

THE BOY CRISIS IN EDUCATION

Submission
to the
Joint Committee on Education and Skills
of the
Oireachtas



Men's Voices Ireland

www.mensvoicesireland.com

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Introduction

There is today a wealth of literature which shows that boys are struggling in school at all levels and underachieving in comparison to girls. This is happening across not only the western world but further afield in Asia and Africa as well. Despite this, there remains a lack of concerted effort to address this problem; A great deal of attention, however, continues to be paid to recruiting more girls into STEM subjects both at secondary and at third level.

Dropout rate for boys at secondary level 50% higher than for girls

In 2010, The dropout rate for girls at second level was 8.4%: for boys it was 12.6%: a 50% higher rate.

Men and Women at Third Level

- Women are more likely to have a third-level qualification than the men.
- 53% of women aged 25-34 having a third-level qualification.
- Of men between these ages, only 39% have a third level education: a 14% difference. (CSO Women and Men in Ireland Report: Tables 3.8, 4.1, 4.2 and 4.4 (Link below))

IUA's *Gender at a Glance* Report, 2009 (Link below)

The Study, *Gender at a Glance*, prepared by the Irish Universities Association, states in its summing up of the 'gender issues' it has identified in our universities (Page 23):

"There are more males than females in Engineering, Construction and Manufacturing and Computing and Computer Science at both undergraduate and postgraduate level."

Pains have been taken to draw attention to the minority of subjects in which men predominate. As it is not referred to once in the report, equal effort appears to have been taken to paper over, to not bring into the national discussion, the much more disturbing reality that the male proportion of students at university is now only 42%, and that it is women, not men, who dominate, sometimes overwhelmingly, in the majority of university subjects (statistics from the IUA *Gender at a Glance* Report 2009, Page 9):

FEMALE/MALE IRISH UNIVERSITY GRADUATES

Subject	Female (%)	Male (%)
Law	61.7	38.3
Medicine	57.6	42.3 (sic)
Subjects related to medicine	82.1	17.9
Veterinary science	79.4	20 (sic)
Education	80.4	19.6
Social Studies	64.5	35.5
Languages	68.9	31.1
Biological Sciences	60.8	39.2
Agriculture (and related)	63	37%

The same ever-dwindling numbers of male students at universities is occurring across the world; it is related to problems of under achievement at an earlier stage. Despite this disturbing reality, there are at Trinity College, for example, no fewer than three programmes designed and funded to increase the participation of women in a number of areas, especially in STEM subjects which many more men choose to study:

- **WiSER** works to “*recruit, retain, return and advance*” women in academic science, engineering & technology (SET).
- **INTEGER** is a European-funded project which develops and implements Gender Action Plans to create sustainable structural transformation in Trinity College Dublin, to improve the career progression of women scientific researchers.
- **Athena SWAN Charter:** “*Recognising commitment to the advancement of gender equality in academia, addressing unequal gender representation across academic disciplines, professional and support functions and removing the obstacles faced by women.*”

There are no initiatives (funded or otherwise) to “recruit, retain, return and advance” men in subjects where women predominate.

Ratio of male/female teachers

At primary level **85%** of teachers are female. This has remained roughly the same since 2003.

At secondary level the percentage of male teachers has fallen steadily from **40%** in 2003 to **31.7%** in 2012.

Taking Boys Seriously

Published in 2012, *Taking Boys Seriously* is a five-year research project, undertaken by Ken Harland and Sam Macready at the University of Ulster. ([Link below](#)). Below are some observations and recommendations from this report:

R 1) Barriers to learning should be addressed as early as possible (e.g. primary school...).

Some of the barriers to learning from boys' point of view included:

- Falling behind in school and course work and feeling they could not catch up.
- The lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills that are being carried forward from primary school and are not attended to early on in post-primary school.
- Getting bored easily and allowing this to show itself in disruptive behaviour in the classroom or simply turning off from the teacher.
- Poor teacher/pupil relationships.

R 2) Further research into gender specific teaching should be carried out.

- Boys would benefit from having a specific pedagogy during their development to assist their understanding of what it means to be a man and to celebrate masculinity.
- The nature of teacher/pupil relationships is a primary factor in boys' motivation and attitudes towards learning. While this relationship is important for all young people, it was the primary factor in determining the extent to which these boys engaged with lessons and it influenced their expectations as to how well they would do in subjects. Boys were looking for teachers who were interested in them, encouraged them, showed them respect and would help them sort out issues as quickly as possible.
- R 6) The importance of teacher-pupil relationships should be at the heart of schools' ethos and approach to learning.

In S3.3 they look again at boys' underachievement and present some possible explanations as presented in a report by Gallagher 1997: This drew from a random selection of 24 studies from England, Scotland, and New Zealand and suggested a range of issues including the lack of male teachers; gender stereotyping by teachers; assessment favouring girls; boys rejecting authority and girls co-operation as contributing factors in boys underachievement.

Other studies

The NUU study tallies in its findings with other research:

An OECD study from 2014: Trends Shaping Education 2015 Spotlight 7 (*Link below*) has this to say:

“Aiming for a better balance of men and women among teachers can nevertheless have positive effects on all students. Male teachers can serve as role models and contribute to students developing positive gender identities, particularly for those students who do not have many positive male role models in their lives.

“Some countries are actively seeking to increase the numbers of male teachers. In the UK for example, the Training and Development Agency (TDA) has made a specific effort to recruit qualified male primary teachers.”

Another OECD study, The ABC of Gender Equality in Education: Aptitude, Behaviour and Confidence (*Link below*) says of school results:

- Teachers give girls higher marks than boys of a similar ability. The suggestion is because girls are more likely to be better behaved in class, they are seen as being better at the subject and their results are marked up.
- Boys far behind girls at reading while at school, but gap closes among adults.
- Boys are more likely to spend time playing videogames than girls and are less likely to spend time on homework.

Response to the above OECD report

In a piece entitled *Clever girls, stupid boys?*, BBC Education correspondent, Sean Coughlan, responds to the OECD report ([Link below](#)):

There has been a major long-term international trend towards girls getting better results in school, and young women being more likely to go to university than young men.

The gap is so great that the UK's university admissions authority has warned that being male could soon be seen as a new form of social disadvantage.

In the UK, the gender gap between men and women entering university has never been wider. In a remarkable statistic from the UCAS admissions service, the gap is more than 50% in a quarter of parliamentary constituencies.

But the OECD study throws up some disturbing trends which have so far gained very little publicity. First of all, it suggests that school systems give greater rewards to girls rather than boys, even when pupils are of similar ability.

Teachers are more likely to "mark up" girls' work, says the study. It suggests that this leniency in marking is an unacknowledged reward for girls being more school-friendly.

Girls are more likely to be better behaved, more likely to get homework finished, less negative about going to school. And even when boys' work is just as good, the higher grade is more likely to go to a girl.

The biggest gender gap in school is usually associated with literacy, with girls runaway leaders in exams and international reading tests.

The study also has some nuggets about the influences that shape how well pupils do at school. Girls do much more homework than boys and this has a direct impact on results.

Boys are much more likely to spend long hours playing on computer games and this can have a direct impact on the likelihood of doing homework.

Boys Adrift

Leonard Sax's book, *Boys Adrift*, 2009, says 5 factors are to blame for boy's falling behind:

- Teaching Methods
- Video Games
- ADHD and medication for this
- Endocrine disruptors
- Devaluation of Masculinity

Christopher Cornwell

Professor Christopher Cornwell from the University of Georgia has stronger things to say:

- Examining student test scores and grades of children in kindergarten through fifth grade, Cornwell found that boys in all racial categories are not being *"commensurately graded by their teachers"* in any subject *"as their test scores would predict."*
- *"Teachers", he says, "tend to assess students on non-cognitive, "socio-emotional skills." This has had a significant impact on boys' later achievement because, while objective test scores are important, it is teacher-assigned grades that determine a child's future with class placement, high school graduation and college admissibility."*

Warren Farrell Ted Talk

In his Ted Talk of Oct 2015 ([Link below](#)), Warren Farrell endorsed these findings and added others:

- Dad deprived boys is a factor.
- Boys and also girls in this category are more prone to low school grades, to bad behaviour and many other negative factors. Prisons are centres for dad deprived boys.
- Fatherlessness is a huge problem and is strongly correlated with a range of negative behaviour problems.
- The feminisation of education is a factor.
- Lack of purpose: Boys do not receive sufficient encouragement.

Gijsbert Stoet

Speaking at a Male Psychology Conference at University College London, June 2016, Gijsbert Stoet of the University of Glasgow says boys are falling behind even at pre-school level; particularly in reading.

- Causes: Boys don't do homework; hyperactive, spend too much time at videogames, VG. A US study found boys spend 13 hours /week at this compared to 5 hours for girls.
- The rates at third level are a direct result of underachievement at primary and second level.

He proposes some drastic measures: *begin school at 6; no VG, no mobile phones, no computers!!*

At University level the effects are evident:

Daily Telegraph article

Here is a quote from a *Daily Telegraph* piece (2015) by Jonathan Wells (*Link below*):

"A report published last week by the Independent Commission on Fees has uncovered a widening gender divide in university admissions. For whilst over a third of 18-year old girls enrol on a higher education course in Britain, only one quarter of boys follow suit.

So why are fewer male students applying for university courses?

*Mary Curnock Cook, the chief executive of UCAS, undergraduate courses at university and college UK, believes the "**potential of young men is somehow being let down by the school system**".*

This suggests that the methods and techniques used to prepare pupils for their GCSEs and A-levels are angled more towards female students, and that schools and sixth forms may not be preparing boys adequately enough for these academic hurdles.

CSO 2011 Report: Women and Men in Ireland

<http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-wamii/womenandmeninireland2013/educationlist/education/#d.en.65505>

Open in Excel: [Women and Men in Ireland, 2013 Table 4.2 \(XLS 13KB\)](#)

Irish Universities Association 'Gender at a Glance' Report

<http://www.iaa.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/IUS-04-2013-Gender-At-A-Glance.pdf>

NUU Study: Taking Boys Seriously

<http://www.socsci.ulst.ac.uk/sociology/profiles/k.harland/Taking%20Boys%20Seriously.pdf>

or <http://www.ulster.ac.uk/sass/files/2014/09/Taking-Boys-Seriously-DE-FINAL-PDF.pdf>

OECD study: Trends Shaping Education, 2014

[https://www.google.ie/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&rlz=1C1CHBF_enIE736IE736&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=trends+shaping+education+2016+pdf&*](https://www.google.ie/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&rlz=1C1CHBF_enIE736IE736&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=trends+shaping+education+2016+pdf&*>)

OECD study, The ABC of Gender Equality in Education: Aptitude, Behaviour and Confidence

<https://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-gender-eng.pdf>

BBC News/Education piece: Clever girls, stupid boys?

<http://www.bbc.com/news/education-31751667>

Warren Farrell TED talk

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qi1oN1icAYc&t=311s>

Daily Telegraph article:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/11773729/Why-are-fewer-boys-going-to-university.html>