing it as there being one thing that is

going to fix it. It is a bit of an annoying answer. If there was one thing, on the other side of that, it would be investment in long-term attitudinal change campaigns. It is going to be a long-term investment, it is going to cost money and we are not going to see the results very quickly, but we need to do this now so that in 10 years' time we are not back talking about the same things.

Q139 Chair: What would be a good example of an attitudinal campaign that has really worked?

Dr Vera-Gray: I do not know. Longitudinal-wise, I want a big amount time to think about it, but the Home Office's This is Abuse campaign was brilliant because—we were talking about this earlier—one of the things they did was to fund Jo and colleagues to work with disclosures that are going to come up from young people. It needs to happen alongside the specialist sexual violence sector, so you have the messages out there but you also have somewhere for young people to go and for parents, adults and anyone that needs to start talking. It is investment in the specialist sexual violence sector as well as long-term attitudinal change.

Q140 Chair: We know how to do it. We have done it before.

Dr Vera-Gray: It just costs money and it does not happen very quickly.

Jo Sharpen: When you increase awareness, you also increase risks. Unfortunately, although the new campaign has been working quite well with young people, it does not have any support attached to it. The budget was not there this year for that. That worries me, because young people are seeing the new adverts, they are suddenly recognising that they might be in an abusive relationship and they are not sure where to go for support because there is not that support element to this campaign. It has to always come hand-in-hand, or you are just increasing risk for young people.

Lynette Smith: Start early. It is just so much easier for everybody: for the children, for teachers, for parents, and you get those benefits.

Sophie Bennett: My one recommendation would be to introduce a whole package of measures—is that cheating?—including ensuring that tackling sexism is a core and compulsory part of initial teacher training, but also that there are continued professional development opportunities for teachers. Ending sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools should be a key priority for the Department for Education. It should make that clear and communicate that to schools through issuing national guidance, including things like practical advice on how to implement a whole-school approach. It is also really important that tackling sexism is included in Ofsted's assessment criteria.

Jo Sharpen: It has to be a whole-school approach. If we are recommending that schools need to teach SRE, it should not be about just teaching SRE; it should be about embodying that ethos within the whole school. Our prevention platform has everything that you would need to be able to do that. It has already been done. It is already out there. It has to be about teacher training. It has to be about policies that reflect it, so bullying policies need to reflect sexual bullying, for example. It has to be about campaigning, participation of young people, institutionalising the whole thing, making it a cross-curricular activity, not just something that is in PSHE, working with local specialist services, which are also

so underfunded to do this work. It has to be a whole joined-up package and not seeing those things in silos. Again, Ofsted is so important within that as well.

Susie McDonald: Wonderfully, we are all giving the same recommendations, so that is less complicated. We need to put a value on it, first of all. Then my five-pronged approach would be about training. Everybody in schools need to be trained so they understand what is at the root of this problem. Policies within schools need to involve and include sexual violence. It needs to be monitored properly, so calling it sexual misconduct is very vague and it is not good enough. We need to listen to the views of young people. I would welcome any policymaker to come in and listen during a workshop to how young people engage in the issue. I know you had the hearing last week. Young people really get it and are able to quickly articulate what is wrong and what to do about it. Finally, resource it: schools really like working with outside specialist organisations but, because they are operating in deficits now, they cannot afford to work with those agencies. If they are operating alone, they are going to really struggle with that.

Lynette Smith: I have done mine: start early.

Marai Larasi: I just want to echo everything that has already been said, but also add that the Government have created obligations on schools to tackle radicalisation. For us, it is really painful that the everyday terrorisation of young women and girls within schools is not being taken seriously. This is something about investing in the whole-school approach and ensuring that that is part of the inspection framework, because we need a structure where schools are held accountable around this. We do not want this to be seen as an additional burden for schools. We want it to be seen as an opportunity for schools to do the thing that they are committed to doing, which is actually making a difference for children and young people. It is about how we do that in a way that is sensitive as well as robust.

Q141 Jess Phillips: None of you said compulsory SRE. Is that just a given?

Jo Sharpen: Yes, in the whole-school approach.

Jess Phillips: I was just checking.

Marai Larasi: The whole-school approach includes compulsory SRE.

Q142 Chair: Is there anything anybody else wants to add?

Susie McDonald: Can I just say something? A 13-year-old girl said to me two weeks ago during a workshop, “Can I swear, Miss?” I said, “In context, yes.” She said she had read somewhere this quote: “Men fuck and women get fucked.” She said, “That is true, isn’t it, Miss?” I just thought it is so damning that, in 2016, that is how 13-year-old girls feel.

Chair: I cannot thank you enough for your very frank and insightful evidence today. This format has worked extremely well; it has meant we have been able to have a very good and free-flowing conversation. As I said when I started, I know it takes a long time to prepare for and come along to these sessions and you have given up a morning of your week, and we really appreciate that. Our role is to try to identify issues that need to go up the Government’s agenda and to really question whether policies are effective. Your evidence

today has really helped us in our deliberations on this matter. I hope you will look at our report with interest when it is published. Thank you.