Learner experience and reporting of Peer-on-Peer Abuse (PoPA) in Welsh colleges: Findings from a learner survey and desktop review of cross-college level policies and procedures.

Table of Contents

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Executive summary

Introduction: This report summarises the findings and outputs from a package of work commissioned by Welsh Government and led by Cardiff and Vale College to explore prevalence, experience, and reporting of peer-on-peer abuse (PoPA) across seven Welsh colleges: Bridgend College, Coleg Cambria, Cardiff and Vale College, Coleg y Cymoedd, Merthyr College, Pembrokeshire College, and Saint Davids. A learner survey was carried out to explore whether experiences of PoPA are connected to demographics such as sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, and/or disability. Additionally, a desktop audit of college-level policies and procedures was carried out to explore similarities and variability in the way colleges respond to PoPA.

Aims: The primary aim of this work was to explore self-reported PoPA experiences across the colleges, and learners' perception of college-level policies and procedures in addressing and managing incidents. Insights from this work are expected to inform college and system level measures to foster safer and more inclusive college environments for learners across Wales.

Key findings: Respondents aged 17 and 18 (55%) had the highest representation in the sample. Learners identified in their majority as straight (77.1%) or as LGBTQ (14.9%). More than 2 in every 3 learners said they would report PoPA if it occurred. More than half of the respondents would report to their college and support staff (62%) and were aware of their college processes for reporting PoPA (58%). However, from those learners who reported experiencing PoPA, less than 1 in 10 (9%) had reported the incident to their college. The most common PoPA experience reported by learners was in relation to gender/sex, with 1 in 10 learners (10.6%) self-reporting as victims. Abuse based on ethnicity was also common (1 in 12 (8.5%)), followed by abuse based on sexual orientation (1 in 14 (7%)). The survey included a range of open-ended questions to invite learners' opinions for improving college policies and processes around PoPA. Raising awareness and having open discussions about incidences and issues were suggested as a mechanism for prevention by learners. Furthermore, reporting mechanisms should provide empathy, confidentiality, and ongoing support for victims, and abuse taken seriously with perpetrators facing consequences. Findings from the survey should be interpreted with caution when translated to new settings as most respondents were learners in Cardiff and Vale College (77.2%, *n*=1440) and that skewed the data.

Conclusions: This work suggests that learners experience abuse and become targets based on different characteristics such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and disability. Colleges have a responsibility to provide a safe and comfortable space for learning, and mechanisms, policies and procedures are required to avoid abuse being tolerated. Victims require reliable support from internal services (i.e. college staff) and external sources, such as police services, family, friends, and support networks. Many factors influence whether victims seek support from their colleges, so colleges should raise awareness of reporting policies with learners. Robust safeguarding procedures should be put in place to prevent harm and support victims in getting support from external partners.

Introduction

Peer-on-peer abuse (PoPA) is a global problem that requires concerted efforts to minimise harm and promote inclusivity, with education settings playing a key role in improving learners' experiences. PoPA includes a spectrum of different types of harassment and violence that can have detrimental impact on the learners' mental well-being. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that "Children and young people have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account," (United Nations, 1989).

Education settings have an important role in safeguarding those under the age of 18 and commit to providing a safe learning environment. Further education colleges are attended by learners of varied age groups (some learners aged over 19), different backgrounds, including multiple religions and ethnicities, as well as disabilities and other personal and protected characteristics. As a safe and diverse space for learning, colleges provide learners opportunities to share experiences and grow relationships with peers, but this can sometimes lead to incidents of harassment and abuse. Understanding learners' experiences is important to inform policies and procedures on harassment and violence, recognising the needs of victims seeking support, and exploring the experiences of learners who have reported incidents to their college.

Reports of sexual harassment and abuse in education settings have highlighted the issue of abuse in colleges and education settings in Wales (Welsh Government, 2021). This led to a review of resources available to schools and learners, and the Minister for Education announcing an Estyn review of school culture and processes that might prevent learners "feel[ing] comfortable and safe" in their education setting. Colleges in Wales were found to have well-established disciplinary procedures to respond to the most serious reported cases of sexual harassment, but less serious incidents were often grouped together with generalised bullying (Estyn, 2023).

Reporting and monitoring systems across colleges are variable and are not of sufficient quality; this is combined with a lack of staff confidence, knowledge, and skills in effectively responding to sexual harassment (Estyn, 2023). A report on learner experiences showed that 1 in 2 learners had experienced harassment and more than 3 in 4 of respondents (78%) had witnessed harassment whilst in post-16 education (Culture Shift, 2022). Also, people who identified as disabled were more likely to report harassment, and regardless of the type of abuse, respondents expressed that they wanted to stop the harassment by seeking help and prevent it from happening again, take action to punish the perpetrators, and support the victim in seeking specialist support. Children and young people with disabilities are three times more likely than those without any self-reported disabilities to be victims of peer-on-peer harassment (Jones et al ,2012). A report in 2023 by Estyn showed that where colleges held specific training sessions with staff on addressing sexual harassment, this has helped staff to recognise incidents and address them appropriately (Estyn, 2023). There is a recognised need for the development of more resources to support college staff in dealing with issues such as peer-on-peer sexual harassment.

Peer-on-Peer Abuse (PoPA) in this report is defined as:

"*Discrimination, hate speech, harassment, and/or violence between peers (both perpetrators and victims), which happens in a college environment or because of relationships formed at college*".

The rest of this report presents survey findings from a survey carried out across 7 Welsh colleges between April and July 2023. The aims of the survey were to:

1. Assess experiences of PoPA across colleges; and
2. Assess learner's perspectives on current services and on what can be improved.

It is acknowledged from the outset that most respondents in the sample were learners from Cardiff and Vale College, and representation from the rest of the included colleges was not as high.

Results

Survey sample

Demographic characteristics

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents. Age distribution shows a concentration among 17-year-olds (33.6%, n=626), and most identified as (cis-) boys/men (54.0%, n=1007). Most respondents were of White ethnicity (77.4%, n=1443), and non-religious (53.5%, n=998). 83.6% (n=1558) of learners reported they did not consider themselves to have a disability. Sexual orientation data indicates 77.1% (n=1437) identified as straight, and 14.9% (n=277) as LGBTQ.

Table 1. *Demographic characteristics of the respondents (N= 1864).*

Gender	%	n	Sexual orientation	%	n
Boy / man	54.0	1007	Straight	77.1	1437
Girl / woman	37.1	692	LGBTQ	14.9	277
Trans boy / man	1.4	27	Other	1.0	19
Trans girl / woman	0.4	8	Did not want to answer	6.7	126
Non-binary	2.0	38	Did not answer	0.3	5
Unsure / questioning	1.0	19	**Ethnicity**	**%**	**n**
Other	0.2	4	Non-white	10.8	201
Did not want to answer	3.4	63	White	77.4	1443
Did not answer	0.3	6	Mixed or multiple ethnic group	4.9	92
Age	**%**	**n**	Other	3.3	62
≤ 15	0.9	16	Did not want to answer	3.2	60
16	10.5	196	Did not answer	0.3	6
17	33.6	626	**Religion**	**%**	**n**
18	21.0	392	Non-religious	53.5	998
19	11.1	208	Christian	18.4	344
20-24	11.8	220	Non-Christian	10.0	187
≥ 25	8.6	161	Other	4.9	91
Did not answer	2.4	45	Did not want to answer	12.8	239
Disability	**%**	**n**	Did not answer	0.3	5
Yes	7.4	138			
No	83.6	1558			
Did not want to answer	8.8	164			
Did not answer	0.2	4			

It is important to note that given Cardiff and Vale College had a much larger sample (*n*= 1440), three times larger than samples from all other colleges combined (n=424), totals are skewed by the Cardiff and Vale sample. Thus, we suggest exploring the characteristics of the sample from each college in turn. Cardiff and Vale College had the highest representation (77.2%, *n*=1440), followed by Merthyr College (10.7%, *n*=200). Below, we present detailed demographic characteristics of respondents per college.

Table 2 shows the distribution of ages across colleges. More than half of the total of respondents (*n*= 1018, 55%) across colleges were 17 (*n*= 626, 34%) or 18 (*n*= 392, 21%) years old. Respondents within Cardiff and Vale College reflect this with learners aged 17 and 18 comprising more than half of respondents (*n*=782, 52%). Most respondents from St Davids (*n*= 29, 69%) were 17 years old, and none of the respondents from that college were aged 19 or older. In contrast, most respondents from Bridgend College (61%) were aged 19 or older, with more than half of those (*n*= 17, 35%) aged 25 or older.

Table 2. *Distribution of age across colleges.*

	≤ 15		16		= 17		= 18		= 19		20 - 24		≥ 25		Answered		Missing Count		Total
Cardiff and Vale College	13	1%	148	10%	463	32%	289	20%	171	12%	183	13%	134	9%	1,401	97%	39	3%	1,440
Merthyr College	0	0%	33	17%	84	42%	55	28%	15	8%	10	5%	3	2%	200	100%	0	0%	200
Coleg Cambria	0	0%	6	9%	18	28%	22	34%	7	11%	9	14%	3	5%	65	100%	0	0%	65
Bridgend College	0	0%	0	0%	10	20%	8	16%	7	14%	6	12%	17	35%	48	98%	1	2%	49
St Davids	2	5%	5	12%	29	69%	2	5%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	38	90%	4	10%	42
Pembrokeshire College	1	3%	1	3%	19	48%	8	20%	3	8%	5	13%	3	8%	40	100%	0	0%	40
Coleg y Cymoedd	0	0%	3	11%	3	11%	8	29%	5	18%	7	25%	1	4%	27	96%	1	4%	28
Total (*n*, %)	16	1%	196	11%	626	34%	392	21%	208	11%	220	12%	161	9%	1,819	98%	45	2%	1,864

Table 3 shows the gender identity distribution by college. More than two thirds of respondents identified as girls/women from Coleg y Cymoedd (*n*= 19, 68%) and Bridgend College (*n*= 35, 71%). Most respondents across colleges identified as binary cis-gendered (91%). Coleg Cambria and Pembrokeshire College had more varied representation for gender specifically the trans and non-binary identities being 11% and 22% respectively.

Table 3: *Distribution of gender identity across colleges.*

	Boy / man		Girl / woman		Trans boy / man		Trans girl / woman		Non-binary (neither male nor female)		Unsure / questioning		Other		Did not want to answer		Answered (%)		Missing		Total
Bridgend College	7	14%	35	71%	0	0%	0	0%	3	6%	2	4%	0	0%	1	2%	48	98%	1	2%	49
Coleg Cambria	36	55%	19	29%	1	2%	2	3%	4	6%	1	2%	0	0%	2	3%	65	100%	0	0%	65
Cardiff and Vale College	839	58%	493	34%	15	1%	5	0%	18	1%	10	1%	3	0.2%	52	4%	1,435	99.7%	5	0.3%	1,440
Coleg y Cymoedd	7	25%	19	68%	0	0%	0	0%	2	7%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	28	100%	0	0%	28
Merthyr College	85	43%	96	48%	6	3%	1	1%	4	2%	4	2%	1	0.5%	3	2%	200	100%	0	0%	200
Pembrokeshire College	15	38%	14	35%	4	10%	0	0%	5	13%	1	3%	0	0%	1	3%	40	100%	0	0%	40
St Davids	18	43%	16	38%	1	2%	0	0%	2	5%	1	2%	0	0%	4	10%	42	99.7%	0	0%	42
Total (*n*, %)	**1,007**	**54%**	**692**	**37%**	**27**	**1%**	**8**	**0%**	**38**	**2%**	**19**	**1%**	**4**	**0.2%**	**63**	**3%**	**1,858**	**100%**	**6**	**0.3%**	**1,864**

Table 4 shows the distribution in ethnicity of respondents by college. Approximately 3 in 4 respondents reported as white (*n*= 1443, 77%). St Davids had the biggest proportion of learners reporting as non-white (*n*= 10, 24%). Across colleges, only 5% of respondents identified as belonging to a mixed/multiple ethnic groups, 3% responded with "other" and 3% did not want to answer.

Table 4: *Distribution of ethnicity across colleges.*

	Non-White		White		I don't want to answer		Mixed or multiple ethnic group		Other		Answered		Missing		Total
Bridgend College	1	2%	45	92%	1	2%	1	2%	0	0%	48	98.0%	1	2.0%	49
Coleg Cambria	2	3%	56	86%	2	3%	3	5%	2	3%	65	100.0%	0	0.0%	65
Cardiff and Vale College	183	13%	1,068	74%	51	4%	78	5%	55	4%	1,435	99.7%	5	0.3%	1,440
Coleg y Cymoedd	0	0%	28	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	28	100.0%	0	0.0%	28

Merthyr College	3	2%	188	94%	1	1%	4	2%	4	2%	200	100.0%	0	0.0%	200
Pembrokeshire College	2	5%	35	88%	2	5%	1	3%	0	0%	40	100.0%	0	0.0%	40
St Davids	10	24%	23	55%	3	7%	5	12%	1	2%	42	100.0%	0	0.0%	42
Total (*n*, %)	201	11%	1,443	77%	60	3%	92	5%	62	3%	1,858	99.7%	6	0.3%	1,864

Table 5 shows the distribution of disability by college. Most respondents across colleges (*n*= 1558, 84%) did not report having verbal or physical disability. In Cardiff and Vale College, 6% (*n*= 83) reported a verbal or physical disability.

Table 5: *Distribution of disability across colleges.*

	Yes		No		I don't want to answer		Answered		Missing		Total
Bridgend College	8	16%	39	80%	1	2%	48	98.0%	1	2.0%	49
Coleg Cambria	9	14%	45	69%	11	17%	65	100.0%	0	0%	65
Cardiff and Vale College	83	6%	1,226	85%	128	9%	1,437	99.8%	3	0.2%	1,440
Coleg y Cymoedd	6	21%	19	68%	3	11%	28	100.0%	0	0%	28
Merthyr College	22	11%	167	84%	11	6%	200	100.0%	0	0%	200
Pembrokeshire College	8	20%	27	68%	5	13%	40	100.0%	0	0%	40
St Davids	2	5%	35	83%	5	12%	42	100.0%	0	0%	42
Total (*n*, %)	138	7%	1,558	84%	164	9%	1,860	99.8%	4	0.2%	1,864

Table 6 shows the distribution of religion by college. Across colleges, the majority of respondents were non-religious and 29% of respondents were Christian or another religion ("non-Christian"). More than two thirds (71%) of respondents from Coleg y Cymoedd identified as non-religious. 13% of respondents did not want to report their religion.

Table 6: *Distribution of religion across colleges.*

	Non-Religious		Christian		Non-Christian		I don't want to answer		Other		Answered		Missing			Total
Bridgend College	30	61%	9	18%	1	2%	4	8%	4	8%	48	98.0%	1	2.0%	49
Coleg Cambria	39	60%	7	11%	3	5%	9	14%	7	11%	65	100.0%	0	0%	65
Cardiff and Vale College	737	51%	275	19%	171	12%	193	13%	60	4%	1,436	99.7%	4	0.3%	1,440
Coleg y Cymoedd	20	71%	1	4%	1	4%	3	11%	3	11%	28	100.0%	0	0%	28
Merthyr College	124	62%	30	15%	5	3%	25	13%	16	8%	200	100.0%	0	0%	200
Pembrokeshire College	27	68%	10	25%	0	0%	2	5%	1	3%	40	100.0%	0	0%	40
St Davids	21	50%	12	29%	6	14%	3	7%	0	0%	42	100.0%	0	0%	42
Total (*n*, %)	**998**	**54%**	**344**	**19%**	**187**	**10%**	**239**	**13%**	**91**	**5%**	**1,859**	**99.7%**	**5**	**0.3%**	**1,864**

Table 7 shows the distribution of sexual orientation by colleges. A little over three quarters (77%) of respondents identified as straight, and 15% identifying as belonging to the LGBTQ+ category. Almost an equal split of respondents from Pembrokeshire College were straight (43%) and LGBTQ+(45%). Less than a third of the respondents from the remaining colleges were LGBTQ+, and Cardiff and Vale College (12%) had the lowest percentage of LGBTQ+.

Table 7. *Distribution of sexual orientation across colleges.*

	Straight		LGBTQ+		I don't want to answer		Other		Answered		Missing			Total
Bridgend College	31	63%	15	31%	2	4%	0	0%	48	98.0%	1	2.0%	49
Coleg Cambria	43	66%	18	28%	3	5%	1	1.5%	65	100%	0	0%	65

Cardiff and Vale College	1,152	80%	166	12%	107	7%	12	0.8%	1,437	99.8%	3	0.2%	1,440
Coleg y Cymoedd	17	61%	8	29%	2	7%	1	3.6%	28	100.0%	0	0%	28
Merthyr College	149	75%	42	21%	5	3%	3	1.5%	199	99.5%	1	0.5%	200
Pembrokeshire College	17	43%	18	45%	3	8%	2	5%	40	100.0%	0	0%	40
St Davids	28	67%	10	24%	4	10%	0	0%	42	100.0%	0	0%	42
Total (*n*, %)	**1,437**	**77%**	**277**	**15%**	**126**	**7%**	**19**	**1%**	**1,859**	**99%**	**5**	**0.3%**	**1,864**

Study mode and year of study

Respondents attended college courses with different study modes and were at various stages in their courses. Table 8 shows the distribution of studying pattern by college. Most respondents studied full-time (76%), with Bridgend College respondents had the largest split of full-time (92%) and part-time (2%) study mode.

Table 8. *Distribution of studying pattern across colleges.*

	Full-time		Part-time		I don't want to answer		Total		Missing		Total
Bridgend College	45	92%	1	2%	2	4%	48	98.0%	1	2.0%	49
Coleg Cambria	56	86%	6	9%	3	5%	65	100.0%	0	0.0%	65
Cardiff and Vale College	1,069	74%	253	18%	116	8%	1,438	99.9%	2	0.1%	1,440
Coleg y Cymoedd	25	89%	2	7%	1	4%	28	100.0%	0	0.0%	28
Merthyr College	159	80%	33	17%	7	4%	199	99.5%	1	0.5%	200
Pembrokeshire College	34	85%	1	3%	5	13%	40	100.0%	0	0.0%	40
St Davids	34	81%	2	5%	5	12%	41	97.6%	1	2.4%	42
Total (*n*, %)	**1,422**	**76%**	**298**	**16%**	**139**	**8%**	**1,859**	**99.7%**	**5**	**0.3%**	**1,864**

Table 9 shows the year of study of the learners by college. Approximately half of the learners (51%) were in their first year of study across colleges, with St Davids having the highest number of learners in their first year (79%) and Coleg y Cymoedd the lowest number in their first year (29%). Overall, only 9% of respondents across colleges were in their third or fourth year, and 10% declined to answer.

Table 9. *Distribution of year of study across colleges.*

	1st year (or year 12)		2nd year (or year 13)		3rd year		4th year or more		I don't want to answer		Total		Missing		Total
Bridgend College	21	43%	17	35%	2	4%	3	6%	3	6%	46	93.9%	3	6.1%	49
Coleg Cambria	30	46%	22	34%	8	12%	1	2%	3	5%	64	98.5%	1	1.5%	65
Cardiff and Vale College	714	50%	417	29%	87	6%	46	3%	167	12%	1,431	99.4%	9	0.6%	1,440
Coleg y Cymoedd	8	29%	9	32%	6	21%	2	7%	2	7%	27	96.4%	1	3.6%	28
Merthyr College	120	60%	60	30%	12	6%	5	3%	3	2%	200	100.0%	0	0.0%	200
Pembrokeshire College	19	48%	9	23%	3	8%	6	15%	3	8%	40	100.0%	0	0.0%	40
St Davids	33	79%	2	5%	0	0%	1	2%	5	12%	41	97.6%	1	2.4%	42
Total (*n*, %)	**945**	**51%**	**536**	**29%**	**118**	**6%**	**64**	**3%**	**186**	**10%**	**1,849**	**99.2%**	**15**	**0.8%**	**1,864**

Survey findings

The findings section of this report is split into five key headings: i) the learners' perception of existing support, ii) reported incidences of PoPA, iii) disclosure preferences and factors influencing non-disclosure, iv) support received after reporting PoPA, and v) learner perceptions of staff knowledge and understanding of PoPA.

Overall perceptions of existing support

Respondents were asked about PoPA support and processes at their college, including who they think they should report to. Table 10 shows the proportion of learners who were (58%) and were not (11%) aware of college support for experiences of PoPA. Over 60% of learners from Merthyr college (71%), Coleg Cambria (69%), Bridgend college (63%), and Coleg y Cymoedd (68%) reported that they were aware of college support for experiences of PoPA. Just 1 in 3 learners in Pembrokeshire College and St Davids were aware of their college support, which is much lower than the average across colleges (58%).

Table 10. *Learners reporting that they were or were not aware of college support for experiences of PoPA.*

	Yes		No		Unsure		Did not want to answer		Missing		Answered		Total
Cardiff and Vale College	818	57%	161	11%	97	7%	169	12%	195	14%	1,245	86%	1,440
Merthyr College	142	71%	14	7%	7	4%	5	3%	32	16%	168	84%	200
Coleg Cambria	45	69%	5	8%	6	9%	3	5%	6	9%	59	91%	65
Bridgend College	31	63%	7	14%	2	4%	3	6%	6	12%	43	88%	49
St Davids	13	31%	5	12%	1	2%	5	12%	18	43%	24	57%	42
Coleg y Cymoedd	19	68%	3	11%	1	4%	1	4%	4	14%	24	86%	28
Pembrokeshire College	13	33%	4	10%	3	8%	1	3%	19	48%	21	53%	40
Total (*n*, %)	**1,081**	**58%**	**200**	**11%**	**117**	**6%**	**189**	**10%**	**280**	**15%**	**1,584**	**85%**	**1,867**

We further explored learners' experiences by asking them about who they would report incidences of PoPA to, both internally and externally to their college (Table 11): 62% of learners would report PoPA to college or support staff, 5% of learners would not tell anyone at college, 12% declined to answer, and 5% of learners would tell someone else. Over 70% of learners at Merthyr college (75%), Coleg Cambria (82%), Coleg y Cymoedd (71%) would report PoPA to their college staff and support.

Table 11. *Distribution of who learners experiencing PoPA would report to.*

	College Staff and Support		I wouldn't tell anyone at college		Did not want to answer		Other		Answered		Missing		Total
Cardiff and Vale College	875	61%	68	5%	217	15%	78	5%	1,214	4%	226	16%	1,440
Merthyr College	149	75%	5	3%	7	4%	4	2%	164	6%	36	18%	200
Coleg Cambria	53	82%	3	5%	3	5%	1	2%	58	8%	7	11%	65
Bridgend College	34	69%	7	14%	1	2%	3	6%	42	0%	7	14%	49
Coleg y Cymoedd	20	71%	2	7%	1	4%	1	4%	24	0%	4	14%	28
St Davids	13	31%	6	14%	3	7%	3	7%	24	5%	18	43%	42
Pembrokeshire College	18	45%	2	5%	0	0%	1	3%	20	3%	20	50%	40
Total (*n*, %)	**1,162**	**62%**	**93**	**5%**	**232**	**12%**	**91**	**5%**	**1,546**	**4%**	**318**	**17%**	**1,864**

Learners were asked in the survey about "what role can colleges and staff take in responding to PoPA?"; the following priorities were identified from learners' responses:

Taking action after incidents of PoPA were reported was considered critical: holding perpetrators accountable, offering support and safeguarding victims, practicing empathy and compassion, allowing anonymous reporting and ensuring confidentiality were suggested principles and strategies. There was a focus on ensuring that those who engage in abusive behaviour face appropriate consequences, whether through punishment, disciplinary action, or restorative justice. Safeguarding measures, one-on-one support, and creating safe spaces for discussion were common themes from qualitative responses. Some responses mentioned the importance of providing ways for students to report incidents anonymously and ensuring their confidentiality. Furthermore, supporting victims and providing a safe space may encourage disclosure of incidents, fostering trust and demonstrating that their concerns are being taken seriously and will be addressed.

"How they (college staff) respond to people who come to them with problems. All problems, regardless of who the instigator may or may not be or what issues that person might have. Sometimes, it seems as though people within the college treat some people like small

children who cannot be held accountable for their actions, if they struggle with mental health issues or disabilities. These things do not excuse them from being held accountable for things they do or say to other people, in or outside of college."

Many participants stressed the importance of creating a safe and welcoming environment where students feel comfortable discussing their experiences and seeking help. The role that teaching staff and support teams can play was highlighted for addressing and preventing abuse. It was suggested that collaboration with external organisations and continuous communication with various stakeholders and among students can help in combating PoPA. Proactive measures such as awareness campaigns, addressing discrimination and early intervention were suggested as mechanisms for abuse prevention.

Types of PoPA incidences reported and/or experienced

The survey asked learners about whether they had experienced PoPA, how many incidents they experienced and how many incidents they had discussed with someone (from their college support or external; Table 12). 56% reported they had not experienced PoPA, but of those who had; 1.8% of learners had experienced 1 incident, 1.7% of learners had experienced 2-3 incidents, 1.7% of learners had experienced 4 or more incidents, 5% of learners did not want to speak to someone, and 13% of learners did not want to answer. Learners from Cardiff and Vale College reported more individuals who experienced 4 or more incidents, than had experienced one incident of PoPA. Whereas no learners from Pembrokeshire College reported having experienced more than one incident.

Table 12. *Number of PoPA incidents experienced and discussed.*

	Not applicable – No experience of PoPA		1 incident		2-3 incidents		4 or more incidents		I did not speak to someone		Did not want to answer		Answered		Missing		Total
Bridgend College	27	55%	3	6.1%	4	8.2%	2	4.1%	2	4%	0	0%	38	78%	11	22%	49
Coleg Cambria	39	60%	1	1.5%	5	7.7%	2	3.1%	5	8%	6	9%	58	89%	7	11%	65
Cardiff and Vale College	813	57%	21	1.5%	10	0.7%	22	1.5%	71	5%	223	16%	1,160	81%	280	19%	1,440
Coleg y Cymoedd	16	57%	3	10.7%	1	3.6%	1	3.6%			2	7%	23	82%	5	18%	28
Merthyr College	120	60%	4	2.0%	11	5.5%	3	1.5%	12	6%	10	5%	160	80%	40	20%	200
Pembrokeshire College	13	33%	2	5.0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	5%	2	5%	19	48%	21	53%	40

St Davids	12	29%	0	0%	1	2.4%	1	2.4%	5	12%	3	7%	22	52%	20	48%	42
Total	**1,040**	**56%**	**34**	**1.8%**	**32**	**1.7%**	**31**	**1.7%**	**97**	**5%**	**246**	**13%**	**1,480**	**79%**	**384**	**21%**	**1,864**

Table 13 presents the distribution of demographic characteristics by the total number (and %) of learners reporting whether they had experienced PoPA (*n*=1864). Learners who reported experiencing any type of PoPA were asked about the kind of PoPA they experienced. We categorised the different types of PoPA as discrimination, harassment, hate speech and any form of violence (sexual, physical, financial, emotional). The most self-reported experience of PoPA was based on the learners' gender/sex (10.6%), and the least common PoPA experience was based on disability (3.9%). PoPA based on ethnicity was less common, with 1 in 12 (8.5%) learners experiencing this, followed by religion with 1 in 15 (6.8%) and sexual orientation with 1 in 14 (7%) reported incidents by learners across colleges.

Table 13. *Responses to "Have you experienced PoPA based on…?" broken down for the following demographic characteristics: gender/sex, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity and religion. "Unknown" refers to missing counts or respondent choosing "I do not want to answer".*

Gender/Sex	%	n	Ethnicity	%	n
Yes	10.6%	197	Yes	8.5%	158
No	52.5%	978	No	54.3%	1013
Unsure	10.4%	193	Unsure	9.7%	180
Unknown	26.6%	496	Unknown	27.5%	513
Sexual Orientation	**%**	**n**	**Religion**	**%**	**n**
Yes	7.0%	130	Yes	6.8%	126
No	54.5%	1016	No	62.0%	1155
Unsure	8.2%	153	Unsure	6.5%	121
Unknown	30.4%	565	Unknown	24.7%	462
Disability	**%**	**n**			
Yes	3.9%	72			
No	66.1%	1232			
Unsure	5.8%	108			
Unknown	24.2%	452			

We explored experiences of PoPA by different demographic characteristics in turn, for example harassment targeting the learner's gender/sex, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or disability. Table 14 presents the distribution of PoPA based on gender/sex by college. Colleges with the highest proportion of students (approximately 1 in 5 learners) that reported PoPA due to gender/sex were: Coleg Cambria (18.5% or), Coleg y Cymoedd (17.9%), and Pembrokeshire College (17.5%). In Cardiff and Vale College, which has the highest number of survey respondents, almost 1 in 10 learners reported they experienced PoPA due to gender/sex.

Table 14. *Distribution of PoPA based on Gender/Sex Among Learners Across Colleges.*

	Yes		No		Unsure		Did not want to answer		Answered		Missing		Total	
Coleg Cambria	12	18.5%	35	53.8%	6	9.2%	7	10.8%	60	92.3%	5	7.7%	65	3.5%
Coleg y Cymoedd	5	17.9%	16	57.1%	3	10.7%	2	7.1%	26	92.9%	2	7.1%	28	1.5%
Pembrokeshire College	7	17.5%	17	42.5%	2	5.0%	3	7.5%	29	72.5%	11	27.5%	40	2.1%
Bridgend College	8	16.3%	31	63.3%	4	8.2%	1	2.0%	44	89.8%	5	10.2%	49	2.6%
St Davids	6	14.3%	18	42.9%	4	9.5%	5	11.9%	33	78.6%	9	21.4%	42	2.3%
Merthyr College	25	12.5%	117	58.5%	22	11.0%	19	9.5%	183	91.5%	17	8.5%	200	10.7%
Cardiff and Vale College	134	9.3%	744	51.7%	152	10.6%	313	21.7%	1343	93.3%	97	6.7%	1,440	77.3%
Total (*n*, %)	**197**	**10.6%**	**978**	**52.5%**	**193**	**10.4%**	**350**	**18.8%**	**1718**	**92.2%**	**146**	**7.8%**	**1,864**	**100**

Table 15 shows the distribution of PoPA based on the learners' ethnicity. In Bridgend College, Coleg Cambria and Pembrokeshire College, at least 1 in 10 learners have experienced PoPA due to their ethnicity. Colleges with learners most likely to report experiences of PoPA (Table 3) were Bridgend College (12.2%), Coleg Cambria (10.8%) and Pembrokeshire College (10%).

Table 15. *Distribution of PoPA based on Ethnicity Among Respondents Across Colleges.*

	Yes		No		Unsure		Did not want to answer		Answered		Missing		Total	
Bridgend College	6	12.2%	34	69.4%	2	4.1%	2	4.1%	44	89.8%	5.0	10.2%	49	2.6%
Coleg Cambria	7	10.8%	42	64.6%	6	9.2%	7	10.8%	62	95.4%	3.0	4.6%	65	3.5%
Pembrokeshire College	4	10.0%	20	50.0%			3	7.5%	27	67.5%	13.0	32.5%	40	2.1%

	Yes		No		Unsure		Did not want to answer		Answered		Missing		Total	
St Davids	4	9.5%	16	38.1%	4	9.5%	5	11.9%	29	69.0%	13.0	31.0%	42	2.3%
Cardiff and Vale College	121	8.4%	758	52.6%	142	9.9%	293	20.3%	1314	91.3%	126.0	8.8%	1,440	77.3%
Merthyr College	15	7.5%	124	62.0%	21	10.5%	16	8.0%	176	88.0%	24.0	12.0%	200	10.7%
Coleg y Cymoedd	1	3.6%	19	67.9%	5	17.9%			25	89.3%	3.0	10.7%	28	1.5%
Total (*n*, %)	158	8.5%	1,013	54.3%	180	9.7%	326	17.5%	1677	90.0%	187.0	10.0%	1,864	100.0%

Table 16 shows the distribution of PoPA across colleges based on learners' religion. A larger proportion of learners reported PoPA at Pembrokeshire College (10%), Coleg Cambria (9.2%) and Cardiff and Vale College (7.1%) compared to the other colleges. The lowest proportion of learners who experienced PoPA due to their religion attended Coleg y Cymoedd (3.6%).

Table 16. *Distribution of PoPA based on Religion Among Respondents Across Colleges.*

	Yes		No		Unsure		Did not want to answer		Answered		Missing		Total	
Pembrokeshire College	4	10.0%	19	47.5%			2	5.0%	25	62.5%	15	37.5%	40	2.1%
Coleg Cambria	6	9.2%	45	69.2%	3	4.6%	7	10.8%	61	93.8%	4	6.2%	65	3.5%
Cardiff and Vale College	102	7.1%	870	60.4%	99	6.9%	242	16.8%	1313	91.2%	127	8.8%	1,440	77.3%
Bridgend College	3	6.1%	39	79.6%			2	4.1%	44	89.8%	5	10.2%	49	2.6%
St Davids	2	4.8%	18	42.9%	4	9.5%	4	9.5%	28	66.7%	14	33.3%	42	2.3%
Merthyr College	8	4.0%	144	72.0%	13	6.5%	12	6.0%	177	88.5%	23	11.5%	200	10.7%
Coleg y Cymoedd	1	3.6%	20	71.4%	2	7.1%	2	7.1%	25	89.3%	3	10.7%	28	1.5%
Total (*n*, %)	126	6.8%	1,155.00	62.0%	121	6.5%	271	14.5%	1673	89.8%	191	10.2%	1,864	100.0%

Table 17 shows the distribution of PoPA based on the learners' sexual orientation. In Bridgend college, Merthyr college, Coleg y Cymoedd and Pembrokeshire college at least 1 in 10 learners have experienced PoPA due to their sexual orientation. Learners at St Davids experienced the least, with less than 1 in 20 experiencing PoPA due to their sexual orientation.

Table 17. *Distribution of PoPA based on Sexual Orientation Among Respondents Across Colleges.*

	Yes		No		Unsure		Did not want to answer		Answered		Missing		Total	
Bridgend College	6	12.2%	34	69.4%	2	4.1%	2	4.1%	44	89.8%	5	10.2%	49	2.6%
Merthyr College	22	11.0%	113	56.5%	19	9.5%	19	9.5%	173	86.5%	27	13.5%	200	10.7%
Coleg y Cymoedd	3	10.7%	15	53.6%	4	14.3%	2	7.1%	24	85.7%	4	14.3%	28	1.5%
Pembrokeshire Collee	4	10.0%	18	45.0%			3	7.5%	25	62.5%	15	37.5%	40	2.1%
Coleg Cambria	6	9.2%	43	66.2%	6	9.2%	6	9.2%	61	93.8%	4	6.2%	65	3.5%
Cardiff and Vale College	87	6.0%	776	53.9%	119	8.3%	307	21.3%	1289	89.5%	151	10.5%	1,440	77.3%
St Davids	2	4.8%	17	40.5%	3	7.1%	5	11.9%	27	64.3%	15	35.7%	42	2.3%
Total (*n*, %)	**130**	**7.0%**	**1,016**	**54.5%**	**153**	**8.2%**	**344**	**18.5%**	**1643**	**88.1%**	**221**	**11.9%**	**1,864**	**100.0%**

Table 18 shows the distribution of PoPA based on the learner's disability by college. The highest number of learners who experienced PoPA for their disability were in Bridgend college (12.2%), whilst the lowest was St Davids (2.4%).

Table 18. *Number Distribution of PoPA based on Disability Among Respondents Across Colleges.*

	Yes		No		Unsure		Did not want to answer		Answered		Missing		Total	
Bridgend College	6	12.2%	33	67.3%	2	4.1%	2	4.1%	43.0	87.8%	6	12.2%	49	2.6%
Merthyr College	15	7.5%	140	70.0%	13	6.5%	8	4.0%	177.0	88.5%	24	12.0%	200	10.7%
Coleg y Cymoedd	2	7.1%	18	64.3%	3	10.7%	1	3.6%	24.0	85.7%	4	14.3%	28	1.5%
Pembrokeshire College	2	5.0%	18	45.0%	4	10.0%	1	2.5%	27.0	67.5%	15	37.5%	40	2.1%

Coleg Cambria	3	4.6%	49	75.4%	5	7.7%	5	7.7%	62.0	95.4%	3	4.6%	65	3.5%
Cardiff and Vale College	43	3.0%	953	66.2%	80	5.6%	224	15.6%	1,306	90.7%	140	9.7%	1,440	77.3%
St Davids	1	2.4%	21	50.0%	1	2.4%	4	9.5%	27.0	64.3%	15	35.7%	42	2.3%
Total (*n*, %)	72	3.9%	1,232	66.1%	108	5.8%	245	13.1%	1,666	89.4%	207	11.1%	1,864	100.0%

Disclosure experiences and factors associated with non-disclosure

It is important to understand what may enable or prevent learners from reporting incidents of PoPA. The survey explored the number of PoPA incidents experienced, factors influencing disclosure and non-disclosure, and the method of communicating PoPA incidents. Lastly, learners were asked about the level of understanding they perceive college staff to have, and staff knowledge and proficiency in responding to PoPA.

Table 19 shows the distribution of who learners who have experienced PoPA and who they notified. 48% of learners reported that they had not experienced PoPA but of those who had, 9% reported to college staff and support, 2% reported to an external support system, 2% reported to someone inside or outside college that was not an authority figure, 7% did not report their incident, and 15% did not want to answer. Learners from Coleg Cambria (11%) and St Davids (14%) were less likely to report incidents of PoPA than learners from other settings.

Table 19. *Distribution of the disclosure of PoPA incidents: individuals and entities notified.*

	College Staff and Support*		External Support		Someone outside of college & someone at college		No-one		I do not want to answer		Other		I have not experienced PoPA		Answered		Missing		Total
Bridgend College	8	16%	5	10%	5	10%	4	8%	2	4%	2	4%	25	51%	38	78%	11	22%	49
Coleg Cambria	6	9%	3	5%	2	3%	7	11%	5	8%	0	0%	37	57%	57	88%	8	12%	65
Cardiff and Vale College	115	8%	15	1%	15	1%	99	7%	250	17%	46	3%	694	48%	1,183	82%	257	18%	1,440
Coleg y Cymoedd	5	18%	2	7%	2	7%	1	4%	2	7%	0	0%	13	46%	24	86%	4	14%	28
Merthyr College	35	18%	2	1%	6	3%	8	4%	16	8%	6	3%	96	48%	158	79%	42	21%	200

Pembrokeshire College	5	13%	1	3%	0	0%	2	5%	0	0%	0	0%	12	30%	18	45%	22	55%	40
St Davids	2	5%	0	0%	1	2%	6	14%	3	7%	1	2%	11	26%	23	55%	19	45%	42
Total (*n*, %)	176	9%	28	2%	31	2%	127	7%	278	15%	55	3%	888	48%	1,501	81%	363	19%	1,864

*College Staff and Support include: Tutor, Pastoral Coach, Student Services, Wellbeing Team, and Safeguarding.

The survey asked respondents, "What things might help you to get, or stop you from getting, support from college staff*?*". There are several factors that learners perceived to facilitate or hinder their willingness to reach out for support. The following learner quote highlights the importance of staff creating a safe space:

"I think having tutors be educated on PoPA as well as a course on providing a safe space for students would be useful. Most of my tutors are usually very focused on the work rather than supporting students with other issues and having a familiar face to talk to would be helpful. The pastoral tutors are helpful however we only see them once a week."

Learners described awareness and advocacy as key factors for making support services accessible and well-known while educating students about their options. Emotional barriers that victims might face include fear, stigma, peer pressure, and societal perceptions that may discourage them from seeking assistance. Many respondents mention fear, anxiety, or embarrassment as potential factors that might stop them from seeking support from college staff. The importance of trust in support services was emphasized for ensuring confidentiality, addressing safety concerns, and creating an environment where victims feel comfortable seeking help. One learner said the following about the response they would like to get from college staff:

"How they respond to people who come to them with problems. All problems, regardless of who the instigator may or may not be or what issues that person might have. Sometimes, it seems as though people within the college treat some people like small children who cannot be held accountable for their actions, if they struggle with mental health issues or disabilities. These things do not excuse them from being held accountable for things they do or say to other people, in or outside of college."

This quote reflects the expectation for colleges to provide fair treatment to all learners and take action in response to reported incidents of PoPA.

After incidents occur, learners might choose different ways to report to their college, whether it is in person or through online communication with the college. Table 20 shows the methods of communication learners' use for discussing PoPA incidents. Of those who had experienced PoPA; 5% discussed incidents online, 11% discussed incidents in-person, 5% did not speak to someone and 15% did not want to answer the question, and 1.2% reported other. 1 in 5 learners from Bridgend College, Coleg y Cymoedd and Merthyr College reported they would discuss PoPA incidents in person.

Table 20. *Methods of communication for discussing PoPA incidents.*

	Online*		In-Person		I did not speak to someone		Did not want to answer		Not applicable - I have not experienced PoPA		Other		Answered		Missing		All
Bridgend College	6	12%	10	20%	4	8%	2	4%	28	57%	1	2.0%	41	84%	8	16%	49
Coleg Cambria	3	5%	10	15%	5	8%	6	9%	38	59%	1	1.5%	58	89%	7	11%	65
Cardiff and Vale College	72	5%	140	10%	73	5%	247	17%	701	49%	16	1.1%	1,178	82%	262	18%	1,440
Coleg y Cymoedd	4	14%	6	21%	1	4%	1	4%	16	57%	1	3.6%	24	86%	4	14%	28
Merthyr College	10	5%	40	20%	9	5%	9	5%	102	51%	3	1.5%	161	81%	39	20%	200
Pembrokeshire College	1	3%	2	5%	2	5%	2	5%	13	33%	0	0.0%	19	48%	21	53%	40
St Davids	4	10%	5	12%	6	14%	4	10%	10	24%	0	0.0%	23	55%	19	45%	42
Total (*n*, %)	100	5%	213	11%	100	5%	271	15%	908	49%	22	1.2%	1,504	81%	360	19%	1,864

*Via email, phone or Teams message

Some participants express concerns about being judged or stigmatized if they seek support, especially related to sensitive topics. Some responses indicate that fear of how peers might perceive them or the pressure to conform to social norms could affect their decision to seek help. Trust in the confidentiality of the support services is an important factor that might encourage respondents to seek help. There are unique circumstances for each student, so cultural differences, personal situations, and past experiences might also impact their decision to

seek support. Some participants highlight potential difficulties in communicating due to language barriers or cultural differences. Some participants indicate that personal circumstances, such as busy schedules or family responsibilities, could impact their ability to seek support. Some responses reflect past experiences with the staff's response, either positive or negative, influencing their willingness to seek support.

Table 21 shows factors influencing learners' non-disclosure of PoPA. It should be noted that most respondents to the survey did not answer this question due to routing requirements (93%), so findings are should be interpreted with caution. 4% of learners reported it was their personal preference not to disclose their incident, 0.4% of learners reported they did not disclose their incident due to a lack of awareness of accessibility of services, 0.4% of learners reported they did not disclose their incident due to concerns about privacy, and 0.4% of learners reported other. The highest proportion of learners who would not report incidents of PoPA due to personal preference (6.2%) and lack of awareness of accessibility of services (3.1%) attended Coleg Cambria. Notably, Learners may have personal reasons for not disclosing incidents that are not related to poor practices or negative experiences from college support.

Table 21. *Factors influencing non-disclosure: reason for silence.*

	*Personal Preference		Accessibility **		Concerns about privacy***		Did not want to answer		Other		Answered		Missing		Total
Bridgend College	1	2.0%	1	2.0%	1	2.0%	1	2.0%	0	0.0%	4	8.2%	45	92%	49
Coleg Cambria	4	6.2%	2	3.1%	1	1.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	7	10.8%	58	89%	65
Cardiff and Vale College	61	4.2%	3	0.2%	2	0.1%	24	1.7%	5	0.3%	95	6.6%	1,345	93%	1,440
Coleg y Cymoedd	1	3.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	3.6%	27	96%	28
Merthyr College	4	2.0%	0	0.0%	2	1.0%	1	0.5%	1	0.5%	8	4.0%	192	96%	200
Pembrokeshire College	1	2.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	2.5%	2	5.0%	38	95%	40
St Davids	2	4.8%	1	2.4%	2	4.8%	0	0.0%	1	2.4%	6	14.3%	36	86%	42
Total (*n*, %)	**74**	**4.0%**	**7**	**0.4%**	**8**	**0.4%**	**26**	**1.4%**	**8**	**0.4%**	**123**	**6.6%**	**1,741**	**93%**	**1,864**

*The individual did not want to or did not need to;

** Lack of awareness of accessibility of services;

*** Concerns about privacy such as teachers, tutors, peers, parents, or carers finding out

Support after reporting PoPA to college

It was important to explore the experiences that learners had when they reported PoPA to their colleges. Table 22 shows the support received after sharing PoPA incidents. Of those who had experienced PoPA, 6% reported they had received a friendly and supportive conversation, 7% received advice, 0.9% received signposting to services, 0.6% received mediation between themselves and their perpetrator, 1% received disciplinary processes for the perpetrator, and 17% did not want to answer. No learners from Coleg Cambria, Coleg Cymoedd, and Pembrokeshire college reported that they received signposting to services or mediation between themselves or their perpetrator. Furthermore, no learners from Coleg Cymoedd and Pembrokeshire College reported that their perpetrator was disciplined.

Table 22. *Support received after sharing PoPA incident/s with colleges.*

	Not applicable - I have not experienced PoPA		A friendly and supportive conversation		Advice		Signposting to services		Mediation between you & perpetrator		Disciplinary process for perpetrator		Did not want to answer		Other		Answered		Missing		All
Bridgend College	28	57%	7	14%	9	18%	4	8.2%	2	4.1%	1	2.0%	4	8%	1	2%	40	82%	9	18%	49
Coleg Cambria	39	60%	6	9%	6	9%	0	0%	0	0%	2	3.1%	9	14%	1	1.5%	57	88%	8	12%	65
Cardiff and Vale College	754	52%	64	4%	79	6%	9	0.6%	6	0.4%	9	0.6%	272	19%	44	3.1%	1,166	81%	274	19%	1,440
Coleg y Cymoedd	16	57%	5	18%	4	14%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	4%	1	3.6%	24	86%	4	14%	28
Merthyr College	111	56%	17	9%	19	10%	1	0.5%	2	1.0%	4	2.0%	13	7%	5	2.5%	158	79%	42	21%	200
Pembrokeshire College	13	33%			1	3%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	5	13%	2	5%	19	48%	21	53%	40
St Davids	10	24%	3	7%	3	7%	2	4.8%	1	2.4%	2	4.8%	7	17%	5	11.9%	22	52%	20	48%	42

| Total (n, %) | 971 | 52% | 102 | 6% | 121 | 7% | 16 | 0.9% | 11 | 0.6% | 18 | 1.0% | 311 | 17% | 59 | 3.2% | 1,486 | 80% | 378 | 20% | 1,864 |

Learners were asked, "What can colleges do to support learners experiencing PoPA?" In the dynamic landscape of further education, prioritizing well-being and safety of every learner is a foundational commitment that colleges hold. Yet, the prevalence of PoPA highlights the pressing need to enact comprehensive measures that provide support, prevent abuse, and cultivate awareness within educational settings. A concerted effort aims not only to prevent and address incidents of PoPA, but also to cultivate an inclusive atmosphere that empowers learners to speak out, seek assistance, and engage in meaningful dialogue about PoPA.

> *"Listen to the issues and find the root of the problem. Sometimes, it's as easy as educating the students at large about PoPA, LGBTQIA+ issues and opening up the conversation about what counts as harassment, especially sexual harassment. A lot of people don't realise that making unwanted advances after specifically being told to stop, is harassment. Also don't discredit the student's testimony. Of course, I am not saying to believe them blindly and without evidence, but always sway to support the side that is the victim until there is evidence proving otherwise, if there is any physical proof, or more than one person is corroborating the same counter story."*

Supporting learners who experienced PoPA can be improved by several measures and processes. Teaching students about personal boundaries, conflict resolution, and recognising abusive behaviours, were highlighted by learners as important for educating both potential victims and bystanders. It was stressed that conversations should be inclusive, discouraging discrimination, and providing support specifically for LGBTQIA+ learners who may be at risk. Some measures that were considered necessary were early intervention, concerns of victims should be taken seriously, providing counselling, creating safe spaces, taking action against perpetrators, and offering guidance, regularly checking in with individuals to ensure their well-being and having support groups for those affected. Some institutional measures such as reporting abuse and removing perpetrators were suggested alongside ongoing processes such as policy evaluation, staff and student training, and collaboration in effectively addressing peer-on-peer abuse.

Perceptions of staff knowledge and understanding of PoPA

It was important to understand how learners perceive the knowledge and expertise of college staff in responding to PoPA (Table 23). 43% of learners thought their college staff understood PoPA, but 5% thought their college staff did not. Merthyr College (56%) reported the highest perceptions of level of college staff understanding of PoPA, Pembrokeshire College (18%) reported the highest perception of college staff not understanding of PoPA.

Table 23. *Perceptions of level of college staff understanding of PoPA.*

	Yes		No		Unsure		Did not want to answer		Answered		Missing		All
Bridgend College	22	45%	6	12%	6	12%	2	4.1%	36	73%	13	27%	49
Coleg Cambria	27	42%	5	8%	12	19%	6	9.2%	50	77%	15	23%	65
Cardiff and Vale College	616	43%	55	4%	260	18%	222	15.4%	1,153	80%	287	20%	1,440
Coleg y Cymoedd	11	39%	2	7%	8	29%	0	0.0%	21	75%	7	25%	28
Merthyr College	112	56%	5	3%	34	17%	5	2.5%	156	78%	44	22%	200
Pembrokeshire College	7	18%	7	18%	4	10%	1	2.5%	19	48%	21	53%	40
St Davids	8	19%	3	7%	7	17%	3	7.1%	21	50%	21	50%	42
Total (*n*, %)	803	43%	83	5%	331	18%	239	12.8%	1,456	78%	408	22%	1,864

Table 24 shows the learners perceptions of the level of college staff's knowledge and proficiency in responding to PoPA. 42% of learners reported that they thought their college staff responded appropriately, 5% reported did not. Merthyr College (56%) reported the highest perceptions of college staff level of knowledge and proficiency, Pembrokeshire College (15%) reported the lowest.

Table 24. *Perceptions of level of college staff level of knowledge and proficiency in responding to PoPA.*

	Yes		No		Unsure		Did not want to answer		Missing		Answered		Total
Bridgend College	22	45%	3	6%	9	18%	2	4.1%	13	27%	36	73%	49
Coleg Cambria	25	39%	5	8%	15	23%	5	7.7%	15	23%	50	77%	65
Cardiff and Vale College	600	42%	58	4%	262	18%	223	15.5%	297	21%	1,143	79%	1,440
Coleg y Cymoedd	12	43%	2	7%	7	25%	0	0%	7	25%	21	75%	28
Merthyr College	112	56%	5	3%	34	17%	5	2.5%	44	22%	156	78%	200
Pembrokeshire College	6	15%	6	15%	5	13%	2	5.0%	21	53%	19	48%	40
St Davids	7	17%	4	10%	8	19%	2	4.8%	21	50%	21	50%	42
Total (*n*, %)	784	42%	83	5%	340	18%	239	12.8%	418	22%	1,446	78%	1,864

Discussion

The results of this survey provide a snapshot of learner experiences of PoPA, and perceptions of support, across seven colleges in Wales. Learner's awareness of policies and willingness to seek support for PoPA varied across colleges. Most learners reported that support was available to them within their education setting. Learners that had experienced PoPA reported that they did disclose incidents to college staff and support in the main. However, our study found that if they had not disclosed the incident to college staff, they were unlikely to disclose the incident to anyone else. Several factors influence learner's ability or willingness to report incidences to their college. A recent report from Wales found that incidents, specifically of sexual harassment, are grossly under-reported, as learners either did not want to or did not know how to report (Estyn, 2023). Barriers to disclosing incidents of PoPA have been explored in other studies, and include self-reliance when dealing with incidents, concern about their peers' opinion, fear of the reaction and harassment repeating, and fears of identity of LGBTQ+ being revealed while seeking support (Victim Support, 2022). Other research has shown that 79% of learners believe that sexual assault happens a lot or sometimes (Ofsted, 2021). Findings from that study suggested that learners identifying as female, LGBTQ+ and as having additional learning needs may be more likely to experience sexual harassment. Ofsted urges post-16 education settings to act against sexual harassment even where reported incidents seem less frequent, as incidents are often not reported. This programme of work explored in detail the experiences of learners and perceptions on the issue of peer-on-peer abuse that can occur face to face or online. Other studies have found that more than half of adolescents aged 11-16 had been targeted by online hate and chose to not report to a parent, teacher, or another adult but rather to ignore it (UK Safer Internet Centre, 2016).

Following disclosure, the support that victims received was largely described as "advice" or "a friendly and supportive chat". Learners reported that informal support was rarely escalated, with college staff signposting them to further services, mediation, and disciplinary procedures for the perpetrators. Welsh Government guidance has been provided for some types of abuse, including sexual abuse, exploitation, and harmful sexual behaviour (Welsh Government, 2024). Ofsted guidelines advise grading incidents by their severity: normal, inappropriate, problematic, abusive, and violent, and further advise responding to all incidents regardless of severity. Training for staff members has been considered essential in recognising signs of abuse and in ensuring appropriate action is taken (Ofsted, 2019). Learners in this survey generally reported a positive perception of college staff's understanding, knowledge, and proficiency in responding to PoPA.

Due to the limited representation of respondents from some colleges, findings should be interpreted cautiously. Results of the survey indicate a need for further investigation into the experiences of victims for different types of PoPA such as hate crime, discrimination, sexual harassment, and violence. The level of granularity was not possible in the current study due to small response rates from some colleges. Children and young people may seek support from their colleges, as our survey revealed. Young people might not perceive the police to be a source of support and may prefer to seek support from youth clubs and counsellors (Dinisman, 2021). This finding highlights the need for colleges and external partners such as the police to work in partnership and offer coordinated support to young people. Proactive support, and offering impartial and independent advice to victims has been shown to be valuable in cases of hate crime (Victim Support, 2022).

In conclusion, the available support and monitoring procedures may vary based on the college environment and learners have expressed their suggestions to create a safer environment and a culture of inclusive learning for all learners. Further research with greater representation from all the colleges in Wales is required for a detailed picture of learner experiences nationally.

Suggested changes to inform college policy and support

College reporting mechanisms and victim support can be improved by supporting learners in identifying and reporting PoPA, taking appropriate actions to intervene and provide mechanisms for disciplining perpetrators.

Through concerted efforts staff can create a comprehensive response framework that not only addresses immediate instances of PoPA but also actively contributes to fostering a safe, empathetic, and informed environment. By prioritizing action against perpetrators, providing support, nurturing empathy, and taking preventative steps, colleges can contribute a culture of respect and well-being, minimising incidents of PoPA.

Several enabling factors were reported for seeking help and support from the colleges. Acknowledging these influences, colleges are tasked with creating an environment that fosters accessibility, empathy, and trust, ultimately shaping students' comfort and readiness to seek assistance.

Finally, there is a need to teach students about the nature of abuse, its consequences, and how to prevent it. Acting against perpetrators is imperative when addressing PoPA as it establishes a clear and actionable stance against harmful behaviour, thus acting as a deterrent. Involving staff, students, and other stakeholders' can create a network of support that allows victims to share their experiences without fear of judgement or reprisal. Prevention efforts, such as raising awareness and addressing discrimination, cultivate a culture where abuse is less likely to occur in the first place. Through education and awareness campaigns, colleges can challenge harmful attitudes and stereotypes, making it clear that a respectful and safe community is the norm.

The following recommendations can support colleges in their work to identify and address issues of PoPA amongst learners:

- Different types of PoPA require tailored responses; but strengthening college level processes and structures will support college responses to all types of PoPA;
- Ensure that all relevant staff members undertake professional learning that enables them to confidently recognise and respond to harassment, as well as help learners develop their empathy and understanding of healthy relationships;
- Ensure that all learners benefit from opportunities to take part in learning activities and discussions about forming and maintaining healthy relationships;
- Develop strategies to prevent and tackle inappropriate behaviour, verbal or online harassment, misogynistic attitudes and isolation cultures developing among groups of learners; and
- Record, categorise and analyse instances of sexual harassment, assault and abuse in a consistent way that enables leaders to identify trends and take appropriate measures in response.

Additional advice and guidance about dealing with harassment, abuse and violence can be found in the "Keeping learners safe" (Welsh Government, 2022). Other professional support for schools and colleges and staff who work in those settings can be accessed through helplines on tackling issues such as confidentiality and anonymity.

The following recommendations should support the Welsh Government in its work with further education colleges to monitor and address issues of PoPA amongst college learners:

- Make clear which aspects of Welsh Government education guidance relates to certain types of PoPA and applies to further education colleges, which can help clarify any differences between requirements in schools and further education colleges; and
- Provide appropriate guidance to colleges to help them adopt a co-ordinated and consistent approach to recording and categorising incidents.

Colleges should be aware of the landscape and build good relationships with external partners for reporting incidents, such as the police force. The Wales Violence Prevention Unit, Public Health Wales, was established in 2019 to provide a cross-sector collaboration, build evidence of violence prevention, especially on adverse childhood events, and lead a whole-system response to violence.

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Appendix 1: Data Cleaning and Data Handling

The findings and recommendations in this report draw on the data collected from the survey. The data cleaning process in this study focused on ensuring the integrity and accuracy of the collected data.

From the initial sample, 2,666 responses were collected from both the Welsh and English versions of the reports. Among these respondents, 2,285 completed the consent section of the survey. After careful examination, 34 individuals were identified to have provided inconsistent answers. Consequently, they were excluded from the dataset to maintain the integrity and accuracy of the findings. As a result, the total number of valid respondents in the revised dataset is now 2,251. By striking a balance between removing nonsensical responses and ensuring the preservation of valid data, the study aimed to maintain the quality and reliability of the dataset.

It is also worth mentioning that throughout the survey, there is a decline in response count due to participants not completing the survey. These occurrences were considered while interpreting the survey results.

Moreover, to enhance the clarity of the data analysis, certain responses were amalgamated into similar or simpler categories. For instance, when examining the religious demographic, some participants had chosen "Other" and specified "Catholic," while the option for "Christian" was available before that. To avoid redundancy, these responses were merged into their appropriate categories.

Additionally, considering the relatively low numbers and dispersion within the ethnicity responses, it was deemed beneficial to create two broader categories: "White" and "Non-White." Consequently, subcategories such as "White Roma," "White British," etc., were grouped under the "White" category, while responses like "Pakistan," "Chinese," etc., were consolidated under the "Non-White" category. This reclassification facilitates a clearer comparison of numerical differences between these two overarching groups, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the data.