

Being a Boy

2025 EVALUATION REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Being a Boy Project 2025 was an effectively targeted project that engaged boys eligible for Free School Meals, a key underrepresented demographic at Arts University Bournemouth (AUB). All participants were from groups underrepresented in higher education, with over 80% meeting multiple widening participation criteria.

The series engaged 74 attendees, with 31 unique learners; 15 attended two or more workshops, and nine attended three or more. Participants were from 12 education providers across Dorset and Hampshire. A key strength of the 2025 series was the number of participants who chose to attend multiple workshops. The project continued to run through individual sign-ups, with young men self-electing to take part based on interest in either the art form or the themes covered. In addition, three participants had taken part in workshops in previous years, some as early as 2023. One new participant from the same education provider shared that they joined following a recommendation from their peers, demonstrating that the project continues to grow through positive relationships-built year on year.

In 2025, the Being a Boy Evaluation Star continued to be developed, with changes to the scale and the introduction of opportunities for qualitative participant responses. Each workshop has its own unique Evaluation Star, linked to the Taking Boys Seriously Principles (TBS P)¹, allowing for bespoke statements aligned to the creative tools and outcomes of each session. This remains a significant strength of the project, highlighting how creative materials and activities can support participants' identity development and open conversations in different ways. The creative workshops continue to foster collaborative and supportive learning environments, providing space for participants to share their feelings and lived experiences through creative materials. The project evolves in response to the young men who engage with it, embedding their voices into the workshops. National recognition has continued to grow, with an exhibition at the House of Commons in March 2026 featuring artwork from the 2025 series, that Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy spoke at.

The Being a Boy Project is a core component of AUB's 2024–25 to 2027–28 Access and Participation Plan², contributing to Strategic Intervention One: "Increase the GCSE attainment of boys in Dorset who are eligible for free school meals, working with educational partners to close the GCSE attainment gap for this group." This document outlines key findings from the 2025 Being a Boy activity and provides recommendations for the 2026 workshop series.

INTRODUCTION

AUB's Being a Boy project was launched in 2021-22 and is recognised as sector best practice in addressing the GCSE attainment gap for working-class boys. The 2025 workshop series marked the fourth year of the project, which is firmly embedded within AUB's Access and Participation Strategy as a Strategic Intervention in the 2024–25 to 2027–28 Access and Participation Plan. The project is aligned with Ulster University's TBSP³ across all workshop activities. AUB is positioned as a leading university in delivering outreach activity that highlights the gaps in GCSE attainment outcomes and progression to higher education for young working-class men and boys eligible for free school meals.

¹ University of Ulster (2018) *Taking Boys Seriously Principles - Taking Boys Seriously: Boys as Relational Learners*. Available at: https://www.ulster.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1511242/UU-TBS-Principles.pdf (Accessed: 3 September 2025)

² Arts University Bournemouth (2024) *Arts University Bournemouth Access and participation plan 2024-25 to 2027-28*. Available at: https://webdocs.aub.ac.uk/Access%20and%20Participation%20Plan%202024-25%E2%80%932027-28.pdf?_ga=2.52809965.415002430.1701775227-1692506891.1701775227 (Accessed: 3 September 2025)

³ University of Ulster (2025) *Research Project – Taking Boys Seriously*. Available at: <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/research/topic/social-work-and-social-policy/research-themes/taking-boys-seriously> (Accessed: 3 September 2025)

While AUB has led this work to support young working-class men for several years, the project has increasingly become part of a wider national movement. Networks such as Boys' Impact continue to grow, strengthening collective approaches to support. AUB remains a co-chair of the Dorset Boys' Impact Hub, with the development of a further 16 regional hubs focused on supporting young working-class men across the UK. The Being a Boy project has been shared across these regional hubs as an example of best practice, presenting at the Boys' Impact Conference at the University of Wolverhampton in September 2025.

The UK government has intensified its focus on supporting young working-class men in education, in response to evidence showing low GCSE attainment for this group and worsening outcomes since the pandemic. The government's Schools White Paper aims to break the link between background and educational success, building upon this momentum for change, as further educational reports highlight increasing concern around boys' educational outcomes. The Sutton Trust's Sutton Trust September 2025 report⁴ showed that just 14% of young white British men eligible for Free School Meals progressed to higher education in 2023-24. Media streaming platforms and broadcasters have increased their representation and exploration of themes linked to masculinity through programming which has increased wider discussion and call to action around working with young men. With the increased interest, recognition and government focus, the Being a Boy project held an exhibition at the House of Commons in March 2026, sponsored by local Labour MP Jessica Toale, celebrating the project and the young men that have participated over the years.

In January 2025, Arts University Bournemouth launched the fourth series of the Being a Boy project, mobilising creative disciplines including Acting, Photography, Illustration, Fashion Communication, Make-Up for Media and Performance, and Graphic Design. These creative subjects were used as vehicles for young men to explore and express what being a boy means to them. The rationale for the project's continuation and development is to deepen understanding of how best to support young working-class men, while amplifying their voices and stories as part of a national movement for change. The use of creative subjects provides space for meaningful learning with participants, and the project continues to be shaped each year by reflection, learning, and participant feedback.

AIMS, OBJECTIVES, AND OUTCOMES

OBJECTIVES

Across the suite of workshops, Being a Boy has four key objectives that underpin the project as a whole:

- Engage meaningfully with boys ([Taking Boys Seriously Principle 8](#)).
- Value the voice of boys ([Taking Boys Seriously Principle 10](#)).
- Challenge and affirm masculine identities ([Taking Boys Seriously Principle 4](#)).
- Utilise a 'strengths-based approach' to learning ([Taking Boys Seriously Principle 3](#)).

OUTCOMES

Drawing on insights from the 2024 workshop series, nine learner outcomes have been selected based on the TBSP⁵. While some workshops are recurring, the Evaluation Star statements for the 2025 series have been updated to reflect the specific principles emphasised this year. These updates closely align the statements with workshop activities, following recommendations from the 2024 evaluation report. New workshops were

⁴ The Sutton Trust (2025) *Changing the conversation about boys and young working-class men in education*. Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/changing-the-conversation-about-boys-and-young-working-class-men-in-education/#:~:text=It's%20a%20set%20of%20societal,encouraging%20progress%20across%20key%20areas>. (Accessed: 13 February 2026).

⁵ University of Ulster (2018) *Taking Boys Seriously Principles - Taking Boys Seriously: Boys as Relational Learners*. Available at: https://www.ulster.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1511242/UU-TBS-Principles.pdf (Accessed: 3 September 2025)

reviewed collaboratively with facilitators to identify TBSP that aligned most with the planned creative activities. All Evaluation Star statements continue to measure the impact of each workshop and address the project’s three themes: *Being a Boy* (Knowledge), *Being Yourself* (Confidence/Self-Efficacy), and *Expressing Yourself* (Skills).

The below table shows a breakdown of each workshops targeted outcomes and Evaluation Star statements participants will measure:

TABLE ONE – Being a Boy 2025 Workshop Objectives, Outcomes, and Evaluation Star Statements

Workshop	Objective	Outcome	Project Theme	Eval Star Questions/Scale 2025
Identity	Identify blocks to boys learning (TBSP 6)	Participants connect more with subjects and being actively engaged in their learning (TBSP 6).	Being a Boy	I’m interested in learning where this subject could take me
	Enable creative learning environments (TBSP 9)	Participants discover new life skills, by learning in a range of different ways (TBSP 9).	Being Yourself	I’m confident trying new activities
		Participants feel less boredom in the learning environment (TBSP 9).	Expressing Yourself	I feel excited by creative learning environments
Evolve	Connect boys to learning context (TBSP 7).	Participants relate their life experiences within a broader socio-economic context (TBSP 7).	Being a Boy	I can see how my life is shaped by those around me
		Participants demonstrate an increase in confidence, self-esteem, and self-image (TBSP 7).	Being Yourself	I am confident being myself in front of others
	Promote positive mental health (TBSP 5).	Participants have more self-awareness regarding their own stress triggers, fears, and anxiety (TBSP 5).	Expressing Yourself	I can talk with those around me about things I find difficult
Snapshot	Demonstrate dignity and respect (TBSP 2).	Participants feel valued in the learning environment (TBSP 2).	Being a Boy	I have valuable opinions and ideas
		Participants demonstrate increased self-worth (TBSP 2).	Being Yourself	I expect myself to achieve good things
	Engage meaningfully with boys (TBSP 8).	Participants increased confidence in expressing and questioning their thoughts and beliefs (TBSP 8).	Expressing Yourself	I’m not afraid to voice a change in opinion
Transform	Challenge and affirm masculine identities (TBSP 4).	Participants have an increased awareness of how traditional notions of men and masculinity can negatively impact societal, community and family attitudes to education and learning (TBSP 4).	Being a Boy	I think that masculinity means different things to different people I think men can do anything....even study makeup
	Recognising the primacy of relationships (TBSP 1).	Participants have an increased confidence about their knowledge and learning (TBSP 1).	Being Yourself	I feel confident when learning new things
		Participants feel more comfortable seeking personal and educational support (TBSP 1).	Expressing Yourself	I’m comfortable asking for help when I need it

Freestyle	Connect boys to learning context (TBSP 7).	Participants relate their life experiences within a broader socio-economic context (TBSP 7).	Being a Boy	I can see how my life is shaped by my experiences
	Enable creative learning environments (TBSP 9).	Discovering new social skills (TBSP 9).	Expressing Yourself	I feel more comfortable meeting new people
		Enjoying learning and having more fun (TBSP 9).	Being Yourself	Learning new things can be fun
Reclaim	Challenge and affirm masculine identities (TBSP 4).	Participants have increased awareness of how traditional notions of men and masculinity can negatively impact societal, community and family attitudes to education and learning. (TBSP 4).	Being a Boy	I think that masculinity means different things to different people
	Utilise a 'strengths-based approach' to learning (TBSP 3).	Participants demonstrate increased self-determination, resilience, and independence (TBSP 3).	Being Yourself	I'm determined
		Participants can articulate an appreciation of their abilities and potential beyond academic success (TBSP 3).	Expressing Yourself	I'm good at things that aren't taught at school

OUTPUTS

- A series of six subject-specific workshops for young men at AUB.
- Further development of the Being a Boy Evaluation Star.
- Production of a documentary following the journey of the young men in the Transform workshop.
- Being a Boy 2025 Anthology.
- Paper sessions linked to Being a Boy workshops at Boys' Impact National Conference.
- Paper session linked to Being a Boy project development delivered to Manchester Metropolitan University and Greater Manchester Higher Widening Participation Professional Network
- Celebratory project exhibition at the House of Commons.

WORKSHOP SERIES

The 2025 Being a Boy project delivered six student-facing workshops that provided creative channels for participants to reflect on what being a young man means to them and on their own lived experiences. The workshops offered an innovative mechanism for exploring the potential implications for boys' future health, happiness, and educational success.

The project engaged 31 unique learners (aged 12-16) across the following workshops:

- Identity (Fashion Communication) – 14 May
- Snapshot (Photography) – 22 May
- Reclaim (Graphic Design) – 11 June
- Evolve (Acting) – 17 and 18 June
- Transform (Special Effects Make-Up) - 8 July
- Freestyle (Illustration) – 16 July

ATTENDANCE, ENGAGEMENT, AND ELIGABILITY

It is an integral part of the Being a Boy project that all workshops are booked through individual student sign-up, allowing participants to self-elect to take part based on creative interest in the workshops and/or an

exploration of their masculinity and identity. Participants are targeted through the team’s external partner contacts, including third-sector organisations, community groups, and providers of alternative educational provision for students who may no longer be in mainstream education. Through AUB’s co-chair role in the Dorset Boys’ Impact Hub, opportunities are shared with members, which includes local authorities, mainstream schools, and alternative provision settings that are developing programmes to support young men.

The 2025 workshop series did not include any bespoke workshops. In 2025, the number of unique learners reduced compared with previous years, with a total of 31 unique learners (compared to 64 in 2024). This reduction was largely due to an increase in participants attending multiple workshops during the series, with 15 learners attending two or more workshops in 2025. This repeat participation resulted from continued engagement from participants in previous years, peer recommendations from former participants, and established relationships with education providers. While the increase in repeat participation reduced the overall number of unique learners, it was significant that participants chose to engage in multiple workshops.

This sustained engagement enabled the Being a Boy team to build stronger rapport with participants, better understand their individual needs over a longer period, and enhance their overall experience. This voluntary and consistent participation reflects the team’s ability to build relationships with young men that are based on trust, mutual respect, and a non-hierarchical approach. Through these established relationships and natural repeat engagement, the team was also able to facilitate a focus group with participants, providing further insight into the wider impact of the workshops beyond the measured TBSP.

The table below provides a breakdown of participant representation across each workshop and their eligibility criteria. All participants met the eligibility requirements, with over 80% meeting multiple criteria.

TABLE TWO – Being a Boy 2025 Workshop attendees

Workshop	Capacity	Signed Up	Attended	No. of Education Providers Represented in Attendees	No. of Participants at the workshop that attended multiple workshops	WP Eligibility Criteria of Attended Participants					
						Alternative Provision	Free School Meals	Care Experienced and/or Estranged	Young Carer	Service Child	Eligible Postcodes*
Identity	15	13	13	7	10	1	7	2	2	1	10
Snapshot	12	11	11	4	11	1	8	1	1	1	7
Reclaim	15	15	13	7	7	1	8	2	1	1	10
Evolve – Day 1	15	11	10	5	7	0	4	2	3	0	3
Evolve – Day 2	15	11	9	5	6	0	3	2	3	0	2
Transform	12	12	8	3	6	3	4	1	0	0	4
Freestyle	15	15	10	5	8	3	7	2	1	0	7
Total	99	88	74	36	15**	9	41	12	11	3	43

*TUNDRA LSOA Quintile 1 and 2 and/or IMD Decile 1- 4

**Total of participants attending multiple workshops represented by unique learners

*TABLE THREE – Being a Boy 2025 Repeat Participants**

WORKSHOP	Snapshot	Reclaim	Evolve	Transform	Freestyle
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No of repeat participants	10	7	7	6	8
Participants Total	10	13	10	8	10
Percentage of Repeat Participants	100%	54%	70%	75%	80%
Average Percentage of Repeat Participants					76%

**This table only includes 5 of the 6 workshops from the 2025 series, not including the first workshop in the series, Identity. This is because at this point in the series they were not yet repeat participants.*

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

EVALUATION STAR DEVELOPMENT

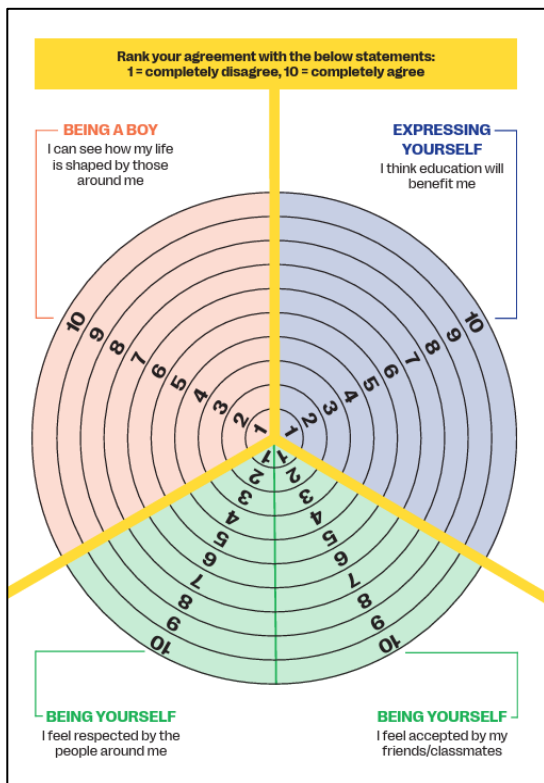
The Being a Boy Evaluation Star continues to be an area of development within the project. Feedback gathered through the 2024 focus group highlighted the need for refinement, particularly in relation to the language used within the Evaluation Star statements. The 2024 Evaluation Star also limited the young men’s ability to provide feedback in their own words, as most qualitative insight was gathered through informal conversations with facilitators. Not all participants were able to engage in these discussions due to time constraints and capacity within workshop sessions.

The 2025 Evaluation Stars aimed to increase opportunities for collecting qualitative data, including the introduction of free-text questions in both the pre- and post-workshop Evaluation Stars. As part of the 2025 workshop evaluation, a new pre-workshop free-text question was introduced: *“Complete the sentence – ‘Being a boy is...’”*. This question was inspired by creative writing activities delivered during the 2024 Character workshop, which successfully generated rich insights into participants’ lives, experiences, and perceptions of masculinity and identity. While some 2025 responses offered meaningful reflections, many participants found it challenging to engage with the question prior to the workshop. This resulted in a number of one-word or blank responses, limiting the depth of insight captured at this stage. Further analysis of these responses can be found in the [Qualitative Turn](#) section of this report.

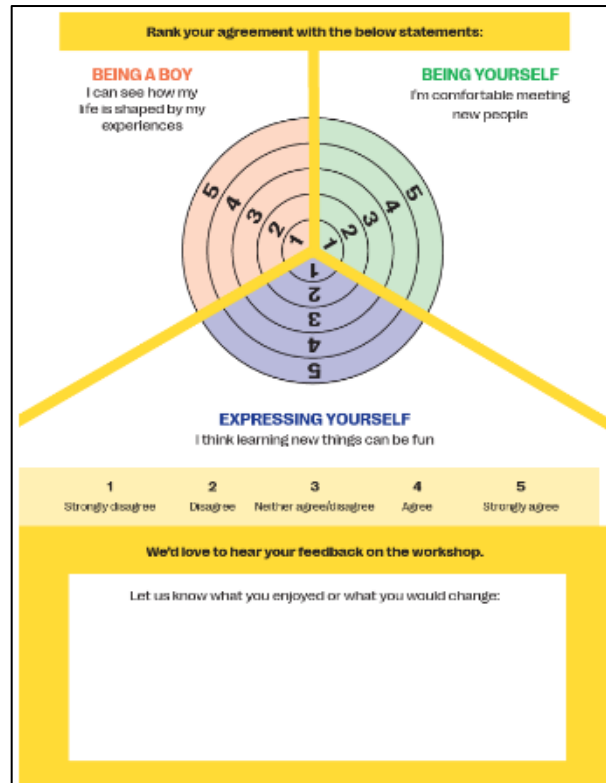
For the post-workshop evaluation, participants were asked: *“Let us know what you enjoyed or what you would change.”* Although this open-ended format encouraged participant feedback, the combined phrasing made responses difficult to interpret. In many cases, it was unclear whether participants were expressing enjoyment or suggesting areas for improvement. To improve clarity and data usefulness in future evaluations, this question will be separated into two distinct prompts.

Additional developments to the Evaluation Star included the introduction of a Likert scale with clearly defined descriptors for each response option. This change supported participants in assessing their level of agreement with the evaluation statements and proved effective in capturing a more accurate reflection of participants’ feelings and the overall impact of the workshops.

2024 Freestyle Pre and Post workshop Evaluation Star



2025 Freestyle Post workshop Evaluation Star



PROJECT THEME ANALYSIS

ANALYSING THE DATA

A continued strength of the *Being a Boy* project is the alignment of the workshops with the TBSP, using a range of creative materials and tools to generate and nurture conversations and exploration around masculinity and identity. As creative materials and activities naturally lend themselves to developing different skills, it is now a standardised aspect of the project that each workshop focuses on a selected two to three TBSP. These are linked to the project’s aims and outcomes through its three core themes: increasing participants’ knowledge of masculinity (*Being a Boy*), building confidence and self-efficacy (*Being Yourself*), and developing communication skills to express thoughts on masculinity (*Expressing Yourself*). Collectively, these themes are designed to equip young men with metacognitive strategies that support them in overcoming challenges, enhancing educational engagement, and strengthening their connection to learning.

Following the development of the Evaluation Star, participants were asked to respond using a five-point Likert scale, supported by a key that clearly defined what each score represented, including the option to neither agree nor disagree. In analysing the data, the project focuses on identifying changes between pre- and post-workshop scores, to evidence improvements across the project’s aims and themes. For the Transform workshop, two statements were used to assess the *Being a Boy* theme, and a mean average was therefore calculated to allow for comparison with other workshops.

The workshops are designed for small groups, with a maximum capacity of 15 participants per session. Maintaining small group sizes is a core principle of the project, enabling participants who attend individually to feel comfortable and supported when engaging in discussions around masculinity. These smaller groups also create space for meaningful one-to-one conversations centred on participants’ lived experiences, fostering

stronger connections with staff and facilitators and supporting relationships that place each young man at the centre of their learning (TBSP 1). However, the resulting small sample sizes require a more nuanced and critical approach to data analysis, ensuring that findings are interpreted carefully and not overgeneralised to wider populations.

COLLECTED DATA

The below table shows the number of participants that engaged in the workshop and how many participants were excluded from the data analysis due to incomplete or missing data sets from the pre or post Evaluation Stars.

TABLE FOUR – Participants Data Included in Analysis

Workshop	No. of Participants data included	No. of Participants data excluded
Identity	13	0
Snapshot	10	0
Reclaim	13	3
Evolve	10	1
Transform	8	0
Freestyle	10	2
	64	6

DATA HIGHLIGHTS ACROSS PROJECT THEMES

The following data tables show the percentage of participants who experienced either a decrease, no change, or an increased score in agreement with the Evaluation Star statement aligned to each project theme.

In instances where workshop Evaluation Stars included multiple statements from a single theme, an average across those statements was calculated. A breakdown of individual statement response data can be found later in the analysis of each workshop. This is indicated with an asterisk*.

TABLE FIVE – Being a Boy: Knowledge Percentage Data

Being a Boy: (Knowledge)			
Workshop	Difference in agreement with Being a Boy Evaluation Star statements from pre and post workshop surveys		
	Decrease	No Change	Increase
Identity	8%	31%	62%
Snapshot	0%	70%	30%
Reclaim	10%	80%	10%
Evolve	11%	67%	22%
Transform*	6%	75%	19%
Freestyle	0%	88%	13%
TOTAL % AVERAGE ACROSS ALL WORKSHOPS	6%	69%	26%

The table shows that, across the workshop series, an average of 69% of participants reported no change for this project theme, with five workshops recording individual percentages of 65% or above. The Identity workshop showed the largest increase, at 62%.

Further analysis of individual participant data indicates that, in workshops where no change was observed, most participants had already agreed or strongly agreed with the statement in their pre-workshop Evaluation Star. This suggests that there was limited scope for further improvement within those sessions. It is also notable that the Identity workshop, which demonstrated the greatest increase, was the first in the series. Subsequent workshops included a high proportion of repeat participants, with an average of 76% of attendees in workshops following Identity having previously engaged in the series. This may help to explain the absence of additional increases in later workshops, as returning participants were already familiar with the project language, team, and objectives, and felt confident in this area. It may therefore be beneficial to consider expanding the response scale from 1-5 to 1-7 for the 2026 series, to provide a broader range of options and capture more nuanced shifts in participant responses.

TABLE SIX – *Being Yourself: Confidence/Self-Efficacy Data*

Being Yourself: (Confidence/Self-Efficacy)			
Workshop	Difference in agreement with Being a Boy Evaluation Star statements from pre and post workshop surveys		
	Decrease	No Change	Increase
Identity	15%	62%	23%
Snapshot	30%	70%	0%
Reclaim	0%	70%	30%
Evolve	0%	11%	89%
Transform	50%	50%	0%
Freestyle	13%	75%	13%
TOTAL % AVERAGE ACROSS ALL WORKSHOPS	18%	56%	26%

The data above show that an average of 56% of participants reported no change in the *Being Yourself* project theme, with three workshops recording averages of over 60% reporting no change. When analysing individual participant data sets, similar patterns emerge to those seen in the *Being a Boy* project theme, with many participants already agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement prior to the workshops. Evolve showed the greatest increase in this area, at 89%, which may be attributed to the theme’s focus on confidence. This is an area where many participants are likely to experience a direct and tangible impact, given the workshop’s emphasis on performance and acting.

TABLE SEVEN – *Expressing Yourself: Skills Data*

Expressing Yourself: (Skills)			
Workshop	Difference in agreement with Being a Boy Evaluation Star statements from pre and post workshop surveys		
	Decrease	No Change	Increase
Identity	8%	77%	15%
Snapshot	0%	90%	10%
Reclaim	0%	50%	50%
Evolve	11%	33%	56%
Transform	13%	63%	25%

Freestyle	25%	75%	0%
TOTAL % AVERAGE ACROSS ALL WORKSHOPS	10%	65%	26%

The table above highlights the *Expressing Yourself* project theme, which saw an average of 65% of participants reporting no change in communication skills across the workshops. This theme aims to equip young men with tools to express their views and feelings about masculinity, while also empowering them to support their peers in doing the same.

The Evolve workshop achieved the highest increase, as participants directly draw on communication skills to develop performances. Activities are initiated through acting games, which support the development of confidence and encourage engagement. Snapshot, a redeveloped version of the Capture workshop, recorded the highest percentage of participants reporting no change. Analysis of the raw data suggests this is largely due to participants already reporting a high level of confidence in this project theme, indicating that a review of the statements and how they are measured may be needed across all project themes.

WORKSHOP DATA AND REPEAT PARTICIPATION

The following table shows participants raw data responses to each of the three project themes, indicating those that had already started the workshops either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the Evaluation Star statement.

From the above project theme tables and the below raw data table, we can see that the workshops that saw increases were Identity and Evolve. This is significant as Identity is the first workshop in the series, meaning the participants were not yet familiar with the format of the workshops allowing for a greater impact and results from the creative tools and dialogue on masculinity and identity. Evolve also saw more significant increases, arguably, being a the only two-day workshop allowed more time for participants to grow in confidence with a direct and clear indicator of this confidence growth shown in all participants contributing to a final performance on stage.

When looking at the raw data it highlights that of the workshops that saw a majority no change, this is due to participants either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement in their pre-workshop Evaluation Star.

TABLE EIGHT – Workshop Raw data

BEING A BOY – Project theme and Evaluation Star Statement			
Workshop	Scale	Pre-Workshop – No. of Participants	Post Workshop – No. of Participants
Identity	Disagree or strongly disagree	1	0
	Neither agree/disagree	6	1
	Agree or strongly agree	6	12
Snapshot	Disagree or strongly disagree	2	0
	Neither agree/disagree	3	3
	Agree or strongly agree	5	7
Reclaim	Disagree or strongly disagree	0	0
	Neither agree/disagree	3	2
	Agree or strongly agree	7	8
Evolve	Disagree or strongly disagree	1	0

	Neither agree/disagree	2	3
	Agree or strongly agree	6	6
Transform		Pre Workshop	
		Statement 1	Statement 2
	Disagree or strongly disagree	0	0
	Neither agree/disagree	1	1
	Agree or strongly agree	7	7
Freestyle	Disagree or strongly disagree	0	0
	Neither agree/disagree	2	1
	Agree or strongly agree	6	7
BEING A YOURSELF – Project theme and Evaluation Star Statement			
Workshop	Scale	Pre-Workshop – No. of Participants	Post Workshop – No. of Participants
Identity	Disagree or strongly disagree	0	0
	Neither agree/disagree	2	0
	Agree or strongly agree	11	13
Snapshot	Disagree or strongly disagree	0	0
	Neither agree/disagree	5	5
	Agree or strongly agree	5	5
Reclaim	Disagree or strongly disagree	1	1
	Neither agree/disagree	3	1
	Agree or strongly agree	6	8
Evolve	Disagree or strongly disagree	1	0
	Neither agree/disagree	3	0
	Agree or strongly agree	5	9
Transform	Disagree or strongly disagree	0	0
	Neither agree/disagree	1	2
	Agree or strongly agree	7	6
Freestyle	Disagree or strongly disagree	3	2
	Neither agree/disagree	1	2
	Agree or strongly agree	4	4
EXPRESSING YOURSELF – Project theme and Evaluation Star Statement			
Workshop	Scale	Pre-Workshop – No. of Participants	Post Workshop – No. of Participants
Identity	Disagree or strongly disagree	0	0
	Neither agree/disagree	3	3
	Agree or strongly agree	10	10

Snapshot	Disagree or strongly disagree	0	0
	Neither agree/disagree	3	2
	Agree or strongly agree	7	8
Reclaim	Disagree or strongly disagree	1	1
	Neither agree/disagree	2	0
	Agree or strongly agree	7	9
Evolve	Disagree or strongly disagree	4	0
	Neither agree/disagree	3	6
	Agree or strongly agree	2	3
Transform	Disagree or strongly disagree	1	1
	Neither agree/disagree	3	1
	Agree or strongly agree	4	6
Freestyle	Disagree or strongly disagree	0	1
	Neither agree/disagree	3	3
	Agree or strongly agree	5	4

The following table indicates the number of participants that had participated in previous workshops in the series. This was a significant success of the Being a Boy series, highlighting the projects regional recognition and strengthened relationships with education providers. Repeat participation may have also contributed to many workshops not seeing an impact later in the series.

TABLE NINE – Repeat Participants

	Snapshot	Reclaim	Evolve	Transform	Freestyle
No. of repeat participants	10	7	7	6	8
Participants Total	10	13	10	8	10
Percentage of Repeat Participants	100%	54%	70%	75%	80%
Average Percentage of Repeat Participants at each workshop					76%

*Identity workshop discounted from the above table due to being the first workshop in the series.

CREATIVE WORKSHOPS ANALYSIS

WORKSHOP SUMMARIES

The 2025 workshops series saw the following workshops return as part of the series: Identity, Freestyle, and Snapshot. Snapshot was rebranded from previously run workshop, Capture, due to the development of the workshop activities from previous years. Each of the returning workshops followed the same previously set aims with the reviews done on their Evaluation Star statements to correctly align with the workshop's activities and outcomes.

NEW WORKSHOPS

This year, the Being a Boy project launched two new creative workshops: Reclaim (Graphic Design) and Evolve (Acting). Although the series previously included an acting workshop, Evolve worked with a new workshop lead to devise a new set of activities exploring identity through applied theatre techniques. These workshops offer

different creative tools for exploring masculinity and identity, while giving repeat participants the opportunity to try new activities.

RECLAIM

Reclaim was a brand-new workshop for the 2025 series, exploring graphic design through the creation of pictograms, personalised notebooks, and posters to express themes of masculinity and reflect on what is important to the young men. The workshop supported participants in creating their own symbols and posters by hacking existing graphic design. Through varied methods of reproducing their designs, the young men were encouraged to think about how they had reclaimed these materials to create new messages using paper collage and digital tools, adopting a strengths-based approach to support this learning ([TBSP 3](#)).

The workshop used pictograms as a graphical tool, exploring how signs and symbols function as visual representations for brands and companies. Participants explored how pictograms convey meaning and evoke a universal visual language to communicate ideas of identity, whether for a company or to express what is important to an individual. The young men were encouraged to identify key words and themes that describe what it means to them to be a boy, reshaping and reforming images to communicate, challenge, and affirm their masculine identity ([TBSP 4](#)).

EVOLVE

Evolve was a brand-new Acting workshop led by Theatre Practitioner Will Hudson, CEO and Founder of Society Unlimited and researcher and project manager for Voicebox, an organisation that discusses and promotes healthy masculinity in schools and youth settings. This was a two-day theatre workshop combining acting, voice, and movement to explore the pressures facing young men, as well as the fun and freedom of being a boy. Participants were asked to question “what does masculinity mean”, relating this to their own life experiences, celebrating their individual journeys and the experiences that have made them who they are ([TBSP 7](#)).

Across the two days, the young men developed their confidence and understanding of their own masculinity, using acting exercises to investigate the dynamics of masculinity and their relationship with the participants’ sense of authenticity ([TBSP 5](#)). The young men co-created several short performances and explored how masculinity can be expressed creatively as a positive force for change. The performances included their own devised movements inspired by key themes, an original poem entitled ‘The Pressures of Masculinity’, and two scenes exploring challenges that young men encounter in their daily lives.

RETURNING WORKSHOPS

IDENTITY

The workshop introduced participants to creative skills and concepts that challenge gender stereotypes and explore masculinity. The 2025 workshop was led by Christian Azolan, Lecturer in BA (Hons) Fashion Communication, who developed the workshop activities, focusing on opportunities for fashion photography. The workshop continued its collaboration with AUB undergraduate students to enhance engagement in a creative learning environment ([TBSP 9](#)). Through these activities, the young men created personalised caps and T-shirts, forming branding for their identity through fashion.

SNAPSHOT

Renamed from *Capture* in 2025, Snapshot photography workshop adopted a new format. Previously, it focused on studio-based portraits of past, present, and future selves; however, this approach limited participants who lacked access to professional equipment for future independent exploration. The revised workshop explored photography beyond studios, using internal and external environments to develop

documentary-style skills and ways of seeing as a photographer. Participants left with printed portraits and a memory stick of images reflecting frames of masculinity, producing inspiring, thought-provoking self-portraits (TBSP 8).

TRANSFORM

For 2025, Transform developed activities in Special Effect Make-Up, exploring ideas of inner fears with the young men to unpacking stereotypes of masculinity through make-up of how this can be expressed creatively and emotionally (TBSP 4). Participants continued to work in pairs, being collaborative with their designs and creative choices in exploring the Being a Boy themes (TBSP 1). The workshop was also the focus for the 2025 project documentary and collaborated further with male Make-Up staff and students, empowering the young men to feel confident in exploring this art form.

FREESTYLE

The young men explored how the skateboard deck has been used as an art form throughout history and the different ways digital manipulation and transformation of their artwork can communicate a different version of their story and voice (TBSP 7). As part of the workshop activities, the workshop team explored the BA Illustration exhibition with them, examining different illustrative art forms, and developing their skateboard designs to communicate brand design and advertising.

CREATIVE WORKSHOPS ANALYSIS

WORKSHOP ANALYSIS

WORKSHOP EVALUATION STAR DATA

The following tables highlight the data gathered from each workshop when participants completed the workshop Evaluation Stars. To assess the impact the workshops are having across the three project areas, the tables compare the difference between pre- and post-workshop data and the increase shown.

IDENTITY

TABLE TEN – Identity Workshop Evaluation Star Data

IDENTITY						
	<i>Being a Boy: I'm interested in learning where this subject could take me</i>		<i>Being Yourself: I'm confident trying new activities</i>		<i>Expressing Yourself: I feel excited by creative learning environments</i>	
Change in Agreement After Workshop	No. of Participants	%	No. of Participants	%	No. of Participants	%
Decrease	1	8%	2	15%	1	8%
No Change	4	31%	8	62%	10	77%
Increase	8	62%	3	23%	2	15%
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	13	100%	13	100%	13	100%

The table above shows participants' responses to Evaluation Star statements for the Identity workshop. The most significant increase was in the *Being a Boy* project theme, with 62% of participants reporting greater interest in where the subject could lead them. Other themes, *Being Yourself* (62%) and *Expressing Yourself* (77%), showed little change due to high initial agreement, leaving limited scope for growth. This suggests the workshop successfully reinforced existing confidence while sparking new curiosity around masculinity, highlighting its role in deepening engagement and identity exploration.

SNAPSHOT

TABLE ELEVEN – Snapshot Workshop Evaluation Star Data

SNAPSHOT						
	<i>Being a Boy: I have valuable opinions and ideas</i>		<i>Being Yourself: I expect myself to achieve good things</i>		<i>Expressing Yourself: I'm not afraid to voice a change in opinion</i>	
Change in Agreement After Workshop	No. of Participants	%	No. of Participants	%	No. of Participants	%
Decrease	0	0%	3	30%	0	0%
No Change	7	70%	7	70%	9	90%
Increase	3	30%	0	0%	1	10%
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	10	100%	10	100%	10	100%

The table above presents Evaluation Star data from Snapshot participants. While most responses show no change across the three project themes, this reflects participants' high initial agreement in Table Eight, with half of participants already agreeing or strongly agreeing with *Being a Boy* and *Being Yourself*, and seven participants with *Expressing Yourself*. Snapshot built on Identity workshop learning, using collaborative outdoor photography to boost confidence and creative expression. This approach continued to maintain existing confidence while encouraging participants to voice opinions and explore ideas. Future development could consider ensuring that, where workshops use the same creative tool, these are presented with different activities or challenges to encourage varied learning approaches for participants who attend multiple workshops.

RECLAIM

TABLE TWELVE – Reclaim Workshop Evaluation Star Data

RECLAIM						
	<i>Being a Boy: I think that masculinity means different things to different people</i>		<i>Being Yourself: I'm determined</i>		<i>Expressing Yourself: I'm good at things that aren't taught at school</i>	
Change in Agreement After Workshop	No. of Participants	%	No. of Participants	%	No. of Participants	%
Decrease	1	10%	0	0%	0	0%
No Change	8	80%	7	70%	5	50%
Increase	1	10%	3	30%	5	50%
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	10	100%	10	100%	10	100%

The above table shows the data gathered from participants in the brand-new Graphic Design workshop, Reclaim. The data set shows that most participants reported no change for the *Being a Boy* and *Being Yourself* project themes. However, Table Eight shows this is due to a high percentage of the group either agreeing or strongly agreeing with these statements, as well as 54% of participants having previously engaged in workshops within the series. This again suggests that the creative tools are encouraging the young men to maintain their skills and confidence in exploring what masculinity means to different people. *Expressing Yourself* showed half the group increased their agreement with this statement, indicating the workshop introduced unfamiliar tools and techniques that expanded participants' creative expression beyond what they were familiar with in their educational context.

EVOLVE

TABLE THIRTEEN – Evolve Workshop Evaluation Star Data

EVOLVE						
	<i>Being a Boy: I can see how my life is shaped by those around me</i>		<i>Being Yourself: I am confident being myself in front of others</i>		<i>Expressing Yourself: I can talk with those around me about things I find difficult</i>	
Change in Agreement After Workshop	No. of Participants	%	No. of Participants	%	No. of Participants	%
Decrease	1	11%	0	0%	1	11%
No Change	6	67%	1	11%	3	33%
Increase	2	22%	8	89%	5	56%
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	9	100%	9	100%	9	100%

The above table shows the data responses from participants in the Evolve workshop. This workshop worked with a smaller data set but saw the largest impact across the series, with both *Being Yourself* (89%) and *Expressing Yourself* (56%) showing a significant increase in agreement with the Evaluation Star statements. This increase may be due to the extended duration of the workshop and a smaller group size, allowing trusting relationships to build with the practitioner and between the participants when devising the performance, which was inspired by their lived experiences. The *Being a Boy* theme, however, saw a majority reporting no change (67%); however, six of the nine participants were already in agreement or strong agreement with this statement, indicating that the Evaluation Star scale may not have allowed sufficient room for growth.

TRANSFORM

TABLE FOURTEEN – Transform Workshop Evaluation Star Data

TRANSFORM								
	<i>Being a Boy 1: I think that masculinity means different things to different people</i>		<i>Being a Boy 2: I think men can do anything....even study makeup</i>		<i>Being Yourself: I feel confident when learning new things</i>		<i>Expressing Yourself: I'm comfortable asking for help when I need it</i>	
Change in Agreement After Workshop	No. of Participants	%	No. of Participants	%	No. of Participants	%	No. of Participants	%
Decrease	0	0%	1	13%	4	50%	1	13%
No Change	5	63%	7	88%	4	50%	5	63%
Increase	3	38%	0	0%	0	0%	2	25%
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	8	100%	8	100%	8	100%	8	100%

The table above reflects the data from the Transform workshop. The workshop worked with the smallest data set, with six of the eight participants having previously taken part in workshops across the series. This workshop included two statements in the *Being a Boy* project theme, underpinning key activities and aims when exploring make-up as a creative tool for expression with young men. This project theme saw a high proportion reporting no change due to seven participants either agreeing or strongly agreeing with both statements prior to the workshop. For *Being Yourself*, there was an even split of participants reporting a decrease or no change in confidence when trying new things. Interestingly, three participants who reported a decrease came from the same education provider and worked in pairs. Working alongside peers may have limited their comfort levels in trying new things, aiming to fit in with their peer group.

FREESTYLE

TABLE FIFTEEN – Freestyle Workshop Evaluation Star Data

FREESTYLE						
	<i>Being a Boy: I can see how my life is shaped by my experiences</i>		<i>Being Yourself: I feel more comfortable meeting new people</i>		<i>Expressing Yourself: Learning new things can be fun</i>	
Change in Agreement After Workshop	No. of Participants	%	No. of Participants	%	No. of Participants	%
Decrease	0	0%	1	13%	2	25%
No Change	7	88%	6	75%	6	75%
Increase	1	13%	1	13%	0	0%
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	8	100%	8	100%	8	100%

The table above displays the data gathered from the Freestyle workshop and its impact. Due to missing data, eight of the ten participants from the workshop are included in the table. The data reflect patterns seen across other workshops in the series, with a majority showing no change due to participants either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statements prior to the workshop activities. For the participant who did show an increase, they were a consistent attendee across the series, engaging in all workshops. This makes the increased response in the *Being a Boy* and *Being Yourself* themes significant, as it reflects how repeat participation can support the development of interpersonal skills and a deeper understanding of project activities.

PARTICIPANT DATA ANALYSIS

REPEAT AND INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANT DATA

ANALYSING THE DATA – PROJECT THEMES

Each workshop measures outcomes that are linked to the TBSPs, which in turn, aim to remove barriers for boys and young men in their learning. The Being a Boy workshops mobilised creative mediums to explore themes related to identity, masculinity and educational success.

BEING A BOY PROJECT THEME – (TRANSFORM AND RECLAIM)

Being a Boy is a central theme within the workshop series, focusing on deepening participants’ understanding of masculinity and sharing personal challenges. When comparing data from Transform and Reclaim, differences in impact are evident despite similarities in workshop activities, particularly in their shared focus on re-branding masculinity and exploring what it can mean to young men. Although Transform included an additional statement within the Being a Boy project theme, both workshops shared the statement “I think masculinity means different things to different people”, aiming to increase awareness of how masculinity can be reshaped beyond traditional notions.

The Transform workshop continued to utilise make-up as a creative tool to challenge young men to discover new ways of expressing identity, using creative practice to unpack these themes. As make-up is often viewed as a stereotypically female tool, many participants had not previously experimented with it. The workshop introduced male make-up artists as reference points to challenge assumptions about how men can express identity. In 2025, activities included creating zombie looks, encouraging participants to explore inner fears and how these might manifest creatively. Participants explored fears ranging from animals to anxieties about the future, including one participant who used split-face make-up to represent challenges around emotional

expression. This illustrates how creative tools enable young men to communicate internal struggles linked to masculinity ([TBSP 4](#)).

Reclaim also focused on creative tools to re-brand and visually express identity, using pictograms to create logos representing masculinity. By identifying passions, interests, and values, participants developed visual representations that reflected individual interpretations of masculinity. This strengths-based approach supported discussion of what is important to participants while exploring how masculinity operates within graphic design. Although impact was not fully reflected in the data due to high initial agreement, the workshop produced a diverse range of logos, reinforcing masculinity as personal and individual.

BEING YOURSELF PROJECT THEME – (SNAPSHOT AND IDENTITY)

In addition to supporting young men in expressing what masculinity means to them, the workshops aimed to build participant confidence. This was achieved through encouraging individual sign-ups, mixing young men from different education providers, and using creative tools to explore challenging topics. Both Snapshot and Identity incorporated group-based activities, using photography to explore confidence and creative self-representation.

In Identity, participants explored fashion and styling, using photography to communicate masculinity through curated looks. Personalised caps and t-shirts were used as an accessible introduction to fashion and identity, producing immediate and engaging results. Participants incorporated designs linked to personal passions, hobbies, or their own fashion brands. One participant added the phrase “Speak Up” to his design, linking masculinity to emotional expression and mental health awareness. While this activity was consistently engaging, later moodboard and collage exercises appeared less connected to participants’ understanding of masculinity and fashion, leading to reduced engagement. Although moodboards were later used to inform a group fashion shoot, the earlier disconnect may have contributed to 62% of participants reporting no change in confidence when trying new activities.

The Snapshot photography workshop approached confidence from a different perspective, shifting away from studio-based work toward documentary-style photography in indoor and outdoor environments. This aimed to show participants that powerful self-expression does not rely on professional studios. Participants demonstrated greater freedom of movement and experimentation, producing dynamic and playful images. However, previous studio-based themes of past, present, and future selves were less explicit, which may explain why some participants reported a decrease in agreement with the statement “I expect myself to achieve good things.” Additionally, end-of-session photo selection and printing limited opportunities for structured reflection and discussion of achievements.

EXPRESSING YOURSELF PROJECT THEME – (EVOLVE AND FREESTYLE)

Developing young men’s ability to express themselves and build resilience is central to the project, with creative approaches used to support confidence in sharing personal responses. Performative workshops can present challenges, as participants often work with unfamiliar peers, navigate group dynamics, and share feelings about masculinity through performance.

The Evolve workshop was delivered over two days to allow time for trust to develop and confidence to build. Activities were introduced through acting games, providing accessible and engaging ways for participants to get to know each other before exploring deeper themes linked to masculinity ([TBS P 7](#)). Young men told stories through devised characters and created movement sequences in response to their own descriptions of masculinity, allowing for expression without reliance on spoken word ([TBS P 5](#)). Combining scripted acting with devised theatre techniques resulted in a 56% increase in agreement with the statement, “I can talk with those around me about things I find difficult,” demonstrating the positive impact of performance on self-expression and resilience.

The Freestyle workshop explored self-expression through contemporary illustration, using skateboards as creative surfaces and digital tools to develop ideas. Participants worked within illustration studios and visited the Summer Shows to experience a range of illustration practices. While this broadened understanding of creative environments, the core activity of developing personal designs remained consistent with previous years. This open-ended approach supported a respectful and collaborative atmosphere but proved challenging for some participants who may prefer more structured, step-by-step activities. Although 63% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that learning new things can be fun, this led to a majority reporting no change (75%) when measuring workshop impact ([TBSP 9](#)).

THE QUALITATIVE TURN

EVALUATION STAR QUALITATIVE DATA – ‘BEING A BOY IS’ STATEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Inspired by the *Being a Boy Is* poem activity devised in the 2024 Character workshop, the 2025 Evaluation Stars were developed to include qualitative data. Participants were asked to “finish the sentence: Being a boy is...”. The question was designed to gather insight into how young men see themselves and their masculinity prior to engaging in workshop activities. The young men were guided to write a single word or short phrase, focusing on their immediate response based on how they felt at the time.

ANALYSIS RESPONSES

Although the question generated some interesting responses, many participants found the task confusing and were unsure what to write, with several choosing to leave it blank. When the activity was introduced in the Character 2024 workshop, participants had taken part in a two-day acting experience, allowing time to build trust and relationships. This process later resulted in a devised poem, with each participant contributing a line beginning “being a boy is,” producing insightful and creative reflections on the pressures young men face in relation to masculinity.

In contrast, placing the activity at the start of workshops limited opportunities for reflection and emotional awareness, making similar outcomes difficult to achieve. While confidence was explored across all workshops, the performative and extended nature of the Character workshop enabled more considered responses following sustained reflection.

Although the data did not capture in-depth reflections, it highlighted participants’ excitement for the workshop activities, with “fun” being the most common response. This suggests a positive relationship with identity and engagement in the day and may also indicate that some participants have not yet identified or articulated the challenges associated with masculinity, which the workshops aim to explore further.

Other responses such as “fun but stressful,” “fun but annoying,” and “tiring but exciting” demonstrate emerging self-awareness, with the use of “but” reflecting an ability to hold positive and challenging feelings simultaneously. One participant responded, “being happy?”, suggesting uncertainty around happiness as part of masculine identity.

Responses such as “challenging” or “really bad to me” indicate participants engaging with the workshops to better understand these pressures, while blank or uncertain answers like “I don’t know” may reflect a lack of confidence to express emotions, aligning with wider discussions around emotional masking among young men.

“BEING A BOY IS...” WORD CLOUD



The above image shows all the responses from the young men that completed the sentence ‘Being a boy is’ on the pre workshop Evaluation Stars across the series. The word cloud indicates repeated responses through the size of the words with “Fun” and “Good” being the most frequent responses across the series. Not included are those that left the question blank.

REPEAT PARTICIPANTS RESPONSES

TABLE SIXTEEN – Repeat Participants ‘Being a Boy Is...’ First and Last Responses

‘Being a Boy is...’ Evaluation Star Responses				
Participants that engaged in 4 or more workshops in the series				
Participant No.	1	2	3	4
First Workshop of the series response	Fun	Being what you want to be!	Fun	Being a Boy
Last workshop of the series response	Challenging	Being you	Boring	Being a Boy

With many young men attending multiple workshops in the 2025 series, the project was able to build strong relationships and gain longitudinal insight into participants’ evolving views on masculinity and identity. Repeat engagement enabled further analysis of the “being a boy is” responses, highlighting how sustained participation can influence attitudes and self-reflection.

The table above presents responses from participants who attended four or more of the six workshops. Comparing responses from their first and final workshops helps identify changes over time. Participant 1 initially gave a common positive response, which may have reflected either genuine feeling or peer influence within the workshop environment. Although they attended five workshops, they left the question blank in several sessions, later explaining uncertainty about what to write. In their final workshop, they responded with “challenging,” suggesting a deeper understanding of how traditional masculinity can have negative impacts (TBSP 4).

Participant 2 also showed change, moving from an externally focused response linked to aspirations to “being you” in their final workshop, indicating increased confidence in identity and self-worth (TBSP 3). Participant 3’s final response, “boring,” was more negative; however, facilitators noted this may have been influenced by disappointment related to forgotten personal work they had intended to bring to show the workshop lead, showing a care and connection of mutual respect built with the team. Participant 4’s response remained unchanged throughout, which may indicate difficulty engaging with the evaluation task or a stronger preference for practical workshop activities.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- **Shifts in understanding of masculinity over time**
Several participants demonstrated a progression from surface-level or immediate positive responses to more reflective and critical understandings of masculinity, suggesting increased awareness of how traditional norms can be challenging or limiting.
- **Mixed Emotional Experiences of Masculine Identity**
Participants’ responses reflected a balance of positive engagement and underlying pressure. Responses such as “fun but stressful,” highlight enjoyment and ownership of identity alongside recognition of emotional and social pressures.
- **Recognition of Struggle and Challenge**
Some responses, such as “challenging”, highlighted genuine difficulties with masculine identity. These responses suggest the workshops provided a space where participants were beginning to confront and explore these challenges.
- **Engagement and Anticipation**
Despite limited depth in responses about masculinity, the frequent use of “fun” indicates positive engagement and openness to participation.
- **Masking, Silence, and Confidence Barriers**
Blank or “I don’t know” responses may reflect more than confusion; they may indicate discomfort or a lack of confidence in expressing emotions. This aligns with masking and reluctance to openly share feelings that participants face.

FOCUS GROUP

INTRODUCTION TO THE FOCUS GROUP

In January 2026 the Senior Research and Evaluation Officer met with five of the young men who participated in workshop series, after the Transform Documentary Preview Event, to learn more about their experiences in a 30-minute focus group at AUB.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The focus group discussion provides strong evidence that the *Being a Boy* workshops supported the boys’ personal development across the three thematic areas: Being a Boy (Knowledge), Being Yourself (Confidence/ Self Efficacy), and Expressing Yourself (Skills). Participants described the workshops as enjoyable, confidence building, and different from school, with several boys articulating meaningful personal gains.

BEING A BOY – KNOWLEDGE

Participants showed early but emerging awareness of how gender expectations shape boys' behaviour and emotional expression. One participant explicitly recognised the value of challenging stereotypes through the makeup workshop, noting that it demonstrated that "boys can [wear makeup] as well," reflecting increased awareness of restrictive norms around masculinity.

When asked deeper questions about identity, such as "being a boy is...", participants often responded with humour or brief answers, suggesting some discomfort or unfamiliarity with articulating emotional or reflective insights. Several boys described the question as "deep," indicating that the workshops may have introduced them to reflective thinking not typically encouraged in their usual environments.

Overall, the discussion suggests that while participants may not yet fully articulate the societal pressures on boys, the workshops created space for them to begin exploring these ideas.

BEING YOURSELF - CONFIDENCE AND SELF EFFICACY

Participants consistently described the workshops as enjoyable, relaxed, and confidence building. One boy clearly articulated a personal shift, explaining that he "gained confidence that [he] didn't have when [he] walked into the room," particularly around performing and speaking in front of others. This aligns strongly with the project's aims around empowerment and self-efficacy.

The boys also felt respected and treated more like young adults than in school. They highlighted the smaller group sizes, the supportive adults, and the absence of pressure to answer questions immediately. This environment appeared to help them feel valued and more willing to participate.

Several boys also noted that meeting new people was a positive experience, and that they "got on with them pretty well," suggesting increased social confidence.

EXPRESSING YOURSELF – SKILLS

The workshops provided opportunities for hands on, practical learning that participants contrasted favourably with school. They described the sessions as "more practical," "more chilled," and offering "more focus on us." This suggests the workshops supported independence, self-determination, and engagement with creative tasks.

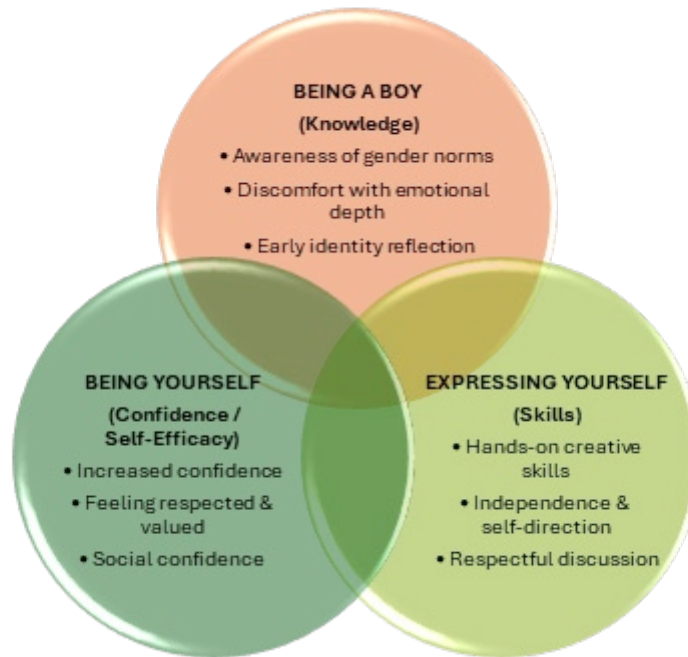
Participants also demonstrated respect for others' views, particularly when discussing meeting new people and listening to different perspectives. Although some boys were distracted at times, the overall tone of the discussion showed a willingness to share ideas and respond to questions.

Several boys used the makeup materials at home after the workshop, creating scars or effects for Halloween. This indicates that the skills learned were not only understood but applied independently beyond the workshop setting.

CONCLUSION

The focus group suggests that the *Being a Boy* workshops successfully created a supportive, engaging environment where boys could explore identity, build confidence, and develop creative and interpersonal skills. While some participants struggled to articulate deeper reflections on masculinity, the workshops appear to have laid important groundwork for future conversations about gender, emotions, and self-expression.

VISUAL SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP LINKED TO PROJECT THEMES

**BEING A BOY RESEARCH OUTPUTS 2025**

Alongside measuring the impact of the workshop series on young men in the Dorset area, the project also highlights and celebrates the impact of this work across the sector through dissemination via publication and at conferences. The following outputs demonstrate the impact of the 2025 Being a Boy series.

CONFERENCE PAPERS:

- Ball, E. (2026, January 15). Being a Boy – The Project so Far. Manchester Metropolitan University and Greater Manchester Higher Widening Participation Professional Network, Online
- Ball, E. (2025, September). Being a Boy: Transform. Boys' Impact Conference, Manchester

PROJECT CONSULTATION

In addition to contributing papers, the Being a Boy team has also been approached to contribute to wider research and consultation on projects, using Being a Boy as an example of best practice.

UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH PROJECT CONSULTATION

The University of Portsmouth, part of Boys' Impact, approached AUB to collaborate on the development of their own Being a Boy project, exploring how to take the project on the road through a skills-based workshop. A working group was established to support the creation of the project, with Kate Venables, Access and Participation Manager and former Being a Boy project lead, joining the development meetings to provide insight into the project and its use of the Taking Boys' Seriously Principles throughout workshop-based activities. The Being a Boy project continues to be a collaborative outreach programme, supporting the University of Portsmouth to construct their own version and establishing the project as a model of best practice for outreach and engagement when supporting young men.

CONTRIBUTION TO DOCTORAL THESIS RESEARCH

The Being a Boy team were approached by Francesca Plom, a postgraduate researcher at University of East Anglia. As part of her doctoral thesis, Francesca is researching how Higher Education Institutions have responded to national policy changes following the pandemic, and how these changes influence work targeting boys from low socio-economic backgrounds. The study focuses on widening participation initiatives that specifically aim to support boys from low socio-economic backgrounds, and the policy landscape surrounding this work.

As a contribution to this research, Francesca interviewed Eleanor Ball and Kate Venables about their experience of delivering the Being a Boy project and supporting young men across Dorset post-pandemic. The interviews, conducted both jointly and separately, will be used as part of the wider doctoral research and covered the aims of the project, perceived barriers faced by young men in education, and how the project has developed through the use of evaluative tools and progression opportunities.

BEING A BOY 2025 CELEBRATION

The inclusion of the Being a Boy Celebration is an important element of the project, aiming to celebrate the young men's creative achievements with their supporters, families, and education providers. The event also provides an opportunity to champion the voices of young men, highlighting the creative messages behind their artwork, stories, and the challenges they face. The event usually marks the launch of the next Being a Boy workshop series and shares key project outputs, including the latest workshop documentary and anthology.

Due to severe weather warnings and local flooding, the Being a Boy Celebration for the 2025 workshop series was cancelled for safety reasons. Although the event could not take place, the latest project documentary, *Being a Boy: Transform*, was launched online, with bookers invited to watch remotely as a virtual celebration. The anthologies were also posted to all the young men and their supporters to recognise and celebrate their engagement with the project.

As the Being a Boy Celebration is a cross-institutional collaborative event, and due to participants' education priorities, it was not possible to reschedule this year. However, the 2025 Celebration saw a lower rate of bookings compared with 2024, when an exhibition format allowed invitations to previous cohorts. While it is not possible to host a yearly exhibition, the team will explore alternative celebration formats and timings to better support engagement.

Although an in-person celebration was not possible for the 2025 series, the *Being a Boy: Transform* documentary was shared across project networks to celebrate participants virtually. As of 20 March 2026, the documentary has received 86 views on Arts University Bournemouth's YouTube channel (reflecting the same number of bookings for the event itself), continuing to amplify young men's voices and achievements.

MOVING FORWARD

Although the Being a Boy Celebration has previously been well attended, supporters and repeat participants are now familiar with the event format. As the 2025 Celebration could not go ahead, the team plans to use this opportunity to reflect on how the event can more closely support workshop outcomes and provide young men with meaningful opportunities to share their experiences with supporters.

A particular challenge has been the timing of the Celebration. As young men return from summer holidays and begin a new academic year, including starting GCSEs, engagement with further project activity can become more difficult. The team will review options for hosting the Celebration directly after the final workshop, before the summer term ends, while experiences remain fresh and opportunities for connection are stronger.

The team will also evaluate whether the event format could be less formal. While a theatre-based celebration offers a space for recognition and achievement, the formality may be less engaging for some young men and less aligned with the collaborative atmosphere of the summer workshops.

Event timing will also be reviewed as although weekday evenings have supported parent and carer attendance, education priorities and commitments can be a barrier. The team is therefore exploring a weekend Celebration, aligned with the Festival of Creativity on campus in July 2026.

HOUSE OF COMMONS EXHIBITION RECEPTION AND TRANSFORM DOCUMENTARY

In addition to the planned Celebration event, the Being a Boy project was invited to share an exhibition at the House of Commons for 2nd – 6th March 2026 in the Upper Waiting Hall. The exhibition included highlights from 2022 onwards, including artwork and images from the 2025 series. The exhibition was sponsored by Labour MP Jessica Toale, and the exhibition also hosted a reception which was attended by David Lammy, Deputy Prime Minister who gave an address at the event. Further attendees included Labour Councillor George Farquhar, Deputy Mayor of Bournemouth, and Councillor Mark Howell, Mayor of Poole, members of Dorset Boys Impact Steering Group and National Hubs as well as a host of MPs, Lords, and dignitaries with over 80 attendees across the evening reception. Combining these numbers with booked attendees for the Celebration event and Being a Boy: Transform documentary viewings, brings an estimated total of 254 supporters of the young men across these events.

The event was a huge step forward in national recognition for the young men that have taken part in the project and of the project being a continued example of best practice to engage meaningfully with young men. The news of the event was further shared through local Dorset publications along with Guild HE.

In addition to the planned Celebration event, the *Being a Boy* project was invited to share an exhibition at the House of Commons from 2–6 March 2026 in the Upper Waiting Hall. The exhibition included highlights from 2022 onwards, including artwork and images from the 2025 series. The exhibition was sponsored by Labour MP Jessica Toale, and included a reception attended by David Lammy, Deputy Prime Minister, who gave an address at the event providing a personal account to the young men present of how creativity aided the discovery of his own identity. Further attendees included Labour Councillor George Farquhar, Deputy Mayor of Bournemouth, and Councillor Mark Howell, Mayor of Poole, as well as members of the Dorset Boys' Impact Steering Group and National Hubs, alongside a host of MPs, Lords, and dignitaries, with over 80 attendees at the evening reception. When combined with booked attendees for the Celebration event and *Being a Boy: Transform* documentary viewings, this brings an estimated total of 254 supporters celebrating the voices of young men across these events.

The event was a significant step forward in achieving national recognition for the young men who have taken part in the project and for the project itself as an ongoing example of best practice in meaningfully engaging young men. News of the event was also shared through a ⁶press release from Arts University Bournemouth as well as shared local Dorset publications and Guild HE.

“ I am proud to sponsor the Being a Boy exhibition in Parliament and to champion the remarkable young men whose work is on display this week. Projects like this demonstrate the power of the arts to build confidence, strengthen identity and open up new pathways for boys who too often face entrenched disadvantage...

⁶ Arts University Bournemouth (2026) *Being a Boy project launches exhibition at House of Commons*. Available at: <https://aub.ac.uk/latest/being-a-boy-project-launches-exhibition-at-house-of-commons> (Accessed: 4 March 2026)

...This Government is committed to improving outcomes for men and boys, from addressing educational inequalities that disproportionately affect white working-class boys and those eligible for Free School Meals, to delivering a stronger focus on men's health and mental wellbeing as part of our wider health strategy. **Initiatives such as Being a Boy show what is possible when we listen to young men and boys, invest in early intervention, and create spaces where they can explore who they are."**

- *Jessica Toale, Labour MP Bournemouth East*

In addition to professionals and members of the House of Commons, young men who had engaged in the project and their supporters were also invited. Among those invited were participants who engaged at the start of the project in 2022, who have remained in contact with the team and their education supporters. One participant from the 2024 series delivered a poetry reading to guests at the event and has since gone on to engage in the team's Post-16 outreach project, All Access AUB, and now holds an offer to study an undergraduate course at AUB.

The young men were also offered a bespoke tour of the House of Commons, delivered by Jessica Toale's team, along with a private viewing of the exhibition before guests arrived. The young men and their supporters expressed immense appreciation for the opportunity, with some participants having never visited London or travelled by train before the visit, providing a unique and memorable experience to share with their supporters.

"What an eye-opening experience for the boys and what wonderful rooms to open them to what could be. [My son] took great pride in meeting our Deputy Prime Minister and hearing his story and seeing someone who looks like his grandfather in such a position was a real moment for him!"

- *Parent of 2023-2025 Participant*

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BEING A BOY 2025

Evaluation of the 2025 series gave us five recommendations to focus on in planning the 2026 series:

1. AUB is committed to delivering six workshops as part of the Access and Participation Plan
2. Explore opportunities to develop a new workshop with Film course and Innovation Studio.
3. Explore opportunities to run a bespoke workshop with an education provider.
4. Refine the Being a Boy Evaluation Star
 - a. Ensure post workshop evaluation feedback questions are clear to allow participants opportunity to leave additional comments providing further qualitative data.
 - b. Change the scale of the Evaluation Star to a wider range to allow opportunities for increases in scoring.
 - c. Reflect on the statements assigned to each workshop, ensuring they are linked to the workshop aims and activities.
5. Provide training opportunities for Being a Boy workshop leads to develop their understanding of the challenges young men face and how this could be supported within their creative activities.
6. Explore reformatting the Being a Boy Celebration, moving it to the summer to allow further opportunities for engagement.

7. Embed focus group interviews as part of the workshop activities for participants that self-elect to provide further feedback.

SUMMARY

The Being a Boy Project in 2025 was an effectively targeted programme engaging young men from underrepresented backgrounds in higher education, including those eligible for Free School Meals as part of the project's eligibility criteria. The creative outcomes from the workshops continue to reflect how creativity can unlock conversations, stories, and ideas, providing a supportive space for young men to engage with their masculinity and identity. With growing recognition, including a House of Commons exhibition, the project continues to be positioned as an example of best practice, championing the voices of working-class young men.

The aim of the Being a Boy project is to “increase the GCSE attainment of boys in Dorset who are eligible for Free School Meals, working with educational partners to close the attainment gap for this group.” This strategic intervention is a key objective of the Access and Participation Plan 2024–25 to 2027–28, with evaluative tools, including focus groups, shaping the ongoing development of the project and learning directly from young men's experiences.

The ongoing development of the Being a Boy Evaluation Star has enabled the collection of richer qualitative data, with plans to reshape the questions to provide clearer understanding of participant responses. Building on findings from focus group evaluation, the 2026 workshops will look to include informal, focus-group-style interviews, giving participants the option to self-select when booking onto workshops.

