

Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy

PAPER 8

Education and gender equality

Marion Sharples, November 2019

This is a preliminary paper on education to inform the Commission's discussion on public services in Belfast. It summarises much of the Women's Budget Group recent work on education. A full paper on an education system in a gender-equal economy will be produced later on in the Commission period. As much of WBG work on education thus far has focused on education in England, this paper focuses primarily on England. The paper will be expanded to cover the other 3 nations of the UK over the course of the Commission.

Disclaimer: This paper was written by a Women's Budget Group staff member to inform the Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy and should not be taken to represent the views of the Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy.

The education system in the UK is highly gendered. Firstly, women make up the majority of those working in education, but are concentrated in lower-paid roles such as teaching assistants, and are under-represented at management levels. Secondly, women face the brunt of cuts to the education system, both as employees facing job cuts and, in their role as primary carers of children, having to manage cuts to the school day or fight for support of children with special education needs and disabilities in a context of gravely insufficient funding. Thirdly, schools, colleges and universities are the sites where children and young people gain both education and much of their knowledge on how to navigate adulthood, which has huge implications for gender equality throughout their lives. What is deemed important enough to teach children about? What behaviour is acceptable between peers? Who is in charge, and why? What career paths are open to/intended for whom? All of these questions have significant gendered implications.¹ This paper outlines some of the key issues in the education system and presents some proposals for change.

1. What are some of the problems in the current education system?

Funding for education

- Funding for education was cut drastically between 2010 and 2019. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) reports that, between 2010-11 and 2015-16, education spending across the UK fell by 14% in real terms, taking it back to the same level as 2005-06 and to a similar share of national income as in the 1990s.²
- Education saw the biggest budget boost in the 2019 Spending Review, with a further £7.1 billion allocated across England to schools by 2022/23, £400 million to Further Education (FE) and £66 million to early-years education. This is a very welcome boost to the education

¹ An interesting example of a current scheme to actively challenge gender inequality at primary school is Lifting Limits, a pilot scheme run by a non-profit in five schools in Camden, North London, which encourages teachers and pupils to apply a gender lens to everything they do in the classroom – from language used to wall displays, books used and the curriculum. For coverage of the pilot scheme see: <https://amp.theguardian.com/education/2019/nov/12/clean-five-schools-of-sexism-teachers-pupils-gender-equality>, and for more on Lifting Limits itself, see: <https://www.liftinglimits.org.uk/>

² Institute for Fiscal Studies (2017) *Long-run comparisons of spending per pupil across different stages of education* (<http://bit.ly/2zF4pA1>) p9

budget, but as ever, the devil is in the detail, so the effectiveness of this funding boost will depend on where the money is allocated.

Funding for schools

- Looking specifically at schools in England, cuts since 2010 equate to ‘the biggest real-terms fall in school spending per pupil for at least the last 30 years’, according to the IFS.³
- Regarding the recent funding boost promised in the 2019 Spending Review, while the additional funding is very welcome, there are concerns that the money allocated to schools in England for the next year, a further £2.6bn, will not yet be enough to reverse the 8% in cuts since 2010 (for that £4.1bn would be needed).⁴ The Chancellor’s commitment to increase funding for schools that have ‘historically been underfunded’ will mostly benefit schools in more affluent areas, with pupils with higher levels of attainment and with less English language requirements.⁵ It may mean that the additional funding will not benefit the most disadvantaged children, who are likely to be at schools that have received additional funding because of increased needs and therefore not been the “underfunded” ones.
- The implications of the cuts to schools’ budgets since 2010 are far-reaching. A 2017 poll of head teachers by the Sutton Trust found that 80% had cut the number of teachers or teaching assistants as a result of funding cuts and almost a third (30%) said they were using money from the pupil premium, intended to support the most disadvantaged pupils, to plug gaps in their school’s budget. Schools with disadvantaged intakes were more likely to report cuts to staff numbers.⁶
- These job cuts are disproportionately affecting teaching assistants and support staff in schools across England: there is now just one teaching assistant for 67 pupils in secondary schools. Children with special educational needs and disabilities rely heavily on teaching assistants, so they’ll be suffering the most as a result of these devastating staff cuts.⁷ And these job cuts are not borne equally by women and men – 91% of teaching assistants in England were women in 2016.⁸
- Earlier this year, 26 schools in England, most of them in Birmingham, were found to have reduced school hours in order to cut costs.⁹
- Similarly, cuts to local council budgets, combined with an increase in the number of children with complex and significant needs, mean that support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities across England is falling far short of what is needed.¹⁰
- Moreover, these cuts have knock-on impacts for the primary carers of pupils.¹¹ Since women tend to be the primary carers of children, the work of trying to get additional help, taking children to appointments, appealing against decisions and so on is largely carried out by women. This can be seen in the disproportionate number of women (73%) applying for Legal

³ IFS (2018) *2018 Annual Report on Education Spending in England* (<https://bit.ly/2D5G3EW>)

⁴ IFS (2019) 2019 annual report on education spending in England: schools (<http://bit.ly/2lztj0Q>), in WBG (2019) *An End to Austerity? What the Spending Review means for women* <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/FINAL-Spending-review-response-06-09-19.pdf>

⁵ Education Policy Institute (2 August 2019) ‘Analysis: “Levelling up” - what it really means for school funding’ (<http://bit.ly/2m2Ev6v>)

⁶ <http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/pupil-premium-polling-2017/>

⁷ <https://neu.org.uk/schools-forced-cut-teachers-and-teaching-assistants-posts-make-ends-meet>

⁸ <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/teachers-leaving-faster-than-ever-and-10-other-school-workforce-findings/>

⁹ <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/more-schools-could-be-forced-to-cut-teaching-hours-warns-union/>

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/nov/10/councils-face-crisis-special-needs-education-funding> and

<https://www.teachers.org.uk/news-events/conference-2018/sen-funding-in-crisis>

¹¹ https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/centres/chrp/publications/unravelling_equality_full.pdf

Aid for education-related cases, such as appeals against exclusions or admissions, bullying, special educational needs or disability discrimination.¹²

- More than eight out of 10 teachers say mental health among pupils in England has deteriorated in the past two years – with rising reports of anxiety, self-harm and even cases of suicide – against a backdrop of inadequate support in schools.
 - In a survey of 8,600 school leaders, teachers and support workers, 83% said they had witnessed an increase in the number of children in their care with poor mental health, rising to 90% among students in colleges.
 - School staff who took part in the survey were also asked to pinpoint what hinders them from properly supporting young people experiencing mental health issues. They blamed real-terms funding cuts (57%), cuts to teaching assistants (51%) an “exam factory” assessment system (53%) and problems accessing external support services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) (64%).¹³

Teachers’ pay and the gender pay gap

- Teaching is a profession dominated by women. Across the UK, 85% of primary teachers are women and 61% of secondary teachers are women.¹⁴ Teaching is also relatively low paid compared to similar professions. NASUWT, the teachers’ union, reported that in 2015 the salaries of comparable professions were 20.2% above those of secondary school teachers, and 32.4% ahead of average earnings for primary school teachers.¹⁵
- In September 2019, the government announced that salaries for new teachers would rise to £30,000 by 2022-23.¹⁶ While this move is most welcome, staff recruitment and retention remain an issue. Recruitment of teachers in secondary schools fell in 2017/2018 from the previous academic year, meaning that almost 4,000 teaching posts went unfilled.¹⁷ Teachers have had to make up for the shortfall in staff by teaching larger classes and by working longer hours. So, while the announcement in the Spending Review to increase teacher starter salaries is welcome, action is also needed on hours and class sizes to improve teachers’ working conditions and address the retention crisis.
- The average pay for all women teachers in all state-funded schools in England, including academies, is £2,900 less than for their male counterparts every year (£37,700 compared to £40,660).¹⁸ The main reason for this is the far greater likelihood of a male teacher securing promotion, especially to headships. In all state-funded primary & nursery schools in England, 14% of all teachers are men, but 27% of head teachers are men. In secondary schools, 36% of teachers are men, yet 62% of head teachers are men.¹⁹
- The rise of academies - which are not accountable to local communities, parents, or councils - is indicative of the recent marketisation of the school system across England. The gender pay gap in academies is particularly stark: this year’s gender pay gap reporting revealed that

¹² Ministry of Justice, 2010. Legal Aid reform: scope changes at p.46 [online] November 2010 Available at: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/docs/eia-scope.pdf> [Accessed 8 April 2011]

¹³ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/apr/17/mental-health-young-people-england-crisis-point-teacher-school-leader-survey>

¹⁴ OECD figures (2017) https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=EAG_PERS_SHARE_AGE

¹⁵ NASUWT (2017) *Pay gap between teaching and other professions harming education* (<http://bit.ly/2lp1580>)

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/30000-starting-salaries-proposed-for-teachers>

¹⁷ Department for Education (2019) *Statistics: initial teacher training* (<http://bit.ly/2lxqmOu>)

¹⁸ Department for Education (20 July 2017), *School Workforce in England: November 2016*, London, Main tables: SFR21/2017 Table 9a www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2016

¹⁹ Department for Education (20 July 2017), *School Workforce in England: November 2016*, London, Table 5 www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2016

women were paid 55p for every £1 that men earned at both the Delta Academies Trust and the White Horse Federation, two of the biggest academy trusts in England. The gender pay gap widened between 2018 and 2019 in 10 of the largest 16 academy trusts.²⁰ An element of the gender pay gap within a marketised education system is the bonus gender pay gap: The Kemnal Academies Trust (TKAT) had the largest bonus gender pay gap, with women paid just 14p for every £1 earned in bonuses by men. Multi-academy trusts have been widely criticised for high executive pay, with 23 trusts paying their chief executives more than £200,000 in 2018. Dan Moynihan, CEO of the 43-school Harris Federation, topped the list with a salary of £440,000.²¹

Further education

- Further education colleges and sixth forms have faced the largest cuts in recent years. In England, between 2010–11 and 2018–19, spending per student fell by 12% in real terms in 16–18 colleges and by 23% in school sixth forms.²² These cuts hit women hardest as they are the majority of students in further education, and further education has traditionally been a route for women returners to work to gain new skills.
- In 2016/17, women made up 54% of all students on apprenticeships in England.²³ However, most women are on apprenticeships that lead to low-paid occupations. For example, 84% of those on health and social care apprenticeships in 2016/7 and 93.1% of those on childcare apprenticeship programmes were girls or women. In comparison, men made up 97% of those on engineering apprenticeships and 78% of students on STEM degree apprenticeships.^{24 25}

Higher education

- Universities follow the pattern of all sectors of education in paying women staff less than men, on average, and in the same grades, as well as having fewer women at senior level.²⁶ The average gender pay gap in universities in 2018 is 15.9% with 30 universities reporting a 20% pay gap.²⁷ White academic staff at the UK's universities and colleges were also found to earn £7,000 more than their black peers, or 14 per cent more.²⁸ There are 25 Black women professors in the UK.²⁹
- There is also a gendered impact of the move from the state funding of university study to the introduction of tuition fees in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which have been hiked considerably over the past two decades, and particularly the widespread funding of these fees through loans – and only loans, after maintenance grants were scrapped by the government in 2015. Research by the University and College Union demonstrates that, because of the gender pay gap in graduate occupations and time out of the workforce due to unpaid caring, women pay a significantly larger proportion of their income back in loan

²⁰ <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/englands-largest-academy-trusts-see-gender-pay-gap-widen/>

²¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/28/women-earn-50p-for-1-made-by-men-at-some-multi-academy-trusts>

²² IFS (2019) 2019 annual report on education spending in England <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14369>

²³ HOC (2018) Briefing paper Apprenticeship Statistics England <https://bit.ly/2J2UXeo>

²⁴ All figures taken from Skills Funding Agency (2017) *FE data library: apprenticeships* (<http://bit.ly/2hnLIZ5>)

²⁵ HOC (2018) Briefing Paper Apprenticeship Statistics England <https://bit.ly/2J2UXeo>

²⁶ UCU (2017) *UCU names and shames colleges and universities that hold down women's pay* (<http://bit.ly/2iR5Zxo>)

²⁷ THES (6 Apr 2018) 'Gender pay gap: how much less are women paid at your university?' (<https://bit.ly/2JnyQ29>)

²⁸ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/university-black-minority-ethnic-pay-gap-academics-professors-ucu-staff-a9155451.html>

²⁹ https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10075/Staying-Power/pdf/UCU_Rollock_February_2019.pdf

repayments than men, and over a longer period of time.³⁰ The current interest rate for student loans for students who started their studies after 2012 is 5.4%, which is higher than the average interest rate on a mortgage.³¹

Subject segregation by gender

- Closing the gender gap in STEM is critical to addressing the skills shortage in STEM subjects.³² In 2019, for the first time ever, more girls than boys took A levels in science subjects in England, which is an excellent step towards closing this gap. However, this is not equally spread among sciences, as more girls (63%) took Biology, slightly more girls than boys took Chemistry, and more boys (77%) took Physics. Boys also continued to dominate computing and maths.³³
- In 2017/18, women made up 35% of those studying degrees in STEM subjects, with the starkest contrast in engineering and technology, with women making up just 19% of students.³⁴
- This feeds through into the labour market where women make up only 22% of those working in STEM. In engineering the proportion of women is again particularly low (12%).³⁵

Sexual harassment in schools and universities

In 2016, the Women and Equalities Select Committee released a report into sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, finding that:

- almost a third (29%) of 16-18 year old girls say they have experienced unwanted sexual touching at school
- nearly three-quarters (71%) of all 16-18 year old boys and girls say they hear terms such as "slut" or "slag" used towards girls at schools on a regular basis³⁶

Further evidence is notable:

- Girlguiding's Girls' Attitudes Survey 2017 found 64% of girls aged 13-21 had experienced sexual violence or sexual harassment at school or college in the past year. This included 39% having their bra strap pulled by a boy and 27% having their skirts pulled up within the last week.³⁷
- Over a third (37%) of female students and 6% of male students at mixed-sex schools have personally experienced some form of sexual harassment at school.³⁸

³⁰ London Economics (2017) *The impact of student loan repayments on graduate taxes* (<http://bit.ly/2yVTpRz>)

³¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/student-loans-interest-and-repayment-threshold-announcement>

³² <https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/resources/2016/11/women-in-the-stem-workforce-2016>

³³ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/aug/15/female-students-outnumber-males-in-a-level-science-entries>

³⁴ <https://www.stemwomen.co.uk/blog/2019/09/women-in-stem-percentages-of-women-in-stem-statistics>

³⁵ <https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/statistics/2018-workforce-statistics/>

³⁶ Women and Equalities Select Committee (September 2016) *Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools report* (<http://bit.ly/2cl5jVO>)

³⁷ Girlguiding Girls' Attitude Survey 2017, in Department for Education (2018): *Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges: Advice for governing bodies, proprietors, headteachers, principals, senior leadership teams and designated safeguarding leads* (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/719902/Sexual_violence_and_sexual_harassment_between_children_in_schools_and_colleges.pdf) p6

³⁸ NEU and UK Feminista (2017) 'It's just everywhere': a study on sexism in schools and how we tackle it (<https://ukfeminista.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Report-its-just-everywhere.pdf>) in Department for Education (2018): *Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges: Advice for governing bodies, proprietors, headteachers, principals, senior leadership teams and*

In terms of universities, a BBC investigation in 2019 found that reports of rape, sexual assault and harassment at UK universities have trebled in three years. Universities told the BBC they recorded 1,436 allegations of sexual harassment or sexual violence against students in 2018-19 - up from 476 in 2016-17. The data, from 124 of 157 universities, shows there is a chronic lack of robust systems to prevent or respond to sexual violence.³⁹

2. What are possible solutions to these issues?

- Plug **funding** gaps in the education system: £12.6bn for schools, £1.2bn for 16-19 education, £330m for early years provision, and £1.7bn for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).⁴⁰
- End the forced academisation process, outlined in Section 7 of the Education and Adoption Act 2016
- **Significantly increase teachers' salaries** and particularly teaching assistants and support staff, in recognition of the work they do, particularly the essential support for marginalised children and those with SEND
- Create **promotion pipelines** for women teachers to progress to senior leadership and headship positions, alongside many of the recommendations in other Commission discussions around **flexible working, equal parental leave and childcare provision**
- Create **funded apprenticeship schemes** targeted specifically at encouraging girls and women into STEM apprenticeships, and boys and men into health and social care apprenticeships
- **Abolish or drastically reduce tuition fees** across the UK, and bring administration of any student loans system back in-house
- Develop a system of **life-long learning** opportunities which would give women the opportunity to update existing skills or retrain. A life-long training infrastructure could be provided by a combination of public sector education and by employers giving back to the community by contributing to training – for example by:
 - Supporting businesses that provide excellent training with back-up college courses; and possibly subsidising their training if the skills they provide are transferable
 - Requiring employers who don't train to raise their game or pay into a central fund (more than the current training levy).
 - Particularly targeting women who currently take unskilled work over skilled, because it is more compatible with caring responsibilities
 - Ensuring childcare is provided alongside training programmes
- Implement a **zero-tolerance policy** to sexual harassment and sexual violence across all schools, colleges and universities, including with **compulsory training** for all teachers and trainee teachers
- Introduce external **careers guidance** for all students, from providers audited for gender bias
- Ensure that sexism, misogyny, consent, and violence against women and girls are fundamental elements of the new **Relationships Education** (primary schools) and Relationships and Sex Education (secondary schools), which are legal requirements as of September 2020 across England

designated safeguarding leads

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/719902/Sexual_violence_and_sexual_harassment_between_children_in_schools_and_colleges.pdf p6

³⁹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-49893389>

⁴⁰ <https://neu.org.uk/funding/empty-promise-boris>