



**MEN AND BOYS
COALITION**

**CREATING A MORE POSITIVE FUTURE FOR BOYS
AND YOUNG MEN: FOURTEEN POINT PLAN**

BRIEFING NOTE

November 2018

The Men and Boys Coalition

The Men and Boys Coalition is a mutually supportive network of charities, campaign organisations, academics, writers, commentators and activists who are committed to taking action on gender-specific issues that affect men and boys in the UK.

Members of the Coalition share the aims of:

- *Highlighting and tackling issues where the needs of men and boys are unmet*
- *Highlighting and tackling the circumstances where the victims of unfair discrimination are men and boys*
- *Helping create positive and constructive public discussion about men, manhood and masculinity*

For more information please visit <http://www.menandboyscoalition.org.uk>

Foreword

Mary Curnock Cook OBE

I made my first speech about the gender gap in education to the Institute of Physics seven years ago in 2011. Rather to my surprise, it made the front page of a national newspaper. I've been campaigning on this issue ever since and I've been heartened to see others join in and for boys' underachievement in education regularly to hit the headlines and social media feeds.

But understanding and acknowledging the facts is not enough. Through this fourteen-point plan and the inaugural International Men's Day Conference, the Men and Boys' Coalition is making a call for coherent action, not just to address the issues, but also for a tolerant understanding that policies and initiatives specifically targeted at the male sex are not a threat but a positive contributor to gender equality more broadly.

This fourteen-point plan covers a broad sweep of ideas, ranging over a much-needed emphasis on literacy and attainment in school, a call for positive role models (not least in the teaching workforce), specific male mentoring schemes, approaches to male wellbeing and mental ill-health, awareness of colour blindness and a 'take your son to university' day. Perhaps most eye-catching is the call for the creation of a multidisciplinary national 'Centre for Men, Policy and Praxis' to provide an authoritative academic voice for research and practical work with men and boys.

Everyone in the Men and Boys' Coalition is a champion for women's rights, many are feminists, and all would support the welcome initiatives we see across education, employment, careers and other areas to support women to fulfil their potential. But through our commitment to gender equality it has become harder and harder to ignore the parallel challenges for boys and men. Ridiculing or sometimes toxifying masculinity and ignoring male issues is not the way forward. All of us want both men and women to play their role in a tolerant, successful and inclusive society.

This document calls out the spiralling issues for men and boys, manifest most clearly through under-achievement in education, especially for those from lower-income backgrounds. It challenges us to believe that our society can intervene successfully through gender specific activities on behalf of both men and women, and that it can do so without threatening the continuing progress that is being made in equality for women.

November 2018

I. Background

Over the past thirty years, there has been a persistent and growing attainment gap between boys and girls in the UK. Yet, there has been little or no political focus on the causes of the gap, or the measures and policies that could be put in place to address it.

While there have, quite correctly, been initiatives looking at gender pay gaps, at FTSE-100 board membership and at encouraging more girls into STEM and apprenticeships, there have been no national initiatives, policies or campaigns on boys educational achievement.

As we show in Part III of this document, there is now an overwhelming body of evidence showing that British boys are significantly underperforming in education, and that this low attainment, relative to girls and relative to their own potential, comprises a hugely significant failure of educational and social policy. This has significant negative social and economic implications for the individual boys themselves as well as their current and future families and dependants, and for society as a whole. Many years after first being noticed and acknowledged, the attainment gap continues to worsen with every year.

The statistics also show that boys' underachievement is not evenly spread, but is concentrated within social groups that already face unfair discrimination according to class, relative poverty, ethnicity and social marginalisation. Educational underachievement is clearly an issue of significant intersectional discrimination.

In striving to build a fair, inclusive and equal society, the political and education establishment must go beyond words of concern and rhetorical platitudes. It is urgent that our senior political and administrative figures recognise that action is needed and then show real leadership in implementing constructive action.

This 14-point plan brings together powerful and innovative recommendations from some of the country's leading educationalists and academics currently addressing this issue. For further inquiries about the recommendations, please contact the contributors listed after each point.

II. About the contributors

Mary Curnock Cook OBE

Mary Curnock Cook is an independent educationalist, with expertise in participation and progression in the different stages of education, and with a particular focus on those who are disadvantaged in education. From 2010 to 2017, Mary was Chief Executive of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, UCAS, overseeing a transformation of the organisation's operations, communications and data services.

Contact: mary@curnockcook.com

Colour Blind Awareness

Colour Blind Awareness is a non-profit organisation which supports colour blind people and their families and provides training and advice to teachers, schools and businesses in how to become 'colour blind compliant'. One in 12 men and 1 in 200 women inherit colour blindness yet it is an under-recognised and poorly understood condition which can impact most areas of everyday life. One of the main aims of Colour Blind Awareness is to increase understanding of colour blindness in schools so that colour blind pupils can obtain the help and support they need. We are also fighting to ensure equal access to GCSE and A Level exam papers and to educational resources such as textbooks and software.

Contact: kathryn@colourblindawareness.org

Natasha Devon MBE

Natasha Devon MBE tours schools and colleges throughout the UK, delivering talks as well as conducting research on mental health, body image, gender and social equality. Natasha regularly speaks at Parliament and gives evidence to the Education and Health Select Committees, representing the interests of teenagers and teachers. In 2015 she was awarded an MBE for her services to young people and in 2016 the Sunday Times and Debretts named her one of the 500 most influential people in Britain.

Contact: Natashadevon1@icloud.com

Nick Hillman, Director, Higher Education Policy Institute

Nick Hillman has been the Director of HEPI since 2014. He worked for the Rt Hon David Willetts MP (now Lord Willetts), the Minister for Universities and Science, from 2007 until the end of 2013, as Chief of Staff and then Special Adviser in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. His recent pamphlets for HEPI include a comparison of the UK and German higher education system, a co-authored piece on the educational underachievement of young men and a study on students' attitudes to free speech.

Contact: n.hillman@hepi.ac.uk

Ulster University Taking Boys Seriously Project

The five-year research project includes a comprehensive literature review of interventions and HE policies in Northern Ireland, the UK and beyond which seek to address the low attainment and low levels of Higher Education participation among young males; the showcasing of existing best practice; a series of action research projects; and the piloting of new interventions. The key purpose of the research project is to inform and improve policy, training and practice in order to address the under-achievement of young males from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Contact: Prof Brian Murphy b.murphy1@ulster.ac.uk

Mengage

Mengage is a not-for-profit company working with males on their health and the issues that affect their health. The services we provide include direct work with males, accredited male health education and mentoring courses, workshops and training, resources, consultancy and research-based solutions from both national and international practice, backed by years of experience of practical health and education work with men and boys.

Contact: info@mengage.co.uk

Prof Gijsbert Stoet, Leeds Beckett University

Prof Gijsbert Stoet is a Dutch-born psychologist. He has studied and worked in Germany, the USA, and for the last 10 years in the UK. Currently, he is appointed as Professor in Psychology at Leeds Beckett University. In his research, he has highlighted the problems of boys in education. For example, he has shown that boys' underachievement is an international phenomenon and he has called for more attention for this problem.

Contact: stoet@gmx.com

III. Key facts

(1) Key Stage 2

Girls continue to outperform boys. In 2018, the gender gap at the expected standard in reading, writing and maths was 8 percentage points: 68% of girls reached the expected standard compared to 60% of boys.

The gender gap is 8 percentage points for reading, 1 percentage point for maths, 9 percentage points for grammar, punctuation and spelling and 12 percentage points for writing teacher assessment

Department for Education:

[National curriculum assessments at key stage 2 in England, 2018 \(provisional\)](#)

(2) GCSEs

62.3% of males received A*-C grades whilst 71.4% of women received the same results – the equivalent of 261,522 more A-C grades being awarded to women than men.

Joint Council for Qualifications:

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/Download/examination-results/gcse/2018/main-results-tables/gcse-full-course-results-summer-2018>

(3) A Levels

More women achieved A*-C grades than men (78.7% grades compared to 75.1%), which meant that females received 76,891 more A*-C grades in total than men, due to a greater number of women taking them.

Joint Council for Qualifications:

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/a-levels/2018/main-results-tables/a-level-and-as-results-summer-2018>

(4) University

In 2008, the gender gap between British men and women attending British universities was 48,000 (a percentage point gap of 12). In 2017 it had risen to 65,000. Over the decade 520,000 fewer British men had taken places at British universities (a percentage point gap of 14).

UCAS: <https://www.ucas.com/file/138996/download?token=Lb4WNafU>

(5) Apprenticeships

In 2016/17, 54% of apprenticeships starts were started by women (262,820) and 46% by men (228,520).

House of Commons Research Library:

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06113>

(6) Teachers

In 2017, there were 34,000 male primary school teachers in England , making up 15% of the total (187,000 female primary school teachers)

There are 76,500 male secondary school teachers, making up 37.5% of the total (127,700 female secondary school teachers)

DfE: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2017>

(7) NEETS

Between January to March 2016, there were 865,000 people aged 16 to 24 classified as NEET in the UK. Of these, 405,000 (47%) were male and 461,000 (53%) were female. They represented 12% of the total population aged 16-24 (11% of males; 13% of females). There are differences in the composition of the male and female populations who are NEET. Most male NEETs (55%) are unemployed, while most female NEETs (66%) are economically inactive, that is, they are not in work and not looking for or available for work

House of Commons Library:

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06705/SN06705.pdf>

(8) School exclusions

The permanent exclusion rate for boys (0.15 per cent) was over three times higher than that for girls (0.04 per cent) and the fixed period exclusion rate was almost three times higher (6.91 compared with 2.53 per cent).

DfE:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/726741/text_exc1617.pdf

(9) Suicide

In 2017, there were 4,383 male suicides (75%) and 1,439 among women

BBC: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-45407487>

(10) Student Suicide

There were 213 male student suicides between 2012/13 and 2016/17 compared to 105 female student suicides. This is despite fewer male students. The rate for full time students is 5.0 per 100,000 male students and 1.1 per 100,000 female students.

ONS:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/estimating-suicide-among-higher-education-students-in-england-and-wales>

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

ACADEMIC INTERVENTIONS

1) Set a policy goal and targets to raise GCSE attainment/achievement for boys to that of girls

In 2018, 18-year-old women were a startling 37% more likely to enter higher education than men and 38,000 men were ‘missing’ from starting university this autumn (UCAS).

This is the end result of years of lower achievement by boys from early years onwards, culminating in a gap of attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 against all headline measures (See table 1).

These gaps translate into nearly 13,500 fewer boys achieving the keystone Grade 4 English and Mathematics GCSEs, and over 18,000 more boys without English and Mathematics GCSEs at the end of KS4. Less than a third of boys are covering the EBacc syllabus, further limiting their progression options. Average Attainment 8 scores for GCSEs are 49 for girls and 43.7 for boys, meaning that boys are achieving worse grades overall and this is reflected in the negative Progress 8 score for boys.

Boys in all major ethnic groups underachieve compared to their female peers, with white British boys having the lowest achievement rates of all groups. (See table 2) White and Black Caribbean boys from Free School Meals backgrounds have the lowest attainment of all.

Despite the gaps in boys’ achievement at all key stages, the GCSE threshold matters most because it is the gateway to Level 3 study and the potential to progress to higher/degree apprenticeships and higher education. Maths and English GCSEs also continue to remain key basic employability criteria for many employers.

For inquiries regarding this recommendation, please contact Mary Curnock Cook OBE

2) Increased emphasis on literacy skills

One of the largest gaps in educational achievement is in reading and writing. These are the key skills that are important for all children and impact on educational attainment across subject areas.

Currently, in the UK, 19 per cent of 15-year-old boys, compared to 13 per cent of girls, have insufficient reading skills to participate effectively and productively in life. Increased emphasis on reading and writing in the school curriculum for both boys and girls would not only have a crucial impact on educational attainment, but on young people’s life chances in general.

For inquiries regarding this recommendation, please contact Prof Gijsbert Stoet, Leeds Beckett University

3) Gender-inclusive learning resources

At GCSE, boys fall behind in most school subjects except for Mathematics and Physics. While we wholeheartedly support the focus on girls' education in regard to these subjects, it is crucial that this important additional support for girls should not come at the cost of boys who are drawn to studying non-organic STEM subjects (Maths, Computer Science and Engineering).

Similarly, we believe that it is crucial to create the same opportunities for boys to benefit from additional teaching resources in subjects where boys are under-represented, as are provided for encouraging girls into STEM, while at the same time not taking away from girls' academic attainment in subjects such as Medicine, Veterinary Science, Teaching, Law, Psychology and English.

For inquiries regarding this recommendation, please contact Prof Gijbert Stoet, Leeds Beckett University

4) Train teachers in how to identify and support pupils with colour blindness

Statistically speaking, colour blindness (colour vision deficiency, CVD) affects 1 in 12 (8%) boys and 1 in 200 girls (0.5%)*. This means it is likely there will be at least one child with CVD in every co-educated, maintained school classroom, yet teachers are not trained in how to identify and support pupils with colour blindness. As boys are 16 times more likely to have CVD than girls, boys are at a disadvantage in the modern classroom where almost all educational resources rely heavily on colour to convey information.

In an ideal world schools would introduce training for teaching staff through INSET modules, but as existing teachers have little knowledge of colour blindness there is little appetite from head teachers to provide this training for their staff. If teacher training courses included training in how to identify and support pupils with CVD, boys would no longer face indirect sexual discrimination on the grounds of colour blindness in school. Trainee teachers would be able to introduce the topic into schools during their placements. Colour blind boys would no longer need to struggle to understand information presented in colour only because their teachers would understand how to adapt resources to make them accessible, for example by labelling information.

*Source provided by Colour Blind Awareness: Gegenfurtner KR, Sharpe LT. Color Vision: From Genes to Perception. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999

For inquiries regarding this recommendation, please contact Kathryn Albany-Ward, CEO, Colour Blind Awareness

5) Re-introduction of colour vision screening at school entry

Despite the fact it is likely there will be at least one child with CVD in every co-educated, maintained school classroom, parents, teachers (and often the pupils themselves) have no idea which children have CVD. Studies show (e.g. Association of Optometrists #ABSee campaign 2018) that:

- 75% of school age children have had an eye test with an optometrist
- More than 50% of parents (incorrectly) believe their children have a full eye test in school.

Colour Blind Awareness' ongoing study also shows that despite three quarters of pupils being tested by an optometrist, 80% of children have never had a colour vision test. Consequently, most children with CVD remain undiagnosed in school and the vast majority of the children affected are boys. The reintroduction of colour vision screening at school entry would ensure early identification of boys with

CVD and enable schools to provide support, particularly for GCSE and A Level exams where these pupils are entitled to support but can't receive it if they are undiagnosed.

For inquiries regarding this recommendation, please contact Kathryn Albany-Ward, CEO, Colour Blind Awareness

MALE ROLE MODELS

6) Actively promote careers in teaching to men, especially for primary and early years

Just 24 per cent of the state funded teaching workforce are men and it's only 14 per cent for state-funded primary schools and 7 per cent for Early Years (DfE). One in four primary schools have no male teachers and 80 per cent have fewer than three.

Three million children live in single parent families, which is 22 per cent of all children in families; 90 per cent of these families are headed by single mothers. We could estimate therefore that some 2.7m children are growing up in fatherless families. These children are also being educated in an overwhelmingly female-dominated education system.

Being an effective teacher has little to do with gender. This leads people to assume a shortage of men in the classroom does not matter. But it does for two reasons. First, teachers are not just people who impart knowledge; they are role models we remember for the rest of our lives.

It is not an attack on women to note this incredible imbalance. Indeed, it is often mothers, especially single mothers, who most want their children to have more positive male role models.

The second reason for encouraging more men into teaching is to ensure the teaching profession reflects wider society a bit better. Having few male teachers matters for the same reasons that having few female scientists, engineers or computer programmers matters.

It is time for the rest of the UK to look at Scotland's Gender Action Plan, which seeks to end extreme gender imbalances in different university courses. Teacher training should be no exception to such a useful goal.

The lack of male role models for all children, and especially for boys, is unhealthy and is a contributing factor in boys' underachievement in education. Positive action to increase the male teaching workforce is urgently needed.

For inquiries regarding this recommendation, please contact Mary Curnock Cook OBE or Nick Hillman, Director, Higher Education Policy Institute

7) An accredited national peer mentoring initiative, training young male mentors in secondary schools as peer mentors for boys in their last year in primary education

The transition from primary to secondary education is problematic for all young people. For boys, loss of motivation, disruptive behaviours, and problems with literacy are potential features of transition; the majority of school suspensions are of boys.

Mentoring offers an evidence-based approach to addressing concerns related to problematic behaviours in schools and improving school performance. Mentoring programmes and ‘buddying’ with older pupils have been demonstrated as successful means of addressing disruptive behaviours and improving academic performance.

Peer mentoring has also been found effective for primary school pupils transitioning to secondary school. Training young men at secondary schools to mentor and be introduced into feeder primary schools, befriending younger peers will help smoother transition for younger boys, academic performance and countering disruptive behaviours.

For inquiries regarding this recommendation, please contact Mengage

8) Launch a nation-wide ‘Take Your Son into University Day’ campaign

The disparity in male and female entry to university is big and getting bigger. As the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) showed in their 2016 report *Boys to Men*, compared to male students, there are more female part-time students, more female full-time students, more female undergraduate students and more female postgraduate students. This is poorly understood, perhaps because when middle-aged policy makers went to university, the opposite was the case.

Hundreds of millions of pounds are spent on widening participation initiatives each year, but they are sometimes poorly targeted and often under-evaluated. It is clear from the headline data showing disparities in university entry that the various initiatives are not working as effectively as they might. So we need to try something new.

One idea worth piloting is a ‘Take Your Son To University Day’, explicitly modelled on ‘Take Your Daughter To Work Day’, which started in 1993 as a way to inform girls about the full range of careers. A new take on an old idea, parents and carers could take their young men to a higher education campus at a dedicated time to hear tailored information. As with Take Your Daughter To Work Day, schools, colleges and employers could be encouraged to provide time off.

By bringing different generations onto campus, Take Your Son To University Day could also tackle a wider lack of understanding about the benefits of higher education, as learning has been shown to be contagious within families.

For inquiries regarding this recommendation, please contact Nick Hillman, Director, Higher Education Policy Institute

9) Targeted male-friendly sources of information on universities and courses

When universities recognise a need to recruit more men, they tend to pick up the phone to a local well-known sports club. This can lead to media-friendly widening participation schemes run jointly with famous football teams aimed at encouraging more men to enter higher education.

There are doubtless some people who have entered higher education solely as a result of such schemes. It would be churlish to say they should not exist. But they caricature boys as being interested in sport above other pursuits, and they wrongly imply a love of sport is a key differentiator between boys and girls. It is as silly as thinking the one most effective way to help women enter higher education would be to run a scheme in conjunction with a make-up company.

I visit around 50 universities a year. While it is still the case that most vice-chancellors and other senior managers are men, most widening participation teams are predominantly female. Attending open days

and other initiatives aimed at potential applicants are key determinants in decision making. But male organisers of such activities can be very rare indeed. So we need to address the signals we send when having such a big gender bias among those representing our universities to their future students.

For inquiries regarding this recommendation, please contact Nick Hillman, Director, Higher Education Policy Institute

BOY-FRIENDLY PASTORAL SUPPORT

10) Understanding that behavioural and emotional issues usually have the same root cause

Evidence shows a quarter of girls will be labelled as having an emotional issue and a quarter of boys as having a behavioural one. However, there is a lack of understanding that these are likely to be the same. Owing to the way boys and girls are socialised differently, girls often internalise distress, whereas boys are more likely to lash out in anger.

When boys behave in ways which are perceived to be ‘disruptive’ or ‘naughty’ it is incumbent upon us to understand they are likely distressed and need the same amount of emotional support as their female peers. To avoid punishing vulnerable boys, we recommend ensuring educators are aware of the differing ways in which boys and girls express emotional distress.

For inquiries regarding this recommendation, please contact Natasha Devon MBE

11) More training in mental health support for male role models

Research has shown that boys and young men are less likely to engage with any mental health interventions theoretically available to them than girls. For example, they are less likely to see the school counsellor, or to book an appointment to see their GP, if they suspect they have mental health issues. However, it is a myth that they do not talk at all. In fact, they often confide in male sports coaches, their favourite male teacher or other male role model.

We recommend these men be trained in Mental Health First Aid so that the conversations can happen in the most productive way. We need to bring help to boys, rather than expecting them to seek help.

For inquiries regarding this recommendation, please contact Natasha Devon MBE

12) Create spaces where boys feel emotionally supported without talking

Research indicates that boys and young men gain catharsis from activities like sport, music, drama and art, which allow them to explore and exorcise difficult feelings without necessarily having to put them into words. At the same time, sport, art, music and drama are being systematically squeezed out of the curriculum owing to a lack of funding and changing academic priorities.

When asked, teenage boys often say their greatest emotional support came simply from spending time with people who did not judge them, doing something they enjoyed. We need to safeguard space in the school week for activities which support mental well-being.

For inquiries regarding this recommendation, please contact Natasha Devon MBE

RESEARCH AND FUNDING

13) Establish a UK-wide ‘Mindsets Scholars Network’ across higher education, schools and youth organisations

The lower HE participation rates of boys from less privileged backgrounds mirrors their attainment rates in the education system generally. But universities must own the solution too and help make our education system more equitable.

Universities across the UK spend almost a £billion in outreach programmes from their Fair Access and Participation strategies. A slight rebalance and pooling of contributions amongst collaborating HEIs could support a national collaboration with partner schools and youth organisations to explore the impact of positive mindsets in resilience and learning development. This must start with a focus on boys and young men where the problem is most acute and long standing. This is how Ulster University funds its Taking Boys Seriously programme and network across Northern Ireland.

The network must work through the lived experiences of the very boys and young men who are being left behind. It could design new learning environments and instructional approaches around the cognitive approaches to male engagement. It should work with youth organisations to mentor mindsets outside the classroom. It should affect change through growth mindsets that allow boys to belong, to be recognised as smarter, to find purpose in education and to aspire to success by better understanding their world, their masculinity and their peer dynamics.

There are powerful roles in this collaboration for teachers, parents and community youth work.

For inquiries regarding this recommendation, please contact Professor Brian Murphy, Director of Widening Access at Ulster University and project lead for Taking Boys Seriously.

14) The creation of a multidisciplinary national ‘Centre for Men, Policy and Praxis’

With the closure of the Centre for Men’s Health at Leeds Beckett University in 2017, there is no substantive research base for work around male health and related issues, including boys’ educational attainment. Where work is being done, this is often on a ‘single-silo’ basis within academic disciplines and lacks a joined-up approach. The research and policy work is fragmented, and particularly in the case of good practice, often undocumented, underfunded and subject to local financial constraints.

A national ‘*Centre for Men, Policy and Praxis*’ would provide an authoritative academic voice for research and practical work with men and boys, serving as a hub of innovative thinking and good practice. This would be a powerful resource for establishing what works, not just in terms of improving boys’ education, but also for addressing the range of related issues that disproportionately affect men and boys, such as homelessness, suicide and imprisonment.

There is dearth of academic research on this topic. The Government can incentivise such research through targeted grant funding.

For inquiries regarding this recommendation, please contact Mengage or Prof Gijsbert Stoet, Leeds Beckett University

Table 1

(2016/17 data DfE SFR01 2018 England 2016/17):

Gender

As in previous years, girls continue to do better than boys in all headline measures.

Table 17: Attainment 8 and Progress 8 by gender

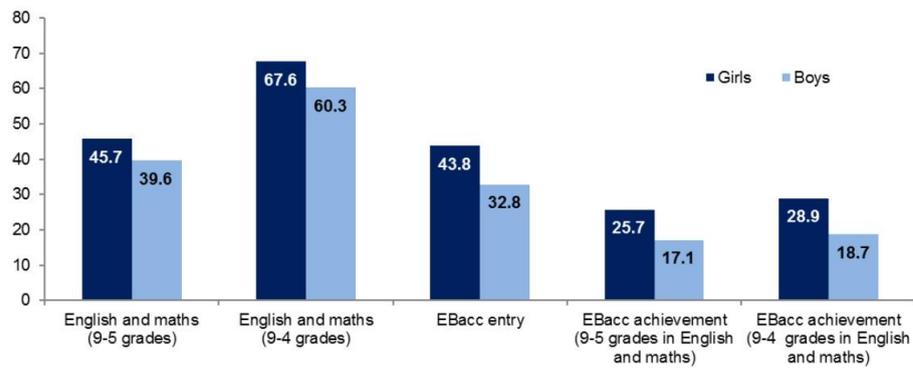
England, state-funded schools, 2017

	Average Attainment 8 score	Average Progress 8 score	Progress 8 lower confidence interval	Progress 8 upper confidence interval
Boys	43.7	-0.24	-0.24	-0.23
Girls	49.0	0.18	0.18	0.19

Source: Key stage 4 revised attainment data

Figure 27: Performance in threshold measures by gender

England, state-funded schools, 2017



Source: Key stage 4 revised attainment data

Table 2

Figure 25: Attainment in threshold measures by major ethnic group (including grades 4 or above in English and maths)

England, state-funded schools, 2017

