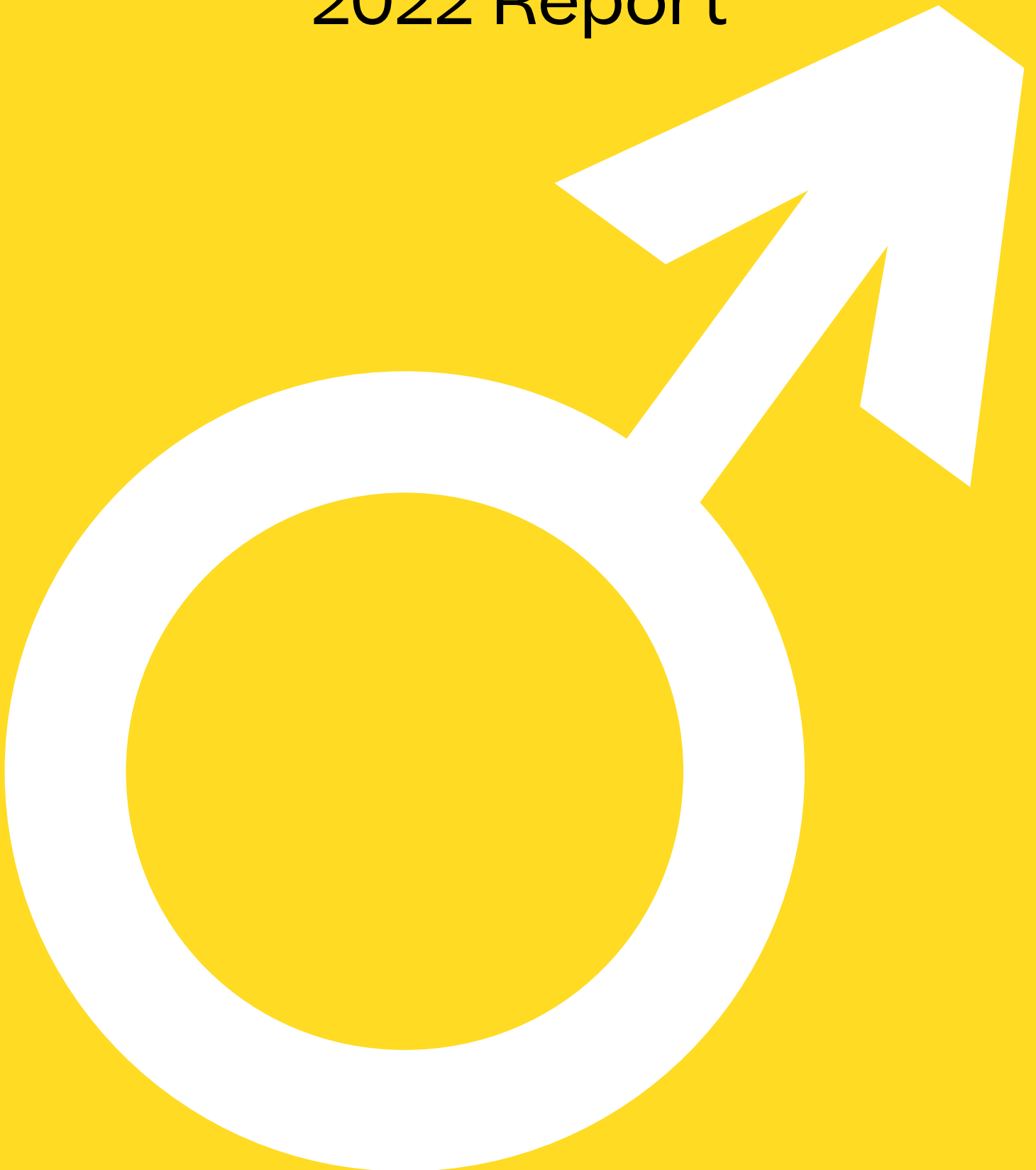


ARTS UNIVERSITY BOURNEMOUTH

Being a Boy

2022 Report



Contents

02 Executive Summary

03 Introduction

04 Rationale

06 Objectives

07 Outputs

08 Teacher CPD Series

09 Being a Boy: with author Mark Roberts

09 Being a Boy: with Heidi and James from Ripples Wellbeing

10 Being a Boy: the weight of inequality

10 Recommendations for Being a Boy 2023 activity

11 Student Facing Opportunities

12 Workshop attendance and engagement

14 Being a Boy: documentary production workshop

14 Being a Boy: Empower

16 Being a Boy: Capture

16 Being a Boy: Lift Off

18 Key issues for consideration

18 Workshop practicalities

18 Trying to capture evidence of impact

19 Confidence

20 Project outputs

20 Research

21 Impact

21 Recommendations for Being a Boy 2023 activity

22 HE Practitioners and Researchers Conference

23 Feedback from the conference

24 Recommendations for Being a Boy 2023 activity

24 Summary

Executive Summary

The Being a Boy Project 2022 was an effectively targeted project that engaged boys on Free School Meals, a key underrepresented demographic at Arts University Bournemouth (AUB).

All the participants involved were from a target group and most met multiple widening participation criteria.

The student facing workshops created the conditions for the participants to express themselves and share their experiences, which enabled the project to meet its key stated aims.

The teacher/advisor CPD series delivered as part of the project, engaged over 400 professionals across the three webinars.

It highlighted the appetite for an increased understanding of how best to support working class boys' attainment in the education sector.

The HE practitioner conference which took place at the University on 8 September saw over 80 participants, from 55 different universities and organisations engage in discussions around working-class boys' attainment, firmly positioning AUB as a driving force in this area of work for the HE sector.

This document highlights the key findings from the Being a Boy 2022 activity and recommendations for future iterations of the project.

400

Professionals engaged across the three webinars

80

Over 80 conference participants

55

Universities and organisations engaged in the discussion

Introduction

The Being a Boy Project was a new pre-16 Access and Participation initiative to support working-class boys at AUB. Activity was developed to meet the challenge of **supporting boys' educational attainment** on a local and national level in the 2021-22 academic year.

Playing to our strengths as a world leading provider of creative Higher Education, the project mobilises AUB's expertise to provide mechanisms for students to explore issues relating to **masculinity, identity,** and the **educational success** of young men.



Rationale

For the last decade, discourse on the substantial gap in rates of progression to higher education for working-class boys has been a regular focus of politicians, educators, and those with an interest in equitable access to educational opportunity.

Yet despite a persistent framing and re-framing of the issue in media and political conversation, gaps in GCSE attainment remain significant, with just 20% of boys on Free School Meals achieving a grade 9-5 in GCSE Maths and English in the Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole Local Authority area. Reflecting this, rates of progression to higher education for the group remain low. In 2022, the proportion of white boys on Free Schools Meals progressing to HE was 14%.

In 2019, an Access and Participation Plan review by the Office for Students suggested that of the 838 targets set relating to university access, success, and progression by providers, only 11 gave specific mention to white working-class males.

20%

Of boys receiving Free School Meals achieved grade 9-5 in GCSE Maths and English in the BCP area

14%

Of white boys on Free School Meals progressed to HE

As such, two things were clear. Firstly, there is an entrenched issue with gaps in GCSE outcomes and HE progression for working-class boys. Secondly, there is very little taking place across the HE sector to address it.

In light of the above, in 2021 the Access and Participation team at AUB put together a project proposal for a range of activities designed to address the issue. However, what quickly became apparent was a distinct lack of evidence surrounding best practice for engagement with working-class boys, or the type of activity that could work to address some of the embedded issues pertaining to gaps in attainment and progression.

Rationale

The team engaged with some fantastic research by academics such as Diane Reay, Mike Ward, Nicola Ingram, and Steve Roberts in the development phase of the project to develop a greater understanding of working-class boys' negotiations of identity, masculinity and educational success. However, it did little to establish the needs of the young working-class men in the University's local context.

The team were also aware that all the reading in the world pales in comparison to the power of taking the time to actually listen. To avoid rolling out activity 'to' groups based on stereotypical assumptions, and instead begin working with them to build relationships and understanding.

In January 2022, AUB launched our Being a Boy project, mobilising creative subjects such as Creative Writing, Photography and Dance as vehicles for young men to express what being a boy means to them.

The rationale for the project was that constituted an exercise in research. An opportunity to use creative subjects to provide space for learning with our young men, before tailoring something more targeted based on the learning and reflections which had taken place.



Objectives

- 1 Develop the knowledge**
of teachers and advisers in issues which contribute to the disparity of educational attainment and Higher Education access in young men.
- 2 Facilitate**
an opportunity for young men to creatively engage with issues relating to masculinity which may impact upon their educational success.
- 3 Increase confidence**
of young people in mobilising creative mechanisms to express thoughts, feelings, and experiences.
- 4 Develop skills**
of the young participants in critical reflection.
- 5 Create**
a mechanism to share findings/reflections from the project with educators locally and nationally.

The short-term objective

of the project was quite simple: to provide a platform for the working-class boys engaging in the project to tell people what being a boy in Bournemouth in 2022 meant to them and to discover how this influenced their future educational orientations.

The medium-long term objective

was to mobilise that learning to inform a robust, evidence led, targeted project for inclusion in the University's new Access and Participation Plan.

Outputs

- A series of three virtual teacher CPD sessions
- Production of a documentary containing the work of the young people involved across all three activities for dissemination to external stakeholders
- A series of three subject-specific on campus activities for young men at AUB
- Higher Education and Researcher Practitioner Conference



Teacher CPD Series

AUB delivered the Being a Boy Teacher and Advisor CPD series in partnership with the University of Portsmouth and University of Winchester. The series had an overall reach of over 400 teachers and advisors, demonstrating a clear demand for this type of development opportunity.

400+

Teachers and advisors
attended the CPD series

Being a Boy: with author Mark Roberts

AUB hosted the first in the series on 9 February 2022 16.00-17.00 with Mark Roberts, author of *Boys Don't Try?: Rethinking Masculinity in School*, a leading expert in issues relating to boys and educational success. Mark provided invaluable insights into what it's like to be a boy in contemporary classrooms and what steps we can take as educators to support them.

318 teachers and advisors registering online for the event; with 150 attending live and 150 accessing the recording post-event.

318

Teachers and advisors
registered online for the event

150

Teachers attended live

150

Teachers accessed the
recording post-event

Mark Roberts said

“To tackle gender attainment gaps, it’s going to take a collective effort. Teachers, academics, parents and, of course, boys themselves will need to strive to overcome the key barriers to academic success. I’m delighted that AUB have facilitated this session for teachers and advisors and am looking forward to sharing some of my solutions to ‘The Boy Question’.”

Lucy Hensher, Teacher at Thomas Hardy, School said

“Some of the strategies suggested in the Being a Boy training I found I could certainly implement into my teaching such as positive reinforcement to ensure conflict is deescalated quickly and learning can begin. This might ensure more boys staying in lessons, having more positive interactions with teachers, and therefore rewriting some of those labels that are all too often given to them from a very early age.”.

Being a Boy: with Heidi and James from Ripples Wellbeing

The University of Portsmouth hosted the second event on 24 March 2022 16.00-17.00 with Heidi and James from Ripples Wellbeing, who shared their own stories of turning negative experiences to positive ones. The pair also provided advice and tools that can be utilised in your own role to support the mental wellbeing of young people.

106 teachers and advisors registered online for the event with approximately 30 joining for the live event.

106

Teachers and advisors
registered online for the event

30

Joined the live event

Being a Boy: the weight of inequality

The University of Winchester hosted the final event in the series, *Being a Boy: the weight of inequality* on 15 June 2022 16.00-17.30 with 50 teachers and advisors joining the live event.

The session explored the implications of socioeconomic inequality on the chances of boys’ educational ‘success’. The session examined the complex intersections of masculinity, inequality and educational expectations which influence boys’ engagement in formal educational spaces.

The panel discussion was hosted by Dr Alex Blower, Access and Participation Manager at AUB, with expert guest panellists

- **Professor Nicola Ingram**, Director of Manchester Metropolitan University’s Education and Social Research Institute and author of the book *Working Class Boys and Educational Success*
- **Dr Craig Johnston**, Senior Lecturer at the University of Winchester, and author of *Where are all the men? Working-class males and care-based degrees*
- **Dr Andrew Hamilton**, Research Associate at Ulster University. Andrew’s work includes *Taking Boys’ Seriously* a longitudinal piece of research which began as a funded project by the Northern Irish Government in 2012

Recommendations for Being a Boy 2023 activity

- To increase collaborative nature of activity and reach while creating a sustainable CPD series by handing over responsibility to the regional hubs of the Boys Impact Coalition.
- AUB’s Being a Boy activity has supported the founding of the Boys Impact Coalition and with Dr Alex Blower as co-lead of the South West Regional Hub AUB will be able to feed into and support future activities, while sharing the workload of hosting future boy’s attainment CPD related activities.

Student Facing Opportunities

The Being a Boy project included four student facing workshops, which provided a creative channel for participants to **reflect on what being a young man means** and their own lived experiences.

The workshops were an innovative mechanism to conduct an exploration of the possible implications for boys’ future health, happiness, and educational success, with the aim of

- Being a listening activity to learn about the boy’s experiences
- **Facilitating an opportunity** for young men to creatively engage with issues relating to masculinity which may impact upon their educational success
- **Increasing confidence** of young men in mobilising creative mechanisms to express thoughts, feelings, and experiences
- **Developing skills** of the young men in critical reflection
- Showing the boys the breadth of opportunity for creative engagement



Three participants attended all three workshops. The rest attended a single workshop. The learners all met the AUB widening participation eligibility criteria and only two participants across the three workshops were not on Free School Meals suggesting the project was effectively targeted.

18 unique learners attended workshops

Documentary workshop

5 attendees

Mainstream School: 0

Alternative Provision: 5

Third Sector Partners: 0

Free School Meals: 100%

Lift Off

4 attendees

Mainstream School: 1

Alternative Provision: 3

Third Sector Partners: 1

Free School Meals: 100%

Empower

11 attendees

Mainstream School: 7

Alternative Provision: 4

Third Sector Partners: 1

Free School Meals: 100%

Capture

10 attendees

Mainstream School: 5

Alternative Provision: 5

Third Sector Partners: 1

Free School Meals: 80%

Across the project, students from Alternative Educational settings engaged not only in multiple workshops, but as active participants in the documentary. The group engaged in a specialist documentary workshop run by the film school prior to the three subject-based sessions and were encouraged to be active contributors in the documentary’s production. As a result, the participants were on first name terms with the production crew and comfortable, enthusiastic participants in the production.

The team worked closely with the participants trusted adults to explain the project and research the workshop artefacts would be feeding into. In particular, with the Careers Lead at one of the Alternative Provisions and Pupil Premium Lead at a school. The University also worked with parents/guardians to discuss any of the participant’s additional needs, worries and/or concerns.

13

The participants were treated as if they were HE students which helped them feel trusted and confident while at AUB and reassured that the team on each workshop had their best interests at heart and confidence in their abilities and unique strengths as individuals. Building trust was really important with these young people. As demonstrated in some of the artefacts, some of the boys have challenging homelives, relationships and educational experiences.

Across the whole project our main priority was for the participants to have fun and a positive experience in a creative university environment. Creating a safe and fun environment for each workshop was extremely important.

The team aimed to become familiar faces to the boys, supporting the development of a sense of belonging. Seeing that AUB, and universities more widely, are environments where they are wanted, welcomed and appreciated for being their authentic selves.

There was evidence from the workshops that some participants who had not considered creative careers and/or AUB were now seeing it as a future possibility, however, there is scope to evidence this more extensively in future work.

All three workshops demonstrated positive impacts, but there was a decrease in participants across the three workshops, most notably the movement workshop with only 4 participants. However, this was likely impacted by several factors including the timing and the content.

A mixed methods approach was employed for the project due to the nature of the workshops and the small numbers of participants. The below draws upon pre and post session evaluation data (collected using Mentimeter polls) and an analysis of the artefacts produced in the workshops. This was triangulated with content from the documentary film and the BBC radio interviews and conversations with the AUB staff involved in the project.



Being a Boy: documentary production workshop

In this workshop, participants

- Practiced with camera and sound equipment (including mirrorless cameras, lenses, sound recorders, and microphones)
- Documentary making is a collaborative process that involves co-creation, whether with a crew or with participants. Participants were encouraged to learn how to work within a team, and to gain the different skills that this entails, from negotiation and compromising to conflict-resolution and resilience
- The knowledge acquired was put into practice through the making of a two minute documentary portrait of one of us that will include an interview and b-roll footage
- The participants continued to be involved in the filming of the *How to be a Boy* documentary

Being a Boy: Empower

In this workshop, participants

- Explored themes surrounding masculinity and identity, and how they impact on our daily lives
- Worked both independently and collaboratively to build confidence in producing bold, exciting, and thought-provoking creative writing pieces
- Worked with the support of an experienced practitioner to evolve their skills and confidence in creative writing
- Broaden existing abilities and develop new skill focused on expression and storytelling

Irene Smith, CIAG Lead at Iford Academy, said:

“What an amazing day where confidence was grown in abundance!”



Being a Boy: Capture

In this workshop, participants

- Explored themes surrounding masculinity and identity, whilst learning how to capture what it means to be a boy
- Engaged with a new art form and gain transferrable skills in a creative field
- Experimented with a wide variety of photography techniques and skills
- Developed the ability to engage independently and explore their own art style

Claire Barnett, Art and Photography Teacher at The Quay School, said:

“Ideas were ignited, and quality work was produced as a result of purposeful and thought-provoking activities. Prior to the workshop, our students would have not been able to imagine that university attendance was something within their reach. By the end of the day this assumption had changed, and they were keen to repeat the experience.”



Being a Boy: Lift Off

In this workshop, participants

- Explored themes surrounding masculinity and identity
- Broadened existing abilities and developed new skill focused on expression and storytelling
- Explored the physical and mental benefits of engaging in a movement focused workshop
- Engaged with a new form of exercise that focuses on strength and trust whilst supporting physical and mental wellbeing
- Benefited from working in a studio environment on site at AUB’s campus with experienced tutors

BBC Radio Solent covered the *Being a Boy Lift Off* workshop, which included interviews with two of the participants and BA (Hons) Dance Course Leader Jane White. The coverage is available to listen to on BBC Sounds [here](#).



Key issues for consideration

Workshop practicalities

The careful selection and use of staff is likely to have had a significant impact upon creating the conditions for the work the boys created and their feeling of belonging. This should be both praised but also carefully considered in future iterations of the project. One concern here might be in the impact of scaling the group sizes which could negatively impact that group dynamic.

There was evidence of the boys feeling a group affinity. This was evidenced by one boy coming to another AUB event and leaving when he realised it was not part of this project. The imitate nature of these workshops is likely to have had a positive impact upon this affinity so consideration should be given to this before the project is scaled up in case it loses some of this.

Trying to capture evidence of impact

Where participants were asked to write words or reflections, these were often far less thoughtful than the reflections within the creative work itself. This is important to note as it suggests a focus on survey-based evaluation techniques may have failed to capture the rich experiences and the transformative effect of these workshops.

This quote from one student after the dance workshop clearly shows the impact upon that individual.

“I didn’t know I would like it until I started it and now I can see it as something I’d see myself doing.”

The quality of the visual outputs and creative choices made in Capture were extremely high. However, creating more emphasis on the creation of statements or time for reflection upon the work could potentially create more positive impact upon confidence. Statements did not reflect the thought that had clearly gone into the image construction.

The movement workshops were highly valued by the participants, however the cost of running a 2-day workshop for 4 participants may not be the most cost-effective use of resources therefore careful consideration should be given as to the content/timing of this if it is run again. One potential consideration is combining movement with another art form.

It was evident that the focus upon valuing the boys’ experiences was a key to the project’s success, particularly in Empower where one of the boys stated that they “wished their English lessons were like this.” The focus on content and creativity clearly felt different to school and may have played a role in the quality of the work produced. In terms of HE progression, this is also important to note as it clearly shows that HE is not just more school which can be a common concern.

Confidence

An improvement in confidence was evident through the documentary, interviews and correlated with the pre and post-survey data (scored out of 5) which evidenced an improvement in confidence across all measures.

3

Pre-survey the boys rated their confidence 3 out of 5

3.9

Post-survey the boys on average rated their confidence out of 5

30%

On average their confidence increased by 30%

	Pre-survey	Post-survey	Change
Empower: writing confidence	3.2	4.4	+1.2
Empower: confidence to write about me	2.8	3.9	+1.1
Empower: confident to write about being a boy	2.7	3.7	+1.0
Capture: photography confidence	3.4	4.3	+1.1
Capture: photography about me	3.1	3.6	+0.5
Capture: photography about being a boy	2.9	3.4	+0.5

The improvements in confidence were greater in Empower as opposed to the Capture. However, this may have been less about the effectiveness of the workshop and more the depth of thought that might have gone into writing the poetry.

For future workshops, more time and space could be given to reflection activities. Whilst this was attempted in Capture, the artist statements were often quite basic in content. It might verbal discussions might be more useful in this context.

Lift off had a far smaller uptake of participants (n=4). The boys that did attend suggested they were there because they felt affinity to the group initially but then found enjoyment in the workshop itself. Whilst there was therefore no pre and post survey data for this group, the radio coverage and reports from the staff suggests this workshop also demonstrated a positive impact upon participant confidence also.

For example, one participant said

“At first I was wary about it because it was a dance lesson but now it’s just fun.”

Project outputs

From its outset, mechanisms to assess and evaluate the impact of the project were built into the programme design. Indeed, as stated in the overarching objectives of the project, it was designed to facilitate an opportunity for young men to creatively engage with issues relating to masculinity which may impact upon their educational success.

Research

It was important that the project not only provided an opportunity for the boys to engage meaningfully in reflections of the impact of masculinity on their day-to-day lives, but also that their voices were amplified so that others could learn from their experiences.

As such, in parallel to delivery of the project, ethical approval was sought to use the creative artefacts produced in the research (poems, photographs, choreography) as data to inform a qualitative research project.

The project had two strands. Firstly, it explored how creative methodologies could be employed to provide a greater depth of understanding in the evaluation of widening participation programmes. Secondly it investigated how the young men’s negotiations of masculinity and socio-economic inequality influenced their orientations for the future in education and work.

Data was collected across all three workshops, with analysis taking place over the Autumn. As a result, an internal evaluation document has been produced to guide the expansion and development of the project for this academic year. Alongside this, two abstracts covering the research themes have been submitted for presentation at the British Sociological Association Conference in spring 2023, alongside an abstract for a journal article in a special issue of the Journal of Boyhood Studies. Reflections from the project were also presented at a national practitioner conference which attracted 104 registrants, and at the GuildHE WP network.



Impact

Alongside the more formal mechanisms of dissemination for learning, the project had a tangible impact on the boys and those who support them. Below are quotes from some of the teachers and advisors supporting the students who provided feedback after sessions.

“Thanks so much again, it’s been incredible being involved with Alex and yourself on this, I’m still bursting with pride.”

“I have seen the images from the students’ photography session yesterday and I am blown away! Thank you for all you are doing for our boys. I can honestly see this being a landmark moment in their journey.”

“Thank you so much for the opportunities we have been given for X Academy and our students. I have loved every part of this journey with them and seeing how they are growing as young men; I am so immensely proud of them and look forward to seeing their future pathways unravel. Feeling very thankfully and privileged to have witnessed this project.”

The project also garnered some attention from local radio stations. A piece about the project which featured on BBC Radio Solent: **Dance inspiring teenage boys to go to uni – BBC Sounds**. Alongside the pre-recorded segment, the radio feature included live interviews with university staff, teachers, and AUB students involved in the project.

Finally, a premiere of the documentary entitled *How to be a Boy* will take place at a theatre in Bournemouth on the 1 February 2023. Alongside the boys featured and their supporters, the event will also bring together key stakeholders in the local educational and creative sectors. It will constitute a first viewing of the full-length documentary and provide a basis to announce the launch of new provision related to the project for 2023.

Recommendations for Being a Boy 2023 activity

- Linking all workshops to the Taking Boys Seriously Principles to ensure clearer evidence base for evaluation of activities.
- Continuing with *Empower*, *Capture* and *Lift Off* considering the recommendations from the evaluation.
- Expanding the Being a Boy workshop series, by adding workshops with two new subject areas.

HE Practitioners and Researchers Conference

On 8 September 2022 AUB hosted the Learning to ‘Level-Up’? Supporting Working-Class Boys’ Progression to Higher Education Practitioners Conference in partnership with the University of Portsmouth and University and Winchester. The conference aimed to explore how we can better support working-class boys’ educational attainment and progression to Higher Education.

For the last decade, discourse on the rate of progression to Higher Education for working-class boys has been a persistent focus of politicians, educators, and those with an interest in equitable access to educational opportunity. However, despite focus on the issue in media and political conversation, gaps in GCSE attainment remain significant, and rates of progression to Higher Education remain low.

In 2019, a review by the Office for Students of Access and Participation Plans suggested that of the 838 targets set relating to university access, success, and progression by providers, only 11 gave specific mention to working-class males.

The Conference brought together over 80 practitioners and researchers from 55 different universities and organisations from across the UK. Providing a space to disseminate research and learn from evidence-based practice. **The Conference Programme** included keynotes from Professor Nicola Ingram, Taking Boys Seriously and Future Men.



Feedback from the conference

The project received feedback from 17 delegates about the various sessions attended throughout the day.

Putting young people’s voices at the heart of the work

“Video footage was a powerful reflection on the truth we all experience in outreach.”

Intersections of class and gender in the making of ‘top boys’ in elite graduate employment with Professor Nicola Ingram
“This is very thought-provoking in the context of how social class intersects with the work my organisation. Furthermore, the top boy attitude seems to be pervading and Nicola’s presentation raised questions about how we can counter it individually.”

Future Men with Ann Cayenne

“This was possibly one of my favourite speakers. I liked hearing from an independent charity.”

Research paper session: Youth work methodology In HE: going from participation to engagement with Nik Marsden
“My favourite session. With experience in the youth work sector personally, this session articulated with such honesty and grace a truth that we all should take seriously in our line of work. If we want to make the biggest impact amongst this underrepresented group, partnership is crucial.”

Research paper: Being a boy – mobilising creative practice as a tool for critical reflection on masculinity and identity with Dr Jon Rainford and Kate Venables
“Very interesting session and shows the true power of allowing, and creating space for, creative expression from honesty in a safe environment.”

Research paper: Parental reflections on boys’ development and achievements through an all-boy dance group with Dr Frances Mary Johnson and Tracy Witney

“Mirrored a lot of creative education I’ve seen, loved this.”

Workshop session: The thrive initiative with Anne Clarkson and Jayne Jackson

“Anne and Jayne were so passionate about the work they do, and it was wonderful to hear about the topics they focused on in the project and their reflections on the need for single-gender support for young people.”

Workshop session: Developing the critical consciousness of boys with Deneen Kenchington

“Fascinating and given me several ideas of how we can counteract some of the points Deneen’s raised within our own programme.”

Workshop session: How to be a boy with Dr Jon Rainford

“I have marked this as lower, simply because I don’t think there was enough time to do this session justice. I liked that it was more practical, and we got to experience what students might experience but it felt a little rushed.”

Taking Boys Seriously: core principles in practice with Susan Morgan

“The principles were very helpful as a backbone to work we could do. So inspiring to see how far the project reached and the impact it is making.”

Driving forward the agenda: The Boys’ Impact Coalition with Dr Alex Blower

“A very emotive session and great to see the impact to date, and with more institutions becoming involved, what the impact could look like in the future.”

Overall conference

“Thought provoking, relevant, and jam packed. Inspirational all round but also has encouraged important discussions internally.”

The conference received press coverage from BBC Radio Solent and featured on BBC News Online increasing the impact and awareness of the conference.

The conference introduced the Boys GCSE Attainment Dashboard and launched the Boys Impact Coalition, with the first meeting scheduled for November 2022.

Recommendations for Being a Boy 2023 activity

- Future conferences to be hosted by the Boys Impact Coalition with locations alternating across the UK to share resources and increase attendance and reach.
- Alex Blower, Access and Participation Manager, to be a co-lead of the South West Regional Hub of the Boys Impact Coalition.
- Opportunities for AUB staff to be involved in the Boys Impact Coalition at a national and regional level.

Summary

The Being a Boy Project 2022 was an effectively targeted project that engaged a key underrepresented demographic at AUB and opened up conversations with young men, teachers, advisors HE practitioners and researchers on how to support working-class boy's attainment.

The student facing workshops created the conditions for the participants to express themselves and share their experiences, which enabled the project to meet its key aims and build on this learning to inform the projects next steps.

The Boys Impact Coalition will provide a structure to continue the discussions on a national level and provide a platform to share AUB's innovative approach. While the student facing opportunities provide a platform to support boys on a local level here in Bournemouth and the wider Dorset region.

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