appg THE ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP men&boys

All-party parliamentary group on issues affecting men and boys

Fourth Report

Closing the Gender Attainment Gap

Report of Inquiry No 4: Boys' Educational Underachievement

Remit of this All-Party Group

'To raise awareness of disadvantages and poor outcomes faced by men and boys in education, mental and physical health and law; to influence attitudes, role models, policy and legislation that will lead to positive differences to their well-being and lives.'

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Foreword by the Chair: Nick Fletcher MP

Welcome to the fourth inquiry from the APPG on Issues Affecting Men and Boys. Our earlier inquiries asked "What it was like being a boy today, growing up in the UK?", "The case for a Men's Health Strategy" and "Tackling Male Suicide".

This report, which took evidence across the spring and summer of 2023, is designed to shine a light on boys' educational underachievement – its causes, its solutions and the wider question – why is it so ignored?

Boys underachieve (relative to girls) at every age and stage of their education. The statistics are published every year and featured in the media – but there is barely a mention of this Gender Attainment Gap. It is hidden in plain sight. It has just somehow become accepted as normal and expected. The silence from Westminster, Whitehall and the national educational establishment is deafening.

There are some reports and research of the causes and what can be done. Few, if any though, feature trials which test effective interventions or do not include regular engagement with the boys themselves. There is certainly a lack of implementation.

It is unacceptable for our society to allow one group of its citizens to constantly underperform, yet we have the data, have the resources to fund research and have the means to implement solutions. We would not allow this to happen in other scenarios such as for a health condition, so why does it happen in boys' education?

Nationally, it is as if no one cares or thinks it's a problem. I truly believe it is discrimination against boys based on their gender. It is clear that there are still issues in the number of women at board level and even in the number of female MPs but we cannot use this as an excuse to ignore the issues many boys are also facing too. I am confident that there would be no end of initiatives and concern, as there should be if working class girls were facing the same issues. Girls and boys should matter equally.

During our inquiry, we have discovered that, around the country, a number of different schools, within current budgets and with the resources available to them, are able to close the Gender Attainment Gap between boys and girls. These schools were not working together; did not know each other and have not followed the same sources, but, amazingly, they have come to broadly similar conclusions. Their voices and those of the boys at their schools are at the heart of this report. Girls are too. Boys doing well at school is good for girls. We share our classrooms, playgrounds and society together.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Issues Affecting Men and Boys will continue to work with educationalists and schools to clarify and share the insights we have learned and will be pressing government and its agencies to support this process.

Nick Fletcher MP (Don Valley)

Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Issues Affecting Men and Boys

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(1) Remit

"What is the extent, causes and potential remedies for the relative underachievement of UK boys in the education system between birth and the end of their secondary schooling?"

The lower school achievement of boys, relative to girls, is known and documented. This inquiry will:

- Summarise the data which illustrates this;
- Identify the economic cost of low male achievement and the effect to the individual;
- Aim to explain the lower achievement;
- Aim to understand why there is so little political and educational interest or effective remedial action on this issue;
- Propose policies which are more likely to be effective than those in use at present and which do not damage girl's attainment.

(2) Quotations from headteachers and leaders

"Part of the success with boys is that schools need to find everybody's hook, because everybody's got one. This is true of girls and boys, but it's particularly true of disaffected boys."
Dominic Burke, Headteacher, Balcarras School.
(mixed secondary school, 11-18 year-olds, Charlton Kings, Cheltenham)

"My summary is to move away from focusing on the boys but focus on high aspirations and high expectations for all. Rather than saying 'right, you lot, you boys, you need to pull your fingers out, we need to sort our boys out'. What we need to sort out is our attitude as staff towards the individual and our aspirations and expectations of every individual."
Chris Eadie, Headteacher, Cardinal Langley Hugh School.
(RC, mixed secondary school, 11-18 year olds, Middleton, Rochdale)

"I used to talk to teachers all over the country about how to engage boys…. I kept hearing it was that you had to make it easy for them. That is exactly not what you have to do. I always say: teach to the top and then help them reach the top because that's what everybody wants to do. Everybody wants to reach the top. Nobody wants to be taught as if they're stupid."
Diane Henson, Headteacher, Wheelers Lane Technology College
(single sex boys' secondary school, 11-16 year olds, Birmingham)

"We moved away from a sense of kind of eye rolling and overlooking if boys didn't have those things or didn't have those things in place. I think we observed in some classrooms in the early days, there was a tendency to almost just be grateful if boys were there and they were doing some work. Whereas actually what we wanted was the same standard of work and the same standard of expectation for all students, and therefore that had to be really applied."
Caroline Barlow, Headteacher, Heathfield Community College.
(mixed secondary school, 11-18 year olds, Heathfield, East Sussex)

"Boys respond better if they are built up, not being told how they shouldn't behave – they need to be shown what good is, they need to be encouraged and believed in, that what grows good fruit."
Sonia Shaljean, Founder and Managing Director, Lads Need Dads
(community interest company supporting boys without father-figures, North Essex)

"It also very important that we counter the damaging negative narrative of 'problem' boys. In other words, if we keep telling working class boys that they are underachievers or failures, that they are violent, that they are problematic, then what do we expect! So, this requires a change the way we speak - about boys - to boys and - how then, in turn, boys view and speak about themselves."
Susan Morgan, Lecturer in the School of Sociology and Applied Social Studies, Ulster University
(Taking Boys Seriously research project)

(3) Executive Summary

This is the APPG's fourth report with this being focused on boys' educational underachievement and the resultant Gender Attainment Gap. Twenty policy recommendations have been made.

Boys are behind girls at every stage of education from early years' through to university and vocational education. They are ahead of girls when it comes to exclusions and being a NEET (Not In Education, Employment and Training).

Evidence from educationalists, academics, headteachers and organisations working in the field was collated over a six-month period between March and August 2023. In addition, a wholesale literature review was also undertaken.

The APPG found that whilst the Gender Education Gap has existed in plain sight for thirty years or more, there has been no political, institutional or educationalist will to try to resolve it. Our recommendations therefore embed responsibilities and accountabilities, based on the same principles as with the Gender Pay Gap.

While there had been some research on the causes and potential solutions, there is little evidence of implementation -especially wholesale. The focus has been on explanation, not on action.

Currently, policies to close the gap for boys is being left to a disparate group of academics and headteachers to create individual solutions (with now only the early signs of collaboration). What is lacking is any central 'push'.

The adult world should better support boys and recognise the need to help, not hinder, them: a hand up, not a push down or a shoulder shrug. This negative societal narrative fails to focus on the problems boys face, but focuses on the problems caused by a small minority.

We do not accept the narrative which accepts boys' underachievement as the norm, that 'boys are defective girls' and that they need 'reprogramming'.

Evidence presented to this inquiry on addressing boys' underachievement and closing the Gender Attainment Gap can be summarised in these four pillars:

- **Institutional Will:** Schools/trusts recognise the gap, collect the data and then commit themselves throughout the school to address it continuously – from governors/academy trust boards through to teaching assistants.
- **Creating a Boy-Positive School Environment:** Schools create an inclusive, fair, positive, relational and aspirational learning environment for all students – that boys and their parents recognise includes them. Boys are not seen as a problem – some just need encouragement, understanding, being believed in, given self-esteem and pushing. They need high expectations and to understand the point of what they are being taught.

- **Tactical interventions on better understanding boys, role models and mentors:** These are aimed at boys where needed, especially role models, literacy mentors, early literacy interventions and study skills. These are not needed for all boys, but are needed for some boys. Better understanding of the difference in boys' motivations compared to girls is important as are more male teachers which would help boys understanding learning is for them too.

- **As a society, we need to care about boys:** At a societal, political and educational level, the negative narrative on boys and the indifference that boys face, especially those with problems, has to change. This also includes dealing with the problems the adult world causes them including family dysfunction, a lack of community aspiration/opportunity and system-level educational indifference.

Some schools are implementing these as the above are based on how they have closed the Gender Attainment Gap. Schools and educationalists looking for a framework, could start with Ulster University's Taking Boys Seriously framework and adapt it to their own school's needs.

Best practice being delivered in some schools must be proactively disseminated. There is a responsibility to ensure these small scale 'best kept secrets' do not remain hidden.

Ultimately, the APPG concludes that the Gender Attainment Gap is not inevitable. It results from the interactions and problems that the adult world – whether families, society, and institutional inaction – has caused them. It is therefore the responsibility of the adult world to address those problems.

This inquiry has identified a number of myths about boys and learning. For example:

- The problem is with all boys;
- Boys should start school a year later;
- Boys learn better from male teachers ;
- That the curriculum has been 'feminised'.

If these myths were correct, the problem would be very hard to solve. Starting all boys a year later or finding more male teachers are relatively hard to implement. The evidence, however, points to much more achievable interventions.

(4) Introduction

This is the fourth report of this APPG. In contrast with earlier inquiries, it has been much harder to find experts and examples of effective interventions. For example, the APPG found:

- Endless data showing how boys are underachieving (relative to girls) at every age and stage. This is collected in official statistics and is fairly well known in the education sector;
- A lot of research which describes and tries to explain these differences, but very few are linked to interventions with actual boys. There is also very little application of that research in schools;
- No large-scale studies where interventions are trialled over several schools and their effectiveness measured by a research team.

While there are very few interventions in schools, there is good evidence that they are effective at all levels of education.

A problem in plain sight

It is as though society knows about the problem but accepts it as a 'given'. The APPG found no evidence that any particular section of society – teachers, teachers' unions, government, male teachers, female teachers, schools' policy, local authority oversight, academy status or others – is responsible for this attitude. It seems like a collective acceptance.

To close the Gender Attainment Gap, it is therefore highly unlikely that:

- The problem will 'fix itself';
- Teachers or parents will be on the streets demonstrating in favour of change;
- A political party will be putting this issue front and centre of their election manifesto.

However, one of the benefits of there being so little action and interest is that almost anything which is done will have a significant effect, so long as those interventions are informed by the evidence.

It is vital, therefore that government and teaching profession implement the proposals and policies laid out in the conclusion of this report.

Past work on Boys' Educational Underachievement

A great deal of relevant work has been done, some of which we draw on here. It shows that the problem has been well documented and studied, but that either the recommended solutions have not been effective, or they have not been implemented.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Issues Affecting Men and Boys does not intend to add to this bookshelf unnecessarily. Our focus has therefore been on the best explanations for this underachievement and the most evidence-based

solutions. The APPG will then focus its work on implementation: an area which has received far less attention in these earlier studies.

Key research publications are listed below and access to the full library is available on request.

- *Girls Rock, Boys Roll,* Simon Burgess et al, Bristol University (2004);[1]
- *Raising Boys' Achievement In Primary Schools (2006)*, Warrington and Younger;[2]
- *Me Read? And How!*, Ontario teachers report on how to improve boys' literacy skills (2009)[3].
- *Boys' Reading Commission report,* National Literacy Trust (2012);[4]
- *Breaking through the barriers to boys' achievement, Gary Wilson (*2013);[5]
- *The Lost Boys* - How boys are falling behind in their early years, Save the Children (2016);[6]
- *When the Adults Change, Everything Changes*, Paul Dix (2017)
- *Why are boys falling behind at school*, Simon Kuper and Emma Jacobs, Financial Times (2018);[7]
- *Boys Don't Try?,* Matt Pinkett and Mark Roberts (2019);[8]
- *The Boy Question*, Mark Roberts (2021);[9]
- *Let's hear it from the boys*, Gary Wilson (2021)[10]

The APPG found little evidence that any of this work had either been applied or tested systematically at scale.

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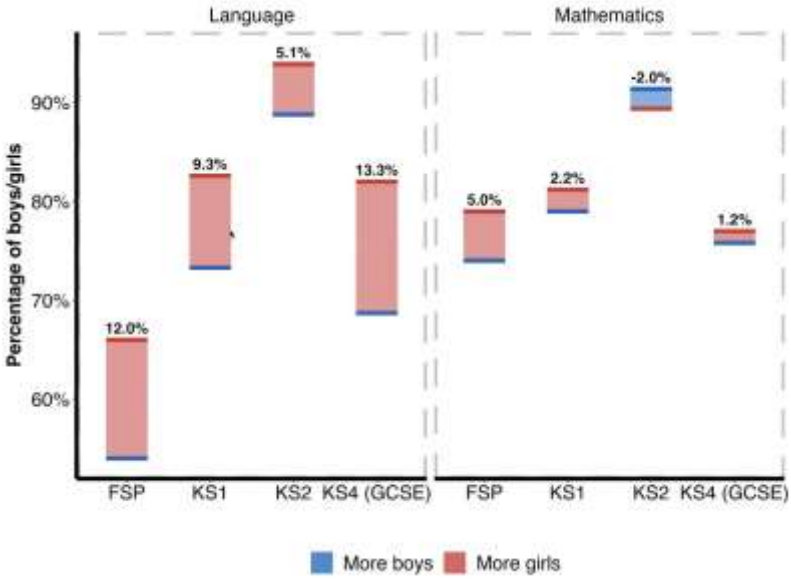
[1] Burgess, Simon et al. (2004). *Girls Rock, Boys Roll,* University of Bristol: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.0036-9292.2004.00303.x
[2] Warrington and Younger. (2006). *Raising Boys' Achievement In Primary Schools*, University of Cambridge Faculty of Education: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/5400/1/RR636.pdf
[3] Ontario Teachers. (2009). *Me Read? And How!,* Ontario Teachers *:* https://www.edugains.ca/resourcesLIT/BoysLiteracy/MeReadandHow.pdf
[4] National Literacy Trust. (2012). *Boys' Reading Commission report* (2012): https://tinyurl.com/yerxamrm
[5] Wilson, Gary. (2013). *Breaking through the barriers to boys' achievement*: https://tinyurl.com/ye2xxj4k
[6] Save the Children. (2016). *The Lost Boys - How boys are falling behind in their early years* (2016): https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/the_lost_boys_report.pdf
[7] Kuper, Simon et al. (2018). *Why are boys falling behind at school*, Financial Times : https://www.ft.com/content/3b2509f2-fda2-11e8-aebf-99e208d3e521%201/19
[8] Pinkett, Matt, Roberts, Mark, *Boys Don't Try?* (2019): https://tinyurl.com/yc3yp6na
[9] Roberts, Mark. (2021). *The Boy Questi*on (2021): https://tinyurl.com/4haz22sb
[10] Wilson, Gary, *Let's hear it from the boys* (2021): https://www.amazon.co.uk/Lets-Hear-Boys-Gary-Wilson/dp/1472974638

Part 1: Statistics

There is a great deal of official statistics, and these are updated annually as part of the examination cycle. They provide a useful data series that can show trends over time. The information below is a snapshot of the key information which shows the Gender Attainment Gap starts before boys first join the education system and continues until they leave as young men.

(5) School-age students (5-16)

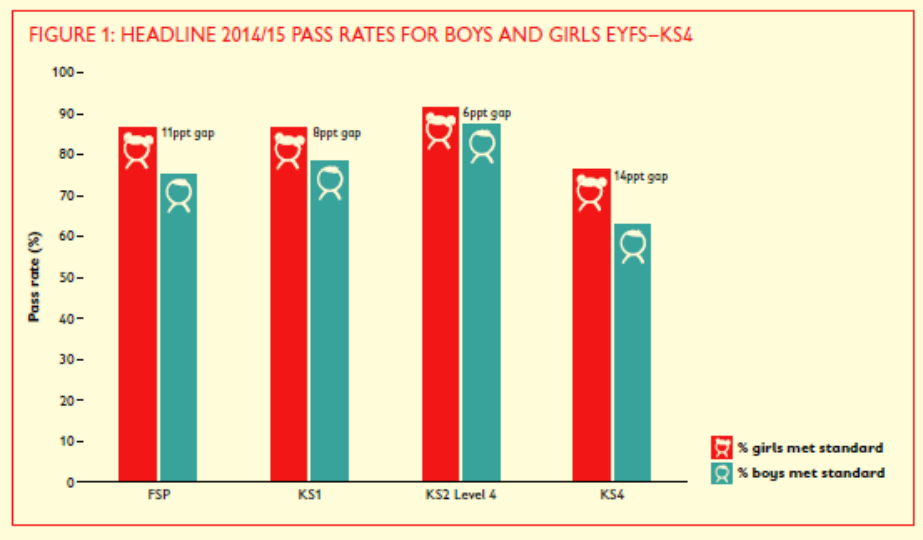
Claire Oakley, PhD Researcher, University of Essex presented an overview of the key statistics when she spoke to the APPG on the gender imbalance throughout the educational cycle from 5 to 16. The table below from her talk shows the gap through the key stages from Foundation Stage (FSP) through to GSCE (Key Stage 4)[11] It shows the gaps in language and mathematics at key stages throughout the education cycle in 2019.



The blue bars show girls achieving higher in the top grades while boys are in the majority for lower grades. The distinction in English is more dramatic, while that it maths is more balanced. The only point at which boys are doing significantly better is A* at A-level maths.

[11] Claire Oakley, University of Essex, Evidence to this inquiry: https://youtu.be/_0sl7EBypOM

This trend was also highlighted in one the most important reports in recent years - The Lost Boys (How boys are falling behind in their early years) by Save the Children[12] which was published in 2016.



These figures from nearly a decade ago showed similar findings to Claire Oakley's, therefore showing that this is not a recent phenomenon at all.

(6) Key Stage 2 SATS (11 year olds)

In 2021/22, 55% of boys met the expected standard in reading, writing and maths (combined), down from 60% in 2019. However, 63% of girls met the expected standard in all three subjects, down from 70% in 2019.[13]

In 2022/23, girls continued to outperform boys at the expected standard in all subjects in 2023, except for maths where boys performed slightly better (1 percentage point difference). In reading, 76% of girls met the expected standard down from 80% in 2022, whilst 70% of boys met the expected standard, unchanged from 2022[14].

The biggest attainment gap between boys and girls remains in the writing teacher assessment at 13 percentage points.

In reading, writing and maths (combined) in 2023, 63% of girls met the expected standard compared to 56% of boys, a gap of 7 percentage points, down from 9 percentage points in 2022. This slight narrowing of the gender gap

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[12] Save the Children. (2016). *The Lost Boys - How boys are falling behind in their early years*: https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/the_lost_boys_report.pdf
[13] Department for Education. (2021/22). *Key stage 2 attainment*: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-2-attainment
[14] Department for Education. (2022/23). *Key stage 2 attainment: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-2-attainment*

is due to an increase in attainment in reading, writing maths (combined) for boys, and a slight decrease in attainment in this combined measure for girls.

(7) Key Stage 4 GCSEs (Level 2)

The Gender Attainment Gap at GSCE level is also very clear and these figures are for 2022.

- 69.5% of boys and 76.5% of girls received a Grade 4/C and above in 2022;[15]
- 22.4% of boys and 29.6% of girls received a Grade 7/A and above in 2022;
- English Language: 63.5% of boys received a Grade 4/C and above and 15.1% received a Grade 7/A. The figures for girls were 79.9% and 25.6% respectively;
- Mathematics: 64.8% of boys received a Grade 4/C and above and 20.4% received a Garde 7/A. The figures for girls were 64.9% and 19.3% respectively;
- 2.6 million GCSE certificates were issued to boys and girls in 2022.

In 2020/21, 48.2% of boys and 55.8% of girls and got a grade 5 or above in GCSE English and maths[16]. In 2021/22, the figures were 47% for boys and 52.7% for girls[17]. A closure of the gap. As outlined in section, there seems to be an impact on the change from exams to assessments and back again – with respect to the change from exams and back. This is worthy of further exploration.

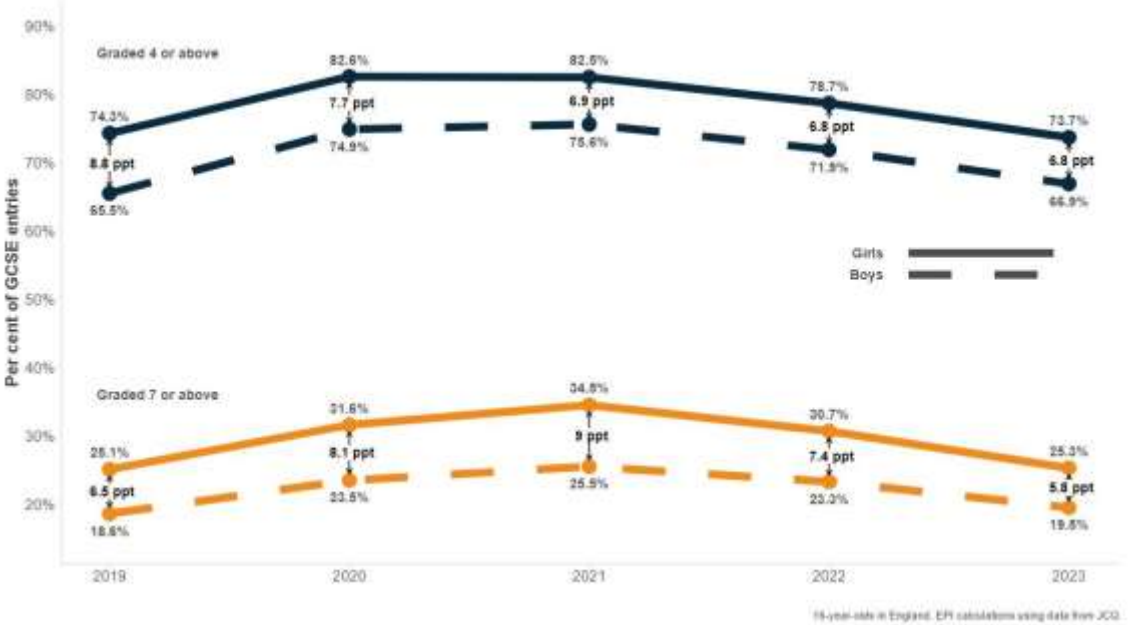
The table below is based on the number of boys and girl who achieved Grade 5 or above passes in English and maths.

Year	Men	Women	Percentage Point Gap
2018/19 (exams)	40	46.6	+6.6
2019/20 (assessments)	45.9	54.1	+8.2
20/21 (assessments)	48.2	55.8	+7.6
21/22 (assessment/exams)	47	52.7	+5.7

Headline analysis[18] from the Education Policy Institute (EPI) show that "in 2023, 73.7 per cent of entries from girls achieved a grade 4 or above in comparison

[15] Ofqual. (2022). *GCSE outcomes in England*: https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk/apps/GCSE/Outcomes/
[16] Department for Education. (2020/21). *GCSE English and maths results*: https://tinyurl.com/5n8az2hn
[17] Department for Education. (2021/22). *GCSE English and maths results:* https://tinyurl.com/2mr2hwyy
[18] Education Policy Institute. (2023). *Analysis - GCSE Results Day 2023:* https://tinyurl.com/2p9pu6xt

with 66.9 per cent of entries from boys. This gap between boys and girls has been narrowing since 2019, with both the percentage of boys increasing and the percentage for girls decreasing. The gap is now 2 percentage points lower than it was in 2019. Similarly, the gap between boys and girls has narrowed amongst the highest attaining, when compared with 2019. This year, 25.3 per cent of entries from girls and 19.5 per cent of entries from boys were awarded a grade 7 or above. This represents a gap of 5.8 percentage points, 0.7 percentage points down on the 2019 gap. This gap has though been higher in the intervening years.”. This graph is from the EPI.



(8) Key Stage 5 - A levels / T levels (Level 3)

A levels

In 2022 in England , fewer men took A-level exams than women with 353,000 men completing the exams compared to 423,000 women[19]. This has a knock-on effect on university entry and of course the overall numbers passing them. This can often be forgotten if looking solely at the percentage point pass rates.

- 80% of young men secured C and above passes in the August 2022 results (83.9% women). This was a total of 282,000 men and 355,000 women.
- 34.7% of young men secured A-A* passes in the August 2022 results (36.9% women). This was a total of 123,000 men and 156,000 women.

[19] Ofqual. (2022 and 2023). *A level outcomes in England*: https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk/apps/Alevel/Outcomes/

In 2023, in England[20], the above pattern persisted with 366,000 men and 431,000 women completing the exams.

- 73.1% of young men secured C and above passes in the August 2023 results (77.4% women). This was a total of 267,000 men and 333,000 women.
- 26.4% of young men secured A-A* passes in the August 2023 results (26.7% women). This was a total of 97,000 men and 115,000 women.

It shows that young men are as capable of getting top grades as young women. The main issue is that fewer young men are getting Grade C so a higher percentage are not doing so well. In addition, fewer boys are taking them, which will be a symptom of lower attainment at GCSE level.

T levels

In 2020, the first students took T (technical) levels, which are the Level 3 equivalent to A levels[21].

In 2023, 3,448 students achieved a T Level result over 10 pathways (subject areas). The percentage of students achieving a Pass or above in their T Level was 90.5%, 85.8% of males and 94.9% of females achieved a Pass or above.[22]

(9) National Vocational Qualifications

There are two forms of Level 3 vocational qualifications and these are different to T Levels. The data below supplied by the House of Commons library show the Gender Attainment Gap is present here[23].

Average points per exam entry, vocational qualifications in England

	Applied general			Tech level		
	Female	Male	Gap	Female	Male	Gap
2017-18	29.8	26.9	2.9	27.8	28.5	-0.7
2018-19	30.3	27.3	3.0	28.4	28.9	-0.5
2019-20	32.9	29.4	3.4	29.8	30.1	-0.2
2020-21	34.5	30.7	3.8	32.1	31.2	0.8
2021-22	33.2	30.5	2.7	30.6	30.5	0.1

[20] Ofqual. (2023). *A level outcomes in England*: https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk/apps/Alevel/Outcomes/
[21] Department for Education. (2022-23). *Provisional T Level results*: https://tinyurl.com/3tcjux3v
[22] Department for Education. (2022-23). *Provisional T Level results*: https://tinyurl.com/3tcjux3v
[23] House of Commons Library / Department for Education. (2021/22). *A level and other 16 to 18 results:* https://tinyurl.com/2ns7sene

(10)Apprenticeships

There can be a view that many boys go down an apprenticeship route from 16 rather continue down an academic route. However, the entry figures for men and women are the same, including at degree level.

In 2021/22, 72,000 men and 72,000 women completed an apprenticeship. The completion rate was 97.5% and 97.6% respectively.[24]

Degree: In the 2021/22 academic year, there were 43,200 apprenticeship starts in England at Level 6 and 7 (degree level), of which 22,000 were female and 21,200 were male.[25]

(11)Exclusions

Whilst not strictly attainment, exclusions are clearly attainment related, show how boys are engaged at school and also indicate background issues in their lives which are preventing this engagement. There is a clear gender gap here: in 2020/21, 2,960 boys and 968 girls were permanently excluded from schools[26].

(12)NEETs

Similarly, to exclusions, NEETS[27] (Not in education, employment or training) are an important indicator of engagement.

The latest figures[28] from the Office for National Statistics (April to June 2023), showed that 12.2% of young men (up 1.1 percentage points on the quarter) and 11.0% of young women (down 0.4 percentage points on the quarter) were NEET. Of the total number of young people who were NEET, 427,000 were young men and 367,000 were young women. The number of young men aged 16 to 24 years who were NEET and unemployed increased by 56,000 on the quarter, a record quarterly increase – a total of 237,000 compared to 90,000 young women.

(13)Higher education /university

Gender balance: Numbers

For a number of decades, there has been an increasing gap between the number of men and women entering higher education/university to the point that in

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[24] Department for Education. (2021/22). *Apprenticeships and Training*: https://tinyurl.com/4ehz8bhz
[25] House of Commons. (20 January 2023). *Written Parliamentary Question* : https://tinyurl.com/5adbz9pv
[26] Department for Education. (2020/21). *Permanent exclusions and suspensions in England* : https://tinyurl.com/3a9c9kxa
[27] Department for Education. (2022). *NEET age 16 to 24* : https://tinyurl.com/3p8yypax
[28] Office for National Statistics. (April to June 2023). Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), UK: https://tinyurl.com/yubm8ebw

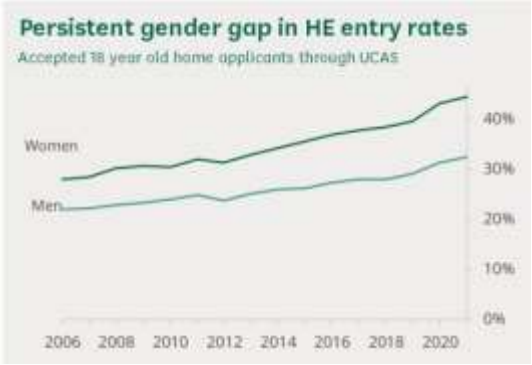
2021/22, 57% of those in higher education were female.[29] In effect, 32% more women go to university than men.

In 2020/21, 38.4% of men 19 and under will have progressed to a HE institution compared to 50.6% of women[30]

On a comparative and numerical basis, 35,000 fewer 18-year-old UK young men (121,000) started university in September 2022 than girls (156,000) of the same age.

For September 2023, 152,120 18-year-old UK women (56.3%) and 118,230 men (43.7%) started university[31]. A gap of 33,890.

This charts below are supplied by the House of Commons' Library shows the trend for 18-year-olds over time with more detailed figures in the chart further below. These figures show that in 2022, 209,000 men started university in September 2022 compared to 280,000 women.



[29] Higher Education Statistics Agency, Higher Education Student Statistics: UK. (2021/22): https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/19-01-2023/sb265-higher-education-student-statistics/numbers
[30] House of Commons Research Library. (2023). *Equality of access and outcomes in higher education in England*: https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9195/CBP-9195.pdf
[31] UCAS. (September 2023). Statistical releases – daily clearing analysis 2023: https://tinyurl.com/3975zw46

Home accepted applications through UCAS
Full-time undergraduate courses

	Female		Male	
	18 years old	All ages	18 years old	All ages
2013	121,725	240,580	97,595	193,030
2014	124,725	250,030	99,830	197,420
2015	132,470	261,755	102,885	201,960
2016	134,475	263,750	104,460	201,730
2017	136,145	263,600	105,440	199,345
2018	134,645	263,180	103,735	196,105
2019	136,555	267,435	104,965	196,900
2020	146,090	281,995	111,805	203,405
2021	155,505	285,360	119,735	206,645
2022	156,220	280,110	121,095	209,250

There are also intersectional differences as well including between groups of males. For instance, the table below[32] shows that white males eligible for free school meals had lower HE participation rates than any other group when analysed by sex, ethnicity and FSM.

The participation rate for this group was a mere 14.6%, nearly five times lower than Chinese boys in the same circumstances. For those not eligible for free school meals, white boys still trail with a participation rate of 36.4% compared to 79.1% of Chinese boys.

[32] House of Commons Research Library. (2023). *Equality of access and outcomes in higher education in England*: https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9195/CBP-9195.pdf

Progression to HE by ethnic group, gender and free school meal eligibility

Percentage of pupils from state-funded schools starting HE by age 19, England, 2020/21

	Eligible for FSM			Not eligible for FSM			All pupils		
	Female	Male	All	Female	Male	All	Female	Male	All
White	22.6%	14.6%	18.6%	48.7%	36.4%	42.4%	45.7%	33.8%	39.7%
Mixed	37.9%	25.6%	31.8%	58.3%	45.3%	51.8%	54.5%	41.7%	48.1%
Asian	61.2%	46.3%	53.8%	74.4%	62.3%	68.1%	72.1%	59.7%	65.7%
Chinese	74.6%	65.2%	69.7%	84.9%	79.1%	81.8%	84.2%	78.2%	81.0%
Black	62.0%	43.6%	52.9%	73.6%	55.6%	64.6%	71.0%	53.0%	62.1%
Other	63.6%	49.1%	56.0%	69.1%	54.4%	61.3%	67.8%	53.2%	60.0%
Total	33.4%	23.0%	28.1%	53.3%	40.7%	46.8%	50.6%	38.4%	44.4%

The difference in entry to higher education is the end result of a decade or more of underachievement of boys compared to girls: a clear final outcome of the gender attainment gap. It is driven by prior attainment:

- Fewer boys obtaining good GCSEs;
- Fewer boys studying A levels;
- Fewer boys go to university.

The difference in entry to higher education is related to prior attainment, [33]not specifically related to gender.

Entry and dropout rates in higher education

The average non-continuation rate at university (2019/20) across all groups was 9.9% - but again there is a big difference[34]. 10.1% of men and 7.5% of women did not complete their university degree. The gap between male and female students was larger for those from more deprived areas.

(14) Male teachers

The teaching workforce of England is consistently predominantly female; 75.5% as at November 2021 (2021/22), up from 74.4% in 2010/11[35].

- 35% of secondary school teachers are male;
- 14% in primary and nursery school are male;
- 25% in Special or PRU schools are male;

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[33] Department for Universities, Innovations and Skills. (2008). *Gender Gaps in Higher Education Participation* : https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8717/1/DIUS-RR-08-14.pdf

[34] House of Commons Research Library. (2023)., *Equality of access and outcomes in higher education in England*: https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9195/CBP-9195.pdf

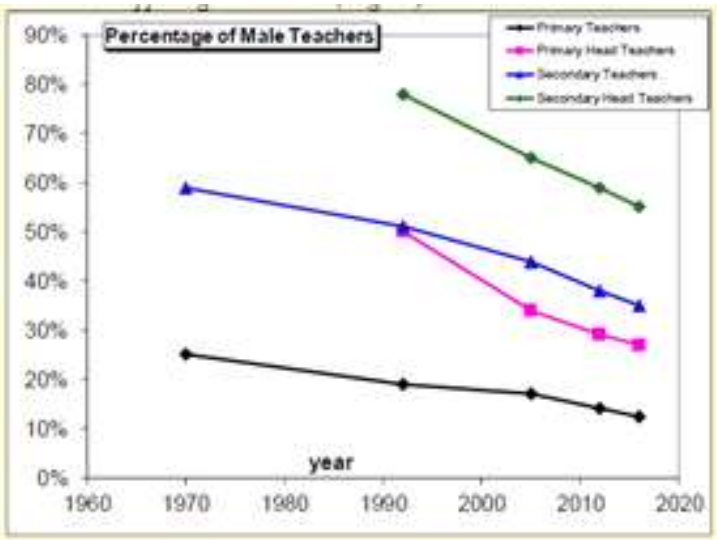
[35] Department for Education. (2022). *School Workforce in England*: https://tinyurl.com/59ay6why

- 2-3% of Early Years Teachers are male.[36]

Other statistics show that:

- 30% of primary schools have no male teacher.[37]

There has been a steady decline in male teachers as shown by this graph from produced by Joshua Fullard at the University of Essex[38].



There is an age-old debate about whether male teachers matter or not, especially for boys. In research conducted by Nick Fletcher MP in April-May 2023 with a small cohort of 114 current or former teachers, 81% stated that more male teachers in schools is important. [39]

The primary reasons given were:

- The lack of prestige for the profession, pay and workload;
- Fear of false allegations/motives;
- Teaching not being seen as a profession for men;
- A lack of career progression.

The three key themes from those who felt more male teachers were important:

- Male teachers act as positive male role models for girls and boys, with a particular benefit for boys without male role models at home or in their community. This included helping these boys to see that learning is not just something that girls do;

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[36] Department for Education. (2019). *Calls for more men to work in the early years*: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/calls-for-more-men-to-work-in-the-early-years
[37] Joshua Fullard. (2022), *Teacher Diversity in England 2010 – 2021:* https://repository.essex.ac.uk/30979/
[38] Joshua Fullard. (2022). *Teacher Diversity in England 2010 – 2021*: https://repository.essex.ac.uk/30979
[39] Nick Fletcher MP. (2023). Increasing male teachers – a conversation starter: https://tinyurl.com/kbncujuv

- It would encourage more young men to consider teaching as a career – in essence “"you have to see it, to be it”;
- Schools should better reflect the communities they serve, and more male teachers would benefit the whole school environment.

This situation is also not going to change any time soon, given that of those starting teaching training courses in September 2023, the figures are – 770 male (27.6%) and 2020 female (72.4%)[40].

(15) Broader social issues

While the numbers in this section are not directly educational and do not show a disadvantage for boys, the current narrative is that these issues predominantly affect girls.

It is important that schools are aware of these issues so they can understand how they will impact on boys’ learning and behaviour especially when the narrative on a number of these issues is that it only affects girls

- Partner abuse: The NSPCC reported that 18% of boys and 25% of girls had been victims of physical violence at the hands of their girlfriend or boyfriend;[41]
- Online Bullying: 42% of boys aged 11-15 and 42% of girls had reported being victims of inline bullying in the past 12 months;[42]
- Bullying: Between the period 2016-2018, 14-17% of boys aged 10-15 and 17%-21% of girls sated they have been bullied in the previous year;[43]
- Body Image: 46% of girls reported that their body image causes them to worry ‘often’ or ‘always’ compared to 25% of boys;[44].
- Mental Health: As shown below, boys under 10 suffer more mental health problems than girls if the same age and then the picture reverses. However, Natasha Devon explained in the APPG’s inquiry called “A Boy Today”, teenage boys with mental health problems exhibit them in different way including non-disclosure and criminal activity thereby their problems not being diagnosed as ‘mental health.[45]. This can also be seen by the fact that between 2017-2021, 31 boys (10-14) and 29 girls took their own life in England and Wales,

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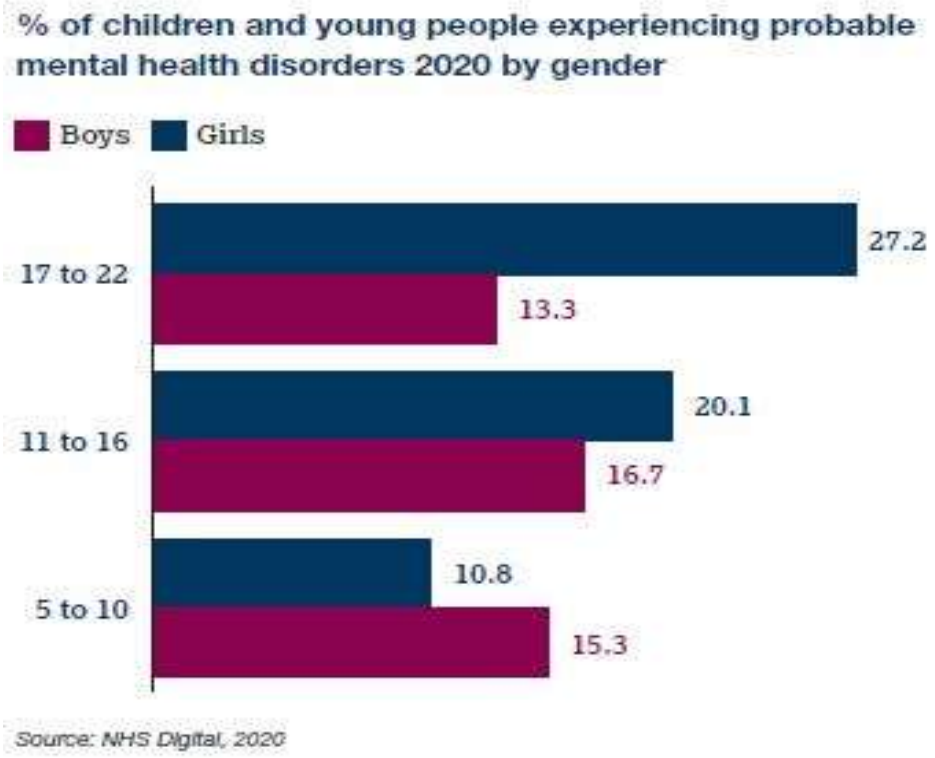
[40] UCAS. (September 2023). Statistical releases – daily clearing analysis 2023: https://tinyurl.com/3975zw46
[41] NSPCC. (2009). *Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships 2009*: https://tinyurl.com/yck63hbn
[42] Office for National Statistics. (2019/20). *Online bullying in England and Wales*: https://tinyurl.com/mbchv5af
[43] Department for education (2018): Bullying in England, April 2013 to March 2018: https://tinyurl.com/m8ckwcnd
[44] Mental Health Foundation. Body image in childhood: https://tinyurl.com/bdzef3yh
[45] Graphic sourced from Plan UK. (2021). *Mental Health and Wellbeing of Young People in the UK with a Gender Lens*: https://tinyurl.com/yzusr9j8

whilst 642 boys (15-19) and 288 girls had. A large gap that is not prevalent under 14.[46]



[46] Office for National Statistics (2022). *Suicides in England and Wales (2021 registrations)*: https://bit.ly/3S8lvhY

Part 2: Evidence

(16) Introduction

The APPG gathered evidence from a wide range of experts:

- Academic and public policy research;
- Headteachers and other experts who gave evidence online/in person at the APPG or by video link;
- Other relevant sources such as Pupil Premium;
- Male psychology research and other evidence showing ways in which boys (on average) are different.

(17) Response from Ministers and OFSTED

As part of the evidence gathering for this inquiry, several Parliamentary Questions were asked by APPG members. Each question specifically referenced boys and asked, for example, which interventions had been shown to close the Gender Attainment Gap.

The ministers' responses were all gender-neutral, stating that they do not target specific groups but their policies are aimed at benefitting all students at the same time.

The APPG obtained a similar response from the school inspectorate OFSTED. They neither measure nor include the Gender Attainment Gap in their school evaluations nor do they offer advice on how to close it.

(18) Academic and Public Policy Research

There has been a huge amount of academic research on this topic as outlined previously (please contact the secretariat to see the full research library). Much of the research though seems to have one or more shortcomings, such as:

- Being largely theoretical and referencing other research only;
- Does not involve any boys or schools;
- Being based on survey evidence of a small sample of boys;
- Does not have sufficient scale to give usable results that can be applied;
- The hypotheses have not been tested on boys;
- Conclusions are drawn that the disengagement of teenage boys' results from some variation on 'harmful/toxic stereotypes of masculinity' – which have been demonstrated to be false;
- Have not led to any implementation of the recommendations, nor an associated prolonged campaign to see those recommendations taken up.

Upon asking academics why there is so little high-quality, tested evidence, the response was focused on the difficulties of organising such research. The primary reasons they cited were the lack of availability of time for researchers,

the difficulty in engaging with schools and the difficulty in accessing data. However, when the APPG contacted schools, it was found that the data is publicly available and that schools were keen to share their experience and show their results.

Professor Becky Francis is Chief Executive of EEF (Education Endowment Foundation) which specialises in high quality research on effective education. We asked whether the EEF could identify research showing good evidence of effectiveness in closing the Gender Attainment Gap, she confirmed that there was none.

Consequently, the conclusions that are drawn here are more heavily on the experience of schools and others in direct contact with boys than with the academic literature.

(19) Our speakers

The evidence provided by the speakers has been recorded and are available on the APPG's YouTube channel[47]. Below are summaries of this evidence.

(A) Academics

Claire Oakley[48], University of Essex.

Claire's focus was on the data showing the degree of underachievement in the UK. Her data has been included in the Statistics section above.

Garth Stahl[49], University of Brisbane.

Garth focused on the range of different themes that have developed around boys' education over the past three decades and a range of solutions which align with boys' identity. He is also clear that boys have strong sense of self and identity, which then affects their learning. Boys are sensitive to being seen either as an academic failure, or as too being 'too academic'.

One size fits all approaches will not always work unless there is some of form context for boys. The context relates to taking account of:

- Family structure (including lack of father-figures);
- School culture towards boys' expectations and learning;
- Poverty;
- Cultural expectations from local communities and peer groups;
- Other intersectional issues.

He made the telling point that some teachers have low expectations of boys, which boys then buy into and which then becomes self-fulfilling. His published

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[47] APPG for Issues Affecting Men and Boys. *YouTube Channel*: https://tinyurl.com/5n7fhfyj
[48] Claire Oakley. University of Essex. *Evidence to this inquiry*: https://youtu.be/_0sl7EBypOM
[49] Garth Stahl. University of Brisbane. *Evidence to this inquiry*: https://youtu.be/fW7Prtl1Y90

research is clear on this point: teachers and schools should always guard against negative discourses with respect to boys.

Liam Waldron[50], Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen.

Liam presented research on the reasons why fewer boys go to university, more fail to complete the course, their grades are lower and they are more reluctant to access support services.

He described how young men did not access the support services which might have kept them on the course, or resolved their mental problems. However, because they were offered only face-to-face support rather than in the ways men choose to communicate (please see the past APPG report on male suicide[51]) this did not work for them. It is also worth noting the student male suicide rate was 4.1/100,000 in 2019 and the female rate was 2.1/100,000.[52]

He also explained that some young men chose the course and university that their friends have chosen because they find making new friends harder than women do.

(B) Interventions

Trefor Lloyd, Boys Development Project

Trefor[53] focused on the need to target underachievers with early intervention and this was the cornerstone of the Boys Development Project that he has created.[54] Independent analysis of the interventions showed that the pupils involved in his project had progressed from significant underachievement to average achievement.

He[55] also told the APPG that originally when he started, he was asked to help underachieving boys in Year 10. He soon realised though that the problems had originated years earlier and that the underachievement had actually started in pre-school pupils. He also found that that it was not exclusively a 'boy' problem, as there were some girls in the group too. Their work confirmed other research which finds about 80% of the seriously underachieving group are boys, so it is not all boys.

Their project identified a range of characteristics of young children at risk of underachievement.

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[50] Liam Waldron. Robert Gordon University. *Evidence to this inquiry*: https://youtu.be/x3Oq7P0zlTs
[51] APPG in Issues Affecting Men and Boys. (2022). *Male Suicide*: https://equi-law.uk/inquiry-no-3-male-suicide/
[52] Office for National Statistics, *Estimating suicide among higher education students, England and Wales: Experimental Statistics*(2017 to 2020): https://tinyurl.com/22behbws
[53] Trefor Lloyd, Boys Development Project, Evidence to this inquiry: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xw7qP40zvU
[54] Boys Development Project: https://www.boysdevelopmentproject.co.uk/resources
[55] Trefor Lloyd. Boys Development Project. *Evidence to this inquiry*: https://youtu.be/6xw7qP40zvU

Susan Morgan, Taking Boys Seriously, Ulster University

Susan Morgan[56] leads Ulster University's Taking Boys Seriously' long-term project[57]. Their research identifies boys as 'Relational Learners' and through their case-study data have developed and begun testing a set of holistic 'relational' educational principles. The creation of the framework and principles had started to be adopted in England as well with Ferndown Upper School in particular using them to raise the attainment of boys in their school.

These aimed at igniting boys' motivation, aspirations and attitudes towards education and learning. These were the key steps for improving working class boys' education. The key principles behind this framework can be seen below and they offer a clear framework for schools to consider.

#1 RECOGNISE THE PRIMACY OF RELATIONSHIP
#2 DEMONSTRATE DIGNITY AND RESPECT
#3 UTILISE A 'STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH' TO LEARNING
#4 CHALLENGE AND AFFIRM MASCULINE IDENTITIES
#5 PROMOTE POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH
#6 IDENTIFY BLOCKS TO BOYS LEARNING
#7 CONNECT BOYS LEARNING TO CONTEXT
#8 ENGAGE MEANINGFULLY WITH BOYS
#9 ENABLE CREATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
#10 VALUE THE VOICE OF BOYS

Sonia Shaljean, Lads Need Dads

'Lads Need Dads' is not a school, it is a community interest company supporting boys without father-figures in North Essex. They have developed an intervention for underachieving boys where adult men help them with their reading and emotional literacy.

Sonia Shaljean[58] explained their reading mentor scheme has positive effects on self-esteem, emotional regulation and literacy: the same dimensions identified by the schools.

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[56] Susan Morgan. Taking Boys Seriously. Ulster University. *Evidence to this inquiry*: https://youtu.be/UIqD8lQO4U4
[57] Ulster University, *Taking Boys Seriously Principles*: https://tinyurl.com/3u3tp3bb
[58] Sonia Shaljean. Lads Need Dads. *Evidence to this inquiry*: https://youtu.be/yr6ELa1BJdI

(C) Schools

The APPG wanted to explore the possibility that there were schools around the country that had closed the Gender Attainment Gap. None had been identified in the research and OFSTED did not offer any, so 15,000 schools were emailed asking if they had closed the Gap. Less than ten replied and four school leaders agreed to speak. These conversations transformed this report as they all gave a similar story.

The APPG secretariat will maintain contact and help build a network of schools to implement these effective approaches.

Wheelers Lane Technology College, Birmingham

Their head teacher, Diane Henson[59], explained that, while they were an all-boys school and hence could not compare their male and female students, she was able to compare their data with national averages. She could show a significant improvement.

They do not take a specific 'boy-friendly' approach and their discipline system, though well-applied and resourced, is not harsh.

They focus on:

- Building relationships so that boys enjoy being there, are known and understood;
- Targeted, pupil-specific interventions based on the monitoring of students;
- Allowing teachers to teach by having non-teaching support staff to take away as much administrative and other related burdens;
- Using 'tried and tested' teaching methods based on evidence.

Cardinal Langley RC High School, Middleton, Rochdale

Assistant Headteacher Andy Eadie[60] showed that while other schools had an increasing gap between Key Stages 2 and 4, by actively engaging with the problem, they were able to now maintain the Gender Attainment Gap at zero. They apply the following approach:

- Building positive attitudes to school by boys and to boys by staff;
- Developing strong links with parents;
- Creating literacy interventions;
- Creating clear discipline boundaries and effective behaviour management.

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[59] Wheelers Lane Technology College. Birmingham. *Evidence to this inquiry*: https://youtu.be/uShuKYuf7fQ
[60] Cardinal Langley RC High School. Middleton, Rochdale. *Evidence to this inquiry*: https://youtu.be/8jVnh9lEzk8

Balcarras School, Cheltenham

Headteacher Dominic Burke[61] explained how their mixed secondary has successfully closed the learning gap between boys and girls over several years. Their approach includes:

- A culture of high expectation and use of male pupil role-models;
- Creating literacy interventions;
- Inclusive enrichment so that every boy can be good at something;
- An initial 'effort challenge' to the boys to challenge them to be as good as the girls (this is no longer necessary as the gap no longer exists).

Heathfield Community College, Heathfield, East Sussex

Caroline Barlow[62], headteacher, produced data on how she improved boys' results and explains the four-pronged approach adopted by her school:

- High expectations of boys;
- Building positive relationships with the boys;
- Instilling oracy and encouraging questioning;
- A consistent response to behaviour and work-completion.

The common factors

All four schools and the earlier Pupil Premium winning school (see section 20) made it clear that there was no 'one thing' which made the difference. They combined monitoring of individual students, interventions in literacy, solid consistent discipline, high expectation, relationship building with boys and their parents alongside a wide variety of non-academic opportunities. This reflects what we were told for early years students by Trefor Lloyd.

Success was not achieved by creating a specifically 'boy-orientated/focused' education system; it was about creating an inclusive, positive and aspirational environment that boys recognised included them.

The key with all four was also that the need to close the Gender Attainment Gap was a core part of their school's educational strategy which the school's staff and governors bought into. It was a whole school approach.

Some referred to male teachers as role models, as well as older male students as literacy mentors.

These ideas are developed in the recommendation in Part 4.

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[61] Balcarras School. Cheltenham. *Evidence to this inquiry*: https://youtu.be/rfcUrfHy0_I
[62] Heathfield Community College. Heathfield, East Sussex. *Evidence to this inquiry*: https://youtu.be/XvjELQFhdM4

Michaela School, Wembley, West London

This school has achieved very good results for all pupils, including boys. We approached them to see if they had closed the Gender Attainment Gap. The headteacher, Katherine Birbalsingh[63] stated that they do not take an approach which targets certain groups, but help all the underachievers by creating an excellent learning environment for all.

While the public image of the school is that it is 'strict', the approach taken at Michaela is remarkably similar to that taken by the four schools above. If the outcomes are compared for the boys at Michaela with average outcomes, they provide further proof that boys' underachievement is not inevitable.

(20)Additional sources of evidence

Pupil Premium

The Pupil Premium is funding to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in state-funded schools in England. Guidance is given to schools by the evidence-based Education Endowment Foundation.[64]

The Pupil Premium Awards identified a number of methods as being the most effective in improving underachievement. These methods included:

- Early intervention: Providing support to pupils early on in their school careers can help to prevent them from falling behind. This can be done through targeted interventions, such as phonics programmes or math tutoring;
- High-quality teaching: Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to benefit from high-quality teaching. This means having teachers who are well-trained and experienced in working with disadvantaged pupils;
- Parental engagement: Parents play a vital role in their children's education. Schools can work with parents to provide them with the support they need to help their children succeed;
- A whole-school approach: The most effective schools are those that take a whole-school approach to improving the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils. This means having a clear vision for how to support these pupils and ensuring that all staff are committed to achieving that vision.

In addition to these methods, the Pupil Premium Awards also highlighted the importance of using evidence-based interventions. This means using interventions, such as those shown below, that have been shown to be effective in improving the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils.

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[63] Michaela School. Wembley, West London. *Evidence to this inquiry*: https://youtu.be/ecJbMfkqjtU
[64] Education Endowment Foundation. (2022). *Pupil Premium Grant*: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/guidance-for-teachers/using-pupil-premium

- One-to-one tutoring: This can be a very effective way to provide targeted support to pupils who are struggling;
- Small group work: This can help pupils to develop their social skills and learn from each other;
- Summer schools: These can provide pupils with extra support and help them to catch up on any missed learning;
- Family learning: This can help parents to support their children's learning at home.

Pupil Premium Award winner: what they did.

In a video from 2013,[65] John Talbot, Head at Smith's Wood Primary in Birmingham, explains how they raised the achievement of their 70% free-school-meals intake. They applied several of the techniques identified by EEF above including employing grandparents, graduates, and dinner-ladies for 15 minute interventions with children on phonics. The adults were trained and the progress was monitored. This had proved successful.

Goal-setting intervention

In a paper on scalable goal-setting interventions which close the gender and ethnic minority achievement gap, the gaps in performance between boys and girls became considerably smaller within the intervention cohort. After Year 1, the gender gap closed by 98%.[66]

The intervention boosted academic achievement and increased retention rates, particularly for ethnic minority and male students (who had underperformed in previous years). The research stated that "Overall, the results indicate that a comprehensive goal-setting intervention implemented early in students' academic careers can significantly and substantially reduce gender and ethnic minority inequalities in achievement."

A common theme also emerged, including from the Ulster University's Taking Boys Seriously project with regard a utilitarian approach.

That is boys need to understand the point of education, why they are in school and what it leads to. Some boys will learn if they see the point, not because they are told to. This was crucial if their outside environment at home and/or their community was not encouraging of academic achievement.

"If you want to be a successful electrician earning £50,000 a year, you need to learn your maths."

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[65] John Talbot, Pupil Premium Award winner 2012: https://youtu.be/dlcIJszIXvk
[66] Michaela C Schippers et al. (2015). *A scalable goal-setting intervention closes both the gender and ethnic minority achievement gap*, published in Nature: https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201514#auth-Micha_la_C-Schippers-Aff1

Parental involvement

The closer involvement by parents was cited by all four schools, indicating a general advantage. They also cite the value of older boys reading to and with younger boys as being an important method of improving literacy, and recognising that reading is for boys too.

The Fatherhood Institute's project[67] called FRED (Fathers Reading Every Day) is a simple, effective and sustainable intervention that gets dads reading to their children.

The end of regular 9-5 type work patterns and the use of zero-hour contracts, shift work and other irregular work patterns are not always conducive to creating a pro-learning environment at home – especially with regard to parental encouragement, engagement and support.

(21)Ways boys are different

Distribution of intelligence between boys and girls

While the average intelligence of school age children does not differ by gender, there are more boys in the lower quintile and more boys with learning difficulties.[68]

While we found no evidence of a 'male brain', for example, there are significant and different ways in which average boys differ from average girls. While these differences are small, they particularly affect underachieving boys.

Genetic or social construct?

There is much debate as to whether the underachievement is the result of genetic factors which affect all boys or whether it is due to socialisation. Some identify 'negative stereotypes of masculinity' when talking about teenage boys.

Research shows that teenage boys do not start underachieving when they reached their teens; they started in pre-school with poor language development. It is this low achievement which results in a negative attitude to education. They cannot access the curriculum because they do not understand what is being taught to them. So they withdraw, become demoralised or 'play up'.

Similar attitudes can be found in girls and also in any field, such as sport, where there is a wide spectrum of achievement. Non-sporty people develop a natural 'not interested in sport: it's a waste of time' attitude.

The seminal 2016 Save the Children Report[69], The Lost Boys, covers this in detail and refences research from the University of Bristol:

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[67] Fatherhood Institute, *Fathers' Reading Every Day*: http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/training-and-consultancy/fathers-reading-day-training/

[68] Cambridge University. (2020). *The Cambridge Handbook of the International Psychology of Women*, pp. 139 – 152 DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108561716

"The new analysis shows the effect it has on children's Key Stage 2 (KS2) attainment. In its new study, the University of Bristol[70] found that being behind in early language and communication at the age of five had a negative impact on all the indicators they measured at the end of primary school. Children who did not achieve the expected standard of early language and communication at five were found to be over four times more likely to have below Level 4 Reading at 11 than those who did. Those who had good early language development in Reception were six times less likely to struggle with English in Year 6."

Are boys are born different?

Research published by Cambridge University stated: "We conclude that there are no overall (average) differences between women and men in general intelligence, but there are some large and persistent differences on cognitive abilities that on average favour males (for example, mathematics, mental rotation, mechanical) or favour females (verbal ability, most tests of memory). There are more males in the low end of the intelligence distribution, at least in part, for sex-related genetic reasons."[71]

Since there are no gender differences in average intelligence but there are significant gender differences in average attainment, this suggests that minor genetic differences are amplified by the interaction between the boy and the adults in his life. However, there is such a large range in attainment that these differences can neither be applied at the individual level nor to make statements about 'all boys'.

While these differences are real, this does not mean that boys are incapable of literacy – just that they will need more help achieving the standard vice versa for women. This is reflected in the evidence given to us by Trefor Lloyd on the effective methods his team deploys.

On average, boy babies show more interest in objects and movement, girl babies in faces and expression.[72]

Early language development is slower in boys.

The evidence and research presented is that on average, boys' language develops at a slow rate than girls.[73] From the research by Shir Adani and Maja Cepanec, they showed:

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[69] Save the Children. (2016). *The Lost Boys - How boys are falling behind in their early years* https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/the_lost_boys_report.pdf
[70] Moss, G. and Washbrook, E. (2016). *The Gender Gap in Language and Literacy Development*, University of Bristol: https://tinyurl.com/y33j6pfr
[71] The Cambridge Handbook of the International Psychology of Women. (2020). pp. 139 – 152, Cambridge University Press: https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108561716
[72] Connellan et al . (2000)., *Sex differences in human neonatal and social perception Infant Behaviour & Development*. 23(1) 113-118: https://tinyurl.com/rbuk7n2c

- Boys represent more than 70% of late talkers and just 30% of early talkers;
- Boys lag behind girls in the development across many communication features. These include eye contact, gesture use, gesture imitation, joint attention, social referencing and more;
- During the first years of life, girls on average acquire language faster than boys and have larger vocabulary. For example, at 16 months, girls have a vocabulary of 95 words, while boys have a vocabulary of 25 words;
- Boys produce word combinations on average three months later than girls;
- The greatest differences between sexes are noticed at the points of development when children master new communication and language skills.

Research from Professor Gijsbert Stoet[74] stated:

"A second factor in boys underachievement is related to their speed of cognitive and emotional development (Barbarin & Soler, 1993). This affects different stages in childhood, both early on and in adolescence. It is well accepted that boys develop language skills more slowly than girls. For example, we know that at 1 year old, the vocabulary of girls is larger than that of boys (Bouchard, Trudeau, Sutton, Boudreault, & Deneault, 2009)."

"Even one-year old girls raised by low-educated mothers have a larger vocabulary than boys of highly educated mothers (Zambrana et al., 2012). This is astonishing because we know that parental education is one of the best predictors of children's success in school (Davis-Kean, 2005). We also know that memory development of boys is different than that of girls. For example, it has been found that female adults can remember earlier childhood memories than men, and that they remember them in more details (Mullen, 1994)."

Further research showed that the most striking difference between girls and boys is the prevalence of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The boy/girl ratio in most studies is between 4:1 and 5:1"[75] [76][77]

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[73] Adani, Shir. and Cepanec, Maja. (2019). *Sex differences in early communication development - behavioral and neurobiological indicators of more vulnerable communication system development in boys:* https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6509633/
[74] Stoet, G and Yang, J. (2016). *The boy problem in education and a 10-point proposal to do something about it, New Male Studies*: https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/4065/1/stoet2016-nms-boys-10-point-plan.pdf
[75] Chloe Gibb, Statistics Compilation. (2021). APPG for Issues Affecting Men and Boys: https://equi-law.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Education-statistics-compilation-by-Chloe-Gibbs-for-APPGMB-11-21.pdf
[76] Burman et al. (2008). *Sex differences in neural processing of language among children Neuropsychologia 46(5) 1349-62* (2008): https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18262207/
[77] *Sex Differences in Speech Acquisition by Pre_School Children*. A Review for APPG for Issues Affecting Men and Boys (conducted in 2023).

This shows the importance of literacy support for some boys at an early age as this can therefore be a drag on their education throughout their educational life: they need support to catch up.

The current norms are not helpful: one secondary headteacher remarked that she was expected, as part of the national curriculum, to teach all boys two hours of French, yet they were nowhere near mastering their own language.

Psychological differences: the Big Five

As described above, there are no average differences between overall intelligence, bar there are cognitive differences, as outlined by Cambridge University.

However, there are also psychological differences. It is these areas which are responsible for the different preferences made by boys and girls (cars versus dolls; physics versus psychology) and also their behaviour preferences (talk versus action, run versus sit).

Many contemporary personality psychologists believe that there are five basic dimensions of personality, often referred to as the "Big 5" personality traits (often referred to OCEAN):

- Openness;
- Conscientiousness;
- Extroversion;
- Agreeableness;
- Neuroticism (OCEAN)[78].

Girls, on average, score higher in Conscientiousness and Agreeableness which results in them being better suited to the classroom. Boys, by contrast score higher in Extroversion, which does not help.

Whether or not these psychological traits are 'natural', or the result of socialisation, matters less than the actions that are taken to address them. For example, there has been a big push on encouraging more young women into studying STEM but less so than encouraging young men into teaching or wider HEAL roles (health, education, administration and literacy)[79].

Boys use less effective study strategies

A recent study of 1,371 Canadian undergraduates suggests that females are more likely to engage in spaced learning than their male peers[80].

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[78] Kendra, Cherry. (2023). *What Are the Big 5 Personality Traits?* : https://www.verywellmind.com/the-big-five-personality-dimensions-2795422
[79] As suggested by Richard Reeves.
[80] Gagnon, M., & Cormier, S. (2019). *Retrieval practice and distributed practice: the case of French Canadian students ,* Canadian Journal of School Psychology, 34:2, pp. 83–97: https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2019-24400-001

A notable study by Griffin et al. identified a strong correlation between a student's study skills and academic success, found a statistically significant difference in these skills between male and female students[81].

The Save the Children's report[82] also quoted that "girls being more motivated to read and willing to persist with the task and boys spending less time reading and being less engaged by it."

Boys as relational learners

A key principle in the Ulster University's Taking Boys Seriously educational framework is their conclusion that boys are relational learners. Taking the evidence from Susan Morgan and also in the previous APPG report[83], the findings were that the quality of the relationship between boys and their teacher(s) is a strong predictor of their eventual attainment.

The learning relational principles were based on youth work methodologies with commitments to:

- Communicate consistent and persistent care;
- Display positive attitudes of acceptance and affirmation, and,
- Engage boys in their learning by linking subjects to their everyday lives.

By adopting these principles, their research showed that a school leader has highlighted a step change in pupil/teacher relationship in his schools. The level of boys' engagement improved their ability to access the curriculum and it also significantly heightened boys' expectations of their own academic performance. As she said, "It allowed boys to shine.". They also posed the effective question that in outside-of-school settings, some boys were achieving outcomes that exceeded their 'ability' at school because those settings were more relational to them.

They concluded that there is a need to prioritise the cultivation of teacher/pupil relationships as part of teacher training and professional development.

Boys are differently motivated than girls

There is good evidence that more boys are more motivated by extrinsic/utilitarian factors (they need to see the point of the learning), while more girls have intrinsic motivation (they try to succeed without needing to know how they will use the knowledge). This came through the evidence from many of the speakers and headteachers.

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[81] Roberts, Mark. (2021). *The Boy Question (p. 60)*, Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Boy-Question-Teach-Succeed-School/dp/0367509113
[82] Save the Children. (2106). *The Lost Boys - How boys are falling behind in their early years* : https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/the_lost_boys_report.pdf
[83] APPG on Issues Affecting Men and Boys. (2021). *A Boy Today*: https://equi-law.uk/boy-today-project/

"A 2014 study of over 400 Italian students[84] ranging from age 9 to 22 found that intrinsic motivation 'tended to be stronger for females than for males across all educational levels. Whereas girls are more likely to be driven by the belief that learning is an end in itself, boys are more driven by 'external regulation', whereby they are motivated by 'a valued end'."[85]

The APPG heard several anecdotes showing a change in work ethic by disengaged students once they knew why they were learning.

These characteristics can manifest as negative for boys at school, but positive for men in their careers. Once a man knows why he needs to learn, he is highly motivated and driven to succeed.

The available research suggested that at school some girls are 'better students' and their intrinsic motivation, cooperative work approach and greater conscientiousness act in their favour.

Boys want to do things with their friends.

The APPG heard from Liam Waldron[86], boys find it harder to make new male friends and so often make the wrong choices about which university or course to take as they want to go with their friends.

Is it 'all boys' or should we focus on the underachievers?

We heard several sources that there is very little that can be said about 'all boys' as the variation between boys is greater than the variation in gender differences.

Trefor Lloyd proposed that we should focus on the characteristics of the student, not on their gender.[87]

(22)Conclusions from the evidence

What this shows is that the underachievement of boys:

- Is based on the actions (or lack of) by the 'adult world' – parents, community, education that leads boys' underachievement – it is therefore not inevitable;
- Can be improved using well-known, accessible interventions;
- It does not have additional costs or budgetary requirements;
- Can be tackled by creating an inclusive, positive, relational, fair, role-modelling, consistent and aspirational learning environment for all students.

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[84] Vecchione, M., Alessandri, G., & Marsicano, G. (2014). *Academic motivation predicts educational attainment: does gender make a difference?' Learning and Individual Differences,* pp. 124–131. https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2014-06022-001
[85] Roberts, Mark. (2021). *The Boy Question.* p. 8 and p.60, Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition : https://tinyurl.com/4haz22sb
[86] Liam Waldron, Robert Gordon University: https://youtu.be/x3Oq7P0zlTs
[87] Trefor Lloyd, Boys Development Project: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xw7qP40zvU

Full details can be found in Parts 4 and 5 of this document.

Part 3: Further reflections

(23) Disconnected research

One of the worrying aspects of this inquiry has been that there are dozens of different academic papers on the Gender Attainment Gap. However, many do not engage directly with boys or lack interventions or practical implementation to make an improvement.

This would not happen, for instance, in medicine. If doctors identified a common medical problem, we would not expect that researchers spend their time explaining the cause while not testing treatments for the disease. If there are potentially helpful interventions, doctors would both use them and also create research projects to evaluate their effectiveness.

Problems that need to be addressed are:

- Why is so little being done?
- Why are teachers not interested?
- Why are researchers not experimenting?

Proposals to address this are set out in Part 4 and 5.

(24) Does it matter that boy, on average, underachieve in education?

From the Save the Children report: "The evidence clearly shows that children who start school behind often remain behind. This has negative consequences for their crucial early development, the rest of their school career and their adult lives.

Falling behind at such an early age has short-, medium- and long-term consequences:

- It has an immediate impact on children's capacity to express themselves, form friendships, participate in learning activities and develop their social skills;
- In the medium-term, it affects their school-readiness and means that some children do not have the solid foundation of skills they need to make the most of primary school when they arrive;
- In the longer-term, falling behind in the Early Years Foundation Stage damages their life chances."[88]

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[88] Save the Children. (2106). *The Lost Boys - How boys are falling behind in their early years*: https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/the_lost_boys_report.pdf

A further 'does it matter?' argument focuses on the fact that boys do better than women in the workplace. However, this again falls into the trap of looking at all boys. Many men do well at school and also well at work, but the outcomes for the boys who underachieve at school are not as rosy.

There are wider implications for society if some boys are underachieving – for example entry into criminal activity, a wider issue given you can fill Wembley Stadium with the number of men in prison.

The report on prison education from the House of Commons' Education Select Committee[89] in 2022 stated:

> A large proportion of prisoners have poor educational attainment, and many were excluded from, or truanted from, schools. 57% of prisoners have English and Maths levels at or below those expected of an eleven-year-old, and over 40% have been permanently excluded from school.
>
> In addition, over 30% of prisoners have a learning difficulty or learning challenges.
>
> Francesca Cooney, Head of Policy at Prisoner Learning Alliance, told us that this figure was likely to be an underestimate as prisons rely heavily on prisoners declaring themselves to have learning needs, and that there was a lack of comprehensive data in this area. Additionally, 51% of boys in young offenders' institutions are from BME backgrounds compared to 14% of the general population, and 25% of children in custody are Black compared to 4% of the general population.

Stephen Akinsanya[90], a leading criminal barrister who works with disadvantaged young people in South London stated in a recent conference that there was a connection between knife crime and low educational achievement – that "many of the young men, did not complete formal education or were wrongly labelled."

The fact as outlined that over 400,000 young men are not in education, employment or training is an outcome of poor educational achievement. That is a generation of 400,000 young men not reaching their potential right now but the impact on them, their families and wider society will last for generations.

(25)Ways boys are treated differently by adults

Amplification by adults

While the average differences between boys and girls in language development are small, they can be either amplified or reduced by the behaviour of the adults they interact with.

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[89] Education Select Committee. (2022/23). *Prison Education*: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmeduc/56/report.html
[90] Stephen Akinsanya: https://www.dioceseofbrentwood.net/stephen-akinsanya/

There is good evidence, for example, that adults treat babies differently depending on whether they think the baby is male or female. In *Girl toys vs boy toys: The experiment*, the BBC found that adults treat a toddler differently depending on whether they think the child is a boy or a girl.[91]

Victim blaming

We found a widely held explanation for Boys' Educational Underachievement was one which blamed the 'negative stereotypes of masculinity' in the boys and that there was a need to improve their attitude.

In effect, that the reason that boys are not doing well at school, is a problem they have caused and a problem of masculinity rather than society and the adults around them. Phrases such as 'toxic masculinity' have become *de riguer* in some quarters, that boys need to be fixed and there is something inherently wrong with them. Civitas found[92] that 41% of sixth-form boys and girls had been told in school lessons that boys were a problem for society.

The Future Men charity[93] found that in 2021, 29% of young men felt 'Forgotten / left behind' and 31% selected 'Unfairly treated'. In effect, these young men are finding that they have problems, but they are not being supported.

A range of organisations are being brought into school to address this, but there seems little scrutiny on the content by teachers or parents of these courses – and the impact on the boys. They also take different viewpoints, and it is vital that the content is scrutinised, and it is a moot point where one-off courses/lessons will work if the environment surrounding boys is not changed. This will also create mixed messages if it conflicts with this environment.

One headteacher, when interviewed, described such courses as divisive and that boys would feel picked on and singled out. He dealt with any problematic attitudes with the individual involved and as part of the normal disciplinary framework.

Progressive Masculinity[94], from whom the APPG received evidence, take a positive view of boys and young men with the stance that we need to support boys with the challenges they have, rather than feeling they are being singled out.

What the effective schools and interventions show is that the boys (and some girls) develop an anti-school attitude in teenage years but that:

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[91] BBC TV. (2017). *In Girl toys vs boy toys - The experiment*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWu44AqF0iI
[92] Civitas. (2023). *Show, Tell and Leave Nothing to the imagination: How critical social justice is undermining British schooling* : https://www.civitas.org.uk/publications/show-tell-and-leave-nothing-to-the-imagination/
[93] Future Men. (2022). *International Men's Day survey*: https://futuremen.org/
[94] Mike Nicholson, Progressive Masculinity: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hm16s74YNmQ&t=754s

- It is derived from the pre-school experience of low language and other skills;
- It results from the way the adults in their lives have treated them;
- A range of other environmental issues such as class, poverty and place.

The effective solutions involve

- Providing support to improve the missing skills/knowledge;
- Treating them positively, kindly, raising their self-esteem and expectations;
- Creating an environment in which these things happen and the boys can flourish.

Parents treat boys and girls differently

Research from Australia showed that parental expectations are critical to higher education participation, given parents' close observation and knowledge of their children's abilities. Lower expectations by parents have an impact.[95]

Other researchers also found that the pre-school home learning environments differed for boys and girls. Significantly more girls' parents reported activities such as reading, teaching songs and nursery rhymes.[96]

Given that 'home-life' routine for many is not as regular ('9-5') as it was potentially in previous generations especially with shift patterns, irregular working patterns and zero-hour contracts, then this could be having a negative impact on the home learning environment especially around support and homework discipline. More research is needed here.

Are boys are marked more harshly than girls?

There is evidence to show that girls are given higher marks by their teachers. This analysis[97] of KS2 results, which compares the teacher-assessed mark with the tested grade, shows systematic bias in favour of girls for the years 2007-15.

A 2015 OECD report[98] "shows that teachers generally award girls higher marks than boys" and recommends that we should "Train teachers to be aware of their own gender biases."

In 2019 (see table below), before for the pandemic, there was near parity in 18-year-old men and women achieving A-A* (25.6% and 25.4% respectively – a

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[95] Dockery, Alfred et al. (2022). *Parental expectations of children's higher education participation in Australia*, British Educational Research Journal: https://tinyurl.com/2pzhmdwc
[96] Department for Education and Skills. (2007). *Gender and education* , p 86 : https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/6616/8/rtp01-07_Redacted.pdf
[97] The Illustrated Empathy Gap. (2018). *Teachers' Bias in Key Stage 2 SATS:* http://empathygap.uk/?p=2206
[98] OECD. (2015). *The ABC of Gender Equality in Education:* https://www.oecd.org/education/the-abc-of-gender-equality-in-education-9789264229945-en.htm

gap of +0.2 in favour of boys). However, when the qualifications moved from exams to teacher-assessment, a gap in favour of young women emerged.

In 2021, the percentage point difference became 4.8% in favour of girls. If all things are equal, the percentage point difference should be approximately the same.

In 2023, when the qualifications reverted back to exams, the difference was minimal, albeit in favour of girls by 0.5 percentage points.

Further research is needed into the causes of this and it may highlight dynamics in the way students are assessed based on their gender. It is curious that this Gender Attainment Gap opened when the qualifications were teacher-assessed and when closed again when the qualifications reverted back to exams.

Ofqual[99] acknowledged that there was a gap that emerged and stated:

"Male candidates, candidates with SEND[100], candidates in secondary selective schools, sixth form and tertiary colleges, have seen, from 2019 to 2021, a small decrease in outcomes (small changes not exceeding 0.2 grade) relative to prior-attainment-matched candidates of their respective comparator group, namely, female candidates, candidates without SEND, candidates in academies respectively." However, it has not assessed the causality.

Year	Men	Male Increase (Percentage Point)	Male Increase (Percentage)	Women	Male Increase (Percentage Point)	Female Increase (Percentage)	Attainment % Gap
2019 (exams)	25.6%			25.4%			-0.2%
2020 (assessments)	36.4%	+10.8%	+42.1%	39.7%	+14.3%	+56.2%	+3.3%
2021 (assessments)	41.6%	+16%	+62.5%	46.4%	+21	+82.7%	+4.8%
2022 (assessment/exams)	35.0%	+9.4%	+36.7%	37.3%	+11.9%	+46.8%	+2.3%
2023 (exams)	26.5%	+0.9%	+3.5%	27%	+1.6	+6.3%	+0.5%

These figures also do not take into account the large difference in young men and women actually studying for A Levels in the first place. In 2023, the number of 18-year-old women receiving a A-A* was 109,000 and for men of the same age it was 90,000

How does poverty affect boys' outcomes?

While there is a correlation between poverty and educational outcomes for children, there is little evidence that it is strictly a causal link on its own. There are many examples of poor families (from some backgrounds) whose children do extremely well due to the support they receive at home.

Some boys from some families in lower socio-economic families/communities will be impacted by parents and communities who are disengaged from the importance of education themselves - not necessarily through any fault of their own. For some families on low incomes, they may be single-parents, working

[99] Ofqual. (2021). *Summer 2021 student-level equalities analysis*: https://tinyurl.com/483sw937
[100] SEND is Special educational needs and disabilities

zero-hour contracts and have uncertain housing/employment arrangements. Some parents may have literacy issues themselves and a poor educational experience. Some communities may see education as a rite of passage rather than something that is positive which then limits a sense of the opportunity and utility that education will bring. There is much commentary on this in the Education Select Committee's report on white working calls boys and girls.

One common characteristic of the boy-positive schools and interventions is the greater links between school and home. Examples such as dads reading to boys have been shown to be effective.

(26)Is 'masculinity' the problem?

Are boys the victims of negative stereotypes of masculinity?

Some of the research papers and articles we examined focus on the attitudes of teenage, disaffected boys. By this age these boys have adopted an attitude to life and school which inhibits their progress: learning is not 'cool'; that reading is 'for girls' and, where a stroppy attitude exists "Where do they get this from?"

Some argue that it is an aspect of masculinity and that we should re-educate these boys in ways which moderate their masculinity.

However, this approach ignores much of the relevant evidence:

- These teen boys were those who, aged four, arrived at school with lower language skills;
- The negative attitude only affects underachieving boys, not all boys;
- That some lower-achieving girls have very similar attitudes.

The conclusion is that this negative attitude is the logical result of their low achievement. Almost any group of people, faced with compulsory participation in an activity where they have low achievement (for example, sport), will find ways to avoid participation.

The response should not be to blame the boys, but to look closely at the process by which they became disaffected and aim to catch that process at the earliest opportunity.

How does the 'toxic masculinity' narrative affect boys?

There is a current view in some quarters that masculinity itself is toxic: that boys are inherently born violent, negative attitude to school etc. This then leads to initiatives to train boys not to cause harm to others.

This concern is that these initiatives start from a negative perspective including that all boys are toxic and/or are likely to develop toxic behaviours, simply because they are boys.

The risk is that boys feel they are being picked on because they are boys (especially if applied to all boys), that no one is interested in fixing the problems

they face, only the problems they cause. One school was clear that they felt these courses were problematic and the key was to be very tough on any boy (or girl) who exhibited troubling behaviour.

As set out in 'Victim blaming' above, if 41% of boys have been told in a lesson they are a problem, that damages their self-esteem and self-worth even further.

There is evidence[101] that boys are negatively affected by such narratives and that they do more harm than good. The effective schools build boys' self-esteem by giving good role-models, proving support and creating a 'can-do' attitude. None of the four successful schools berated boys for their 'masculinity'.

(27)The school environment

At what age are boys ready for formal education?

When the outcomes at age ten for children who started formal learning at age five and seven were compared, there was no difference in overall results. However, the general attitude to learning was lower in those who started at age five. Early negative experiences can have a long-term effect on later attitudes to school.[102]

This need not imply that the age of school-entry need change, simply that students need to be assessed for their readiness for formal learning and not be forced to undertake tasks at which they repeatedly fail.

Should boy's schooling be delayed by one year?

The APPG did not conclude that all boys should start school a year later then all girls, suggested for example, by Richard Reeves[103], whose book, Of Boys and Men, acknowledges the problems that men and boys face and seeks solutions from an awareness of the UK policy landscape.

While the 'significantly underachieving' cohort is mostly boys, there are a significant number of girls with similar characteristics who would not be helped. Furthermore, many boys do very well and would be disadvantaged by the delay. Lastly, there is the issue of whether it is deliverable at a practical level, in schools across the UK.

Do boys benefit from a more disciplined environment?

One of the common features described by the successful schools that were interviewed is that they had good discipline. While there were differences in

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[101] Barry, John. (2023). *Toxic masculinity' is toxic terminology, The Centre for Male Psychology*: https://www.centreformalepsychology.com/male-psychology-magazine-listings/toxic-masculinity-is-toxic-terminology
[102] University of Cambridge. (2013). *School starting age: the evidence*: https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/discussion/school-starting-age-the-evidence
[103] Reeves, Richard V. (2022). *Of Boys and Men*: https://www.waterstones.com/book/of-boys-and-men/Richard-v-reeves/9781800751033

approach, all the schools enforced their rules with some sort of graded warning system with teachers backed up by dedicated senior staff, with detentions and removal from class.[104] They were also seen to be fair to all.

Boys do benefit from this environment, but all students will. Boys, however, suffer where the discipline culture is not present.

It seems that, once the discipline system is established, all students know it will be applied and teachers know they will be supported, so much less use is made of the system as students naturally behave well.

Has the education system been 'feminised'?

There is no evidence that schools in the past thirty years or more have become less boy-friendly and more girl-friendly. It is more of a welcome and wider cultural shift in the attitudes towards women that have played a key part.

Professor Wendy Webster[105], Huddersfield University, stated in an article in the Financial Times on this subject that "historically, sexism has protected boys. Into the 1970s, some British school systems deliberately upgraded boys' results in the frequently life-determining 11+ exam. Girls were often ignored by teachers, sexually harassed and negatively stereotyped in textbooks, according to a report commissioned by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation in 1992".

"But as sexism diminished in schools, girls began outperforming boys. In a reversal of history, in parts of the developed world some girls now have higher expectations than boys for their future education and careers. In 2000, there were still more males than females with tertiary education in OECD countries, yet by 2014, women led, 34 to 30%, mainly because women are now more likely to apply for university than men."

While there is an issue about the lack of male teachers/positive male role models meaning some boys do not see learning is something that boys do, that does not mean schools are less boy-friendly than in the past.

Do teachers communicate negative stereotypes to boys?

As outlined earlier, there are some interesting points that require further research:

- 41% of 16–18-year-old boys and girls said during lessons they have been taught that young men are currently a problem for society;[106]

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[104] See transcripts of interviews with boy-successful schools.
[105] Kuper, Simon et al. (2018). *Why are boys falling behind at school*, Financial Times: https://www.ft.com/content/3b2509f2-fda2-11e8-aebf-99e208d3e521%201/19
[106] Civitas,. (2023). *Show, Tell and Leave Nothing to the imagination*: https://www.civitas.org.uk/content/files/Show-tell-and-leave-nothing-to-the-imagination-.pdf

- 40% also said to Civitas that they have been told about International Women's Day but only 13% about International Men's Day, even though in the UK, they serve both similar positive messages;
- When young men were asked about the emotions they feel as a result of what is currently expected of them by society in the UK today?' For this question, from a list of possible answers, 29% of male respondents selected 'Forgotten / left behind' and 31% selected 'Unfairly treated'.[107]
- The approach taken by the four successful schools is one which recognises the central role of adults in forming the student's attitude.

Do we need more male teachers? Do boys learn better from male teachers?

We found no evidence that boys learn better from male teachers, however, there is a general concern about the lack of positive male role models in the life of some boys.

Research featured in the Mark Roberts book, The Boy Question[108], quoted a 2010 study by Lam et al, of nearly 5,000 Grade 4 students in Hong Kong which saw no evidence that boys improved their reading when taught by men. In fact, their results found that 'both boys and girls learnt better when taught by women'.

The book also highlighted that in 2008, Carrington et al. found no teacher gender effect on attainment data and pupil attitudes in British primary schools. In the same year, Marsh et al. found 'little or no evidence' to support the idea that boys will be more motivated by male than female teachers in secondary maths, science and English classes.

It also found that an international review on gender and education from 2007 indicated that 'the gender of teachers has little, if any, effect on the achievement of pupils', while in 2013, Geri Smyth of the University of Strathclyde stated that 'no studies have indicated improved achievement of pupils (regardless of stage, age, ethnicity or social class) where their gender was matched with that of their teachers'.

Do male teachers provide valuable role-models for both girls and boys?

"Research by Patricia Bricheno and Mary Thornton found a diverse range of role models inspiring their sample of 379 children aged 10–16. They noted that 'both girls and boys named relatives as most important role models more often than

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[107] Future Men. (2022). *International Men's Day research*: https://futuremen.org/
[108] Roberts, Mark. (2021). *The Boy Question* (p. 44). Taylor and Francis. https://www.amazon.co.uk/Boy-Question-Teach-Succeed-School/dp/0367509113

they named anyone else'. Friends also played a prominent part in the students' responses. By stark contrast, teachers barely got a look-in."[109]

However, research from Nick Fletcher MP[110], found that 81% of current and former teachers said that increasing the number of male teachers in school was important. There were a number of reasons for this.

These included the fact that male teachers act as positive male role models for girls and boys, with a particular benefit for boys without male role models at home or in their community. This included helping these boys to see that learning is not just something that girls do.

It would also encourage more young men to consider teaching as a career – in essence "you have to see it, to be it." Schools, like any public institution, should better reflect the communities they serve. More male teachers would benefit the whole school environment too.

From a broader perspective, there is a need to get more men into pursuing careers in Health, Education, Administration and Literacy (HEAL) roles.

The research also highlighted that in the UK, 35% of secondary school teachers are male, as are a mere 14% of primary and nursery schoolteachers, and 2-3% of early years' teachers. 30% of primary schools have no male teacher at all.

One charity, the Men and Boys Coalition[111], which represents a range of academics and organisations in the field of men's health and wellbeing has suggested a "This Boy Can" approach to getting boys into teaching, care roles, nursing and related roles. This is similar to the "This Girl Can" campaign[112] to get girls to participate in sport/STEM careers.

Taking the relational education propagated by Ulster University a step further, more positive male role models for boys and young men would help with aspiration, understanding career opportunities and understanding the whole purpose of education. These are not necessarily fictional characters of sports stars but once that young men can relate to.

One school has older male pupils engage in leadership and learning activities like reading with younger boys.

Inviting men of all ages, but particularly former students in their early 20's, should be encouraged where they have just finished apprenticeships, vocational training courses and university – and are 'getting on'. This can include builders,

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[109] Roberts, Mark. (2021). *The Boy Question*. Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition Roberts: https://tinyurl.com/4haz22sb
[110] Nick Fletcher MP. (2023). *Increasing male teachers – a conversation starter:* https://tinyurl.com/kbncujuv

[111] Men and Boys Coalition: https://www.menandboyscoalition.org.uk
[112] This Girl Can: https://www.thisgirlcan.co.uk/

nurses, teachers, accountants, business owners, police officers, social workers, engineers, game developers and managers.

Would boys benefit from single-sex education?

While there are benefits and disbenefits, such a change is highly unlikely and so does not form part of our proposals. Three of the four schools who demonstrated a closing of the learning gap were co-educational.

Why do we have programmes for 'Girls into STEM' but none for 'Boys into HEAL'?[113]

This is a point raised in Richard Reeves' book, Of Boys and Men[114], and it has been elsewhere. It is very welcome that more young women are being persuaded and actively given the opportunity to find careers in STEM, but there are no equivalent initiatives aimed at young men with respect to health/care, teaching, administration or literacy roles. Ministers have been asked these questions in the Education Select Committee, but no answers have been forthcoming. The Government must change direction.

Does boys without fathers/father figures at home matter?

There is always a discussion about the importance of fathers or stepfathers in the home. There has been little substantial research in this area until two recent reports.

Leeds University Business School

Research led by the University of Leeds[115] found that children do better at primary school if their fathers regularly spend time with them on interactive engagement activities like reading, playing, telling stories, drawing and singing.

Analysing primary school test scores for five- and seven-year-olds, the researchers used a representative sample of nearly 5,000 mother-father households in England from the Millennium Cohort Study - which collected data on children born 2000-02 as they grew up.

According to the research, fathers who regularly drew, played and read with their three-year-olds helped their children do better at school by age five. Fathers being involved at age five also helped improve scores in seven-year-olds' Key Stage Assessments.

Their involvement impacted positively on their children's school achievement regardless of the child's gender, ethnicity, age in the school year and household

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[113] STEM: science, technology engineering, maths. HEAL: health, education, administration, literacy.
[114] Reeves, Richard V. (2022). *Of Boys and Men*: https://www.waterstones.com/book/of-boys-and-men/Richard-v-reeves/9781800751033
[115] Norman, Helen, and, Davies, Dr. (2023). *Paternal Involvement and its Effects on Children's Education (PIECE).* Leeds University Business School: https://tinyurl.com/yr3uz4a6

income. The data showed that mums had more of an impact on young children's emotional and social behaviours than educational achievement.

Fathers or father figures at home who are involved in the learning and development of boys (as well as girls) clearly have a positive impact on boys' educational development. This pre-school learning means that when they reach formal education, they are not behind. This should mean that, all things being equal, they are not behind their female peers for the rest of their school life.

Lads Need Dads

A significant body of teacher-based research116 was published in 2021, by Essex-based Lads Need Dads prevent and address problems related to boys who lack a positive male role model at home.

They surveyed with 615 primary school teachers and 639 secondary school teachers across Essex with the following results. These suggest that the lack of fathers does make a difference with a key recommendation that boys without fathers should be flagged to secondary schools by primary schools when the transition takes place. This would mean that secondary schools would be aware of this disadvantage.

Research with primary school teachers found:

- 89% said they did believe there was a link between boys having absent fathers or limited access to a positive male role model and disruptive behaviour at school;
- 68% stated it affected boys' academic achievement;
- 47% stated it affected their attendance;
- 39% believed that these boys were more likely to be sent out from class;
- 52% of teachers rated ages 6 to 10 years as the most important for young boys to have a consistent positive male role model;
- 90% said boys in their school would benefit from increased opportunities to access increased support from adult males.

Research from secondary school teachers found:

- 93% said they did believe there was a link between boys having absent fathers or limited access to a positive male role model and disruptive behaviour at school.
- 78% stated it affected for academic achievement
- 66% stated it affected attendance.
- 60% stated these boys were more likely to be sent out from class
- 55% of teachers rated ages 11 to 15 years as the most important for young boys to have a consistent positive male role model

[116] Lads Need Dads. (2022). *Teachers' experiences of the impact of fatherlessness on male pupils:* https://ladsneeddads.org/research/

- 91% stated boys in their school would benefit from increased opportunities to access increased support from adult males.

Both reports show the vitally important role that fathers play in the educational achievement of their sons and this should not be underestimated. Nor should the role of mothers with respect to their emotional social development either.

(28) Cultural factors

Why is there so little interest from either the teaching profession or from government at a system level?

The APPG has not found a specific answer to this. The teaching profession at a national level itself seems to have little interest in this Boys' Educational Underachievement . This indifference is, however, in line with what the APPG has found in several areas of public policy. The APPG still has campaigns for parallel strategies on Men's Health and Violence against Men and Boys, for example.

One reason suggested is that men are doing well in the employment later in life so that perhaps their underachievement in education is not so important. However, when the focus is switched from 'all boys' to the underachieving group, there is a price that individuals and society pay for low school achievement.

Mary Curnock Cook. former CEO of UCAS (University and Colleges Admissions Service) regularly raised the issue, but found little interest in actions to address boys' underachievement?[117]

In the course of this inquiry there have been several significant examples of a general non-interest in this topic:

- APPG members have asked a number of Parliamentary Questions, all related to boys' achievement. Every answer received from a Minister was gender-neutral and consequently did not answer the question asked;
- The Education Endowment Foundation were asked for references to research in this field. Apart from the [118]Warrington and Younger book from 2006, they were not aware of any other research which involved interventions with boys;
- The APPG wrote to 15,000 UK schools asking if they had closed the gap between boys and girls. It received less than a dozen positive responses, but half of those have not responded to a request to hear what they have done.

(29) Summary of the evidence

This section summarises the evidence in Parts 2 and 3.

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[117] Mary Curnock Cook OBE, Evidence to this inquiry: https://youtu.be/YS36UIOa76A
[118] Warrington M and Younger M. (2006*). Raising Boys' Achievement in Primary Schools*: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Raising-Boys-Achievement-Primary-Schools/dp/0335216072

Please note that while in this summary we refer to 'boys' as this is the subject of this report, there are girls with similar characteristics who will be helped with the same interventions. However, there are many more boys than girls in this group.

(30)Building the disengaged teenage boy

The following is based on the evidence the APPG has received and could be seen as a typical educational journey of the creation and building of an educationally disengaged teenage boy.

As a baby

Boys are born with average differences which predispose them to be slower to develop language skills. They tend to prefer objects to people.

Adults interact with boys and girls differently. They encourage boys to be active and girls to talk. They read more to girls and teach them to sing nursery-rhymes more often.

At Nursery School

Children with lower language skills tend to play together with other low-language games (Lego, climbing, riding bikes). They get less practice at talking than their talkative peers.

Low-language (LL) children cannot use language to moderate their behaviour. They cannot tell the other child or the teacher what is wrong and so they act-out by, shouting, hitting, grabbing, running away and/or hiding. Adults respond to this behaviour by reprimand. Adults are firmer with boys than girls.

Primary school

Unless there is an intervention (which can be very effective), LL children arrive at primary school with lower language skills, less vocabulary and less self-regulation. This means they understand less of what the teacher says and so act-up more. The reprimands continue and so LL boys start to associate education with negative experience.

As the LL child has the same teacher for most of the week, the teacher can get to know the child and set appropriate work. The child progresses and the language gap between the girls and boys narrows from 12% to 5% (as measured by their KS2 assessment) as set out by the analysis from Claire Oakley.

Unless the language/vocabulary/Oracy problem is addresses, the LL child becomes a Low-achieving (L-A) child.

Secondary School

In many schools the detailed knowledge of the individual is not systematically transferred from primary to secondary school. This disproportionately disadvantages the L-A student.

While some special-needs children get individualised support at secondary school, most LL children do not. They are now taught by a dozen different teachers who may teach several hundred individual students each week. No-one has individual knowledge of the student.

Low-achieving (L-A) students soon start to understand that they are failing. They see the test results of their friends and they find themselves in lower sets.

The girls go through puberty earlier than the boys so that, by Year 9 the class contains more mature girls and less mature boys. Boys' maturity does not 'catch up' till Year 12.

L-A boys now start to be labelled as troublesome and systems are put in place to manage them. A culture of low expectations and less-controlled discipline develops.

While the education system has not been 'feminised', it benefits those students (more girls than boys) who can easily/willing sit, listen, write and discuss. It also benefits those who can better access the curriculum.

GCSE results and A-levels

As shown by the GCSE results presented by Claire Oakley, the gap between boys and girls attainment grows (on average) from 5% at the start of Year 7, to 12% at the end of Year 11.

Few of these L-A boys continue to A levels and higher education.

Outcomes for L-A boys

In the past they would have found jobs in mines, building trades, factory work, so this has mattered less than it does today when these opportunities are in decline.

These boys now become a majority of NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and are more likely to be unemployed, abuse drugs or alcohol, get involved in crime and spend time in prison.

The last figures showed that 427,000 men between 16 and 24 are NEET, with an increase of 50,000 who were unemployed between January-March 2023 and April-June 2023, a record quarterly increase.[119]

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[119] Office for National Statistics. (2023). *Young people not in education, employment or training* : https://tinyurl.com/yubm8ebw

Adult response

Adults amplify the issues boys face. Because this underachieving group is found everywhere and for decades, some adults come to believe that the boys have adopted some sort of 'harmful stereotype of masculinity' and blame the boys themselves (or those who 'taught them the stereotype'). They suggest some sort of re-education to retrain the boys.

Nor is it just the parents and teachers. Society is complicit in this way of relating to L-A boys.

They fail to understand that it is not the boys' fault. The boys are exhibiting a natural reaction to an environment created for them by adults.

To reverse this process, it is the adults who need to change. The boys will then change in response to this positive environment.

The way ahead

The successful schools have countered this narrative at every stage. Central has been a change in culture where the expectations are raised, and support given. This is elaborated in Part 4.

Interestingly, a similar process took place from the 1960s onward – but with girls. Girls were held back by low expectations and ideas about what subjects (and sports) were appropriate for girls.

Once this was recognised, society started changing and offering support and encouragement to girls. The widening gap between boys and girls seen from the mid-1980s is a testament to the success of this aspiration/culture change.

We need to put our shoulder to the wheel and now really focus on improving the attainment of boys whilst not losing sight of the need to keep improving the attainment of girls.

Part 4: Recommendations

While this report focuses on boys, these recommendations apply equally to underachieving girls and can mostly be applied in a gender-neutral way. They are a culmination and distillation of sifting through the evidence received and the research available.

A table summarising the policy recommendations can be Part 5.

(31)General

There are a range of key learnings and principles:

- Positive outcomes are available for some even quite modest interventions;
- The earlier the intervention starts, the better;
- The majority of the proposed changes to close the Gender Attainment Gap can be implemented by schools themselves with no input from government or national education bodies, albeit the changes should be public supported by government and these bodies;
- Boys and men are often blamed for their own misadventure. However, the conclusions are that that these misfortunes are their response, not to their deficiencies, but to the way the adult world has interacted with them.

(32)Cultural factors

Boys are not 'defective girls'.

The evidence shows that, while boys and girls have the same average intelligence, girls (on average) make better students. This can lead adults to view boys as 'needing to act more like girls'. This ties in with the narrative the APPG saw in both its earlier inquiries – Male Suicide and Men's Health – that men are blamed for not accessing existing support services. In those reports it showed that when services are offered to men where, when and how they prefer to access them, they do so at a similar rate to women.

In education the APPG asserts that, if learning is offered in the ways boys access it, they learn very well.

A boy-friendly school environment is a girl-friendly school environment too – better student culture, better classroom environment, better school reputation - and better results for all.

Resisting harmful narratives

The evidence gathered here shows that the dominant narrative to explain Boys' Educational Underachievement is wrong. Blaming teenage boys' behaviour and achievement on 'harmful stereotypes of masculinity' is a serious misunderstanding.

This can be reinforced by those organisations coming into schools telling boys they need to be fixed, they need saving from themselves and need to be 'cured' of their inherent toxic masculinity and encouraged to be more like female students. Even more so when these organisations are not fixing the adult world that is negatively impacting on the boys. Telling a boy that that he needs to change his ways will jar when his parents are dysfunctional when he gets home and there are people at the school gates enticing him into County Lines.

The APPG does not recommend or believe boy 'blaming', deficit model, 're-education' and toxic masculinity lessons/initiatives will make a difference to the educational achievement of boys. The fear is they are being blamed for how the adult world treats them and once they leave those lessons/initiatives, they will feel nothing has changed. They will feel picked on. In addition, if such initiatives are invoked, the parents should have the right to know about these, these should give consent and should review the content.

The focus has to be on creating a boy-positive learning environment with literacy and mentor support where needed.

General guidance from successful schools

These suggestions are taken directly from the experiences and policies by the schools which have demonstrated that they have closed the Gender Attainment Gap.

Culture

The schools all talk about the culture of their school, making it the sort of place boys want to come to and celebrating success wherever it is achieved.

They all have the institutional will to improve boys' education across the whole school. They collect and recognise the data, have high levels of professional curiosity to 'get to the bottom it', have the determination throughout the school (from governor/MAT-level leadership down to the teaching assistants) to close the gap and then the positive action to implement the policies to do so - with consistent checking and re-working.

Expectations

Rather than writing off a group of low-achieving boys and managing them and their behaviour, these schools set high expectations for all their students and then put in place sufficient personalised support to help them succeed.

Literacy

The schools recognised that the root of underachievement for many boys is low literacy skills. All put in place extensive support, sometimes for years (often taking this group out of foreign language lessons so they can better understand English). They do not treat low achievement as inevitable.

Family links

All the schools made extra effort to create strong links with the student's family as they recognised the importance of parents valuing education too – especially if they themselves had negative experience when they were at school. Some gave extra support to help parents help their own child's learning.

Discipline

While none of the schools described their behaviour policy as 'strict', their description of the actual process showed that there was a centralised discipline system which not only gave full support to the classroom teacher, but also ensured communication with home. They created an environment where the consequences were so certain that they were needed much less. The discipline structured was also equally applied for boys and girls so was fair and consistent.

Pre-school

Guidance should be made available to parents on how best to help their boy learn. Parents need to be aware that many boys develop language more slowly and so may need extra support from adults.

The role of the father in helping with literacy should be emphasised. Reading with his son not only helps the boys' reading, but also counters any later ideas that 'reading is for girls'.

This is outlined in the research on the impact of fathers on their children's education set out above.

Primary school

Primary schools should be required to use the Early Years' Foundations Stage assessment to identify the students with weak language skills and intervene to close the gap. The school should be assessed on its capability in achieving good progress with the lower-achieving student.

Secondary School

A similar approach to that in primary should also be placed on secondary schools. The effective schools had active literacy programmes. These should be the norm.

Mark Roberts, in his book, The Boy Question, stated that boys need to be taught study skills.

> "But the truth is that these boys lack a fundamental awareness of how to plan the study sessions, how to manage the time they have before key assessments, how to monitor their own progress and how to evaluate their potential academic success. As Matthews et al. make clear, self-regulation skills: …are not innate

traits, rather skills that need to be developed within students over time through the consistent and appropriate efforts of teachers and parents[120]. Without explicit modelling, boys will not become better at self-regulation by chance. Rather than being an organic process, effective self-regulation is much more likely to occur when teachers – the expert learners – demystify the process for their students, the novice learners.[121]

This is also where the real benefit of the Ulster University's Taking Boys Seriously framework comes to the fore:

- A relational approach to education;
- An utilitarian approach; give boys extrinsic motivators by linking the learning and work to the outcomes it will benefit him with.

Work experience and visits to or by employers can join the dots, switch the lightbulb on. When a young man knows what he is aiming for he can see how the schoolwork is relevant.

Boys need to understand the point of education, why they are in school and what it leads to. Some boys will learn if they see the point, not because they are told to.

Higher education

According to Dr Liam Waldron, boys report the guidance they received at school regarding course choices as being poor. Many end up studying on courses or at universities because their friends are, rather than making choices that best match their real interests and attributes.

From his evidence, further and higher education needs to learn the same lessons as this APPG identified in its reports on men's health and on male suicide: that services which are offered when, where and how men prefer to access them are used far more often that if they are offered only by face-to-face appointment.

The male student 'drop-out' rate is higher at university than girls, as is the suicide rate and the academic achievement is lower. The lack of research, understanding and actions on this is a significant gap. There lacks the political and establishment will to look at the underlying reasons - as if is not 'just a given' - and it raises the question, is this because it is boys/young men and they don't matter as much?

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[120] Matthews, J.S., Kizzie, K.T., Rowley, S.J., & Cortina, K. (2010) '*African Americans and boys: understanding the literacy gap, tracing academic trajectories, and evaluating the role of learning-related skills*', Journal of Educational Psychology, 102:3, pp. 757–771.
[121] Roberts, Mark. (2021). The Boy Question, p.65 Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition: https://tinyurl.com/4haz22sb

While the Athena Swan Charter[122] provides support for female students at university, there is no equivalent for male students especially into subject areas where they are very unrepresented.

It is also unclear what impact and action is being taken by the Office for Students on male school-age outreach and the male participation rates in higher education. This is with respect to its Access and Participation guidance[123] that higher education institutions have to adhere to. The APPG will explore this further.

The same questions will also be asked of teacher training institutions: what activities they are undertaking to specifically attract more young men into taking PGCEs and equivalents.

(33)Public policy

Redirecting Pupil Premium

Currently Pupil Premium funding is directed towards schools with children on free school meals (FSM) This is a common category and has the benefit of being simple to identify. However, this does not direct resources to all underachievers as:

- Some children from low-income families are doing well;
- Some children from higher income families need extra support.

The APPG recommends a review so that the extra Pupil Premium resources better reflect the need to support schools with under-achieving children rather than just those on Free School Meals.

OFSTED

There is a lack of accountability on schools closing the Gender Attainment Gap. This has to change if rapid progress is to be made.

The APPG recommends that OFSTED inspections should report on the schools' Gender Attainment Gap and their activity and results in addressing it. This should feature in their assessment and rating. Closing the gap should form a key part of national education policy and OFSTED inspections are a key lever in achieving it and to 'concentrate the minds'.

(34)Teacher training

Initial Teacher Training Train should ensure those becoming teachers avoid cognitive biases that they may have such as harsher treatment or low expectations.

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[122] Advance HE, Athena Swan Charter: https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan-charter
[123] Office for Students, Access and Participation Guidance: https://tinyurl.com/2p8cy25n /

New teachers should develop no sense of inevitably about boys' underachievement, that they recognise the barriers some have with regards general literacy levels compared to girls. It should instil a level of professional curiosity into the lives of boys and why some are under-achieving. The training should include elements which alert teachers to any unconscious biases, prepare them to notice when they are exhibiting them and what makes a boy-positive learning environment. This includes being clear that they must not have lower expectations to boys.

Awareness raising is vital to overcome any potential inaction and recognition once they are actively in the classroom.

(35) Research

Promoting interest in boy's education research.

There is not a huge library of research into boys' educational underachievement in the UK system - let alone the wholesale actioning of any recommendations. There is some welcome research including active research, as shown by the 'Boy Impact: Supporting the Educational Outcomes and Progression of Working-Class Boys' Conference in September 2023.

However, this is not systemic and there seems no appetite or interest at a national level. There are no specific boys' education research programmes at the Education Endowment Foundation (there was no representation at the above conference or from similar organisations) or other organisations. It is not helped by the policy silence across Westminster or Whitehall which also act as a stimulus.

It feels as if those academics and researchers who are conducting research are 'outliers', albeit very welcome. This should be a mainstreamed part of the education community; a systemic field within the education research community.

A research group, led by Dr Alex Blower (Access and Participation Manager, Arts University Bournemouth) who convened the above conference, has been formed. This has to be actively funded and supported - it is led by academics volunteering.

This research and recommendations should be brought into the school settings so it can be tested, evaluated and implemented if needed. Building direct connections between schools and academics is crucial.

Research guidelines

We propose guidelines for those applying for research funding for educational research to ensure that practical solutions are properly tested. These guidelines draw on those used by EEF to assess the quality of other educational research intended to impact pupil outcomes, and include:

- The experiment takes place in schools, not a lab;

- It involves a representative sample of schools and pupils to aid generalisability;
- There are control groups or matched samples for comparison;
- Evaluation is conducted over a meaningful period using, where possible, standardised tests, such as Key Stages or GCSE exams, for pre- and post-testing.[124]

Small scale studies with few pupils and evaluated by the experimenter are not sufficient.

As even the material covered in this document shows, there have been numerous initiatives to address boys' underachievement, however, most have been short-term with no follow-up or integration into mainstream practice. It is as though society simply assumes that the current situation is 'normal' and so has little incentive to see it as a problem needing action.

(36) Government action

During the course of this inquiry, several APPG Parliamentarians have asked Parliamentary Questions related to boys' learning and the gap between boys' and girls' achievement. Every reply received has been non-gendered, covering initiatives which are offered to all pupils without any focus on what specific initiatives could support boys over and above the overall learning environment. Those gender-neutral answers will not close the gap as they will benefit all pupils equally. This must change. The solution is a combination of that approach, plus tactical interventions on mentors and literacy, plus dealing with the negative impact the adult world has on boys.

The Equality Act 2010 provides a requirement that observable disadvantage of a group be addressed. This is done for other protected characteristics, but not for boys.

The Department for Education needs its own cultural change so that Boys' Educational Underachievement and the Gender Attainment Gap are recognised as a problem worthy of action.

There also seems no action or interest from wider equality-based organisations including the Equalities and Human Rights Commission nor the Government Equalities Office. There is no commentary or call to action – the subject matter is met with wholesale institutional indifference.

A table summarising the policy recommendations can be Part 5.

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[124] Guidelines provided by Professor Becky Francis, Chief Executive, The Education Endowment Foundation

Part 5: Conclusions

We find that while data about Boys' Educational Underachievement is well known and widely available, there has been little action to close the Gender Attainment Gap.

However, those who have succeeded in closing the gap have done so with straight-forward, well-evidenced methods and with the same resources as are available in all schools.

The APPG concludes that closing the gap is achievable and can be addressed by a concerted effort and requirement to implement the approaches of the successful schools. Political and societal narratives have to change too.

In effect, it is based on four core pillars:

- **Institutional Will:** Schools/trusts recognise the gap, collect the data and then commit themselves throughout the school to address it continuously – from governors/academy trust boards through to teaching assistants. It is a whole-school cultural approach

- **Creating a Boy-Positive School Environment:** Schools create an inclusive, fair, positive, relational and aspirational learning environment for all students – that boys and their parents recognise includes them. Boys are not seen as a problem – some just need encouragement, understanding, being believed in, given self-esteem and pushing. They need high expectations, their successes celebrated, a disciplined environment and to understand the point of what they are being taught. A positive and encouraging relationship with boys' parents is also vital.

- **Tactical interventions on better understanding boys, role models and mentors:** These are aimed at boys where needed, especially role models, literacy mentors, early literacy interventions, oracy and study skills. These are not needed for all boys, but are needed for some boys. Better understanding of the difference in boys' motivations compared to girls is important as are more male teachers which would help boys understanding learning is for them too.

- **As a society, we need to better care about boys:** At a societal, political and educational level, the negative narrative on boys and the indifference that boys face, especially those with problems, has to change. This also includes dealing with the problems the adult world causes them including family dysfunction, a lack of community aspiration/opportunity and system-level educational indifference.

While individual schools can implement policies which close the gap for boys, a wider change will be significantly helped by the political, institutional, societal and educational recognition that this is an issue which needs to be addressed. For too long the Gender Attainment Gap has been taken as a given, that nothing

can be done and that it is not a problem. This is not an acceptable narrative for a country that believes in equality, diversity and inclusion.

Too many boys are being let down which then has an impact on the, their families, society, women and girls and the economy. It is not their fault – it is a reflection of how the adult world treats them, so it is culturally it is vital to be boy-positive in outlook and to address the adult world that impacts on them

The recommendations below set out a range of policy proposals, however the key is for schools/trusts, educationalists and the Government put their individual and collective shoulder to the wheel.

(37)Policy Recommendations

Framework	
1	School should look to create the boy-positive learning environment based on the four pillars suggested by the evidence presented to the APPG.
2	Ulster University's Taking Boys Seriously' framework for improving boys' attainment should be better recognised and promoted across all UK secondary schools. Schools, in the absence of any specific strategies and plans of their own, should recognise this framework as a tool to support them.
Research Support	
3	Government ring-fenced funding including for dissemination of frameworks and findings with respect to strategies and tactics to improve boys' educational attainment. This should be administered by organisations such as the Education Endowment Foundation.
4	The Government should fund high-quality research which extends the work of the voluntarily Working Group formed by educationalists to tackle this issue. The findings should be available to all schools.
5	Some evidence points to a widening of the Gender Attainment Gap between boys and girls when qualifications were assessed wholly by teachers – research should be undertaken aimed at finding the reasons for this.
Accountability	
6.	The Gender Attainment Gap should be a feature of all OFSTED investigations for primary and secondary schools. Schools should be assessed on this gap and measures they are taking to close it.
7	The remit for a Minister for Men must specifically include improving education attainment for boys. A clear objective and responsibility for closing the attainment gap to be given to a Minister within the Department for Education. This issue should be formally recognised as a national education priority by the Government.

Careers and Recruitment	
8	Careers services should promote careers as teachers to boys during secondary education.
9	Teacher training should feature developmental/biology and psychology differences between girls and boys. For example, how do boys differ from girls in language development and at what ages is this critical or how does puberty affect their learning development.
10	The Government must embark on male-focused recruitment campaigns in schools aimed at promoting careers in Health, Education, Administration and Literacy (HEAL). This should be the basis of a "This Boy Can" promotional campaign similar to the hugely successful "This Girl Can".
Mentoring, parents and Literacy	
11	A national mentoring scheme for boys should be promoted and funded, based on the model developed by Lads Need Dads. There should be similar promotion of the Fatherhood Institute's FRED (fathers' reading everyday) campaign.
12	Nursery and Primary schools should provide focussed additional support to boys and girls who arrive at school with poor literacy. The Early Years 'Foundation Stage Assessment' being the key tool.
13	Schools should focus on improving parent engagement so that the whole family understand and support their children's education.
Masculinity	
14	Schools inviting in organisations to talk about boys' issues such as 'toxic masculinity' 'positive masculinity' or similar should assess the impact these courses/organisations have on the boys. They should inform parents about these organisations and the course content and ensure that issues around harm are addressed in a holistic way to all pupils(male and female) – including on intimate partner violence and bullying (including online). Schools should not accept students being told in lessons that boys are a problem for society.
Core recommendations from a previous APPG report "A Boy Today"[125]	
15	Boys growing up in fatherlessness households should be formally recognised by policy makers and the educational establishment as being at risk in terms of educational achievement and personal development.

[125] APPG for Issues Affecting Men and Boys. (2021). *A Boy Today*: https://equi-law.uk/boy-today-project/

16	There needs to be greater access to funding at a national and local level for schemes that target fatherless boys.
17	Boy-friendly reading programmes with volunteer mentors should be rolled out across the UK.
18	A flagging system between primary and secondary schools should be introduced which indicates to secondary schools where a boy is from a single-parent household.
19	There should be one-to-one mentoring for low-achieving boys in their first year of secondary school.
20	Society, policy makers and the health and social care system need to stop making mistakes in their thinking and approaches regarding boys' mental health such as: 1. There are higher rates of mental health issues in girls than boys; 2. Victim blaming; 3. Assuming young men have the same social cues around "masculinity" as their Forebears; 4. Boys do not to suffer with problems such as relationship abuse, eating disorders, suicide ideation and bullying (especially online).

Annex 1 Evidence Sessions

Information about the evidence sessions can be found at: https://equi-law.uk/inquiry-4-boys-edu-underachievement/

The recordings are available on the APPG YouTube channel[126]

Annex 2: Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for this inquiry can be found at: https://equi-law.uk/inquiry-4-boys-edu-underachievement/

Annex 3: Authors and Secretariat

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Further information about the APPG including its membership, can be at: https://equi-law.uk/appg-menboys/

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[126] APPG YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLzohjr2unR96Wa4RQWmlmX6ENLGLDyOrp