Improving Gender Balance and Equalities – Policy Review Guidance

As part of your work towards becoming a gender balanced school, you may want to examine existing policies within the school, or consider creating new policies where there could be gaps. This guidance has been created to support you in undertaking a policy review for your school, outlining the different steps involved and highlighting the areas you might want to focus on.

There are a number of policies where messages around gender stereotypes and equality of opportunity could be embedded. These may include:

- Uniform Policy
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Inclusion and Equality Policy
- Wellbeing and Care Policy

Stage 1 – Form an Action Group

The first step towards reviewing school policies from a gender balance and equalities perspective is to be inclusive of students and staff through forming an Action Group that can lead on this work. This should consist of both students and staff from the school with a focus in inclusivity and diversity. There should be more students engaged than staff to ensure that it is pupil led. Key members include:

- Someone to lead the group who can implement policy changes
- Students from the school (of various age and stage, the group should be inclusive and ensure that it is accessible to young people who might not normally put themselves forward for these types of opportunities).
- Someone from the wider school community

When the group has been formed, it might be worthwhile spending some time examining gender stereotypes and equality to help the members of the group understand the relevance of work around challenging gender stereotypes and how these stereotypes can influence their choices, beliefs, self-perception and perception of others. You can find ideas for activities here: https://bit.ly/2KRODWn

Steps:

- ❑ Recruit students and staff for Action Group (between 6-12 members).
- ❑ Deliver workshop on gender stereotypes, unconscious bias and equality to members.
- ❑ Establish working agreement with group.
- ❑ Identify goals and create plan.

Stage 2 – Review Existing Policies and Identify Gaps

When the members of the Action Group feel confident, ask them to review some of the schools existing policies where messages around gender and gender stereotypes might sit, and prioritise which of the policies they want to focus on first. To support with this decision, we recommend that your school has undertaken some of the actions listed in the 'practical places to start' guidance, such as an environmental audit and pupil survey, as this can help identify the priority areas to focus on.

The members of the Action Group may also feel that there are gaps within your policy library that could be met with the development of a new policy.
(It may make sense to focus on a shorter or more straightforward policy first, to familiarise the students with the process, such as the uniform policy. Or they may feel that there is another policy which needs reviewed more urgently. The young people should lead this.)

Steps:

❑ Present group with school policies and give adequate time for discussion and review.
❑ Prioritise areas to focus on.
❑ Identify gaps in policy library.

Stage 3: Writing your Policy

Once you have looked at the findings from your wider consultation(s) and audit(s) and have decided on which policy(ies) to focus on, you can start reviewing your policy.

If you are looking at an existing policy, there are a number of steps you can take to help identify how to enhance it and where messages around equality of opportunity and challenging gender stereotypes might fit. These could be:

- Examining the language and considering how it might be unnecessarily gendered (e.g. in the uniform policy, it may be split into 'boys' and 'girls' uniforms. The gendered lists could be removed and instead have one list with the various uniform options for all).
- Identifying language that may discriminate against one gender over another (e.g. if the uniform policy states 'skirts of an appropriate length').
- Making clear statements about measures you will put in place to address any imbalance and inequality (e.g. in the anti-bullying policy, describing how incidents of sexism and other discriminatory behaviours will be addressed).
- Naming the impact of gender stereotyping within relevant policies (e.g. within health and wellbeing policy, or within equality and inclusion policies. Relevant connections can be made between gender stereotyping and impacts on mental health, body image, subject accessibility and equality of opportunity. You can find out more about the impact here: https://bit.ly/2tl0Mgt).
- Ensure that protected characteristics[1] are mentioned in relevant policies (e.g. equality ad inclusion, health and wellbeing, anti-bullying).

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[1] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/4

When reviewing your policies and considering where there might be gaps to create new policies, you can use existing policy and practice frameworks such as:

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- The Equality Act (2010) and corresponding advice for schools: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/315587/Equality_Act_Advice_Final.pdf
- Education Scotland's Equality Policy: https://education.gov.scot/Documents/Education-Scotland-Equality-Policy-October-2017.pdf
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/what-we-do/childrens-rights/united-nations-convention-of-the-rights-of-the-child
- Public Sector Equality Duty: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149
- Curriculum for Excellence (particularly Health and Wellbeing): https://education.gov.scot/Documents/health-and-wellbeing-eo.pdf
- GIRFEC: https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/
- Scottish Government Equally safe Strategy: https://www.gov.scot/policies/violence-against-women-and-girls/equally-safe-strategy/

Stage 4 – Consultation

Once your group has amended or written a draft of the new policy, it is important to gather feedback from both those that will be recipients of the policy, those that are involved in the implementation of it and any external partners/experts as well as parents/carers. This could be done via email, focus group or survey. Questions should explore whether:

- The policy meets identified issues in the school
- The policy sets out clear ways to challenge gender stereotypes and promote equality of opportunity
- The policy is inclusive and accessible (can those that are recipients of the policy easily understand it?)

Recommended changes should be reviewed and implemented if appropriate/required.

Stage 5 – Roll out/Communication of Policy

When you are happy with your policy, it is time to communicate it to the rest of the school community. You can consider how you do this effectively and in a positive way, that maximises engagement. This should link in with on-going work around gender balance and equalities within the school.

Steps:

- ❑ Launch the policy
- ❑ Communicate the procedures to staff, children and young people and parents and carers.
- ❑ Make a plan to ensure that you are consistently raising awareness of the key themes in the policy
- ❑ Highlight the existence of the policy where relevant and how it is utilised in everyday practice.
- ❑ Ensure that the policy can be easily accessed (e.g. via school website, in communal areas of the school)
- ❑ Ensure training and information on key themes is available for staff, and that these themes are addressed with young people in appropriate settings (e.g. in PSE lessons).

The new policy is a mark of success in the school, and demonstrates the commitment to working towards being more gender balanced and promoting equality of opportunity. Those involved in the review and development of the policy should have their contributions recognised.

Checklist for Policy Review:

Recruit for Policy Review Action Group…………………………………………………… ☐

Run gender workshop for members of Action Group……………………………….. ☐

Create working agreement………………………………………………………………. ☐

Identify goals and set out Action Plan and agree timescale/meeting times………. ☐

Assign Roles………………………………………………………………………...…… ☐

Examine finding from relevant surveys/audits and identify priorities………………. ☐

Explore existing policies and identify gaps…………………………………………..... ☐

Identify policy(ies) to work on/write……………………………………………………. ☐

Consult with students/staff/parents and carers………………………………………. ☐

Make amends accordingly………………………………………………………………. ☐

Launch policy………………………………………………………………………….....☐

Celebrate achievements and contributions……………………………………………. ☐

Raise awareness of policy and communicate…………………………………………. ☐