

## CHALLENGING SEXISM

### Consider how you would help learners to

- break down existing stereotypes
- realise that they don't have to conform to stereotypes
- understand that different cultures have different stereotypes
- appreciate that stereotypes put pressure on people to conform
- explore stereotypes as a cause of bullying
- understand that they have the power to change things
- take forward gender issues

### Challenges to you as a trade unionist – Ask yourself

- Why inequalities persist in your workplace?
- What responsibility falls to the system of education if young men and young women are unable to break out of traditional roles,?
- Whether the policies in your workplace challenge stereotypes?
- How school-based recruitment of staff affects the gender balance within the establishment?
- Whether there is an appropriate gender balance of staff on all establishment decision-making committees?
- How the roles and status of different members of staff affect the gender ethos of your establishment?

This document is also available by request on tape, in Braille, large print, various computer formats and in community language translations.

Please contact EIS Equalities Department on 0131 225 6244.

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## EIS EQUALITY

## CHALLENGING SEXISM

“Gender-stereotyped careers are an accepted part of life unfortunately and the only way of changing this is by educating young people and making them aware of all the doors that are open to them”

**Male Student**

[www.works4me.org.uk/](http://www.works4me.org.uk/)

The logo for the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) features the lowercase letters 'eis' in a stylized, blue, sans-serif font. The 'e' and 'i' are connected, and the 's' is positioned to the right. The letters are set against a white background.

## CHALLENGING SEXISM

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The Sex Discrimination Act (1975) as amended prohibits sex discrimination against women and men on the grounds of their gender, of marital status and on the grounds of gender reassignment.

It prohibits discrimination in the field of education. All educational establishments and local authorities are required to comply with sex discrimination legislation. There should be clear policies and guidance to help teachers and all staff to promote gender equality.

The EIS believes that all educationalists must go beyond compliance with the law and challenge sexism and sexist stereotypes and promote positive gender equality. This is a complex and often misunderstood area of education.

There are no easy answers to it and no single simple solution. Schools adopt a wide variety of approaches to different learning styles to encourage all pupils to reach their potential. Some have introduced single sex classes for underachieving boys. This is a development which the EIS should monitor closely for its educational impact.

The EIS believes that it is essential to challenge stereotyping and prejudice which limit and lead to discrimination. It endorses the work of the Equal Opportunities Commission (Scotland) with which it has worked closely in its education working groups.

The EOC (Scotland) guide for parents published in 1998 states that:

“Outdated notions that treat girls and boys differently and expect different outcomes, achievements and behaviour based on their sex, serve only to limit our children.”

In further work on gender segregation in education and in the work place (2000), it claims that stereotypes based on gender “pigeonhole boys and girls, men and women into fixed roles and behaviours that deny individual aspirations.” The EIS believes that this has a profound impact on future job prospects, earnings and opportunities.

The EIS recommends that part of its ongoing work in gender equality should be to continue to work with the EOC and others to monitor and challenge the effects of subject and career segregation

The EIS believes that sexism, however it manifests itself, is wrong. It can bring educational establishments into conflict with the Sex Discrimination Act. Women and men, boys and girls all experience it at a variety of levels and at different times in their lives.

In an EIS survey of male primary teachers one stated that:

“Casual sexism is very prevalent in primary staffrooms sometimes manifesting itself in light hearted banter and sometimes virulently anti-male attitudes.”

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This quotation from the EIS document, ‘Breaking down the Barriers: the Gender Jigsaw’, EIS, 2004, outlines EIS policy in regard to gender and education.

“There is no doubt that considerable progress has been made in understanding barriers to equality between boys and girls, men and women in the last 50 years. Legislation, the development of equal opportunities policies and, within education, a greater knowledge of how children learn, have removed some obvious barriers or at least provided the opportunity to challenge prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination. However, there are barriers which remain almost impervious to change and continue to have a profound effect on choices and life patterns of men and women. It is evident that gender issues in education are complex. Research shows consistently that social class is the greatest determinant of educational outcomes. Putting together the final picture of the ‘gender jigsaw’ requires an understanding of the context of the lives of young people and how the various pieces influence and affect their future. The success of a genuinely inclusive education policy requires a wide range of strategies which consider all barriers to education for all young people.” (‘Gender Jigsaw’, EIS, 2004)

### Challenges to educators

“In what ways ... are your programmes going to close gaps, reduce inequalities, remove discriminations, in particular discriminations which are covertly, indeed visibly institutionalised?” (Robin Richardson, 1990, ‘Daring to be a teacher’)

- consider your own perceptions of femininity, masculinity, relationships and sexuality
- consider how you can enlist the help of parents/carers in questioning stereotypes
- consider to what extent society still adheres to traditional male and female roles
- consider if you are doing everything you can to ensure your classroom or teaching space is welcoming to both sexes and that resources are free from gender bias
- consider what view you have of men who wish to work with young children
- consider the impact of not challenging stereotypes especially at the earliest age
- consider how your establishment’s ethos takes account of female and male pupils, students and teachers
- consider how you might challenge traditional attitudes to career routes and work placements for boys and girls.
- consider how your establishment’s behaviour policy for students impacts on boys and girls
- consider to what extent your establishment includes gender issues in policy planning and development