

Factsheet

The Gender Equality Duty, Education & Violence Against Women

What is the Gender Equality Duty?

The Gender Equality Duty (GED) is a new law that came into force in April 2007 requiring all public bodies in England, Wales and Scotland to take steps to **promote equality of opportunity between women and men** and **eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment** in all their functions. This is known as the 'general duty' and will apply to some voluntary and private organisations as well¹. It is enforceable by judicial review proceedings and anyone can take this action.

Many public bodies (including schools, colleges and universities) also have specific duties which include:

- Setting gender equality objectives published in Gender Equality Schemes, and implementing them within three years.
- Gathering relevant information and consulting with employees, service users and others to set those objectives (including pupils, students and parents).
- Carrying out gender impact assessments on all current and new policies.
- Reviewing and revising the Gender Equality Scheme at least every three years.
- Reporting on progress against the Scheme annually.

The specific duties are enforceable by the Equality and Human Rights Commission only, although inspectorates and regulatory bodies should monitor performance against the duties. There are statutory Codes of Practice for England and Wales and for Scotland, as well as guidance for specific sectors (e.g. education) and on issues such as carrying out gender impact assessments and procurement. These are available on the Commission's website.

There are also public sector duties to promote equality on the grounds of race and disability.

Violence against women

Violence against women includes rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, sexual harassment, stalking, trafficking, sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and crimes in the name of honour. It is both a cause and consequence of women's inequality and can have a devastating impact on individual victims, affecting their mental and physical health, as well as employment and educational opportunities. Sexual bullying and harassment is common in schools, however VAW is also a serious problem for society more broadly - government research puts the cost of domestic violence alone in England and Wales at £23 billion a year².



The following statistics give an idea of the nature, scale and impact of violence against women:

- Almost half of women in England & Wales experience domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking during their lifetime³.
- In a survey for the National Union of Teachers, around half of respondents had witnessed sexist language or bullying⁴.
- 42% of young people know girls who have been hit by a boyfriend and 40% of young people know girls who have been coerced or pressurised to have sex by a boyfriend. Most don't think there is enough information to deal with these issues⁵.
- Over 75% of 11-12 year old boys think that women get hit if they make men angry, and boys more than girls of all ages believe that some women deserve to be hit⁶.
- 85% of forced marriage cases involve female victims⁷. The majority are under 24 years old and some are as young as ten years old.
- It is estimated that 7000 girls in the UK are currently at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM)⁸.

How can the Gender Equality Duty address violence against women and girls?

Here are just some of the ways that the new law can address violence against women and girls:

- Schools, colleges and universities should ensure they have an accurate picture of the experiences of young people, support students who are victims of gender-based violence and deal with perpetrators appropriately. They will need to challenge attitudes and beliefs around violence.
- Colleges and universities could campaign around alcohol, safety and consent to sex, particularly during freshers week and students union nights that encourage drinking.
- Schools and colleges should include actions in their Gender Equality Schemes to address forms of violence most common among young women including FGM and forced marriage.
- Young people should be taught about healthy relationships and consent to sex as part of PSHE. Attitudes about healthy relationships are formed young, so primary schools should ensure they deliver education about healthy and equal relationships.
- Policies on teenage pregnancy, drugs and alcohol should address the link with violence.
- Schools, colleges and universities must have policies on sexual bullying and harassment, and provide support for children living with domestic violence. Existing anti-bullying policies must be adapted to refer explicitly to sexism and define clearly sexual bullying.

1 The Gender Equality Duty is contained in the Equality Act 2006 and applies to all bodies carrying out 'public functions'.

2 S Walby, *The cost of domestic violence*, Department for Trade and Industry, 2004.

3 S Walby and J Allen *Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey*, Home Office, 2004.

4 A Serious Business: An NUT survey of teachers' experience of sexism and harassment in schools and colleges www.nut.org.uk.

5 ICM polling for End Violence Against Women published in November 2006.

6 A Mullender et al, *Children's perspectives on domestic violence*, Sage, 2003.

7 *Forced Marriage: A wrong not a right*, Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2005.

8 Source: FORWARD.

To download ***Tools for Change***, a toolkit of factsheets and enforcement letters, and for more information on violence against women go to www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk.

For more information on the Gender Equality Duty go to www.equalityhumanrights.com.