

GENDER ACTION London Pilot

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

Summary

IOP Institute of Physics

"We feel that we are at the beginning of our journey and there is still a lot more we can do."

- Nursery School - Initiator submission

DECEMBER 2019

ABOUT THE AWARD

Gender Action is an awards programme which promotes and supports a whole-school approach to challenging gender stereotypes, based on over 10 years of research and evidence from project partners King's College London (KCL), Institute of Physics (IOP), University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) and University College London Institute of Education (UCL IOE). Gender Action also worked closely with The Development Education Centre South Yorkshire (DECSY) to develop the framework and best practice.

The aim of the award scheme is to inspire, incentivise and support schools, nurseries and colleges to tackle gender stereotyping in all aspects of the education establishment, including the community and curriculum to provide better outcomes for individuals and communities. Participating nurseries, schools and colleges pass through various stages in the programme; moving from Registered, to Supporter, to Initiator, to Champion, to Beacon status.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The following terms are used to describe the process of engaging with Gender Action:

Registered – education establishments register support on the website via an online form and automatically join the Gender Action mailing list. This prompts a letter to gain support from senior management.

Supporters – badges are awarded when a signed letter is received from senior management.

Initiator – badges are awarded when a school's Initiator plan has been assessed and approved.

Champion – badges are awarded when the schools' project has been evidenced and approved, against the Initiator plan.

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Beacon – final badge to be awarded to those who truly excel and innovate to combat gender inequality and injustice. They will support other schools and be beacons of best practice, showing measurable impact. Beacon status requires a longstanding commitment to whole-school change and was not expected within the scope of this pilot.

Focus Areas – schools submit plans using the Focus Areas to shape their activity.

Schools – participating nurseries, schools and colleges will be collectively referred to as schools, for ease of reading, except where details specifically refer to one age group.

REPORT SUMMARY

The 2019 Gender Action pilot was funded by the Mayor of London and officially launched to all nurseries, schools and colleges across London in February 2019 with the ambition that learning from the pilot would inform a planned national rollout in 2020.

Research demonstrates that gender stereotyping in education has a profound impact on the choices made by children and young people. These choices go on to affect the type of employment opportunities which are open to education leavers, resulting in gender imbalance in a range of careers. The pilot encouraged educational establishments to audit themselves and design, plan and implement projects to challenge these outcomes. Participating establishments were encouraged to evidence the reason for their choices and the impact of the work they did throughout the process.

The independent evaluation shows that the award process has met a need in the education system and had significant impact on participating schools. Schools have begun to change the way they think in relation to gender and, through an iterative process of developing projects for Gender Action, have accessed support and shaped their understanding about how to take whole-school change forward.

This report summarises the collated data and activity for the duration of the pilot, from mid-November 2018 until the end of October 2019 and uses this evidence to make recommendations to support the next phase of the development and rollout of Gender Action.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was carried out on behalf of Gender Action by always possible with the aim of exploring the process of accreditation, the tools and resources needed for effective delivery as well as the potential impact in schools.

Range of research approaches:

- data on how many schools engaged with the programme at each stage
- observing teacher planning and training events
- individual interviews with teachers
- reflection documents from facilitators and members of the consortium through the pilot
- research into how digital badging and school awards are used in different contexts
- Initiator submission documents: Goal Setting and Action Plans
- Initiator moderation feedback
- online engagement statistics

The story so far...

Over **1500** people reached through face to face engagement

425 registered on the mailing list

305 schools registered their interest in the award

120 schools became Supporter schools

1 in 14 schools across London engaged with Gender Action

31 nurseries, schools and colleges submitted Initiator plans

25 nurseries, schools and colleges were awarded Initiator status

25 nurseries, schools and colleges are now working towards Champion level

IDENTITY & COMMUNICATION

The pilot demonstrates Gender Action has a high level of appeal at education settings from early years up to secondary schools. Schools came from across age groups, included both private, state schools and academy chains and spanned across London Boroughs.

Raising awareness activity took time, but through networks, partners and stakeholders Gender Action made good use of resources and broadened its reach. A blend of digital and face-to-face communications are essential in building awareness and trust in the scheme.

Schools clearly started to use the award as a positive badge of honour, and the clarity of the award's mission is starting to create new cultures of whole-school statements about gender.

Going forward, Gender Action has a role to play in helping schools articulate the impact of their activity and to celebrate their achievements.

PRACTICALITY & SCALABILITY

The low barrier to entry at Registration and Supporter level was effective at securing early engagement. Schools who got further through the programme tended to be those who had already identified a need for a framework to help tackle gender or equality issues they had already identified. There is the potential to develop simple audit tools which support unengaged schools to start to identify the situation in their environment.

The flexibility afforded to schools in identifying their own challenges meant schools were able to use the framework to shape projects to meet their own outcomes. Key to the award's continued success will be moving whole-school gender-inclusive behaviour from a theoretical concept to tangible action that can be articulated with, by and for all school staff.

Good examples of how the programme has been applied in different settings are already beginning to emerge. Language used and the specificity of evidence needed is being tested, in order to help evolve the accreditation. Some schools identified ambitions to become beacons of best practice which offers opportunities for a network of peer support to increase the capacity of the rollout.

"We hope that working on these priority areas will create a change in culture within the school that positively benefits not only the children but also everyone in the wider community, helping to create a dynamic and enabling environment."

- Nursery - Initiator submission

RELATIONSHIPS & SUPPORT

The collaborative, iterative and flexible approach is working well. Opportunities to network and share ideas and best practice with other educators are of enormous value to participating schools. The cross-sector consortium of experts and partners adds value to the programme.

Additional resources and gender-inclusive teaching resources can be developed following pilot feedback. This will support teachers to feel more confident tackling gender stereotyping and build a strong base of advocates within their school community. Gender Action can also develop resources to demonstrate how the programme is a solution to schools meeting their statutory obligations.

Balancing the level of communication with schools can be challenging. Gender Action needs to keep the programme on the agenda, without schools becoming overwhelmed with information. Checking in with schools is important to troubleshoot any challenges which have not been picked up through other means. Events and CPD opportunities are effective in maintaining contact with schools indirectly and provide good opportunities for peer support.

Resources and support requested by participating schools:

- Gender-inclusive language posters
- Gender-inclusive language alternatives for teachers
- Lists of gender-inclusive books and video clips to support lessons
- Best practice models for feminist clubs
- Conversation starters to explore gender stereotyping
- Resources to tackle rape culture and sexual harassment
- Resources to support gender neutral PE practice
- Lesson plans around collecting data
- Adaptable questionnaires supporting student voice and engaging parents/carers
- Audits to support schools identifying their current situation
- Teacher training on how to pass on enthusiasm for science in nursery and primary teaching
- Resources to support whole-school staff meetings and making a compelling argument for change
- Case study template to enable schools to share best practice and ideas more widely

WIDER CONTEXT & LEARNING

Gender Action gives a focus, framework and structure to address the root of many challenges brought into classrooms, including domestic violence, mental health, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and human rights.

The central platform enhancements will be pivotal for any rollout. This will improve the communication flow between schools and Gender Action. There is also potential for this platform to provide valuable datasets to support the effective development of the programme and measure the impact of the programme over time.

Gender Action will be an award programme, rather than digital badges. However, the way digital badges are used to identify specific skills could provide an opportunity for Gender Action to award incremental progress.

Whole-school approaches to ideas like Gender Action do need targeted and clear support over a period of time. It is clear from the pilot that long term change is about more than achieving the award and involves schools demonstrating a long-term behaviour change.

The teachers involved in the programme to date identify the programme has introduced new ways of thinking. Schools work within a community and a system; it will be interesting to see how the Gender Action award impacts a wider reduction in stereotyping and unconscious bias over time.

“Planning over time enables schools to ensure they are going for long term change not just short one-off activities.”

- Consortium reflection document

RETHINKING ENGAGEMENT

Target local engagement to nurture and support schools already engaged with gender-inclusive activity, including:

- Provide intense support to ten schools working through the process of achieving Champion status, with an eye on how these schools can become Beacon schools in the next three years
- Co-design the process of Champion status alongside schools to develop clear guidance for each step of the process of achieving an award
- Encourage the ten Champion schools to create data stories and maps of whole-school engagement to use as case studies

“Our school already had these issues on their radar, the lead teacher had done wider reading. The Gender Action process has provided a focus and a structure, and the ability to get feedback from experts. There is sometimes will in schools, but this does not always lead to execution.”

- Secondary – Initiator submission

Create systemic change by building communities of peer support, including:

- Developing opportunities for schools to support each other and build connections, through CPD and planning opportunities at every award stage
- Investing in supporting schools to tell positive stories and articulate the impact of the programme, through case studies, online and celebration events
- In time, ensure resource is in place to support Beacon schools to mentor other schools and further develop the programme

Maintain central coordination of the awards whilst developing local networks, including:

- Using collated insights gathered through schools’ interactions with the online platform to develop a bank of resources which meet the challenges often identified by schools
- Increase teachers’ confidence to deliver and advocate for key messages by stimulating conversation and supporting schools to navigate controversy
- Curate a programme for participating schools through events and online community

Develop a clear role and offer for partners and stakeholders to build local networks of supporters as well as schools, including:

- A separate registration process and identity
- Resource sharing and signposting
- Recommended CPD provider partners



THE GENDER ACTION PROCESS

Make raising awareness of the programme in schools part of the process of gaining an award, including:

- Articulating the stages of the programme as an iterative process through which educational establishments continually interrogate how gender plays out in their environment
- Providing a 'Get Started' kit on sign-up: a series of posters and resources to use around school and templates to use in internal and external communications
- Introduce Interim Badges, enabling schools to celebrate their achievements throughout the time it takes to achieve champion status

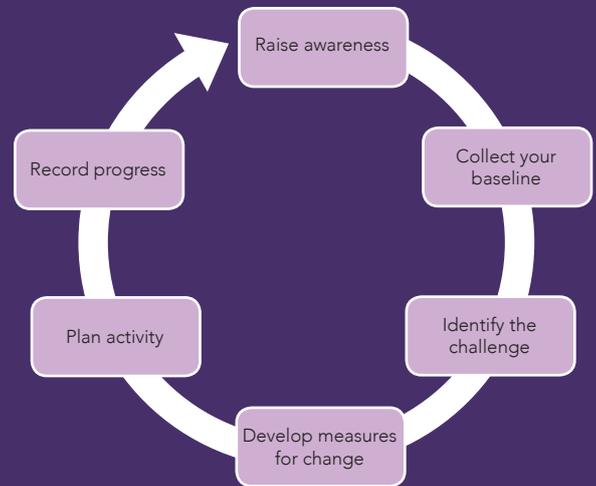
Refine the process of submission through the online platform to encourage schools to think in terms of Gender Action outcomes, including:

- Linking schools to the online platform as soon as they Register, so targeted support can be given at each stage and more information can be collected about how schools engage with the process
- Designing the stages on the platform to encourage educators to use their baseline data to identify their challenges, before deciding on their activity
- Using prompts and dropdown options to nudge schools to consider the full eco-system of the school community and how their projects could touch different levels of staff, parents and governors as well as students

Support schools to positively articulate impact, including:

- Using Gender Action Focus Area statements to clearly articulate the outcomes for which Gender Action projects are aiming
- Provide and suggest easy to use audit activities against these outcomes to encourage schools to collect baseline data as soon as they register and monitor movement towards these goals
- Create dropdown menus with suggestions to explain the type of responses expected at every stage of the process, so schools are guided to think in terms of these outcomes

ILLUSTRATION OF THE SUGGESTED GENDER ACTION PROCESS



“As we are an early years setting, most children are only with us for 1 or 2 years so we need to be on a continual cycle where attitudes and approaches of staff, children and families are challenged and a new perspective introduced which opens up a world of gender possibilities.”

- Initiator submission - Nursery

Define a Champion school by the behaviours they exhibit in approaching their challenges, as well as the activities they carry out, including:

- Using quantitative and qualitative data to demonstrate and celebrate impact over time
- Engaging a broad range of learners, staff and the wider school community
- Embedding activities and practice in school development

EXAMPLE OF USING FOCUS AREA DEFINITIONS TO FORM POSITIVE STATEMENTS FOR SCHOOLS

| FOCUS AREA | DEFINITION | SUGGESTED AUDIT QUESTIONS |
|--|--|--|
| PERSONAL PRACTICE: SUPPORTING STAFF TO REFLECT | It's important to involve all staff within the school, to ensure everyone is working towards gender equality, trained to play an active role, and aware of the effects of unconscious biases. | Our staff undergo CPD activity to support gender-inclusive teaching practice. Our staff monitor classroom management to ensure opportunities are open to all. Our staff challenge unconscious bias in ourselves and others. |
| STUDENT VOICE: PUTTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF CHANGE | A crucial step is supporting children and young people to understand and challenge gender injustice and stereotypes, allowing them ownership of the issues. | Our staff discuss gender injustice and stereotypes openly with learners. Learners are supported to challenge gender injustice and stereotypes through all areas of school life. Learners are given opportunities to lead the development of gender equal practices in our school. |
| CURRICULUM AND LEARNING | Resources and the curriculum should be balanced to ensure equal opportunities. Learners should be able to choose subjects and activities based on their preferences and skills, rather than being guided by their gender. | Our staff regularly review our curriculum to ensure it has good gender balance. Our resources are monitored to ensure they are gender-inclusive. Learners are supported to choose subjects based on their personal preferences and skills, not their gender. |
| PROGRESSION, CHOICES AND JOBS | Everyone has a role to play in opening learners' eyes to the diversity and range of options available for their future, without their own or others' gendered expectations. | Our staff provide progression and career advice which presents a range of options regardless of gender. Our staff ensure our career advice presents options which challenge gender stereotypes. Our staff support learners to challenge their own limiting beliefs about their career options. |
| INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS | Schools communicate with a wide variety of audiences, including parents/carers, students, staff and the wider community. It's important to ensure communications materials are not reinforcing gender bias. | Our staff check our external communications to ensure they present achievements and opportunities for everyone. Our staff check our internal communications to ensure they don't reinforce gender stereotypes. |
| ENGAGEMENT WITH PARENTS, CARERS, AND THE WIDER SCHOOL COMMUNITY | The biggest impact will be made when the whole nursery or school community works together. Involving parents/carers from the start can help children and young people challenge gender inequality in wider life. | We work with learners, parents and carers to involve everyone in the school community in challenging gender injustice and stereotyping. |

THE GENDER ACTION PILOT

The Gender Action pilot demonstrated a huge impact in starting conversation in schools about gender stereotyping in education. There was a high level of engagement in the programme from schools across the target region, with clear appetite in other geographical areas, indicating that a national rollout of the programme would be supported. There is also good evidence to show that the programme has wide support from stakeholders outside educational establishments, and there is an opportunity to develop these roles and increase the capacity of the programme.

As the pilot developed, good progress was made towards defining how conceptual ideas of gender balance in education can be delivered through practical activity. An iterative approach to school activity will provide schools with measurable outcomes and incentives to continue their work. Clearer guidance can be co-designed with schools in the next stage of the rollout.

Gender Action offers a structure for working towards change which intersects with a range of other equality issues, enabling schools to tailor their approach to meet their local need. Through exploring the ways in which schools have interacted with the programme at different stages, it has been possible to highlight a range of opportunities to develop the approach and support mechanisms alongside the awards. A key finding of this research was the value schools placed on working with other schools to share challenges and best practice. Developing local support structures to deliver the programme will strengthen local outcomes.

Fundamental to achieving this systemic change is building on the work started in the pilot and continuing to work with the schools that have already moved to Initiator status. Supporting them over the next two years to move them to Champion status will provide Gender Action with valuable insight into how to move schools along this journey. These target schools will also play an important role in supporting other schools, both directly through advice and indirectly through the growing resources and case studies. In order for this to be a sustainable and systemic change to education practice, long term funding needs to be achieved for the core development of the programme.

The timeframe of the pilot means it is not yet possible to measure the full impact of the projects on pupils' long-term choices. However, the programme design is well supported by research and other initiatives. The online platform will offer essential capability to collect data sets which will show the level of impact the programme is having towards national ambitions for change. As development of the Gender Action programme progresses, local networks of schools will increase its capacity to become embedded across the country.

Here is a flavour of what Gender Action Supporters are working on, in their own words:

★ "Improving staff awareness of unconscious bias in their language, praise and reinforcement of stereotypes, and how these interactions affect children and their progress."

★ "Ensuring students feel empowered, informed and able to discuss gender issues when they recognise them, both at school and in their lives outside school."

★ "Making the curriculum as diverse as the students it is designed for, and to actively challenge negative stereotypes and improve representation."



Launch event panel, from left to right:

June O'Sullivan MBE – Chief Executive, London Early Years Foundation; Anna Cole – Parliamentary and Inclusion Specialist, Association of School and College Leaders; Sam Smethers – Chief Executive, Fawcett Society; Dr Mary Bousted – Joint General Secretary, National Education Union; Pran Patel – Teacher and Equity Activist; Vivienne Porritt – National Leader, #WomenEd.

Photo credit: Dan Josman, Institute of Physics.