31% of respondents had seen people their age creating fake profiles of someone to share sexual images, comments or messages in the last year, while almost half (47%) witnessed other young people sharing personal details of someone who is seen as 'easy'.

6% of young people aged 13 – 17 years have had their nude or nearly nude image shared with other people without their permission in the last year, while 51% have witnessed this happening.

66% The majority of respondents (66%) agree that people will think badly about a girl if her nude or nearly nude image is posted online, whereas a smaller proportion would think the same if it were a boy (45%).

23% of respondents have witnessed young people secretly taking sexual images of someone and sharing them online, while 8% admitted they had done this in the last year.

10% of respondents aged 13 – 17 years have received sexual threats online from people their age in the last year, while 31% have witnessed this happening.

"My mate had an argument with this lad, they can't stand each other, they were talking for a bit but now they don't like each other. She never sent him photos, but he got this photo off the internet and put it on his Story, so-and-so's nudes"
Girl, 13-16 years

" I have experienced lots of homophobic comments after coming out, and have heard other people use them as an insult."
Gender and age unknown

7% of respondents said that someone used sexual images of them to threaten or blackmail them in the last year.

1 in 10 respondents said their boyfriend or girlfriend had pressured them to share nude images in the last year, with girls being more likely to report this.

26% of respondents aged 13 – 17 years have had rumours about their sexual behaviour shared online in the last year, with 65% saying that girls are judged more harshly for this than boys.

4 in 5 respondents (80%) had witnessed people their age using terms like 'sket' or 'slut' to describe girls in a mean way online in the last year, while over two-thirds (72%) had witnessed people using homophobic or transphobic language online.

Almost half of respondents aged 13 – 17 years (47%) said that they have witnessed people their age editing photos of someone to make them sexual, for example putting their face on a pornographic image or placing sexual emojis over them.

1. About this guidance

1.1 Who is this for?

This guidance is for all adults responsible for child protection, children's well-being and implementing safeguarding policies in schools and other youth settings.

1.2 What does this guidance cover?

The guidance covers:
- Defining online sexual harassment and the behaviours it describes
- The impact of online sexual harassment
- The reasons behind online sexual harassment
- Statutory and legal responsibilities for schools and educational settings
- Preventative education
- Improving multi-agency working
- Responding to disclosures
- Increasing reporting amongst young people

1.3 Why is this advice important?

Young people aged 13 – 17 are increasingly at risk of being exposed to unhealthy and upsetting online behaviour from their peers. Whilst technology can be a powerful and positive tool, it also brings with it the potential to carry out harmful actions, including peer-to-peer online sexual harassment.

Addressing all forms of online sexual harassment is vital to support the health and well-being of members of the school community. This is an issue that needs cohesive, collective and collaborative action by the whole school community. In order to teach young people about this issue it is essential that schools model and practice the behaviour they expect from students. This includes open and honest communication, supporting all individuals who need it, involving staff, parents, students and governors, and prioritising relationship and sex education. It includes giving teachers the time, training and support in order to deliver lessons that target these issues. Provision should be made for developing the emotional intelligence and personal development of students and there should be targeted support for those who may have been involved in online sexual harassment. This can only happen with senior leadership commitment, a supportive culture and effective and relevant policies. This advice aims to guide school leaders in embedding best practice throughout their school to manage this issue effectively.

Statistics included are taken from the Project deSHAME survey. This was run in 2017 with over 3000 young people aged 13 – 17 across the UK, Denmark and Hungary. Quotes included are taken from both the survey and from focus groups run in UK schools in 2017. Unless specifically mentioned, statistics and quotes represent data gathered from the UK only.

2. Summary

Understanding online sexual harassment: checklist

☐ Are school staff aware of the different forms that online sexual harassment can take and the specific characteristics of online sexual harassment?

☐ Does the school share a clear understanding of what online sexual harassment is and why it is not acceptable?

☐ Are school staff aware that online sexual harassment can overlap with offline sexual harassment and other harmful sexual behaviours?

☐ Does the school share a clear understanding of agreed terminology and how it should be used?

☐ Does the school effectively address the range of issues relating to bias and prejudice?

☐ Are school staff aware of the range of issues that may contribute to students displaying harmful sexual behaviour online?

☐ Is the school familiar with the key laws and statutory guidance which relate to online sexual harassment?

Preventing online sexual harassment: checklist

☐ Does the school ensure it is taking a whole school approach and embedding online safety and healthy relationships messages across the curriculum and community?

☐ Are the senior leadership team confident and up-to-date in their knowledge of understanding, preventing and responding to incidents of online sexual harassment?

☐ Does the school support all staff in their duty to understand, prevent and respond to online sexual harassment through policy, procedures, and regular training and development opportunities?

☐ Do pupils and staff understand the essentials of keeping themselves safe online – including privacy settings, reporting, and getting material taken down?

☐ Does the school ensure the whole school community is involved in prevention work, including the creation of related policies?

☐ Do all members of staff understand how to report any incident of online abuse they become aware of?

☐ Are students made aware of the different reporting routes available to them? Are students aware of what happens after they make a report and how they would be supported?

☐ Are parents made aware of the different reporting routes available to them? Are parents aware of what happens after they/their child make a report and how they would be supported?

☐ Do staff have an understanding of how young people in the school community use technology? Is the school familiar with the devices, sites and apps the community use?

☐ Does the school promote the positive use of technology?

☐ Are there consequences for sexual harassment, including online, in your school? Is the whole school community clear about sanctions?

☐ Are staff and students aware of the ways in which the school provides support for people who are sexually harassed online?

☐ Is the school monitoring and measuring the impact of its prevention work?

Responding to online sexual harassment: checklist

☐ Are staff familiar with the school's processes for responding to online sexual harassment? If they need to refer to school policies, can they access these easily and quickly?

☐ Is the whole school community aware of how the school supports students who are victims of abuse out of school hours, and in school holidays?

☐ Are staff aware of current attitudes and barriers to reporting amongst students, and are they making efforts to improve these?

☐ Are students who have been harassed being appropriately involved in the decision making and resolution process?

☐ Are appropriate staff trained in carrying out a risk assessment to determine if the incident may be illegal?

☐ Do staff know what to do if they suspect online sexual harassment activity breaks the law?

☐ Do staff know how to escalate reports to appropriate senior staff members using school procedure?

☐ Does the school consult with any other agencies to support their response? (E.g. local children's safeguarding board, children's social services, the police).

☐ Is one staff member acting as the point of contact if other agencies are involved? Is there a clear plan on how to effectively facilitate multi-agency collaboration?

☐ Are staff familiar with the school's processes in relation to searching students, confiscating devices and deleting materials? If they need to refer to school policies, can they access these easily and quickly?

☐ Are all students who may have been affected by an incident of online sexual harassment (bystanders, victims, and perpetrators) being offered ongoing support?

☐ Are parents and carers being kept informed and involved in the resolution of any online sexual harassment incidents?

☐ Are students who have carried out online sexual harassment being supported to change their behaviour?

3. Understanding online sexual harassment

3.1 What is online sexual harassment?

3.1.1 Definition

Online sexual harassment is unwanted sexual behaviour on any digital platform. It can happen between anyone online, but this guidance specifically focuses on peer-to-peer incidences.

Online sexual harassment can include a wide range of behaviours that use digital content (images, videos, posts, messages, pages) on a variety of different online platforms (private or public).

Online platforms include:
- **Social networking services:** Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter
- **Communication and messaging services:** WhatsApp, Kik, iMessage, Facebook Messenger, Skype, Google Hangouts, Facetime
- **Entertainment and gaming services:** YouTube, Xbox Live, Playstation Network

It can make a person feel threatened, exploited, coerced, humiliated, upset, sexualised or discriminated against.

Further factors to consider:
- Gender – This plays a key role. Both boys and girls can be targeted. Research tells us that for some forms girls are more likely to be targeted, and they are often judged more harshly than boys for becoming a victim.
- Vulnerabilities – Online sexual harassment can cross over with other factors that can make young people particularly vulnerable including actual or perceived gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion, psychological vulnerabilities, special educational needs or disabilities.
- Offline behaviours – Experiences of sexual harassment can overlap between the offline and online worlds, including offline behaviour such as stalking, relationship abuse and exploitation.
- Prevalence – Different forms of online sexual harassment can be happening simultaneously across multiple different platforms and can be easily shared between them.

Online sexual harassment is often focused around schools and local communities and can often play out online in front of an active, engaged audience which can add to the distress caused. Bystanders can also be affected by witnessing online sexual harassment regardless of whether they engage with it or not.

Whilst this guidance document targets peer-to-peer harassment, it is also possible for adults to sexually harass young people online. For further advice and resources around adults making online contact with children for sexual purposes, or to report this issue or any other concern around grooming, please visit www.ceop. police.uk.

3.1.2 What forms can online sexual harassment take?

Online sexual harassment can occur in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. Different behaviours are often experienced simultaneously, and can overlap with offline experiences of sexual harassment (e.g. sexual abuse, bullying, relationship abuse and stalking).

For example:
- An anonymous account may be set up to collect and share sexual gossip and rumours in order to shame classmates or peers.
- After a relationship breaks down a young person may find an image they shared with an ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend appearing online with their full name and the school they go to attached, as a way for their ex-partner to humiliate or shame them.
- A young person may fall out with a close friend and find a social media profile set up in their name that 'outs' them as gay, lesbian or bisexual.
- A young person may post a photo of themselves online and receive sexualised comments about their body and sexually explicit comments based on sexual acts or behaviours.
- A young person may feel more comfortable talking about their feelings with a stranger online only to find out it was a classmate and as a result their personal life is being shared and discussed online.
- A nude image may be shared online attached with someone's name, implying that the image is of them, however the image is taken from a random search online.

Further case studies can be found in the deSHAME Research Report.

Project deSHAME categorises online sexual harassment in four main types:

Non consensual sharing of intimate images and videos A person's sexual images and videos being shared without their consent or taken without their consent	Exploitation, coercion and threats A person receiving sexual threats, being coerced to participate in sexual behaviour online, or blackmailed with sexual content	Sexualised bullying A person being targeted by, and systematically excluded from, a group or community with the use of sexual content that humiliates, upsets or discriminates against them	Unwanted sexualisation A person receiving unwelcome sexual requests, comments and content
Sexual images/videos taken without consent ('creep shots' / 'upskirting') Sexual images/videos taken consensually but shared without consent ('revenge porn') Non-consensual sexual acts (e.g., rape) recorded digitally (and potentially shared)	Harassing or pressuring someone online to share sexual images of themselves or engage in sexual behaviour online (or offline) Using the threat of publishing sexual content (images, videos, rumours) to threaten, coerce or blackmail someone ('sextortion') Online threats of a sexual nature (e.g. rape threats) Inciting others online to commit sexual violence Inciting someone to participate in sexual behaviour and then sharing evidence of it	Gossip, rumours or lies about sexual behaviour posted online either naming someone directly or indirectly alluding to someone Offensive or discriminatory sexual language and name-calling online Impersonating someone and damaging their reputation by sharing sexual content or sexually harassing others Personal information shared non-consensually online to encourage sexual harassment ('doxing') Being bullied because of actual or perceived gender and/or sexual orientation Body shaming Sexualised body shaming 'Outing' someone where the individual's sexuality or gender identity is publicly announced online without their consent	Sexualised comments (e.g. on photos) Sexualised viral campaigns that pressurise people to participate Sending someone sexual content (images, emojis, messages) without them consenting Unwelcome sexual advances or requests for sexual favours 'Jokes' of a sexual nature Rating peers on attractiveness/sexual activity Altering images of a person to make them sexual

3.1.3 What can online sexual harassment overlap with?

Other forms of abuse and discrimination

Online sexual harassment can intersect with other discrimination and hate crimes, relating to a person's actual or perceived gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion, special educational need or disability. Young people in these groups may face unique forms of online sexual harassment as well as multiple barriers that can prevent them from accessing support. For example, if a young person receives sexual harassment online that discriminates against them for being LGBT+, they may not wish to seek help if they are not ready or willing to disclose their personal sexual life to school staff. A young person from a religious family may be afraid of telling their parents about an incident if it conflicts with their religious beliefs.

Harmful sexual behaviour and online sexual harassment

Harmful sexual behaviour is an umbrella term that describes behaviours that one would not expect of a child of a particular age or developmental stage. Online sexual harassment and harmful sexual behaviour can sometimes overlap. For example, a 13 year old child starts searching for increasingly violent pornographic videos and sends out the links to younger peers. The harmful content, non-consensual nature and the concerning actions from the 13 year old makes this scenario both online sexual harassment and harmful sexual behaviour.

The key in any situation is to support all of the young people affected, whether victim, perpetrator or bystander. Displaying signs of harmful sexual behaviour may be an indication a child has either been the victim of abuse themselves, or witnessed it happening to others, and is therefore in need of further support.

For more information on recognising harmful sexual behaviour please refer to:
- Step Up, Speak Up! toolkit: Supporting young people who display harmful sexual behaviour online
- NSPCC's Harmful Sexual behaviour Framework:
- Brook's traffic light tool

Child Sexual Exploitation and online sexual harassment

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a type of sexual abuse. This can occur within any relationship in which there is an imbalance of power, including within young people's peer-to-peer relationships. Children who are sexually exploited receive something e.g. money, presents or affection in return for performing sexual activities or others performing sexual activity on them. A young person in an exploitative relationship may not understand they are being abused; they may have been coerced or tricked into believing they are in a consensual, loving relationship with their abuser or they may have been under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Sexual exploitation can also happen to young people in gangs or have a relationship with those in gangs, as part of initiation rituals or demonstrations

of status or power. CSE is not always physical and can happen online too.

CSE and online sexual harassment can overlap, and may have different aggravating factors:
- It may involve adult perpetrators. For example, if an adult was coercing a child to collect nude images of other children in their peer group, this may constitute both CSE and online sexual harassment.
- It may be part of gang related exploitation. For example, if a young person was pressurised into filming sexual activity with another person and made to share the video with their peers as part of an initiation ritual, this may constitute both CSE and online sexual harassment.
- It may be part of further exploitation of a young person's vulnerabilities. For example, if a young person with SEND was being coerced by peers to request sexual acts from others online, this may constitute both CSE and online sexual harassment.

It is important to consider the wider contributing factors about any instance of online sexual harassment. A young person that at first may present as a perpetrator of online sexual harassment, could themselves be a victim of child sexual exploitation.

For more information on CSE please see page 5 of the Department for Education's Child sexual exploitation – Definition and guide.

3.2 Terminology

This guidance refers to victims, perpetrators, and alleged perpetrators, as commonly understood terms by professionals. However, when working with young people it is important to understand that not all young people will identify themselves as victims or perpetrators or want to be labelled as such.

As a school, decide what terminology and language is appropriate to use when handling incidents of online sexual harassment, and ensure this is kept to consistently by all members of staff. If a student is being supported through an incident of online sexual harassment, ensure they have been consulted with as to how they wish to be referred to.

3.3 Impact

3.3.1 Who does online sexual harassment happen to?

Anyone can be subjected to online sexual harassment; there is no 'typical' victim. However, the Project deSHAME research report found that certain groups are more vulnerable than others.

Girls

Typically girls are more likely to identify themselves as victims of online sexual harassment.

71% of respondents aged 13 – 17 years said that they think online sexual harassment happens more often to girls than boys, while just 4% said it happens more to boys and 26% thought it was about the same.

"I was being pressurised into sending sexual photos and videos of myself and was threatened if I didn't. They would go on and on at me when I said no but would carry on with the threats."
Girl, 13 years

This is not to say it never happens to boys, but there is a risk that it goes unreported or unrecognised more often.

"I guess you never know with boys because they never really tell people. So, it's really under-represented in that area with boys and sexual harassment."
Girl, 16-17 years

Children with psychological vulnerabilities

Project deSHAME survey data suggested young people who perceived themselves to have particular psychological vulnerabilities reported experiencing certain forms of online sexual harassment more than their peers who did not identify as such.

- Peer pressure was a significant predictor of all victimisation experiences, with young people who reported greater levels of peer pressure being more likely to report these behaviours.
- Social support was a significant predictor of many victimisation behaviours. The lower the perceived levels of social support reported by young people, the more frequently they reported victimisation experiences.
- Depression was a significant predictor of all but of a few behaviours. Young people who reported higher levels of depression more frequently reported all victimisation experiences, except receiving sexual comments and having nude images shared without permission.
- A high level of self-esteem was a predictor of many victimisation experiences, including having nude images shared without permission, having contact details shared, having images changed to make them sexual, and being blackmailed as a result of sexual images. This may be due to these young people sharing more photos, or taking more risks online, and feeling more competent in being able to handle online problems themselves.

Children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)

During interviews with teachers and professionals it was suggested that young people with SEND can be especially vulnerable as:
- It may be assumed that any changes in behaviour or withdrawal from activities or peers may be as a result of their individual needs and not investigated further.
- Communication barriers may prevent them from asking for helping or obtaining support.
- There is potential for young people with SEND to experience a higher level of targeted bullying.
- There is potential for young people with SEND to be more easily coerced into doing something they feel uncomfortable with or lacking the communication skills to say no.

Project deSHAME research suggests that having a disability is a significant predictor of having nude images shared without permission, having images edited to make them sexual, and receiving sexual threats.

Children who identify as LGBT+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender/sexual)

During interviews with teachers and professionals it was suggested that children who identify or are perceived to be LGBT+ may also be disproportionately targeted. There is a significant gender difference with this form of homophobic, biphobic and transphobic victimisation as well, with boys (12%) being more likely to have been targeted with this form in the last year compared to girls (8%).

It is important to recognise that the inequalities we may see in young people's online lives are a reflection of those seen in wider society. An inclusive and comprehensive approach to relationship and sex education in schools is key to tackling these issues in a broader sense.

3.3.2 Victim blaming

Victim-blaming occurs when others hold a victim accountable for the harm that was committed against them. Victims may also blame themselves for the harm that has come to them.

Why does it happen?
- Societal norms: Young people may hear of high profile harassment or abuse cases in the media, or within their local communities. For example, news stories might refer to a victim as being at fault for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, or wearing inappropriate clothing, whilst the perpetrator's behaviour goes unchallenged.
- Self-protection: The human brain has a tendency to seek out predictability. If something bad happens at random to someone for no apparent reason, people can feel threatened that something similar could happen to them. Victim-blaming may be a subconscious strategy young people employ to
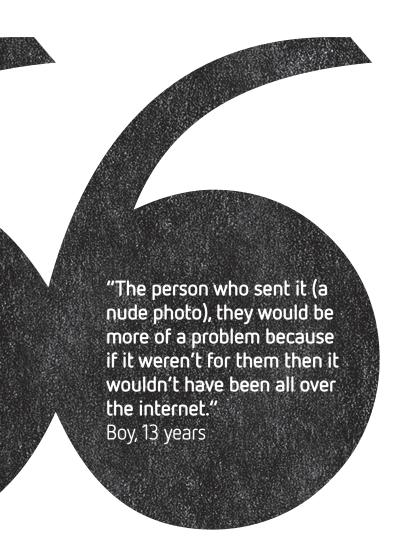
dissociate themselves from the threat of becoming victims themselves.
- Peer pressure: Young people often want to align with strong peer groups. To avoid the risk of being on the outside of a peer group, young people may join in with victim-blaming to show they are not a victim either.

Victim-blaming can often be a secondary form of harassment in cases of online sexual harassment; whether this is experiencing guilt and blame from others, or victims blaming themselves. This can lead to victims feeling alone, unsupported or at fault. This can make the outcomes worse as they may be less likely to report and ask for help.

62% of respondents said that they felt that if someone's nude or nearly nude image is shared online, they are partly to blame.

"It's partially the girl's fault for sending it in the first place."
Boy, 13 years

"The person who sent it (a nude photo), they would be more of a problem because if it weren't for them then it wouldn't have been all over the internet."
Boy, 13 years

3.3.3 Slut-shaming

Slut-shaming occurs when people harass or abuse (mostly) girls and women, for example, because of how they look, what they wear, or their presumed or invented levels of sexual activity.

Why does it happen?
- Societal norms: Modern society can be seen to encourage women and girls to be valued in terms of their sexual appeal. If girls are seen to be 'breaking the rules' of what is socially acceptable sexual behaviour, they can face punishment and shame for healthy sexual expression, or if they are seen to be deviating from this.
- Victim-blaming behaviour: Slut-shaming is a particular form of victim-blaming, and can stem from similar reasons (see point 3.3.2).

"Everyone says its okay for boys to send 'dick pics' but when girls do it all you get is hate like slag, sket, slut etc."
Girl, 14 years

3.3.4 How can it make victims feel?

Online sexual harassment may affect different young people in different ways. These feelings may be an instant reaction, or be delayed, and only affect a victim later on once they have reflected on the situation or if it escalates further.

Online sexual harassment of this kind may make a young person feel any of the following:
- Threatened or scared
- Exploited
- Coerced
- That their dignity is violated
- Humiliated or degraded
- Shamed or judged
- Upset
- Sexualised
- Discriminated against because of their gender or sexual orientation
- Feel guilty or that they are to blame

The experience and impact of online sexual harassment is unique to the individual and can be felt both in the short-term but also can have long-term impacts on mental health and wellbeing. Long term impacts can be amplified because of re-victimisation. For example, if content is re-shared online after the initial incident. It is important to recognise that there is no single way that a young person may experience online sexual harassment and that it might also affect others who witness it.

3.4 Research into online sexual harassment

3.4.1 How common is it?

Project deSHAME was conducted as a result of growing concerns about online sexual harassment amongst young people aged 13 –17 years.

As demonstrated in the quotes and statistics on p.2 and the table on p.7, online sexual harassment encompasses a wide range of behaviours. Project deSHAME data (collected from 13 – 17 year olds) suggests there is a strong likelihood many young people in schools across the country have either witnessed or experienced online sexual harassment.

It might be that this activity takes place outside of school, but it is very likely to have an impact on the school-life of the children involved and on the school itself.

Online safety is a safeguarding issue, as recognised by Ofsted and by the Department for Education. If a child discloses anything that is worrying them online, whether it be from harassing messages or from seeing something upsetting about a friend online, either in or out of school hours, staff should deal with this information in the same way as dealing with any child protection concern.

3.4.2 Why do young people sexually harass others online?

When asked why young people might engage in online sexual harassment, the most common responses were:

#1 **As a joke**
(54%)

#2 **To hurt someone**
(52%)

#3 **To retaliate because someone else started it first**
(50%)

#4 **To get their own back on an ex**
(47%)

#5 **To get respect from their friends**
(45%)

Online sexual harassment emerges from a complex combination of societal, peer, relationship and developmental factors, which are facilitated and moderated by digital technology.

Reasons may include:
- Societal – Sexualisation, misogyny and anti-LGBT+ behaviour can often go unchallenged in wider society that young people are witnessing, and they are often reinforced by narrow gender roles and expectations. Societal factors can often be played out through young people' peer dynamics – see next point.
- Peer group factors – Peer groups can normalise the expectation to engage in certain forms of harassment or sexual behaviour with the attitude 'everyone is doing it' – even if this is not the case. Popularity and status are all possible motivations for harmful behaviour. It can be easy for jokes to go too far or to be passed off as 'banter,' particularly when they are at the expense of another person.
- Relationship factors – As they are learning about relationships, respect and consent, young people may cross the line between flirting and harassment, encouragement and pressure. Sometimes these behaviours are abusive, coercive or exploitative. Break ups can be played out in front of the wider peer group and can involve 'revenge' from both the couple involved and their peers. The 'reputation' of those aggrieved in a relationship may be perceived to be important to maintain and may result in a young person engaging in online sexual harassment.
- Developmental factors – Teenagers have a developmental tendency to seek new sensations, take risks and succumb to peer pressure. They are at a stage where they are exploring their emerging sexuality and may have a lack of understanding about sex and relationships. The enduring nature and audience for digital content means that online communication facilitates a different form of risk-taking and potentially intensifies the impacts.
- See Chapter 5 of the deSHAME Research Report for further details.

3.5 Online sexual harassment and the law

Some incidents of online sexual harassment can break the law. Context is key in every situation and it is crucial that this is taken into consideration when responding. If involved, the police should determine the response on a case by case basis.

Even though some laws may apply in some cases, every instance of online sexual harassment is unacceptable and should not be tolerated, or accepted as an inevitable part of 'being a teenager.'

The age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales is 10. It is worth noting the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Guidelines on prosecuting cases involving communications sent via social media:

"The age and maturity of suspects should be given significant weight, particularly if they are under the age of 18 […] Children may not appreciate the potential harm and seriousness of their communications and a prosecution is rarely likely to be in the public interest".

For the purposes of this information, the term 'child' refers to any person aged 17 or under.

Some of the laws relevant to online sexual harassment include:

Communications Act 2003
This Act covers all forms and types of public communication. With regards to online behaviour, it covers the sending of grossly offensive, obscene, menacing or indecent communications and any communication that causes needless anxiety or contains false accusation.

Protection from Harassment Act 1997
This includes criminal and civil provision for harassment (incidents that have happened repeatedly, i.e. on more than two occasions). It also provides a more serious offence of someone causing another person to fear, on at least two occasions, that violence will be used against them. Stalking, including cyberstalking, is covered.

The Computer Misuse Act 1990
This Act criminalises the impersonation or theft of someone else's identity online. This means that creating a fake account in the name of a peer is technically against the law.

Equality Act 2010
This Act states that is it against the law to discriminate against anyone on the ground of protected characteristics. These include disability, gender, gender reassignment (when a person undergoes a full or partial process – social or medical – for the purposes of reassigning their sex), race, (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin), religion, or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Hate crimes and hate speech: If a crime is committed against someone because of their religion, race, sexual orientation or disability, this is classified as a hate crime. Hate speech is defined as expressions of hatred and threats directed at a person or a group of people on account of that person's colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or sexual orientation. Hate crimes should be reported to True Vision- www.report-it.org.uk

The Malicious Communications Act 1998
This Act covers the sending of grossly offensive of threatening letters, electronic communications or any other form of message with the intention of causing harm, stress or anxiety.

Sexual Offences Act 2003
This Act covers the prevention and protection of children from harm due to sexual offences. The term 'sexual offences' describes offences including, but not limited to, rape, sexual assault, causing sexual activity without consent, child sex offences including grooming, abuse of position of trust, offences against persons with a mental disorder impeding choice, voyeurism offences including recording sexually intrusive images under someone's clothing and indecent photographs of children.

Protection of Children Act 1978 – England and Wales

Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 – Scotland

Protection of Children Act (Northern Ireland) Order 1978

These Acts criminalise the taking, creating, showing, distributing, possessing and publishing any advertisement of indecent photographs of children (people under the age of 18).

Section 33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 – England and Wales
This Act states that it is against the law to disclose private sexual photographs or films of someone else without their consent, with the intent to cause distress. This is sometimes referred to in the media as 'revenge pornography.' Where the images may have been taken when the victim was under 18, prosecutors will consider offences under the Protection of Children Act.

Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016
This Act criminalises abusive behaviour and sexual harm, including disclosing or threatening to disclose an intimate photograph or film of someone else without their consent, with the intent to cause distress. This is sometimes referred to in the media as 'revenge pornography.'

Section 51 of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2016
This Act states that it is against the law to disclose private sexual photographs or films of someone else

without their consent, with the intent to cause distress. This is sometimes referred to in the media as 'revenge pornography.'

🔔 **Outcome 21 Guidance**
As of January 2016 the Home Office launched a new outcome code (Outcome 21) to help formalise the discretion available to the police when handling crimes such as youth produced sexual imagery (sexting). The College of Policing has produced guidance to advise forces on how to respond to and record cases of sexting between those aged under 18. If the making and sharing of images is considered non-abusive and there is no evidence of further criminal activity (e.g. exploitation, grooming) or evidence of it being persistent behaviour, Outcome 21 can be applied. The child's involvement would be recorded on police systems, but as it has been decided that further investigation in order to pursue further formal action is not in the public interest, no further police action would be taken. In the event of a future 'Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service' (DBS) check, it would be unlikely that this record would be disclosed.

See the College of Policing's Briefing Note for more information.

For more information on how to handle reports of sexting within school see the UKCCIS Sexting in schools and colleges guidance.

3.6 Understanding online sexual harassment: checklist

☐ Are school staff aware of the different forms that online sexual harassment can take and the specific characteristics of online sexual harassment?

☐ Does the school share a clear understanding of what online sexual harassment is and why it is not acceptable?

☐ Are school staff aware that online sexual harassment can overlap with offline sexual harassment and other harmful sexual behaviours?

☐ Does the school share a clear understanding of agreed terminology and how it should be used?

☐ Does the school effectively address the range of issues relating to bias and prejudice?

☐ Are school staff aware of the range of issues that may contribute to students displaying harmful sexual behaviour online?

☐ Is the school familiar with the key laws and statutory guidance which relate to online sexual harassment?

"If you had it in Year 7 you'd probably be more scared of getting in trouble with the police and stuff. Then in Year 11 some people just stop caring about getting in trouble."
Boy, 16–17 years