

**Making the Gender Equality Duty real  
for children, young people and their fathers**

## Contents

Introduction	3
The Gender Equality Duty - an overview	5
The Gender Equality Duty in early years provision	10
The Gender Equality Duty in education	16
The Gender Equality Duty in health	22
The Gender Equality Duty and vulnerable children and young people	28
Conclusion	34

# Introduction

The Gender Equality Duty (GED) came into force across the UK in April 2007. Its purpose is to ensure that all men/boys and women/girls are treated fairly by public agencies and public services.

Treated 'fairly' does not always mean 'treated exactly the same'. It does mean that the different needs and realities of women/girls and men/boys should be built into all public policies, practices and services.

Much of the discussion about the GED has focused on its intended benefits for women. Equal pay for equal work is one key goal. There are also other key issues for women in the workplace and in relation to public services and benefits. By contrast, the meaning and manifestations of the Gender Equality Duty for men (particularly as fathers) - and for children and young people - have been taken into account far less frequently.

Two fundamental realities underpin this report:

First, children and young people benefit significantly from healthy, nurturing relationships with their fathers (and other adult men playing a fathering role). These benefits can be enhanced by effective implementation of the Gender Equality Duty. For better or worse – and, by their presence or by their absence – fathers affect their children's well-being in important and enduring ways. [It should be noted that, throughout this publication, 'fathers' refers not only to biological fathers (resident or non-resident), but also to stepfathers, foster fathers, grandfathers and other men who play a fathering role in the lives of children and young people.]

Second, the Gender Equality Duty presents an opportunity to have a positive impact on the education and socialisation of children and young people. It offers a welcome chance to promote and improve gender equality from a very early age. This, in turn, has the potential to help make gender inequality less of a problem for the next generations.

***Making the Gender Equality Duty real for children, young people and their fathers*** focuses on these largely unexplored potential benefits of this new UK legislation. It provides an overview and then explores four key areas in more detail. This report does not provide all the answers about the potential impact of the GED on fathers and their children. Our hope is that it will stimulate thinking and action by revealing major benefits for children and young people that could result from implementing this Duty fully.



# The Gender Equality Duty – an overview

One of the principles driving legislative reform in recent years has been to move away from laws that ask individuals to challenge discrimination after it has happened – and towards more positive measures that place an onus on public bodies to actively promote equality.

It is this approach that has been adopted in the Equality Act 2006, which amends the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 to introduce the Gender Equality Duty.

The Gender Equality Duty comprises: 1) a general Duty that applies across the UK, which came into force during April 2007; and, 2) duties specific to England and Scotland. It does not apply in Northern Ireland, which already has gender equality duty legislation in place.

The general Duty states that public authorities must seek to eliminate unlawful sex discrimination and harassment in the conduct of their own work, as well as to promote equality of opportunity between men and women. It will affect all public sector bodies as employers and as service providers. It also applies to private bodies or voluntary organisations, when they are carrying out public functions on behalf of a public authority.

Specific duties for listed public bodies in Scotland are as follows:

- Publish a gender equality scheme by 29 June 2007
- Report annually and review progress every three years
- Obtain information on how their work affects women and men
- Consult employers, service users, trade unions and other stakeholders
- Assess the impact of policies and practices on both women and men and use this information to inform their work
- Identify priorities and set gender equality objectives
- Plan and take action to achieve gender equality objectives
- Publish an equal pay policy statement (for bodies with 150+ staff) by 28 September 2007 and report on progress every three years

Public authorities may choose to develop a single equality scheme covering the three public sector equality duties on race, disability and gender. This can help provide coordinated action to benefit people who experience multiple disadvantages. However, there is a risk that such a unified approach will result in gender equality not receiving the attention it deserves due to competing priorities and pressures. A single equality scheme would need to ensure that it complied with the distinctive legal requirements of each of the three duties.

Successful implementation of the Gender Equality Duty will require a mainstreaming approach - activities and actions taken to promote gender equality and eradicate

discrimination must be embedded in an authority's general functions and processes.

Elements of successful mainstreaming include:

- Effective management and leadership
- Developing a shared understanding and vision
- Involving a wide range of stakeholders
- Establishing good information systems
- Facilitating staff development
- Integrating gender equality standards and objectives into routine organisational procedures

In maintaining compliance with this Duty, public authorities will also need to have sufficient information to: assess the impact of their work on men/boys and women/girls of all ages; consult those stakeholders in identifying priorities; and, ensure transparency in decision-making. It is essential that implementation of the Gender Equality Duty achieves the desired outcomes (effective) and occurs where changes will make the most impact (proportionate).

## Gender inequality

After thirty years of the *Sex Discrimination Act* being in force, gender-based inequalities remain entrenched and continue to have negative effects throughout England, Scotland and Wales. Some significant progress has been made, but it has been too little and too slow. New focus is needed. Gender inequality will limit economic success and social progress within the nations of the UK – even as it continues to compromise the well-being and life chances of individuals.

### Workforce issues:

Women comprise a clear majority of the public sector workforce in Scotland, Wales and England. In many child-related job categories – particularly within health, social care, education and early years services – the proportion of women employed is even higher (including several in which women exceed 90% of the workforce). In general, women-dominated occupations and professions are clustered at the lower income, lower status end of the public services spectrum. Women-dominated employment still tends to cluster around caring for younger children and vulnerable elderly people.

The overall trend is of decreasing proportions of men being employed in these settings. Yet, women still do not always receive equal pay for doing the same job as men within these job categories. Even within women-dominated employment areas, men disproportionately hold the senior positions and leadership jobs.

Men are also significantly less likely than women to work with children. The younger the child, the less likely it is that a man will be the person caring for or working with the child. For example, childcare is almost entirely a female employment category; primary schools have a heavily female workforce

# The Gender Equality Duty – an overview

(other than as headteachers); and, secondary schools are the first educational settings with more than a token representation of men.

There are many reasons for these inequalities within the UK workforce. These range from gender stereotyping of employment opportunities to the lower pay and lower status associated with 'women's work'. Some barriers to gender equality in the workforce recently have become *more* difficult to overcome.

For instance, men in (or seeking) jobs working with children have long been viewed with distrust because these are not traditional masculine jobs. More recently, men may sometimes run the risk of being suspected nascent sexual predators with bad motives for working with boys or girls. This has not helped to interest or recruit men into child-related occupations and professions. Indeed, the understandable desire to avoid such damning and damaging suspicions about their personal character and professional motivation has led many men to avoid all employment involving regular, close contact with children and young people.

How the Gender Equality Duty can be used to break down this barrier remains an open question – but one well worth asking and attempting to answer.

Eliminating the obstacles to male inclusion in child-related employment is also good for future generations. Keeping children and young people isolated from positive relationships with adult men as carers, teachers and role models – especially with so many mother-only households – is not helpful to their personal development or to the creation of a more gender-equal world.

## **Service delivery issues:**

The delivery of public services is another key concern of the Gender Equality Duty. Much of what makes service delivery 'gender unequal' today is simply a matter of cultural inertia within the public services. In other words, current gender inequality is the result of stereotypic attitudes, outdated assumptions and familiar, comfortable ways of treating fathers and mothers, as well as boys and girls. For example, while contact with mothers tends to be viewed as mandatory and normal within the culture of public services, contact with fathers tends to be treated as either discretionary or 'going the extra mile' by child-related public agencies.

From maternity services that may overlook fathers to those schools that may still routinely send all information about students exclusively to mothers, there is a marked tendency of some public services to treat fathers as invisible, uninterested in their children's lives and uninvolved in the furtherance of their children's well-being. Such behaviour places an unfair burden upon mothers, creates a negative self-fulfilling prophecy for fathers and deprives children and young people of the benefits realised when both parents are

supported to play their mothering/fathering roles well. This pattern of gender inequality within public service delivery -- and its negative consequences for children and young people – is now being addressed by governments in each of the UK's nations. For example, an HM Treasury report noted: "Services do not yet fully recognise or support the key role of fathers . . . The Government believes much more can be done to release the potential improvements in outcomes for children through better engagement between fathers and services for children and families."<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People said: "If our country recognises that [parents sharing roles] is a worthy goal, then we should make it easier for fathers to do so through a legal and cultural expectation of substantial involvement with their children from the earliest stages."<sup>2</sup>

Article 18 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child declares, in part, that:

1. *States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that **both parents** have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents (or legal guardians) have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.*

2. *For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall **render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities** and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.*

The Gender Equality Duty explicitly calls for greater equality in the delivery of public services. The Duty means that public bodies need to take into account the different needs of women/girls and men/boys in the development and delivery of their policies, practices and services. This includes considering how they interact with both mothers and fathers to understand their different experiences and to tackle discrimination. For example, public services that have excluded fathers as a matter of course (because of the assumption that men have little or no role in parenting) must change their behaviours.

How the Gender Equality Duty can be implemented in ways that honour this commitment is one of the questions that should be addressed by the gender equality schemes required of local authorities and other public bodies throughout the UK. Since October 2007, enforcement of the Gender Equality Duty has become the responsibility of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). Relevant voluntary sector organisations have an important role to play in supporting and encouraging public authorities to implement the Gender Equality Duty fully in ways that result in greater gender equality in practice.



# Successful Implementation - an overview

## What will become true if the Gender Equality Duty is implemented well?

- ✓ ***There are fewer, if any, examples of 'women's work' in the world of child-related public services.***

Professions are not seen, or treated, as being more suitable for one gender than another. Working with children and young people is a positive employment choice for men and as likely a career aspiration for boys as for girls.

- ✓ ***Pay, promotions, terms and conditions of public employment are equal for men and women doing the same jobs.***

Working with children and young people is accorded the same pay and status as other important, professional employment. Gender is not a factor in promotion. Parental leave and benefits are equal for mothers and fathers – and can be accessed equally by either parent.

- ✓ ***Public services respect and engage equally with both parents in all public services for children, young people and families.***

Except when there is a specific justification (e.g., child protection or domestic abuse) for withholding information about, or access to, children and young people, mothers and fathers are treated equally by public service providers. Fathers are encouraged and supported in their parental role as fully as mothers by all relevant publicly-funded services.

- ✓ ***Boys and girls grow up healthier, happier, better-educated and having improved life chances when compared with earlier generations.***

Boys and girls experience close and positive relationships with both of their parents – resident or non-resident, biological or *de facto*. Boys and girls face fewer (and less difficult) gender-related barriers and burdens in their personal, school and work lives.

## 'Questions for Consideration'

### Questions for consideration in relation to implementing the Gender Equality Duty

- ? Is the Gender Equality Duty, and the required plans for its implementation, already well-known and taken seriously in your area – and among your colleagues? What can *you* do to make it more prominent?
- ? What will be necessary to transform the words and aspirations of the Gender Equality Duty into meaningful action within your community / organisation / workplace? What is the first step that *you* can take?
- ? How should the parents affected by decisions and actions in your area be treated differently in light of the Gender Equality Duty? What are your priorities for making these needed changes?
- ? How will the children and young people in your area actually begin to benefit from the Gender Equality Duty? How can *you* help achieve this outcome?

## Resources - an overview

### Key resources

A *Gender Audit of Statistics: Comparing the Position of Women and Men in Scotland*. This can be downloaded at:  
**[www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/27104103/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/27104103/0)**

The English-specific gender equality duties are detailed in: *Statutory Instrument 2006 No. 2930 - The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Public Authorities) (Statutory Duties) Order 2006*. This can be downloaded at:  
**[www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2006/20062930.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2006/20062930.htm)**

The Scottish-specific gender equality duties are detailed in Scottish Statutory Instrument 2007 No.32 – *The Sex Discrimination (Public Authorities) (Statutory Duties) (Scotland) Order 2007*. This can be downloaded at:  
**[www.uklegislation.hmso.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/ssi2007/20070032.htm](http://www.uklegislation.hmso.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/ssi2007/20070032.htm)**

Equal Opportunities Commission – **[www.eoc.org.uk/genderduty](http://www.eoc.org.uk/genderduty)**  
The EOC was a primary source of information on all aspects of the gender equality duty. In particular, see: *Twenty-first Century Dad*, this 16-page document containing policy position statements and statistics on fatherhood at: **[www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/21st%20century\\_dad.pdf](http://www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/21st%20century_dad.pdf)**  
It now has been replaced by the EHRC (Equalities and Human Rights Commission) -- **[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)**

A Code of Practice for Scotland on the Gender Equality Duty is available for download from:  
**[www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/Scottish\\_GED\\_Code\\_of\\_Practice.pdf](http://www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/Scottish_GED_Code_of_Practice.pdf)**

Fatherhood Institute - **[www.fatherhoodinstitute.org](http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org)**  
This voluntary sector organisation (formerly named Fathers Direct) is a key source of guidance, policy and research information about fathers. In particular, see the policy section of the web-site for information about the GED and maternity services, as well as the GED and family services.

Read the full text of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child at: **[www.ohcrc.org](http://www.ohcrc.org)**

National Statistics. *Public Sector Employment* can be downloaded at:  
**[www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=1292](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=1292)**  
There are significant differences in the structure and operation of services for young children across Scotland, Wales and England.

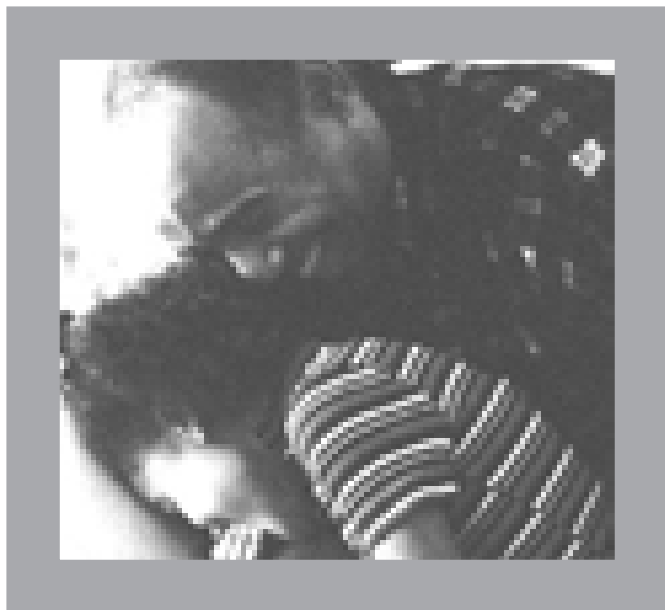


# The Gender Equality Duty in early years provision

However, the basic issues and opportunities raised by the Gender Equality Duty are the same.

This chapter focuses on those early years initiatives that are government-run or operated by private bodies or voluntary organisations when they are carrying out public functions on behalf of a public authority.

## Gender inequality in the early years



“Gender equality (or inequality) begins at home . . . and in the advice given to parents.”

Gender socialisation is often thought of as something that occurs later in life. However, research shows that gender stereotyping and gender-based identity formation occur from birth and are reinforced regularly throughout early childhood. From colours of clothing to types of toys babies and toddlers are given - they learn what they are expected to like, and to do, from a very young age. The effort to eliminate gender discrimination (not gender differences) must therefore begin in the home before children begin attending nurseries, childcare centres or pre-schools.

There is a perennial debate about the extent to which differing preferences of young boys and girls (e.g., girls playing with dolls versus boys playing with lorries) are “natural and inevitable” and the degree to which they are social constructs that begin at home and are later reinforced at childcare centres and pre-schools. We cannot resolve the debate here, but we can prompt discussion about instilling the ethic of gender equality among children of all ages.

Most government-run direct services are for children over the age of four. The Gender Equality Duty covers all of them. However, this Duty will have an impact on very young

children too, primarily through their parents and carers. There is a good deal of work with, and on behalf of, babies, toddlers and younger children.

For instance, there are numerous public sources of information and assistance – from antenatal classes to health visitors and from parent guidebooks to government-funded media broadcasts. All of these help to shape gender-related attitudes and behaviours among parents. No one consciously is seeking to lay a foundation for sex discrimination or gender inequality through these government-funded efforts to inform and aid parents. Still, gender stereotyping and gender inequality may be among their consequences.

The Gender Equality Duty presents an opportunity to reassess the government’s advice and assistance to parents of young children from a gender equality perspective, and also to reconsider any gender bias within government-run services for young children.

### **Workforce issues:**

Women comprise roughly 98% of the workforce in early years provision, which has numerous repercussions on different levels.

The persistent inequality of pay for women throughout the British economy is compounded here by the entrenched devaluing of all ‘women’s work’ in our society. Working in early years settings means having some of the lowest paid and lowest status jobs in the already modest field of education and social services.

A recent 18-month investigation by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) on one such category of ‘women’s work’ – namely, classroom assistants – illustrates the gender pay gap problem endemic to the entire early years sector. The EOC found that, because of the nature of their work, their desire to work with children and the perfect fit (in terms of time management) for many working mothers, employers could get away with paying very poor wages to classroom assistants. It is a classic example of how society, as a whole, and employers, in particular, undervalue work associated with women’s traditional domestic and caring role.<sup>3</sup>

It is disappointing that the widespread attention given to the remarkable research on young children’s brain development has not resulted in a new respect for, or commitment to, the people and professions whose job it is to stimulate and shape these young minds. If the first three years of life are the most crucial ones in human development, then why doesn’t our society place far greater emphasis on what actually is happening to each young child? And, why not give greater recognition to those who care daily for young children?

The Gender Equality Duty has a role to play in changing this situation for the better. Significantly more men will be recruited to, and retained by, services for young children

when there is a dramatic upgrading of the pay and status of this work. If the Gender Equality Duty becomes the stimulus for that change, then it will benefit the entire early years workforce – and, thereby, the children and families served by them.

Improved pay is necessary but not sufficient to solve the gender gap problem in services for young children. Even in Nordic countries (where pay and conditions are better than in the UK), there are fewer men than women in the early years workforce. Men can experience negative reactions about working with young children (except as paediatricians) from peers or families. Such work is seen as ‘natural’ for women – and, conversely, as ‘not natural’ for men.

One Nordic solution has been found through the widespread implementation of ‘nature kindergartens’ in which young children spend nearly all of their time outdoors (no matter what the season or the weather). Using the natural environment as the ‘classroom’ places a premium on nature skills and physical activity. Young boys and girls thrive in such environments, which also tend to be more gender neutral than standard pre-school settings. It has also served to attract many more men to early years work because it strikes these men as work that is more in tune with their own talents and interests. For example, one college in Denmark found that recruiting men became much easier and more successful when they added a ‘nature and movement’ option within their pedagogue-training course.<sup>4</sup>

In the meantime, much can be done to improve the situation by creating a clear and accepted definition of an ‘early years professional’ (or ‘pedagogue’ as the term is used in Nordic countries). Issues about better pay, terms and conditions have to be raised and positively resolved. Affirmative efforts to recruit men should be undertaken within the context and rules of the Sex Discrimination Act (of which GED is a part), so that recruitment practices result in less gender discrimination.

These efforts must deal effectively with the real external and internal barriers facing men interested in working in the early years arena. For instance, they should encourage men to recognise that their experience of being a father is relevant and valued. Helping men to feel welcome in early years settings – whether as fathers, grandfathers, workers, volunteers or students – is a crucial step forward in realising the aspirations of the Gender Equality Duty.

The other early years workforce issue that should be addressed involves child protection checks and procedures. Unfortunately, there is a tiny minority of adults (more often men, but also women) whose motivation for working with young children is unhealthy and unacceptable. There are no easy answers here, just as there is no such thing as screenings that can accurately predict future abusive behaviour. Child protection issues, therefore, will continue to be of paramount importance.

### **Service delivery issues:**

Early years services could, and should, play a vital role in helping mothers and fathers to consciously encourage the ethic of gender equality among young children. This focus on less biased attitudes and behaviour is in keeping with the intent of the Gender Equality Duty. Services that explicitly seek and encourage gender equality can better help young children to develop their own unique talents, instead of discouraging interests that don’t conform to gender stereotypes.

Similarly, early years environments that display a diverse range of images of boys/girls and men/women help to subtly influence young children toward gender equality. Staff should be encouraged to consider all the ways in which they can help children develop positive, non-gender-biased identities. Appropriate pictures, non-sexist language, and gender-neutral activity spaces, games and toys can all aid the positive development of boys and girls.

Since young children absorb virtually everything in their surroundings, creating gender-equal settings is a comprehensive task. How adults speak, listen, play, discipline and behave all convey messages that young children incorporate into their emerging view of the world around them.

Being self-aware (not self-conscious) is the key to maintaining an environment that teaches positive lessons to both boys and girls. A positive approach can help young children learn about who they are, how they should treat each other and what responses they will receive in response to different behaviours.

### **Involving fathers**

The vast majority of fathers (96%) who live with their partners now attend the birth of their child. This is indicative of a sea change in the aspirations and expectations of most fathers today from those in previous generations. The definition of being a ‘good’ father has evolved from one of being a reliable ‘breadwinner’ who chastised his children as required, to one who has regular, active, positive involvement with his children. Fathers are still expected to contribute financially to their children’s well-being, but much more is expected of them in terms of time and commitment by an increasingly large proportion of men, as well as women.

An Equal Opportunities Commission survey revealed that:

- 87% of fathers are confident about their ability to care for their children (and 77% of mothers share that confidence);
- 79% of fathers are happy to stay home alone to care for their children (and 66% of mothers agreed);
- 70% of fathers want to be more involved with their children (and 50% of mothers think that is true); and,

- 58% of men think that ‘breadwinner’ is not the father’s main role (and 62% of mothers agreed).

Whilst a clear majority of men wish to be more involved in their child’s early upbringing, many experience significant difficulties in doing so. Employers have proven to be much less amenable to flexible (or part-time or job sharing) working arrangements for fathers than for mothers. Even when family-friendly policies are officially available to both fathers and mothers on an equal basis, there is a strong and widespread perception that men who take advantage of these policies are looked upon less favourably by their employers than women who do so.

Policies about parental leave and working terms/conditions that result in gender inequality should be re-examined and revised in light of the Gender Equality Duty. The goal is not to advantage or disadvantage either mothers or fathers, but to create and implement effective policies that acknowledge and support the vital contributions of both parents to the well-being of babies, toddlers and young children.

As the Fatherhood Institute notes: “Other European countries have tackled this imbalance by making parental leave available to women and men on exactly the same terms: some for the mother only (as is proposed in the UK until six months after the birth); some for the father only (none proposed yet in the UK); and, some that can be used by either. Even though the pay gap still means men taking time

off is more expensive to the family, the vast majority of families (over 90%) do it when entitlements are structured to be useable – because of the non-financial benefits.”

With the introduction of the Gender Equality Duty, public services should now review the way that they work with families and how they treat mothers and fathers. Adhering to the Gender Equality Duty should mean that maternity and community health services, will encourage the involvement of fathers from the time of their child’s conception onwards.

Even such seemingly obvious ‘women’s’ issues as breastfeeding contain, upon closer examination, an opportunity to involve fathers/partners more fully and directly. After all, successful breastfeeding can be helped by the active cooperation of fathers/partners (from caring for other children in the home to being sensitive to the dietary requirements of lactating mothers). Such help, in turn, is dependant upon both awareness of, and support for, fathers/partners.

Similarly, midwives and health visitors can help fathers to learn how to care for babies at the hospital and on home visits during the first few weeks of a child’s life. Building confidence in fathers during these early days will mean that fathers are less likely to distance themselves from caring tasks and responsibilities as the children grow older. This can lead to greater involvement and positive participation by fathers with their toddlers and young children.



## Successful Implementation - early years

- ✓ ***After the initial period following the birth of a baby, parents (fathers and mothers) have equal choice to be the primary carer for their child.***

Fathers have the training and support necessary to be very competent and confident parents for babies and toddlers. Parental leave and family-friendly policies are gender-neutral – so that fathers actually access these benefits as often as mothers. Early years service providers accord equal respect to all parents -- and share information and advice as readily and effectively with fathers as with mothers. Mothers accept that fathers bring different, but equally valuable, qualities to raising children.

- ✓ ***Services for young children no longer are (or seen as) 'women's work'.***

Men are a significant part of the early years workforce. Women are encouraging and supportive of men in these work roles. The early years workforce is treated with respect and receives equal pay for work of equal value. Boys are as likely to aspire to child-related careers as girls.

- ✓ ***Services for young children are an active, effective force toward creating a more gender-equal society.***

Early years settings offer young children a range of gender-neutral activities and images. Staff members encourage young children to explore and develop their own interests, personalities and talents without reference to whether these are 'gender appropriate.' Young boys are just as likely to be happy, healthy and successful in early years environments as young girls.

### **'Questions for Consideration'**

#### **Questions for consideration in relation to implementing the Gender Equality Duty**

- ? How well do public services for infants and young children in your area connect with, and fully involve, fathers? What will *you* do to further this goal?
- ? How will the young children affected by the implementation plans in *your* area benefit from the Gender Equality Duty?
- ? What can be done to increase the status and pay of early years service providers – and thereby, make it more attractive as a career for men and women alike? What steps can *you* take in this direction?
- ? Are there ways in which early years services in your area can begin to socialise young children toward gender equality? How will *you* help to make this happen?

## Resources - early years

### Key resources

Daycare Trust, 'Men's Work? Changing the gender mix of the childcare and early years workforce' (2003). An 8-page briefing paper available for download at:

[www.daycaretrust.org.uk/mod/filemanager/files/Mens\\_Work.pdf](http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/mod/filemanager/files/Mens_Work.pdf)

Fatherhood Institute 'Early Years' web pages:

[www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/index.php?id=3](http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/index.php?id=3)

This section of the website provides information for professionals on how to engage with fathers in early years settings.

Equal Opportunities Commission 'Equality in the Early Years' web pages:

[www.eoc.org.uk/Default.aspx?page=14806](http://www.eoc.org.uk/Default.aspx?page=14806)

Equal Opportunities Commission, 'An Equal Start: Promoting Equal Opportunities in the Early Years'. Available for download at:

[www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/an\\_equal\\_start.pdf](http://www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/an_equal_start.pdf)

Equal Opportunities Commission (2001), 'The Development of Gender Roles in Young Children: A Review of Policy and Literature'. Available for download at: [www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/gender\\_roles.pdf](http://www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/gender_roles.pdf)

Kahn, T. 'Fathers' Involvement in Early Years Settings: Findings from Research' (2005). Pre-school Learning Alliance. Available for download at: [www.pre-school.org.uk/research/pdf/Fathers%20Report%20-%20final%202.pdf](http://www.pre-school.org.uk/research/pdf/Fathers%20Report%20-%20final%202.pdf)

Learning Teaching Scotland 'Male Workers in Early Years' web pages available at: [www.ltscotland.org.uk/earlyyears/about/currentissues/maleworkers/index.asp](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/earlyyears/about/currentissues/maleworkers/index.asp)

Lloyd, N. et al. 'Fathers in Sure Start', National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) Institute for the Study of Children, Families and Social Issues at the University of London. Available for download at: [www.surestart.gov.uk/\\_doc/P0001408.pdf](http://www.surestart.gov.uk/_doc/P0001408.pdf)

National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) 'Predictors of Father and Father Figure Involvement in Pre-Kindergarten Head Start'. Available at: [www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/](http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/)

Children in Scotland has produced several relevant publications, including, *Northern Lights: Building Better Childhoods in Norway* and *Working it out: developing the children's sector workforce*.

These can be ordered at [www.childreninscotland.org.uk](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk).



# The Gender Equality Duty in education

This chapter focuses on the potential impact of the Gender Equality Duty on publicly-funded schooling – from pre-school through secondary school -- in Scotland, Wales and England. While there are significant differences in the structure and operation of education provision across these three nations, the basic issues and opportunities raised by the GED are the same.

## Gender inequality in government-funded schools

School experience is often different for men and women. Substantial gender differences appear even at the pre-school level and continue throughout primary and secondary school. These differences show up in attitudes, behaviours and performance. For example, the available evidence indicates that young women are more likely to leave school with higher qualifications than young men.

There is a perennial debate about the extent to which these gender differences are “natural and inevitable” and the degree to which they are social constructs that begin at home and are replicated and reinforced at school – a debate that cannot be resolved here.

In light of the new Gender Equality Duty, schools should become places within which both men and women feel equally comfortable, are equally likely to continue their education and are equally likely to succeed.

This is not the case today. Boys are far more likely to be excluded from school than girls. 79% of all exclusions from Scottish schools were male pupils in 2004/05. Boys are also far more likely to be diagnosed with certain behavioural problems, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and more pronounced forms of autism. In fact, boys constituted over 70% of children having official, school-recognised ‘additional support needs’ during 2006.

In general, boys/young men tend to value education less than girls/young women. They are more frequently perceived by teachers to present challenging classroom behaviour - and boys have lower attainment levels than girls. By the age of 13, only 59% of boys, compared to 70% of girls, have reached their expected reading age. Attainment for females is greater at all stages and in nearly all categories (except advanced math and science, which tend to be male-dominated).

Of course, schools are neither failing all boys and young men, nor are they doing brilliantly in educating all girls and young women. There are complex gender issues for both sides.

Choice of elective subjects at secondary schools remains highly gender-segregated. For example, male students are far more likely to take Computing or PE to standard grade, whilst female students are far more likely to choose Foreign Languages or Home Economics. As the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) notes: “Gender stereotyping and the

gender gap continue to have a significant impact on the education, performance and employment choices of boys and girls.”<sup>5</sup> The Gender Equality Duty can be used to offer students, parents, teachers and education leaders an opportunity to consider and address the educational gender gap in government-sponsored schooling.

One often-ignored issue is that some secondary school students are already parents, and most are prospective parents. Policies and programmes do exist to assist teen mothers, but improvements are necessary. Conversely, there are rarely corresponding supports in place through the education system to help teen fathers come to terms with their roles, responsibilities and the potentially positive consequences of being young fathers.

The assumption seems to be that they will not be involved; an assumption that too easily becomes a self-fulfilling negative prophecy. The Gender Equality Duty creates a chance to move beyond the outdated stereotype that young fathers either cannot or will not share the responsibility (and joys) of caring for their babies.

In fact, the Gender Equality Duty offers an occasion to start properly educating and assisting young men to become involved, caring, competent fathers (irrespective of their ongoing relationship with the mother). Better parenting education for both young men and young women would be an appropriate and welcome result of implementing the Gender Equality Duty successfully.

### Workforce issues:

One reason often cited to explain why girls/young women tend to feel more comfortable and successful within schools is that women largely populate them. It remains a rarity to find a male pre-school teacher or men in other pre-school staff roles. Similarly, 93% of Scottish primary school teachers working in publicly-funded schools are women (58% in secondary schools). Men are disproportionately represented only at senior/management levels. Although there is no evidence that the sex of a teacher inherently or inevitably has a significant impact on the academic attainment of a child, this gender imbalance should be redressed.

Add to this workforce reality the fact that mothers are far more likely to volunteer at school -- or to show up for pre-school and primary school events -- and it is clear why schools (at least before the secondary level) are perceived as female domains.

Even within secondary schools, the gender gap tends to be reinforced by the fact that certain traditional ‘male’ subjects (such as Technical Education) continue to be taught primarily by men – whilst traditional ‘female’ subjects (such as Home Economics) are taught almost exclusively by women. These workforce patterns silently uphold and perpetuate the

stereotypes about which subjects are appropriate for which gender.

## **Implications of the Gender Equality Duty for education policy and practice**

### ***Mainstreaming equality:***

The evidence regarding gender inequality in education is not new. However, widespread awareness of inequality has not yet redressed these inequalities. The intention of the Gender Equality Duty is to move from awareness to action – and from acceptance of gender inequalities to their eradication by, and within, government-funded schools.

There is considerable scope for improvement afforded by Scotland's new 'Curriculum for Excellence'. Similar initiatives and opportunities are underway in England and Wales. These existing vehicles should be helpful to advance the Gender Equality Duty.

In Scotland, for instance, local education authorities are responsible for: gathering information about gender equality in their schools; documenting the extent to which their policies and practices promote greater gender equality among students; and, preparing an annual report about the GED-related progress that schools have proposed and made.

A mainstreaming approach would consider all the various factors that might be contributing to the persistence of gender inequalities, sex discrimination and harassment. It also offers the possibility of dealing with multiple types of discrimination (e.g., racial or socio-economic, as well as gender) that occur simultaneously within schools.

Structures, behaviours and attitudes that sustain inequality need to be changed. Reformers should consider workforce practices, timetable changes, teaching methods, guidance and career advisory activities, curriculum content, disciplinary/exclusion procedures and pupil/staff attitudes. In fact, success hinges on schools' ability to deal with these areas simultaneously.

### ***Promoting an inclusive school culture:***

Schools should start from, and work with, the existing attitudes and aspirations of children and young people. The Gender Equality Duty provides an opportunity to shape these attitudes and aspirations in a positive way. Promoting gender equality is a good basis for developing student potential.

Gender stereotyping gets in the way of viewing each child or young person as an individual with unique ways of learning and responding to a school environment. The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) points out: "The new Gender Equality Duty will help schools and education authorities tackle discrimination and promote equality by

taking into account the full impact of gender on pupils' attitudes to school, to each other and to the opportunities available to them."<sup>6</sup>

Promoting an inclusive culture in schools will benefit everyone. An inclusive school culture is one where the emphasis is not only on achieving academically, but also on developing each pupil's fullest potential as people, as members of the workforce, as prospective parents and as active citizens. Such a focus can help schools promote equality in its broadest sense, for instance, by providing new tools to address issues from sexual health to bullying.

## **Involving fathers**

The Gender Equality Duty should serve as a catalyst for all government-funded schools and education authorities to invite, encourage and support the active participation of fathers in their children's education. Beginning with pre-school and continuing through secondary school, fathers should feel far more welcome and much better able to take part in parental events/ consultations than is true in most communities at the moment. Schools need to emphasise to all parents – including fathers – the importance and benefits of being involved in their child's education.

Involving fathers can be a challenging and complex activity for schools, but not an impossible one. One source of complexity is that a significant proportion of pupils have more than one "father" with whom the school now should engage. The presence of a stepfather or a foster father in a pupil's life should not disenfranchise the biological father (or vice-versa). Barring clear reasons for exclusion (e.g., child protection concerns, domestic abuse or compliance with safe contact arrangements<sup>7</sup>), schools should make the effort to locate and communicate with all parents, not just the current resident ones.

Efforts to better involve fathers at school need not have this as their explicit purpose. More ways can be found to bring fathers into the life of the school for reasons that interest and attract them. Once present, then more explicit work with them as fathers can be piggybacked upon the original purpose. For this to happen, someone must take responsibility for working with fathers, as it is unlikely to happen by accident or through diffuse, uncoordinated efforts.

The involvement of fathers can help children's educational attainment and well-being. For instance, fathers who offer kindness, care and warmth during the primary school years are more likely to have children who do well at secondary school. Similarly, fathers who show an interest in what children are learning in class and who read to them at home set an example for their children – particularly sons – that education and reading are valuable, enjoyable and a key means to success.

Active participation by fathers starts through active communication and information sharing with fathers on the part of schools. Unless there is a specific legal or child protection reason for excluding an abusive parent (mother or father), all parents should be treated equally in the distribution of information about school activities and events, as well as individual student progress or concerns. Here, too, the GED offers an opportunity for schools to consider how best to involve both fathers and mothers.





# Successful Implementation - education

## What would successful implementation of the Gender Equality Duty mean within government-funded schools?

- ✓ ***Men are not a rarity within the workforce of pre-schools or primary schools – and women are more fully represented in senior/management positions.***

Women and men are equally likely to be teaching any particular subject at the secondary school level. Universities and CPD providers re-examine their own recruitment/training policies and practices to promote gender equality at the career preparation and career advancement stages.

- ✓ ***Men and women students are equally likely to enjoy, stay and succeed in school.***

Sexual harassment and gender-based bullying at school are history. Men and women students are equally likely to engage in school-sponsored sports and extra-curricular activities, as well as equally likely to select specific subjects to study. Gender equality is *embedded across the curriculum* in numerous, mutually-reinforcing ways. Male and female students are equally unlikely to be disciplined or excluded from school because of their behaviour. Male and female students are equally likely to choose to go on to university and to pursue any field of employment – in part, because school-based guidance and career counselling are gender-neutral. GED-related good practice routinely is exchanged among schools and education authorities.

- ✓ ***Fathers are as well-informed as mothers about the progress of, and concerns about, their children at school – and as fully engaged in supporting their children's success in school.***

Schools are implementing strategies for engaging fathers in their children's learning and fathers feel welcome in schools. Schools work sensitively and collaboratively with fathers, mothers and children in cases of parental separation. If there are no legal or child protection barriers in effect, then schools will communicate and engage equally often, and equally well, with all parents.

## 'Questions for Consideration'

### Questions for consideration in the implementation of the Gender Equality Duty

- ? Is the Gender Equality Duty – and the required gender equality scheme for your schools and education authority - already well-known and being taken seriously by both staff members and students (or in your education-related workplace)? What will *you* do to help with the GED's implementation?
- ? How can your school and/or education authority communicate and engage more fully and effectively with fathers? What steps can *you* take to get this positive emphasis on fathers started?
- ? What are the key first steps that must be taken to reduce gender inequalities within schools (from relationships to curriculum)? How can *you* help?
- ? What can be done to reduce gender disparities in the school/education workforce? Where do *you* think would be the best place to get started?
- ? How will the children and young people in your area actually benefit from the Gender Equality Duty? What can *you* do to ensure that these benefits exist?

## Resources - education

### Key resources

Scottish Government. *Gender Equality: A toolkit for education staff* is available at:  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/08/30161011/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/08/30161011/0)

Equal Opportunities Commission Scotland, *What will the Gender Equality Duty mean for the Pre-16 Education Sector?* Available for download at:  
[www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/What\\_GED\\_means\\_for\\_pre\\_16\\_education\\_in\\_Scotland.pdf](http://www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/What_GED_means_for_pre_16_education_in_Scotland.pdf)

EOC guidance for education in England can be found at the following link:  
[www.eoc.org.uk/default.aspx?page=20177](http://www.eoc.org.uk/default.aspx?page=20177)

Department for Education and Skills, *Engaging Fathers: Involving parents, raising achievement* (2004). Available for download from:  
[www.teachernet.gov.uk/\\_doc/6726/ACF21C0.pdf](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/6726/ACF21C0.pdf)

Educational Institute of Scotland, *The Gender Equality Duty: Local Authorities, schools and the EIS*. 8-page briefing paper available from:  
[www.eis.org.uk/pdffiles/Gender%20advice%20leaflet.pdf](http://www.eis.org.uk/pdffiles/Gender%20advice%20leaflet.pdf)

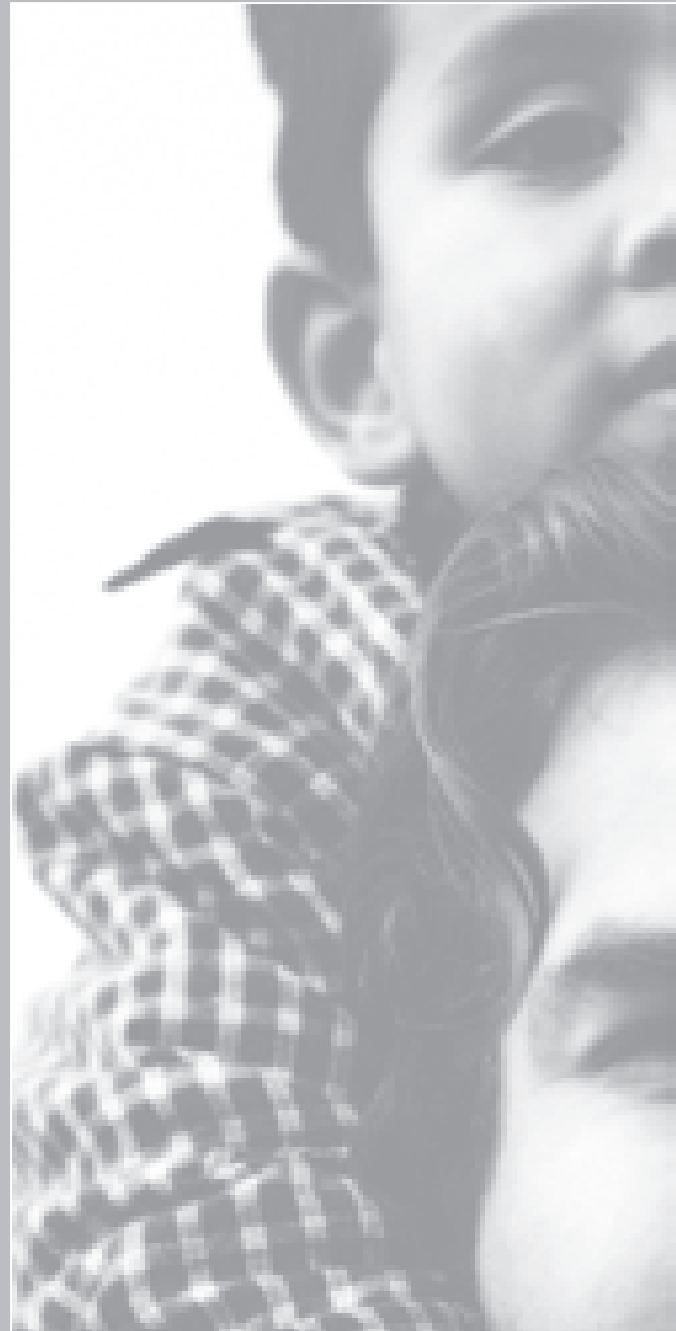
Fatherhood Institute – website section on schools and learning. See: [www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/index.php?id=12](http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/index.php?id=12)

Goldman, R. (2005). *Fathers' involvement in their children's education: A review of research and practice*. London: National Family and Parenting Institute. See:  
[www.literacytrust.org.uk/Research/Fatherreviews.html - Goldman2005](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/Research/Fatherreviews.html - Goldman2005)

*Meeting the gender duty in education 2006*, 4-page TESS pullout. Available for download from:  
[www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/Agenda\\_for\\_Gender.pdf](http://www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/Agenda_for_Gender.pdf)

Scottish Government (National Statistics) *Pupils in Scotland 2007* is available at:  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/07/28100032/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/07/28100032/0)

Scottish Government. *Building the Curriculum for Excellence* can be downloaded at:  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/06/06104407/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/06/06104407/0)



# The Gender Equality Duty in health

This chapter focuses on the potential impact of the Gender Equality Duty on publicly-funded health provision in Scotland, Wales and England. While there are differences in health policy and in the structure and operation of health services across these three nations, the basic issues and opportunities raised by the Gender Equality Duty are the same.

The term 'health' is used broadly. The Duty applies as much to public health campaigns and health promotion activities as to the treatment of illnesses, the management of medical conditions and improved access to services for boys/men and girls/women. The general points made in this briefing are relevant to everything from the treatment of alcohol/drug misuse to the operation of maternity services.

## Gender inequality and health

There are real and persistent gender differences in terms of health status and health issues between males and females. Some of these are obvious and already determined. For example, men never develop cervical cancer and women never develop prostate cancer. Other gender differences are less obvious, but are based on biological/anatomical factors. For instance, sexual transmission of HIV/AIDS is twice as efficient from man to woman as from woman to man.

Other health-related gender differences are caused by a complex mix of cultural and behavioural factors, as well as genetic and biochemical ones (e.g., life expectancy for women is more than five years higher than for men in the UK). And finally, there are major gender differences in some health indicators that appear to be more heavily influenced by social and cultural norms than by male/female physiology (e.g., alcohol misuse or reckless driving).

Here, the focus is on the attitudes acquired and habits developed as boys and girls that could lead to gender-related health inequalities as adults. The long-standing debate about whether persistent gender differences in health status -- and in patterns of morbidity and mortality -- are "natural and inevitable" versus being a social construct will not be resolved here.

However, in light of the new Gender Equality Duty, government-funded health agencies must become equally effective in identifying and meeting the different health care needs of boys/girls, young men/young women and fathers/mothers. They must also become better at preventing health problems for -- and promoting healthy attitudes/behaviours among -- boys/fathers, just as much as among girls/mothers.

Gender inequality still exists in health status and health provision. In general, girls and young women are more receptive to, and better served by, today's spectrum of public health measures and direct health services. Stated the other way around, current health strategies and primary health care practices have proven less effective at reaching, influencing and serving boys and young men.

Women are significantly more likely to visit a GP earlier in the course of an illness or medical condition than are men. This, in turn, means that the treatment of mothers tends to be more successful and less costly than that of fathers.

None of the above should be taken to mean that current health provision is above reproach for girls, young women and mothers. Women of all ages encounter gender inequalities in relation to access and treatment. For example, health services often do not respond well to the needs of women experiencing domestic abuse or mental health concerns -- and they tend not to be as good as they should be at dealing with coronary heart disease among women.

## Workforce issues

Women make up 78% of the NHS workforce in Scotland, with the largest proportion of women working in nursing and midwifery. In a change from the early years of the medical profession, over half of current medical graduates are women.

However, gender differences remain evident in three areas. Women are more likely to become GPs; women are under-represented at the most senior and management levels; and, there is still a significant pay gap favouring men in the health professions. Women also are more likely to be in lower paid, part-time health employment.

For the purposes of this briefing, one key issue for the health sector workforce involves policies and practices for working fathers. Although there is a growing desire on the part of most men to spend more time with their children (and to have more flexible working hours/conditions that support this aspiration), the actions of health sector employers do not routinely reflect this change. Employment practices that encourage, support and reward (or, at a minimum, do not penalise) a better work/life balance for all health workers with children would be of great benefit to those children and young people -- and to their parents.

Enabling more fathers to actively care for their children also is a key way to facilitate more and better-paid employment amongst women -- and thereby, help to reduce the gender pay gap. If few men are actually accessing existing flexible working policies (relative to the proportion of female staff doing so), then health sector employers should actively investigate the reasons behind this gender difference as part of the requirements of the Gender Equality Duty. Once the reasons are better understood, the employer should take the steps to produce gender-neutral outcomes. Experience to date suggests that relatively simple steps toward making it equally easy for working fathers to meet their parental responsibilities -- e.g., time off to collect their children from childcare centres, to attend school conferences or to stay home with a sick child -- can make a big difference to fathers, mothers and their children.

### **Case study:**

At least one NHS organisation has increased the number of male employees working part-time from two to 61. The organisation looked at the interests of different groups of fathers within its workforce, such as new, first-time fathers and non-resident fathers. A member of staff is dedicated to supporting employees who want to become more active fathers, as well as to promoting wider awareness of men's childcare responsibilities/opportunities.

## **Implications of the Gender Equality Duty for the health sector**

### ***Service delivery to children and young people***

Gender inequalities exist in the health system for men and women from infancy to old age. From newborn babies to secondary school students, there often are different expectations about the behaviour and development of girls/young women and boys/young men. Such expectations (e.g., that boys will be relatively active and girls will be relatively docile) exist among both parents and health providers. These gender-stereotyped attitudes reflect cultural norms and traditional gender stereotypes more than immutable physiological truths.

Too often, the gender biases held by parents are reinforced (rather than challenged) by health workers and by publicly-funded health information and advice. From the notion that baby boys need and prefer rougher play than baby girls to the idea that schoolboys want and should have more outdoor time than schoolgirls, these societal attitudes sow the seeds of gender differences in adult health status and health behaviours.

The Gender Equality Duty provides a great opportunity to re-consider the myriad ways (large and small) that health-related messages, attitudes, policies, actions and strategies differ in relation to girls/young women and boys/young men. Where these are justified by inherent biological and physiological differences, they are appropriate and necessary. Where they simply replicate irrational assumptions and gender-biased attitudes, they need revision.

The most important point here is that the gender socialisation of boys and girls affects their life-long health. It is neither just a coincidence – nor pure biology – that girls suffer more often than boys from eating disorders, or that young men have a higher incidence of completed suicide than young women. The gender socialisation established as children, and reinforced during adolescence, sets the stage for markedly different adult health consequences.

There also is a growing concern about the gap between young men and young women in their actual use of health services, even where access is equally available and actively encouraged. This is particularly apparent in sexual health services. Young men are notably more reluctant to seek GP visits or to accept STI (sexually transmitted infection) screening opportunities. The burden of disclosure and treatment tends to be placed upon young women.

Some blurring of gender identities is happening amongst children and young people. Although boys traditionally played sports frequently, more boys now are adopting sedentary lifestyles (for example, spending a lot of time viewing screens) with inevitable negative health consequences. Moreover, a growing number of boys today are developing the kinds of eating disorders traditionally associated with girls. There is some speculation that this is influenced (at least, in part) by the growing popularity of male fashion and body-conscious magazines; publications that may instil an unhealthy, unrealistic image to which some boys now aspire.

Some girls, conversely, are increasingly adopting traditional male behaviours, such as fighting or drinking. A recent BBC survey found that almost one in 10 people aged 18 to 34 reported having been physically attacked by a drunken woman. And yet, the medical evidence is that the identical binge drinking behaviour among young women is even worse for them (physiologically) than for young men.

All of the aforementioned realities create a conundrum for health agencies and services. On the one hand, the evidence shows that existing outreach strategies and health messages are not equally effective for young men as they are for girls and young women. On the other hand, to increase their effectiveness, some health officials tend to opt for campaigns and initiatives that reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. For example, sports-oriented appeals to boys and fashion-oriented appeals to girls. How to deal with the apparent contradiction that gender stereotyping can both contribute to health problems -- and aid in overcoming health problems -- is a dilemma raised when taking the Gender Equality Duty seriously.

Under the Gender Equality Duty, health services need to look at how they engage with young boys/men, and look at barriers that boys/men have in accessing services and provide better solutions. Health services also need to take gender into account when designing health promotion campaigns, given that smoking, food, weight, body image and alcohol consumption have all been so closely linked to the ideals of masculinity and femininity.

### **Involving fathers in the health system**

Supporting both mothers and fathers to become active, nurturing, good parents is crucial in helping children to grow up healthy – physically, emotionally and mentally. Whether the parents are married (or residing together) should not be the

litmus test for involvement of either the mother or the father in their children's health education and health care. There is considerable evidence to show that children are happier and healthier when they have both parents in their lives (irrespective of whether these parents remain a daily part of each other's lives). The research indicates that the involvement of both parents is especially helpful for disadvantaged or vulnerable children.

A prime opportunity for engaging with men is prior to, or immediately after, they become fathers. It is now generally acknowledged that there are considerable benefits from involving fathers at a very early stage in their partner's pregnancy; benefits for the child, the mother and the father himself. Building on this fact, the NHS in England published an eight-page guide for dads-to-be in its *You're Pregnant* magazine (distributed free at antenatal clinics).

There appears to be a particular difficulty within health services and systems in engaging successfully with teen-aged boys and young men who are about to become fathers. Dismissive attitudes and behaviours about the responsibility, maturity and interest of young men in their children can become another self-fulfilling negative prophecy. More could and should be done to identify, educate and assist young fathers (and fathers-to-be) by health professionals. The costs for their children are too high to ignore or resist this opportunity.

The language itself could and should change so that, for instance, reference is made to expectant fathers as well as to expectant mothers. Similarly, the increasing number of grandfathers caring for their grandchildren on a regular basis often feel excluded from even approaching informal meetings of 'mothers and toddlers' and by 'Grannies' groups.

There is some controversy about whether a major increase in the number of men employed to work with fathers (before and after the birth of their children) is a key factor in promoting gender equality. There is widespread agreement, however, about the need for health services to be more welcoming and responsive to fathers. The approach taken seems to matter at least as much as who is dealing with the fathers. Gender equality schemes should go beyond simply opening the door to men for previously all-women health settings and services. The services and approaches used also should be changed for the better.

For a child diagnosed with a disability or long-term medical condition, it is important to engage fathers (as well as mothers) as fully as possible with health professionals. This can help parents come to terms with the disability together; strengthen their relationship; and benefit both the child and the family as a whole.

While this seems obvious, it has not been the norm in practice. All too frequently, fathers (especially non-resident fathers) are absent involuntarily and feel excluded. This reality is a contributing factor to the finding in a study by Mencap that eight in 10 families with a disabled child describe themselves "at, or close to, breaking point". Reaching this

breaking point happens faster, and more predictably, when fathers are not positively involved.

The Gender Equality Duty should serve as a catalyst for all government-funded health services and health-related initiatives to invite, encourage and support the active participation of fathers in their children's healthy development. From birth and continuing through adolescence, fathers should be (and feel) far more welcome to take part in the health education and health care of their own children. The health system needs to emphasise to *both* parents the importance and benefits of being involved in positively influencing and guiding their child's health-related attitudes and actions.

Involving fathers can be a challenging and complex activity, but not an impossible one. Part of the challenge flows from the reality that a significant proportion of children and young people today have more than one "father" with whom the health system now should engage. The presence of a stepfather or a foster father in a young patient's life should not disenfranchise the biological father (or vice versa). Barring clear reasons for exclusion or supervision (e.g., on child protection or domestic abuse grounds), health providers ought to make the effort to locate and communicate with the child's mothers and fathers (resident or not, biological or *de facto*).

National policy in England and Wales -- as seen in documents such as Department of Health's 'National Service Framework for Children' and HM Treasury's 'Aiming High for Children: Supporting Families' -- are beginning to emphasise the importance of involving both parents equally. Engaging with fathers as well as mothers should be seen as a universal and fundamental characteristic of publicly-funded health services. As Minister for Children, Young People and Families, Beverley Hughes noted:

"The vast majority of fathers – whether or not they live with their children day to day – have a crucial role to play in giving their children that best start in life. Their on-going commitment, together with active interest and involvement in all aspects of their children's life and development really matters enormously. But, I also think that many fathers feel that their role is undervalued and isn't recognised by society as a whole; and that they do not feel supported in this role by public services or receive the help they need."

Active participation by fathers starts through active communication and information sharing with fathers from all parts of the health system. Unless there is a specific legal or child protection reason for excluding an abusive parent (mother or father), all parents should receive health information about their children. The GED offers an opportunity for health services and health providers to consider how best to involve both fathers and mothers in promoting their child's health and well-being.



# Successful Implementation - health

## What would successful implementation of the Gender Equality Duty mean in the health arena?

- ✓ **Men are as likely as women to work with babies, children and young people throughout the health sector.**

Boys are as likely to aspire to child-related health careers as girls. Fathers working in health jobs are actually taking advantage of flexible schedules, part-time employment and family benefits as fully as working mothers. Women working in the health system are as likely to be promoted and well-paid as men; thereby eliminating the financial incentive for fathers to go to work, while mothers remain home.

- ✓ **Boys are as likely as girls to live long and healthy lives.**

The health system is equally effective in promoting healthy attitudes and behaviours among young men and young women. Men and women are equally likely to seek and benefit from health advice, care and treatment at the right time.

- ✓ **Fathers are as likely as mothers to be the primary source of good health information and competent health care for their children.**

Health system workers at every level and in every field accord equal respect to all parents – and share information as readily and effectively with fathers as with mothers. Fathers are as likely as mothers to be good health role models – and to advocate for the health needs of their children.

## ‘Questions for Consideration’

### Questions for consideration in the implementation of the Gender Equality Duty

- ? Do your health colleagues fully understand the implications and applications of the Gender Equality Duty and the specific gender equality scheme that affects them? How can you help to inform them?
- ? How will the children and young people in your area actually benefit from the Gender Equality Duty? What can you do to help achieve positive outcomes?
- ? What are the most important next steps in ensuring that fathers are as fully and effectively engaged as mothers in their children’s health (and with health providers)? Which of these steps are you ready, willing and able to take?
- ? What are the best ways to both use (short-term) and eradicate (longer-term) gender stereotyping to improve children’s and young people’s health? Which strategies will you use to make a positive difference?

## Resources - health

### Key resources

Equal Opportunities Commission – Promoting gender equality in health' (2003) is a 64-page research report that can be obtained from:  
[www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/promoting\\_gender\\_equality\\_in\\_health.pdf](http://www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/promoting_gender_equality_in_health.pdf)

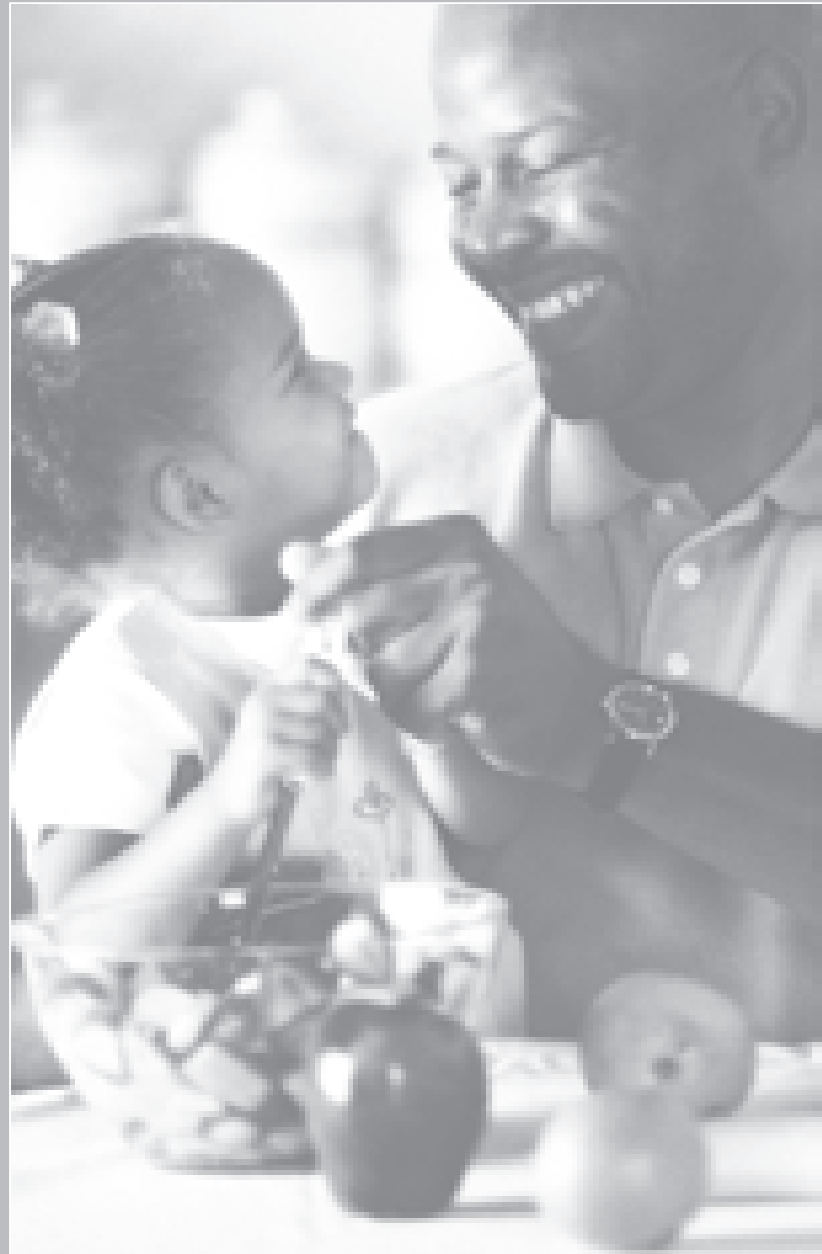
'Fair For All – Gender' was a partnership project between the EOC and the Scottish Executive Health Department. It ties into existing Fair For All strands of race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion and belief. See: [www.eoc.org.uk/Default.aspx?page=19027](http://www.eoc.org.uk/Default.aspx?page=19027)

Fatherhood Institute – In addition to a good section on maternity services from a father's perspective, see the web pages that deal with fathers and drugs/alcohol:  
[www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/index.php?id=16](http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/index.php?id=16)

Enquire – the Scottish national advisory service and helpline for parents, practitioners and young people on additional support needs. See:  
[www.enquire.org.uk/pcp/index.php](http://www.enquire.org.uk/pcp/index.php)

"Dad's Zone" on the Contact a Family website contains useful information for fathers caring for disabled children. [www.cafamily.org.uk/dads.html](http://www.cafamily.org.uk/dads.html)

Men's Health Forum - [www.menshealthforum.org.uk](http://www.menshealthforum.org.uk)  
Offers a range of resources on the gender duty and voluntary sector equality duty network. The Scottish website can be accessed at: [www.mhfs.org.uk](http://www.mhfs.org.uk)



# The Gender Equality Duty and vulnerable children and young people

This chapter focuses on the potential impact of the Gender Equality Duty on public policies and government services concerned with vulnerable children and young people. While there are differences in policies and practices across Scotland, Wales and England, the basic issues and opportunities raised by the GED are the same in all of them.

'Vulnerable children and young people' is a broad category that has several distinct parts. For those who are 'vulnerable' because of disabilities or medical conditions, the connection to the Gender Equality Duty is discussed in the previous section on health.

Here, "vulnerable" is intended to include 'looked after' and accommodated children and young people; those that have been abused or neglected (but not removed from their families); children and young people living in poverty; and, those whose well-being is at risk because of other circumstances. These other sources of vulnerability include (but are not limited to): being a crime victim; children and young people affected by domestic abuse; having a parent in prison; or being (or living within a family that is) discriminated against because of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion or sexual orientation.

All government agencies serving vulnerable children and young people in Scotland, England or Wales are subject to the Gender Equality Duty. It also applies to private bodies or voluntary organisations, when they are carrying out public functions on behalf of a public authority.

## Inequality and vulnerability

All children and young people are born into different circumstances and have different upbringings. They do not: face the same challenges; have the same ability to cope with adversity; or, enjoy equal access to support during childhood and adolescence.

One fundamental goal of UK society is to help disadvantaged/vulnerable children and young people to enhance the quality of their current lives and to improve the chances that their future lives will be happy, healthy and productive. This is, in fact, the *raison d'être* for a wide variety of public policies and publicly-funded programmes and services in each nation.

In light of the new Gender Equality Duty, public policies and public services must become effective in identifying, assisting and benefiting vulnerable boys/young men and vulnerable girls/young women. They must also become more effective in supporting mothers and fathers to positively impact upon the current lives and life prospects of their vulnerable children.

Genuine gender equality in relation to vulnerable children and young people – or in relation to their mothers and fathers – is not the norm across the UK today. Despite significant progress, government bodies and government-

funded groups continue to evidence gender-stereotyped attitudes and behaviours.

## Gender Equality Duty and working with vulnerable children and young people

### Workforce issues:

Women comprise more than 80% of the workforce in social work and children's services. Gender imbalances within these professions can affect policymaking, recruitment and service delivery.

Research shows that men may be put off applying for caring roles within social work and children's services for many of the same reasons that men tend to avoid jobs in childcare, primary school teaching and paediatric nursing.

These reasons include the widespread societal perception that these 'soft' jobs are not fit for men (nor are men fit for such caring jobs). This negative attitude often combines with fear on the part of many men that their motives will be impugned and that they would be leaving themselves open to charges of being nascent sexual predators or potentially abusive.

A much broader swath of recruitment and training efforts – both by tertiary education institutions and by employers – must deal explicitly and successfully with the external and internal barriers facing men interested in working with vulnerable children and young people.

They should encourage men to recognise that their experiences of being with children in a positive, healthy way (perhaps as a father, football coach, tutor or a Scout leader) are relevant and valued. Efforts to make men feel more welcome in settings that deal with vulnerable children and young people – whether as fathers, foster carers, grandfathers, workers, volunteers or students – are crucial steps towards realising the goals of the Gender Equality Duty.

### Service delivery issues:

Both boys/girls and young men/young women are capable of negative and anti-social behaviour. Both genders are capable of bullying and being bullied, as well as being abusive and being abused. It is certainly true that males (of all ages) instigate far more physical violence than females – and are responsible for the majority of domestic abuse (including psychological and emotional abuse, not just physical harm).

However, according to the recent British Crime Survey, men/boys are much more likely to be the victims of violence than women/girls. This is usually male-on-male violence. By contrast, women are much more likely to be the victims of interpersonal violence (i.e., perpetrated by men who are their partners or ex-partners).

We know that men and women (as well as boys and girls) have different experiences and issues that contribute to their vulnerability to harm or lack of success in society. For example, boys are far more likely than girls to be excluded from school and to experience other forms of social exclusion. It is not a coincidence that boys and young men are far more likely than girls and young women to be: 'looked after'; referred to a Children's Hearing on offence grounds; be diagnosed with behaviour-related additional support needs; and, commit suicide. The Gender Equality Duty requires public services to recognise these differences and work to address them appropriately.

One implication of the Gender Equality Duty is that government agencies and voluntary organisations providing public services cannot simply accept the status quo – i.e., major gender differences in the perception of, responses to, and effects of negative behaviour – as an immutable fact of life. There is an obligation under the Gender Equality Duty for the public sector to have due regard for, and to effectively address, the gender-related barriers and discrimination that limit the life chances of girls/boys and young women/young men.

Of course, most vulnerable children and young people did not acquire their 'vulnerable' status because of their own attitudes or actions. They didn't choose to be born into poverty, or to have abusive/neglectful parents, or to suffer from discrimination caused by the colour of their skin or any other factor beyond their control.

For instance, a disproportionately high number of the young people who are most vulnerable (and who have had the most difficult lives) end up becoming young parents. Social agencies and organisations must deal not only with that young mother's and young father's problems, but also with those of their child. Adding the responsibilities of parenthood to the lives of still-vulnerable, still-struggling young people makes life harder for them, the professionals trying to help them and, of course, for the next generation of even more vulnerable children.

In these circumstances, the Gender Equality Duty-related responsibility of public services is to ensure that gender bias does not become an additional burden to be borne by these already-at-risk children and young people. For example, a Children's Panel should be equally sympathetic and responsive when assessing any child's situation and making recommendations (regardless of that child's gender).

The Gender Equality Duty can be used by public authorities to improve the life chances of vulnerable children and young people. For instance, consultations reveal that some men and women prefer, and respond better to, different approaches by social care staff members. In one study of residential care, boys tended to respond better to a clear articulation of the rules, whilst girls usually were more comfortable with, and responsive to, more emotional appeals.

Staff teams could use the results of such consultations with children and young people to inform changes in their practice to meet the differing expressed preferences of girls and boys. They then should monitor and record the impact of practice changes. This would help practitioners to meet the requirements of the Gender Equality Duty, while better serving all vulnerable children and young people.

### **Involving fathers**

The vast majority of children and young people live in two-parent families (eight in every 10 children). Roughly 90% of lone parent households are lone mother households (although this still leaves approximately 150,000 lone father households across Great Britain). Children who live in one parent families (the majority of which have lone mothers) are more likely to: live in poverty; be less successful in school (behaviourally and academically); have more trouble getting along with peers; run a higher risk of health problems; be at greater risk of abuse; and, run away from home. This is due, in part, to larger social and economic inequalities that adversely affect women.

One study revealed a significant link between the level of involvement of fathers and their sons being in trouble with the police. It found that 35% of boys with little or no involvement with their father became offenders, compared to 18% of boys with a highly-involved father. Other recent research confirms that vulnerable children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to gain even more from a strong father-child relationship than do children from better-off families – and to suffer more when this relationship is lacking.

Nonetheless, there remains a tendency for social work professionals and children's services staff members to be dismissive of the role and importance of fathers, especially non-resident fathers. While there are good reasons to be concerned about the involvement of fathers who have been abusive toward either the child or the child's mother (or both), the importance of involving non-abusing fathers often has been under-estimated.

As Cathy Ashley, Chief Executive of the Family Rights Group (FRG) notes: "Evidence from wider research projects, FRG and partner organisations is that there is a systematic failure of social care services to engage fathers and father figures; failure to listen to fathers' concerns; and, failure to provide appropriate parenting support to fathers."

Both mothers and fathers should be supported in caring for their children. The single biggest driver of the gender pay gap is the unequal sharing of parenting roles. Thus, developing the societal expectation that fathers will be involved actively and positively (as well as financially) in the care of their children would be of great benefit to women, to children and to men themselves.

This basic point applies whether or not the mother and father reside together. As Duncan Fisher, Chief Executive of Fatherhood Institute, points out: "Every aspect of the system to support separated families is under fire from both mothers' and fathers' groups. There has been no significant investment in systems that focus on reducing parental conflict and enabling them to deliver what is most important to children – continuity of loving relationships between the children and both parents . . .

A fundamental weakness in policy relating to separated families is the idea that, after separation, one parent is responsible for caring and the other parent has an exclusively financial role.

This does not work financially or emotionally; causes immense distress; and, undermines the welfare of children at greater risk of disadvantage . . . The UK lags far behind other countries in the extent to which it values and supports the continued contribution of both parents to a child's welfare after separation."

Involving fathers can be a challenging and complex activity for the social work and children's services system, but not an impossible one. It can be harder with non-resident fathers. However, 'difficulty' should not prevent service

providers from more fully and meaningfully involving and supporting fathers.

Another difficulty for staff members arises as a result of the reality that a significant proportion of children and young people have more than one "father" with whom public agencies should engage. The presence of a stepfather or a foster father in a child's or young person's life should not disenfranchise the biological father (or vice versa). Barring sensible reasons for exclusion or supervision (e.g., child protection or domestic abuse), social services providers should make the effort to work appropriately with all parents, not just the current resident ones.

Active and positive participation *by* fathers starts through active communication and information sharing *with* fathers by public bodies. Again, unless there is a specific legal or child protection reason for excluding a parent (mother or father), all parents should be involved in the planning and care process for vulnerable children and young people – and in the distribution of information about their children's progress. Here, too, the GED offers an opportunity for children's services and social workers to consider how best to involve both fathers and mothers in giving their children the best possible life chances.



# Successful Implementation - vulnerable children and young people

## What would successful implementation of the Gender Equality Duty mean in relation to vulnerable children and young people?

- ✓ ***Social work and children's services are an active, effective force for creating a more gender-equal society.***

Boys/girls and young men/young women are treated in ways that respect and incorporate gender differences without perpetuating gender discrimination. Irrespective of gender, vulnerable children and young people are equally likely to be heard, heeded and helped by social work and children's services. These systems reduce the vulnerability – and improve the lives and life chances – of boys/girls and young men/young women with equal success.

- ✓ ***Fathers are as likely as mothers to be positive parents and to benefit from their interactions with social workers and children's services staff members.***

Practitioners and policy-makers accord equal respect to all parents – and provide information and assistance equally often and equally well with mothers and fathers. All parents are part of the solution to the problems that have made their children vulnerable.

- ✓ ***Social work, children's services and other careers caring for vulnerable children and young people no longer are (or viewed as) women's work.***

Men are equally represented in these professions – and women are equally likely to be in senior and management positions. Boys are as likely as girls to aspire to careers in these child-assisting public services.

## 'Questions for Consideration'

### Questions for consideration in the implementation of the Gender Equality Duty

- ? How will vulnerable children and young people in your area actually benefit from the Gender Equality Duty? How can you help to realise these potential benefits?
- ? What are the key next steps in ending gender discrimination and promoting gender equality through your area's gender equality scheme? Which of these steps can you help to take?
- ? How can your community and relevant agencies/organisations in your area better hear, heed and help fathers? What will you do to advance equal treatment for fathers?
- ? How can your community and relevant agencies/organisations in your area promote gender equality toward (and among) girls/young women and boys/young men? How can you help?

## Resources - vulnerable children and young people

### Key resources

Scottish Government. *National Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan for Children and Young People* can be found at:  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/06/17/115558/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/06/17/115558/0)

Scottish Government. *Getting it Right for Every Child in Foster and Kinship Care* is available to download at:  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/12/03/143704/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/12/03/143704/0)

Fatherhood Institute – See, especially, sections on separated families and parents in prison at:  
[www.fatherhoodinstitute.org](http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org)

Smith, M et al (eds) (2005) '*Secure in the Knowledge: Perspectives on practice in secure accommodation*' Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care. Available for download from:  
[www.sircc.strath.ac.uk/publications/29034SecureAccomm.pdf](http://www.sircc.strath.ac.uk/publications/29034SecureAccomm.pdf)

Centre for Social and Educational Research, DIT, (2002). '*Gender Equality and Crime Prevention Policies*' Available for download from:  
[www.ndpgenderequality.ie/downloads/geu.crime.pdf](http://www.ndpgenderequality.ie/downloads/geu.crime.pdf)

Articles on male carers can be found on the British Adoption and Fostering website at:  
[www.baaf.org.uk/res/pubs/bmp/archive/topics/male.shtml](http://www.baaf.org.uk/res/pubs/bmp/archive/topics/male.shtml)

Family Rights Group (2006) '*Fathers Matter: Research Findings on Fathers and their Involvement with Social Care Services*'. Available from [www.frg.org.uk](http://www.frg.org.uk)

Ghate, D., Shaw, C. and Hazel, N. (2000) '*Fathers and Family Centres: Engaging fathers in preventative services*', Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available for download from:  
[www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/1859353/18.pdf](http://www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/1859353/18.pdf)



# Conclusion

This report has considered the Gender Equality Duty's potential benefits to children, young people and their fathers. The fundamental thread running through all the chapters is how profoundly important fathers (or father figures) are in the lives, and to the well-being, of all children. This is true whether fathers are good or bad; present or absent.

Accordingly, when schools, health agencies, children's services or other public bodies ignore fathers; accord them only the status of a 'optional extra'; or, fail to help men be the best fathers they are capable of becoming, they are doing no favour to children and young people. The Gender Equality Duty (GED) creates an obligation for public bodies to actively promote gender equality.

By and large, public agencies and institutions want to meet the needs of children and improve the lives of young people. Children and young people need and deserve the best fathering possible. Thus, good fathers and positive fathering should be a more explicit and well thought out element within public sector policies, practices and programmes.

None of this should be taken to mean that fathers and fathering are more important than mothers and mothering. They are not.

However, as the Gender Equality Duty is being considered across Britain, it offers a new chance to take a fresh look at old realities. Rethinking and, where beneficial, reinventing the ways in which the public sector acts in relation to fathers and fathering could be a boon to children and young people. This is one of numerous ways in which the Gender Equality Duty could make a difference for the better in our society.

The other main thread is the GED's potential to change and improve the gender socialisation of the next generation, as well as create gender equality among today's children and young people. Gender stereotyping and gender discrimination do not wait until adulthood to manifest themselves. Therefore, efforts to combat these inequalities must also be taken seriously during infancy, childhood and adolescence. The more that the next generation understands (and believes) that gender is *not* destiny for themselves or their peers, the better the world will become.

For the Gender Equality Duty to live up to its potential and to deliver its prospective benefits, the public sector must go beyond mere compliance. The Duty must be embraced – not just accepted - by policymakers, managers and practitioners.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Aiming High for Children: Supporting Families*, HM Treasury, March 2007

<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Marshall, Presentation at "Fatherhood: the child's perspective" meeting, January 2006

<sup>3</sup> Laura Hutchison, "Scotland's classroom assistants 'victims of gender pay gap'", *Children in Scotland*, June 2007

<sup>4</sup> Ulla Gerner Wohlgenuth, "One for all: men on the pedagogy course", *Children in Europe*, September 2003

<sup>5</sup> *What will the Gender Equality Duty mean for the pre-16 Education Sector?*, Equal Opportunities Commission, 2007

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Children (Scotland) Act 1995 as amended by the Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006

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