

'85

THE ENGLISH

CURRICULUM:

**GENDER**

MATERIAL FOR DISCUSSION

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**ENGLISH  
CENTRE**



# Preface

## THIS BOOKLET

This booklet draws on the ideas and experience of teachers involved in the school-focussed project on English and gender based at the English Centre 1982-1984.

It is one of a series of resource and discussion documents on the English curriculum. The aim of the series is to provide material on aspects of English teaching for department-focussed curriculum development.

## HOW TO USE IT

This booklet is divided into sections. Each section deals with an aspect of English and gender and contains an introduction, suggestions, classroom materials, articles for departmental discussion and a shortlist of resources. (Those resources marked with a single asterisk are partly or wholly reproduced in this booklet. Those marked with two asterisks are available to ILEA teachers at the English Centre or at their local English Centre.) Each section also contains some suggestions for use within departmental meetings. The suggestions for use in The Introduction offer a framework for approaching the booklet as a whole.

## USE OF TERMS

**Gender** — is a psychological and cultural term. It refers to learned characteristics of femininity, masculinity, relationships and sexuality which may vary from culture to culture.

**Equal opportunity** — is taken to mean freedom from discrimination for all and equal access to both education and employment irrespective of their gender, class, race and disability.

**Sexism** — is taken to mean prejudice or adverse discrimination on the basis of either a person's sex or stereotypical views of masculine and feminine roles.

**Anti-Sexist English** — aims to challenge the stereotypical views of femininity, masculinity, relationships and sexuality. It is embodied in the practice through which pupils and teachers are encouraged to examine language and literature to gain understanding of their own experiences within a recognisable social context; to see how these experiences have been represented in the past; and to consider possibilities for change in the future.

This document was compiled by Philippa Hunt, Betty Hunter, Ann Keely, Jane Leggett, Margaret Sandra, Bronwyn Mellor, Ros Moger, Elizabeth Plackett, Helen Savva.

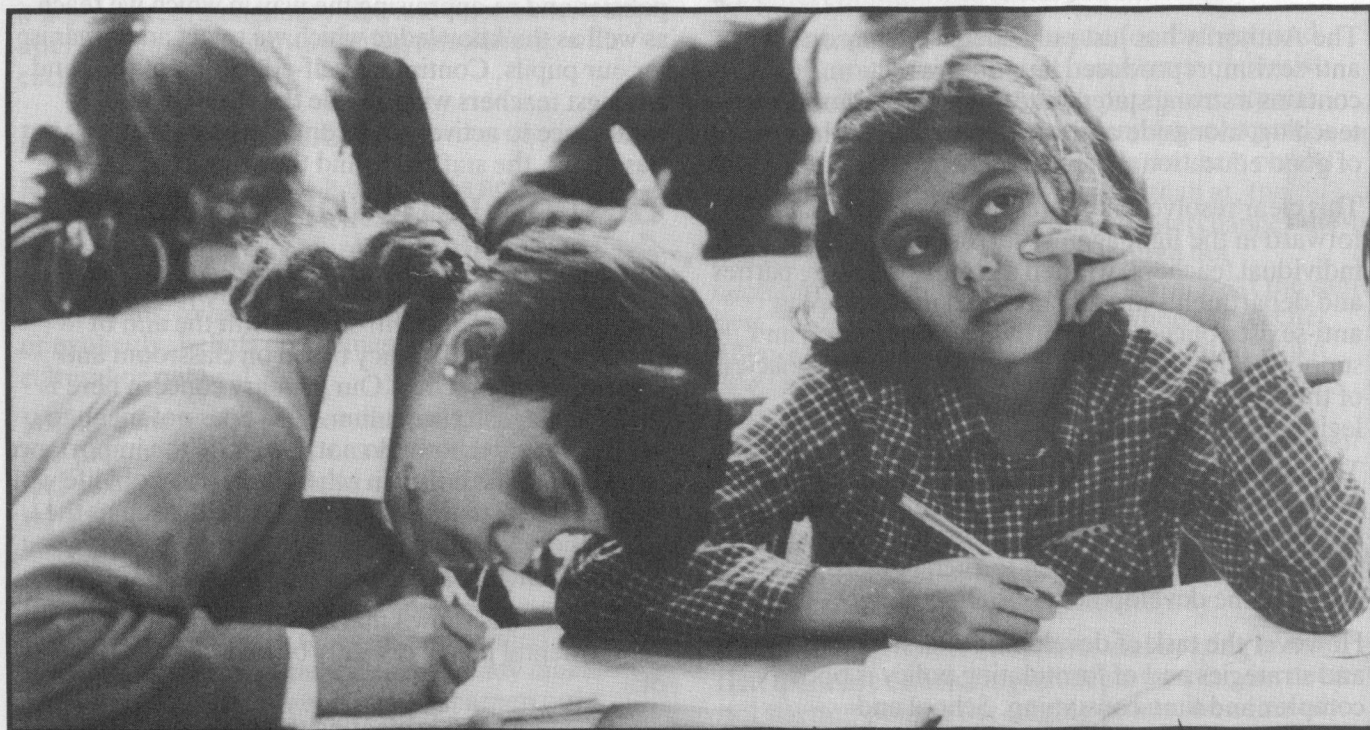
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# Anti-Sexist English



- **The Authority's initiative on sex emphasises the importance of an anti-sexist perspective**
- **The relationship between equal opportunities and anti-sexism needs defining and developing**
- **Effective departmental policies reflect day-to-day classroom practice**
- **Anti-sexist teaching cannot be separated from what English teachers have learnt about learning**
- **English teaching cannot be a neutral activity**
- **English teaching has a history of dealing with social issues**



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# Introduction

## A POLICY FOR EQUALITY: SEX

The Authority has just published its policy on anti-sexism, reproduced later in this section. It contains a strong statement which places anti-sexist teaching, alongside anti-racist teaching, at the centre of good educational practice.

This clear resolve will represent a significant step forward in the fight against sexism in our schools. For individual teachers, women's groups, working parties and departments already involved in developing anti-sexist policies it will provide a vindication and support. For those just beginning to develop policies of this kind, such support will encourage and legitimate their work.

The Authority's Equal Opportunities Unit (Race and Sex), Inspector and Advisory Teachers for Equal Opportunities (Gender) and Relationships and Sexuality Project have been formed to assist and resource the development of such policies.

However the task of developing anti-sexist resources and strategies and of formulating policy is both complex and time consuming. School and departments also need time and space to discuss the implications of the Authority's initiative: to collect, make and evaluate classroom materials and to formulate ideas and experience into working policies.

## PLANNING AND PRACTICE

Some English departments have begun to address issues of gender and anti-sexism. Amongst other things they have re-examined the range of literature for shared and independent reading, ensuring that it includes works written by women and features a balance of female and male characters. Some departments have also begun to develop activities which encourage discussion of gender assumptions made about characters in the literature they use.

Developing these resources is a necessary step towards raising issues of anti-sexism. However it is also necessary to find strategies for discussing the ways in which sexism permeates our society on social, political and economic levels. To do this we need to address ourselves to aspects of sexism implicit in male and female roles, relationships and sexuality, and to find productive and secure frameworks within which to consider them with our pupils.

This is a demanding task, not least because we are largely products of an education system which failed to alert us to the sexism within society; equally as adults we have no special immunity to the way sexism pervades our own social conditioning. Therefore as part of combatting sexism within our day-to-day

practice we need to begin and sustain our own re-education. By addressing our individual perceptions, understanding and knowledge, and becoming informed about the issues involved, we will inevitably have to re-consider our practice as teachers: for example in re-examining school and departmental policies and re-appraising the way in which we teach as well as the knowledge which we select and organise for our pupils. Continuing self-education of this kind amongst teachers will provide the strength and confidence to actively confront sexism in the classroom, the staffroom and the school.

## THIS COLLECTION OF DOCUMENTS

This booklet is designed to support a series of departmental meetings addressing themselves to issues of gender and anti-sexism with the aim of reaching an overall policy based on classroom and departmental practice. Our primary concern here is with the English curriculum. This does not mean to say, however, that we do not recognise the importance of an anti-sexist policy in other areas of school life with which English teachers will be involved, such as the school's organization, administration or staffing arrangements.

Experience has shown that a useful, practical departmental policy can only be negotiated as a result of:

- discussing and evaluating the materials we regularly use in the classroom, whether explicitly tagged gender or not;
- reaching an informed agreement about the strategies and actions we use to mediate these materials;
- feeling able to respond to sexist attitudes and behaviour of teachers and pupils;
- beginning to feed back departmental experience into the rest of the school to support other departments and to help inform and develop whole school policies.

## Anti-Sexist English

The Authority has stated that sexism and racism are incompatible with good education practice. Equally, good English practice must be both anti-sexist and anti-racist. Therefore in writing this section we have made few changes to the definition of good English practice included in "The English Curriculum: Race"

The best of English teaching has always recognised the validity of the child's experience. It has understood that children are not vacant and passive recipients of knowledge; they must engage actively with the business of English, and bring their experience of language and the world to bear on it, in order for successful, enjoyable and worthwhile learning to happen.

What is the business of English? Fundamentally, the processes of language. Language, however, never exists in a vacuum. It must be about something, and it must be presented and received in a certain form. Equally, language itself profoundly influences both the something which it is about, and the form in which it is presented. Language, idea and form exist in any utterance in a mutually affecting relationship with each other.

## BELIEFS AND VALUES

For these reasons, English teaching is never a neutral activity. In our choice and treatment of literature, for instance, or in the way we respond to pupils' writing, we are making and communicating assumptions and judgements. Whatever we do, we represent, implicitly or explicitly, beliefs and values which may be social, cultural or political.

We have made and will continue to make assumptions and judgements about issues of gender and anti-sexism. For example when addressing these issues we have often focussed on girls and women and looked for ways to strengthen their position in relation to boys and men. Whilst this is necessary and must form an important part of our approach, we must also recognise the strength that girls and women already possess and the contribution they already make. In doing this it becomes necessary to sharpen our definition of "anti-sexism" in relation to "equal opportunities." For too long "equal opportunities" has been regarded as something that girls and women achieve only when they compete successfully with boys and men, almost invariably on their terms. An anti-sexist perspective must also ensure that boys are given the opportunity to examine themselves, not necessarily in terms of their relationship with girls or their attitude to girls, but in terms of their own affective domestic and social lives. It is therefore essential that *all* teachers, whether in mixed or single-sex schools address these issues.

## THE CATEGORIES OF ENGLISH

If we list some of the plain categories which make up English — reading literature, writing imaginatively, writing discursively, talking in groups, the study of language, the study of the mass media, for example — we can see in general terms how an anti-sexist dimension to our teaching has obvious appropriateness to the subject. That is not to suggest that incorporating the dimension in a practical way is therefore an easy task.

In developing anti-sexist English we not only have to provide materials and resources which can be used to raise gender issues but also we must develop an anti-sexist perspective which informs all the work we do, so that gender and anti-sexism become deliberate and permanent features of our work.

## STYLE AND ORGANIZATION

In terms of teaching style and classroom organization, there are connections between good English practice and the secure structure pupils need within which to discuss and evaluate their own perceptions of sex-differentiation and social conditioning.

These connections include: space for dialogue and collaboration between pupils; avoidance of divisive competition; a context in which pupils can express both a unique and a collective identity; an expert facilitator (the teacher) who knows that best results are achieved by talking with, rather than at, the pupils, and that in real educational interchanges the teacher always learns as much (though not necessarily the same thing) as the learner. At the same time, an extreme of "neutrality," when the teacher offers no opinions or information, for instance in a discussion where sexist views — whether through ignorance or maliciousness or both — are being expressed, will not make for openness, or freedom of debate, but their opposites. English teachers have a clear responsibility to promote and articulate anti-sexism in their classrooms, and the difficult task of carrying out this responsibility in an unequivocal, though not authoritarian or punitive, way.

From starting-points like these, and bearing in mind that there are ILEA English departments who need not starting-points, but staging-points, on a line of development already well advanced, we believe it will be possible to bring about mature, coherent anti-sexist, anti-racist practice in English classrooms.

## HOW TO USE THIS SECTION: SOME SUGGESTIONS

The aim of this section is to place issues of gender and anti-sexism within the context of good English practice.

- To clarify assumptions about the nature and purpose of discussing gender and anti-sexism, a department could read the introduction to this section and discuss the statements.
- In the light of such a discussion, the department could read the articles reprinted in this section and the introductions to each of the other sections.
- The department could then map out the areas of English teaching and classroom practice that subsequent discussions about gender and anti-sexism should cover.
- A number of departmental meetings could be planned which focussed on single or related areas. As a way of sharing the preparations for such meetings, individuals or pairs of teachers could take responsibility for organising and structuring each of these planned meetings.



# Account of Practice

Concern over the issue of gender is not new to English teachers in ILEA, but there has been a significant shift in emphasis over the last 8 years. In 1976 a group of teachers produced a booklet called *Sugar and spice* which focussed on sex roles and stereotypes. Much of the work done at that time tackled the issue of gender within the framework of a topic or unit and role reversal was often used as a way of highlighting stereotypes. With increasing experience, teachers realised that these approaches were not adequate. The single unit left many other areas of the curriculum unquestioned and prejudices may have been reinforced by an over simplified approach to stereotypes.

Materials and teaching approaches have been at the centre of work done by the English teachers who have worked with advisory staff at the English Centre over the last three years. Meeting regularly during 1982, the group initially responded to immediate needs by compiling a resources booklet. Literature which featured positive female characters, challenged sex stereotypes and was, where possible, written by a woman, was the main source for the booklet. It was felt that literature was invaluable for its power to engage pupil's attention, give shape to human experience and present values and attitudes through narrative. A wide range of literature was selected to encourage teachers to integrate work on gender into the whole English curriculum across years 1 to 6.

The materials collected became the basis for further work as teachers recognised the need to develop teaching strategies which would both challenge pupils and support deeper explorations of assumptions. A school focussed in-service project based at the English Centre during 1982-83 enabled five teachers to work with advisory teachers on devising, piloting and revising new materials. The work of this group then contributed to two gender courses for other teachers, run at the English Centre.

As a result of this active exchange of ideas and experiences and the growing confidence of all those teachers involved in developing curriculum materials, there have been further shifts in emphasis. It has become clear that it is not sufficient to sharpen up perspectives when material labelled "gender" is being used. Teachers must develop an anti-sexist perspective which informs all English work. The early emphasis on girls has been reappraised, since it carries the implication that girls have problems and girls need to change. Contrary to this, our experience shows that it is boys who do less well in English. We now need to address the question of boys' attitudes to English as a school subject.

Finally, what is evident to all those involved in the initiation and production of gender materials is that this kind of work requires a very significant investment of time. If teachers are to produce effective materials and teaching strategies, their personal commitment must be backed by time out of school to discuss and evaluate materials and time in school to pilot them with pupils and to share them with colleagues.

## ARTICLES AND OTHER MATERIALS

\* Denotes wholly or partly included in this document.

\*\* Denotes included in the box of resources available for reference at the English Centre or at the five bases of the Local Leaders.

### \*\* Anti-Sexist Resources

Compiled by Sue Adler and Annie Cornbleet  
Edited by Mitzi Bales Available from ILEA Learning Resources Branch (01-622 9966)

This is the most up-to-date and extensive resources list presently available. It is organised in nine sections including organisations, bookshops, publishers, films, posters, journals and books. There is also an ILEA section. It is designed to go into a folder and be supplemented by new resources as they become available.

### \*\* *Feminism for Girls: An Adventure Story*

Edited by Angela McRobbie and Trisha McCabe  
Routledge 0710009615 £5.95

This book presents feminist perspectives on aspects of adolescence which have been chosen for their special relevance to the lives and experiences of girls and young women today. Chapters cover themes and topics which include romance and sexuality, girls' magazines, careers and the reality of being a black girl in society today. This book is written for girls and young women themselves and for people who are, like the contributors, currently teaching or working with girls.

\* An article from this book called 'Little women, good wives: is English good for girls?' by Gill Frith is reprinted in this section.

### \*\* *Learning to Lose: Sexism and Education*

Edited by Dale Spender and Elizabeth Sarah  
Women's Press 0704338637 £4.95

The articles in this book develop a feminist critique of educational theory and practice. The concepts which have previously constituted a good and sound education are examined and an analysis of their deficiencies is presented along with indications of the way in which education could be transformed if the principles of feminism were taken into account. This book is written primarily for teachers who are involved in examining sexism and developing anti-sexist policies in their schools.

\* An article from this book called 'Sexist Ideology and Education' by Irene Payne is reprinted in this section.

### \*\* *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*

Bell Hooks Pluto Press 0861043790 In this book Bell Hooks examines the impact of sexism on the black woman during slavery, the devaluation of black womanhood, black male sexism, racism within the recent feminist movement, and the black woman's involvement with feminism. She writes, "Although the focus is on the black female, our struggle for liberation has significance only if it takes place within a feminist movement that has as its fundamental goal the liberation of all people."

\* Extracts from this book are reprinted in this booklet in the section on 'Sex, Race and Class'.

### *Between Future and Past (Posters + Teacher's Booklet)*

The Poster Collective, PO Box BCMFPC, London, WC1N 3XX (01-388 0182) The posters, through the juxtaposition of image and text, look at aspects of the ideological, social, and economic structures of women's oppression within the context of the development of European society. They follow a broadly chronological sequence, focussing on women's position in this society at different junctures in history, from feudalism to the present. They also show points at which women, in the process of fighting to change their status, challenge social relations as a whole.

The posters and booklet together have been designed to provide a means of drawing out the elements which construct women's position in society, and to act as a focus for questioning and challenging existing relations.

### \*\* *Something To Tell You: the experiences and needs of young lesbians and gay men in London*

L. Trenchard and H. Warren London Gay Teenage Group  
0950945501 £2.00

This report outlines the results of over a year's in-depth research based on a questionnaire filled in mainly by 18-20 year olds. It highlights the attitudes of schools, the youth service, employers and the police to young lesbians and gay men.

### \*\* *Gen*

Produced by the Women's Education Resource Collective (01-242 6807) £1.50 per issue, 3 issues per year

Gen is an anti-sexist educational magazine. It regularly contains information about anti-sexist initiatives in schools, interviews, reviews, resource lists and feature articles on feminist issues.

# Support Structures in ILEA

## THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES UNIT (RACE AND SEX)

The Unit has been established centrally to monitor policy on Equal Opportunities.

At present the Unit can be outlined as follows:

**Sylvia Denman** (Principal Equal Opportunities Officer)

**Bebb Burchell**

**Mark Gunning**



Race Equality

**Jean Coussins**

**Hilary Lowe**



Sex Equality

— 633 8191

**Elizabeth McGovern** — Teaching Staff and Estab.  
Branches — 633 2167

**Joyce Redfern** — Support Staff — 633 3218

In addition there is a Senior Education Liaison Officer based in the Unit and an Education Liaison Officer in each London borough.

## RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY PROJECT AUTUMN 1984

This new project has been set up to work on resources and to enable teachers to develop strategies and approaches, for use in courses dealing with sex-role stereotyping and personal relationships, including sexual orientation. Schools will have different approaches to curriculum development in this area which the project can support.

The post of Resources Adviser to the project is not structurally part of any Inspectorate or Advisory Team, but has close links with the Health Education and Equal Opportunities teams. To counteract this isolated position an Advisory Group has been set up, chaired by David Mallen AEO/SEC who oversees the project at the moment. This group provides a forum for ideas and discussion and guidance as to how the project might develop. We would welcome ideas, information, interest and involvement.

### What are we trying to do?

- \* — To help create a climate in schools where discussions about relationships and sexuality can take place in an open and unthreatening way.
- \* — To develop in-service training for teachers to achieve this, emphasising small group discussion methods.
- \* To educate against ignorance and prejudice with regard to homosexuality, both in the formal and hidden curriculum.
- \* — To raise awareness re: the existence of lesbian and gay young people in our schools and to respond to their needs.
- \* — To make accessible to all students and staff information about lesbian and gay organisations; existing fiction and non-fiction; other resources which would stimulate discussion and challenge stereotyping and prejudice.
- \* To recognise that discrimination and homophobic attitudes exist and to challenge these at all levels.

For further information contact, **Liz Dibb**, Room 264F County Hall, SE1 telephone 633 5637.

## ADVISORY TEACHERS FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIRLS AND BOYS/WOMEN AND MEN

The Advisory Teachers for Equal Opportunities (Gender) are available to visit schools and colleges to support and work with teachers in carrying out the Authority's policy on equality for girls and boys/women and men. They are:

**Anne Reyerabach** — Primary (including Junior, Infant and Nursery) and Special Schools

**Hilary Bourdillon** — Secondary and Special Schools

**Lois Graessle and Pat McQuade** — FE/16-19 (Colleges and school-college links)

**Anne Reyersbach** and **Hilary Bourdillon** are based at Isledon Teachers Centre, Jack Ashley School, Blackstock Road, N4 telephone 226 0041.

**Lois Graessle and Pat McQuade** are based at North London College, 207 Essex Road, N1 telephone 609 9981.

They are particularly interested in hearing from schools and colleges which are considering or already implementing anti-sexist projects/development and would like resources and support.

There are also two seconded teachers who are available to work with schools on specific curriculum development projects and materials:

**Sue Askew**, former co-ordinator of the Skills for Living Course at Hackney Downs School, is developing anti-sexist work with boys (in both boys and mixed schools) and will be particularly supporting equal opportunities groups and women teachers in boys' schools.

**Elise Dodgson**, former co-ordinator of the Motherland Project is developing anti-sexist/anti-racist work through drama and role-play in various areas of the secondary school.

They are both based at Isledon Teachers' Centre.

**Carol Adams**, Inspector for Equal Opportunities (Gender) is available to visit schools and colleges and to participate in In-Service Training programmes throughout the Authority.

She can be contacted at Room 528A, County Hall, SE1 telephone 633 1474.



## **I.L.E.A. Anti-Sexist Statement (Vol 6 in Race, Sex, Class series) No. 6. A Policy for Equality: Sex.**

The Inner London Education Authority is committed to achieving an education service which provides equality of opportunity and freedom from discrimination on grounds of race, sex, class, sexuality or disability in both education and employment. This statement complements the Anti-Racist Statement adopted in July 1983 and pledges the Authority, all its institutions, the administration and support services actively to combat sexism and to promote equality of opportunity for girls and boys, women and men.

We live in a society in which the process of sex-stereotyping leads people to conform to gender roles which can inhibit individuals' abilities, preferences and aspirations. The effects of sexism impoverish both sexes by limiting horizons and restricting choices. The process of acquiring and practising sexist attitudes is subtle and largely unconscious. It is often only extreme behaviour, such as certain forms of sexual harassment, which strikes people as unacceptable. Recent research, however, has confirmed the strength of sexist messages through everything that goes on informally and/or unconsciously in schools and other places of education which contribute to pupils' and students' experience; for example, teachers having different expectations of girls and boys, or textbooks presenting subjects in a sex-biased way. Despite the formal availability of equal opportunities within the ILEA, in practice girls and boys, women and men make stereotyped subject choices and apply and use their achievements for different purposes when they leave the education system.

Although both sexes are affected by sexism, it is girls and women who suffer most. This is because sexism does not simply encourage a neutral segregation of the sexes, but is based on and perpetuates the notion of male superiority. Greater value and status is often given to traditionally male pursuits and occupations than to traditionally female ones. This places men generally in a position of power over women, whether at home, at work, or through the political, social and economic systems and institutions which govern our lives. This power operates through the existence of formal barriers and open forms of discrimination, only some of which have been made unlawful by the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts. It is also transmitted through sexist attitudes and assumptions which are learned and passed on through schooling, the media and other influences in society as a whole.

Passive support for equal opportunities is not sufficient to challenge sex-stereotyping. Sexism affects everyone and tackling it must be the responsibility of all. Each sector of the education service, including those working in single-sex schools, the post-school sector, the administration, the support services and the Inspectorate must play a part. The commitment and involvement of parents and governors is also vital to the practical implementation of the policy. The ILEA is committed to moving forward to a phase of positive action which will seek to identify sexist practices, especially unconscious ones, and to formulate practical strategies for overcoming them.

The ILEA recognises that education is a powerful vehicle for transmitting values. It can also challenge them. The Authority firmly believes that sexism is incompatible with good educational practice in all sectors of education, and that a commitment to anti-sexism is a fundamental legal and educational duty. The valuable work which has been undertaken in recent years by individual teachers, youth workers and others is acknowledged and the ILEA aims to validate this work through the adoption and implementation of official policy. All educational establishments within the Authority should be assisted in placing anti-sexism, alongside anti-racism, at the heart of educational good practice. Only in this way will *all* our pupils and students reap the full benefit of the education service we provide.