

Being a Boy

CREATIVE WORKSHOPS 2025

OVERVIEW

The Being a Boy workshops provide the space for the young men to explore masculinity and identity through creative expression. Using varied materials, participants share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences of being a boy.

The workshops are part of AUB's Access and Participation Plan 2024/25 – 2027/28's strategic intervention aiming to raise GCSE attainment for boys eligible for free school meals across Dorset. They offer a supportive environment for identity exploration while helping educators understand the challenges these young men face. The Being a Boy Project embeds Ulster University's 'Taking Boys Seriously' principles, with a focus on building confidence, skills, and educational engagement.

The 2025 workshop series introduced three new workshops: Snapshot (Photography), Evolve (Acting), and Reclaim (Graphic Design). With three returning workshops: Identity (Fashion Branding), Transform (Special Effects Make-Up), and Freestyle (Illustration).

Working with young men aged 12–16, the workshops made use of AUB's specialist facilities and creative practitioners, equipping participants with skills and materials they could continue to explore independently. Now in its fourth year, the Being a Boy project continues to grow in popularity across Dorset and receives ongoing national recognition.

PARTICIPANTS

This year, the workshop series engaged 74 attendees across six sessions (31 unique learners).

All participants met one or more widening participation eligibility criteria, with over 80% meeting multiple criteria. The most represented criteria were participants receiving Free School Meals with 45 attendees. Followed by those living in areas with low progression to Higher Education (TUNDRA LSOA quintiles 1–2 or IMD deciles 1–4) with 44 attendees, Care Experienced (13), Young Carers (11) and those studying at alternative provisions.

MARKETING

Through the continued development and national coverage of the project, interest from education providers across Dorset has increased. As co-chair of the Dorset Boys' Impact Hub, AUB shared the workshops as a best practice example with schools developing new programmes to support young men – offering both inspiration and an opportunity for them to get involved. In addition to Boys' Impact promotion, we also marketed the workshops through the following channels:

- Being a Boy Celebration event January 2025
- Campus visits with education providers
- Visits to alternative provisions
- Social media channels
- Email promotion
- AUB Schools Newsletter and External Engagement Newsletter
- Physical mailout of flyers and 2024 Anthology to target education providers



Participants came from across Dorset, representing 12 education providers including mainstream schools, alternative provisions, and home education.

Participants explored three key themes in each workshop: Being a Boy, Being Yourself, and Expressing Yourself, using creative materials to support personal reflection and expression. Participants left each session with their own creative outcomes, which across the workshops included: poetry, performances, original logos, skateboard designs and illustrations, printed self portrait photos, personalised caps and t-shirts, and make-up materials.

SUCCESSSES

A key success of this year's series was the increase in repeat participation, with 15 young men attending two or more workshops and nine attending three or more. This engagement was driven by previous positive experiences, peer recommendations, and strong relationships with education providers. Returning participants expressed a desire to deepen their involvement, attending both new and familiar workshops.

One 2024 and 2025 participant shared:

"It's been better, it's been more fun. Of course, it's lovely to try something new but it's also it's quite cool to explore what you've already done."

At the heart of the workshops are the young men – their voices, passions, and expectations. A continued strength of the programme is the team's ability to listen and respond to individual interests. This year, one participant with a passion for special effects make-up was offered a personalised tour of the department, further materials for use at home, and a funded place at Saturday Art School. Another was invited to perform a poem developed during the acting workshop at AUB's book launch for 'Lost Boys: How Education is Failing Young Working-Class Men', bringing the young men's voices to educators and policy makers. These opportunities reflect the programme's commitment to empowering young men through creativity and celebrating their individual journeys.

2025
FACTS



31

Unique learners engaged in the series

74

Attendees across the workshops

15

Participants attending multiple workshops



LEARNINGS AND NEXT STEPS

The main challenge for the workshops remains as attendance; specifically drop off from booking to attending. Although many of the workshops for 2025 were fully booked, the team still saw an attrition in attendees on the day, particularly in July workshops. This may be due to academic pressures with exams and school trips towards the end of the academic year, making the workshops difficult to commit to.

Consideration on how many workshops run in July and their timing will be given, to support participants' priorities. Some feedback from those that didn't attend's supporters, was that

they were nervous to attend on their own having not met the team before or not been to campus, resulting in not attending. Further collaboration with education providers will be considered to increase participants confidence in attending activities at AUB. Trialling limiting education providers to three spaces per workshop, so that participants arriving as an individual feel more comfortable and included.

Refinement of the Evaluation Star for the workshop will also continue, taking learnings from the young mens' feedback this year.