



COLLEGES' APPROACH TO TACKLING GENDER- BASED VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

SURVEY FINDINGS REPORT

February 2025



INTRODUCTION

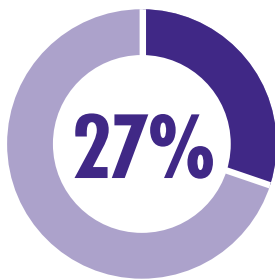
Since January 2023, Colleges Scotland and the College Development Network (CDN) have worked collaboratively to address how gender-based violence (GBV) and harassment is tackled across the Scottish college sector.

Globally and locally, the prevalence of Domestic Abuse, Violence Against Women and Girls and GBV is on the rise, with increasingly concerning statistics being reported:



Estimates published by the World Health Organization indicate that **about 1 in 3 (30%) of women worldwide** have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.

World Health Organization, 2024



Worldwide, **almost one third (27%) of women aged 15-49 years** who have been in a relationship report that they have been subjected to some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner.

World Health Organization, 2024



The latest annual statistical report on domestic abuse recorded by Police Scotland in 2022-23 reported **83% of victims were female** and **4 in 5 incidents (81%) had a female victim and a male suspected perpetrator.**

Scottish Women's Aid, 2024



1 in 5 teenage girls have experienced domestic abuse in their dating relationship.

Scottish Women's Aid, 2024



1 in 5 female students in higher education experiences sexual harassment, and one in four experiences sexual assault.

Scottish Government, 2023



Over half of all students who have experienced sexual assault and/or sexual harassment experienced it on campus.
Scottish Government, 2023

In our capacity as members of the Scottish Government Equally Safe in Colleges and Universities Core Leadership Group, we have sought to understand the approaches colleges are taking to respond to, and prevent, gender-based violence and harassment. This work links closely to the National Equality Outcomes (NEOs) developed by the Equality and Human Rights Commission and Scottish Funding Council. Their collaborative work recognises persistent inequality, evidenced from the Scottish Government's Equally Safe strategy, including issues, predominately from women, relating to accessing support and reporting issues. The related NEO states:

“ Staff and students know how to access support about violence, harassment and abuse, report their experience and feel properly supported in doing so because the services are fit for purpose. Institutions can evidence approaches that prevent and respond to violence, harassment and abuse.”

Scottish Funding Council, 2023

In Autumn 2024, Colleges Scotland and CDN co-developed a survey for sector leads with responsibility for GBV and harassment with the aim of understanding what action is being taken across the sector and the challenges that exist. Across the sector, we received responses from sixteen colleges. This survey complements a similar survey conducted by Universities Scotland (US) earlier in 2024, which aimed to understand how universities are responding to GBV and harassment. As both University of the Highlands and Islands and Scotland's Rural College responded to the US survey, they were able to opt out of completing the college sector survey, however, responses from some of the University of the Highlands and Islands colleges were received.

To maintain consistency across sectors, and to aid data comparison, our survey questions correlated closely to those asked by US.

This report presents the findings from our survey and makes key recommendations for colleges to strengthen their progress in tackling and preventing GBV and harassment.



KEY FINDINGS

To fully understand how colleges are tackling and preventing GBV and harassment, the survey explored a wide range of themes. Our findings are summarised below.

1. Strategic Response to Tackling GBV and Harassment

Firstly, our survey sought to understand how the response to tackling GBV and harassment is being handled at a strategic level. The key findings in this area are as follows:

- 15 out of 16 colleges responded to say that senior management were invested in developing an organisation-wide approach to addressing GBV and harassment. However, only 50% of respondents indicated that a plan of action had been formalised.
- We asked colleges who is accountable at the strategic level for leading on the delivery of prevention activity. Respondents cited a range of individuals, including Vice Principal or similar and Director of Student Services or similar. 4 colleges stated that accountability is shared between roles, including, for example, the Head of Student Experience and colleagues in Equality and Diversity positions. None of the colleges who responded cited their principal as having overall accountability for this work.

- 100% of respondents have worked collaboratively with a variety of stakeholders to develop their strategic response to tackling GBV and harassment. College staff, the students' association/union, students with lived experience and external organisations such as EmilyTest and Rape Crisis were cited as having been involved in shaping this. 50% of respondents said that they have worked with the Police in this capacity.
- 14 out of the 16 colleges who responded said that they provide periodic updates to bodies such as their Governing Board, Senior Management Team and students' association/union about their college's progress to address GBV, harassment, hate crime and sexual misconduct.

2. Preventative Action

One of our survey themes explored preventative activities colleges have implemented since 2018/19 to strengthen their approach to tackle all forms of GBV and harassment. Our findings are as follows:

- 100% of respondents use a student code of conduct to communicate acceptable and unacceptable behaviours to students, as part of their programme of preventative action. 15 out of 16 respondents are using official policies for this purpose.
- 13 colleges have implemented both staff and student training since 2018/19, but only around half are delivering this on an annual recurring basis.
- Currently, only 6 colleges make GBV awareness and anti-harassment information part of their admissions and enrolment processes.

3. Reporting and recording of sexual misconduct cases

A key area of interest was the mechanisms colleges use to manage the reporting, and recording of, cases of sexual misconduct. Our survey tells us that:

- There are a range of options available for students to report different types of misconduct, including in-person, via telephone and online. However, only 50% of the colleges who responded said that there is a dedicated reporting tool available.
- We asked colleges if they collect all reports of GBV/harassment into a centralised, college-wide data report. Only half of those who responded said this data is collated centrally for the college. None of the respondents are collating the data at curriculum area level, and 2 colleges are not collating any data.

4. Training and Good Practice

We asked colleges to tell us about how they have approached training on GBV awareness and anti-harassment, and to share examples of good practice to further progress in this area of work. Our survey results told us the following:

- 11 respondents have introduced a trauma-informed approach to respond to formal safeguarding reports and/or complaints.
- 5 out of 16 respondents have introduced a policy on preventative suspension of reported students (where appropriate), in response to formal safeguarding reports and/or complaints of student misconduct in GBV/harassment cases.
- In response to formal safeguarding reports and/or complaints of student misconduct in GBV/harassment cases, 5 colleges have introduced new risk management frameworks.
- College staff receive a range of training in relation to GBV and harassment, with 10 colleges stating this is mandatory, and with varying levels of specialism depending on their role. Examples include consent training, bystander training and 'train the trainer'. Where training is not mandatory, it is encouraged.
- 11 colleges cited working in partnership with external organisations, such as Rape Crisis and Women's Aid to deliver specialist training to their staff.
- Colleges have highlighted several examples of working closely with EmilyTest, around GBV training (such as L.I.S.T.E.N) and prevention activity. Three respondents said they are working towards achieving, EmilyTest Charter status.
- Some examples of good practice colleges shared with us include the following:
 - Designated safeguarding point of contact in every curriculum area who is responsible for responding to GBV disclosures and providing support and advice.
 - Embedding GBV prevention and support firmly into the learner induction process.
 - Availability of financial support for students facing financial hardship as a result of GBV.
 - Access to emergency accommodation for students affected by GBV.
 - Flexibility for students impacted by GBV in meeting course requirements, such as additional completion time or creating a personal learning support plan for reasonable adjustments.
 - Achievement of the LGBT Youth Scotland Gold Charter which raised awareness of GBV in LGBT relationships.

- Inception of a group of staff and students who work collaboratively on an action plan to raise awareness and provide training in relation to GBV/harassment.
- Provision of a full-time Police Campus Liaison Officer, in partnership with Police Scotland, who delivers a range of GBV training to students, particularly male-dominated curriculum areas.

5. Priorities to tackle GBV and harassment within the student population

We were interested to find out what colleges' priorities are to tackle GBV and harassment within the student population over the next three years. Our survey told us:

- 15 out of 16 respondents said one of their top priorities is working on GBV prevention as part of their college culture.
- 10 respondents told us that one of their highest priorities is to improve reporting mechanisms and associated data issues.
- 7 colleges told us that one of their biggest priorities is to work through sector wide charters, such as EmilyTest and Athena SWANN.

- Only 1 college said that improving risk management processes is a high priority.
- Colleges were able to specify priorities other than those listed – one college cited developing a process to collect criminal charges and convictions at enrolment stage.

6. Challenges to furthering progress

We asked colleges what they consider the main challenges to be when it comes to furthering progress to tackle and prevent GBV and harassment.

- 14 out of 16 colleges said that sustainability of funding and the impact on resources is the main barrier to furthering GBV-related progress in their college.
- Half of respondents felt that both the complexity of cases they are facing, and increased risk of legal challenge present significant barriers.
- 6 respondents felt that a lack of mandatory training for staff and students is a key challenge to furthering progress in this area.
- Only 1 college felt that responding to the volume of disclosures of GBV/harassment is their biggest barrier.



CONCLUSION

To conclude, Colleges Scotland and CDN found this survey exploring how colleges approach GBV and harassment to be a hugely worthwhile exercise and we would like to note our thanks to those colleges who participated.

The findings have given us valuable insight into how colleges across the country are responding to tackling and preventing GBV and harassment. There are clear and tangible examples across the sector of commitment, early training, good practice, and collaborative working to meet our shared ambitions of keeping students safe on campuses. Where there are gaps, there is scope for existing processes and practice to be adopted, and adapted where necessary, by other colleges so that consistency can be achieved across the sector.

The findings have also identified areas where improvements can be made to strengthen our sector's approach to tackling and preventing GBV and harassment. There are some key areas for development which are summarised below:

Strategic Response to Tackling GBV and Harassment

Further development and implementation of both a strategy and action plan to address GBV and harassment.

Preventative Action

Delivery of staff training to tackle all forms of GBV and harassment on an annual recurring basis.

Inclusion of GBV awareness and anti-harassment information/education as part of the admissions and enrolment process.

Reporting and recording of sexual misconduct cases

Improvement of mechanisms to collect, and collate, data relating to sexual misconduct cases.

Training and Good Practice

Development of policy on preventative suspension of reported students, and risk management processes.

Priorities to tackle GBV and harassment within the student population

Increase the number of colleges working towards achieving the EmilyTest Charter Award.

Challenges to furthering progress

Delivery of sector-wide mandatory training in support of GBV/anti-harassment legislation and further develop relationships with third-party organisations delivering specialist training.

NEXT STEPS

Colleges Scotland and CDN will continue to work collaboratively to develop sector-wide guidance, informed by the strengths and areas of for improvement identified, to empower the efforts of colleges in tackling and preventing GBV and harassment.

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