

Meeting the challenge of inequality intersectionality in education

Working with young men who are eligible for Free School Meals

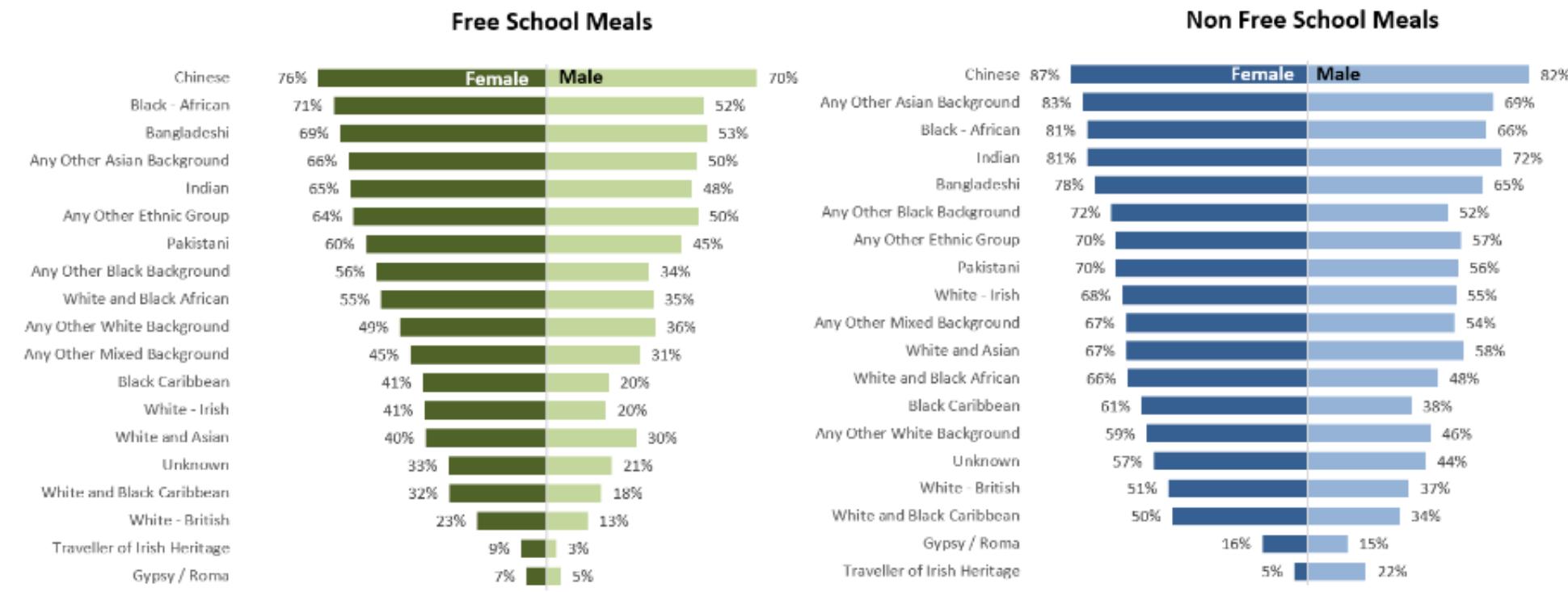
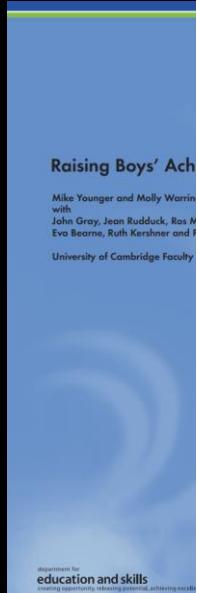
Dr Alex Blower

*Research Fellow: Social Justice and Applied Creative Research, Arts University
Bournemouth & Founder, Boys' Impact*

**BOYS'
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Inequality and Boys' Educational Progression

Progression to HE by age 19 by Free School Meal Status, Gender and Ethnic Group - 2021/22



ys
All-party
parliamentary group
on issues affecting
men and boys

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If Inquiry No 4:
nal Underachievement

This All-Party Group
or and poor outcomes faced by men and boys
l and physical health and law
role models, policy and legislation
ferences to their well-being and lives."

November 2023

House of Commons or the House of Lords. It has
its committees. All-Party Parliamentary Groups
h Houses with a common interest in particular
ort are those of the group.

and Boys: Boys Educational Underachievement - Page 1

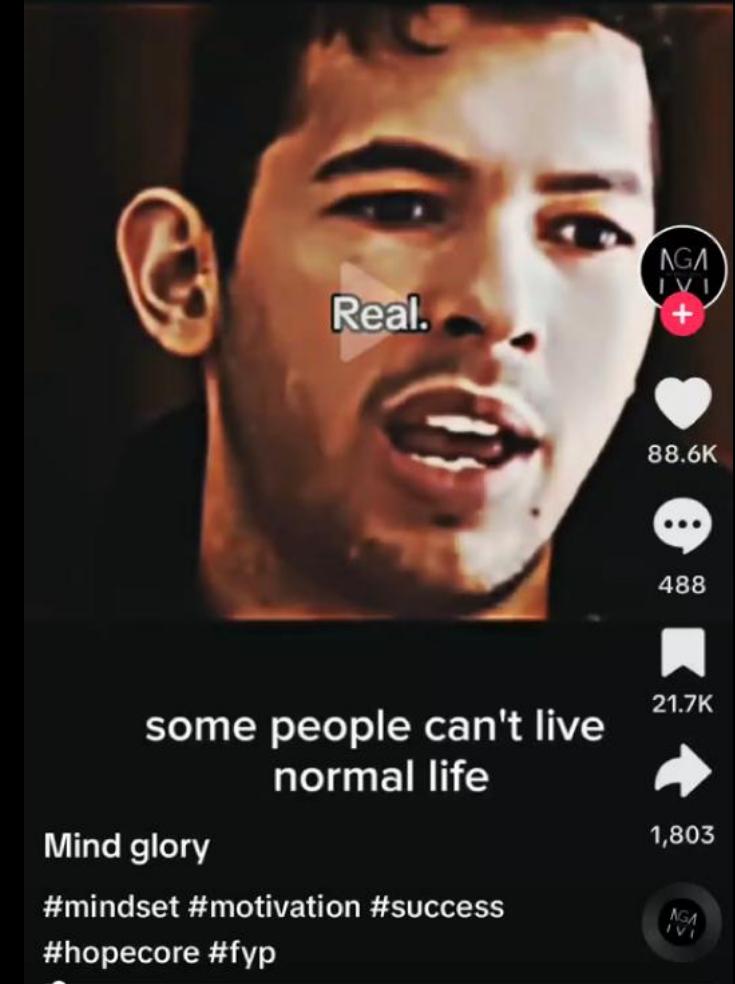
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Inequality and Key Stage 4 Outcomes

Dorset 2022/23

			Total	FSM
Boys	England	Average Progress 8 score of all pupils	-0.17	-0.72
		Percentage of pupils achieving grades 4 or above in English and mathematics GCSEs	63%	40.5%
		Percentage of pupils achieving grades 5 or above in English and mathematics GCSEs	43.4%	23.5%
South West	Dorset	Average Progress 8 score of all pupils	-0.23	-0.82
		Percentage of pupils achieving grades 4 or above in English and mathematics GCSEs	60.7%	37.2%
		Percentage of pupils achieving grades 5 or above in English and mathematics GCSEs	39.5%	19.4%

**Another significant reason:
Where young men are learning
what masculinity means**



Contested Assumptions: Working-class boys

A lack of aspiration

Boys don't like reading

????

Boys view being asked to read as a 'punishment', say one in three teachers

Social media 'having negative effect' on students' willingness to read for pleasure

By Eleanor Busby, PA Education Correspondent & Stephen Pitts

20-03-18 08:00

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The Duchess of Cornwall reading to children to mark World Book Day

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Ofsted chief says poor white communities lack 'aspiration and drive'

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White working class boys will continue to be left behind because 'white privilege' suggests they are the problem

The national conversation has become "preoccupied" with issues around gender, race

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Education and young men's relationships

'The boys, meanwhile, with the demands of masculinity thrust upon them, rarely consider themselves powerful or privileged. They are often insecure in their bodies, embarrassed and out of their depth'

'We have found that young people have a straightforward desire for authentic and healthy relationships be that with their same- or opposite-sex peers. They find it difficult to translate these aspirations into reality, however, as they navigate existing social and cultural expectations and pressures surrounding gender and relationships.'

'Boys and young men, in particular, are pulled between ideas of traditional masculinity and demands to be emotionally self-aware and sensitive'

<https://theconversation.com/gen-z-boys-attitudes-to-feminism-are-more-nuanced-than-negative-222532>

Setty, E. (2022) 'Educating Teenage Boys About Consent: The Law and Affirmative Consent in Boys' Socio-Sexual Cultures and Subjectivities', *Sex Roles*, 87(9), pp. 515–535. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-022-01335-9>.

What the Evidence Says: Contributory Elements

- Mental health
- Relationships
- Peer pressure
- Student expectations
- Teacher expectations
- Socio-economic inequality
- Normative masculinities

“Because society is generally patriarchal....it is a kind of double-edged sword, a poisonous panacea: that is to say, the same system that puts men at an advantage in society is essentially the same system that limits them, inhibits their growth and eventually leads to their breakdown”

[Bola, J.J., 2019. Mask Off: Masculinity Redefined. Pluto Press.](#)

Taking Boys Seriously Research: Data from 442 Adolescent Boys

They spoke highly of educators who:

- *Understood their point of view*
- *Appreciated the issues boys may face outside of school*
- *Connected with boys and listened to their point of view*
- *Challenged them, but in a supportive way*

Boys spoke of rarely being given opportunities to discuss masculine norms and social pressures such as identity formation, sectarianism, and experiences of male violence

85% agree that they are more likely to learn when they know their voice and views are valued in an educational context

It Started with a pilot

- **A listening activity to learn about how working-class young men negotiate masculine expectations in education**
- Facilitate an opportunity for them to creatively engage with issues relating to masculinity which may impact upon their educational success
- Increase confidence of young men in mobilising creative mechanisms to express thoughts, feelings and experiences
- Develop skills of the young men in critical reflection
- A chance to ‘try on’ opportunities for creative educational engagement

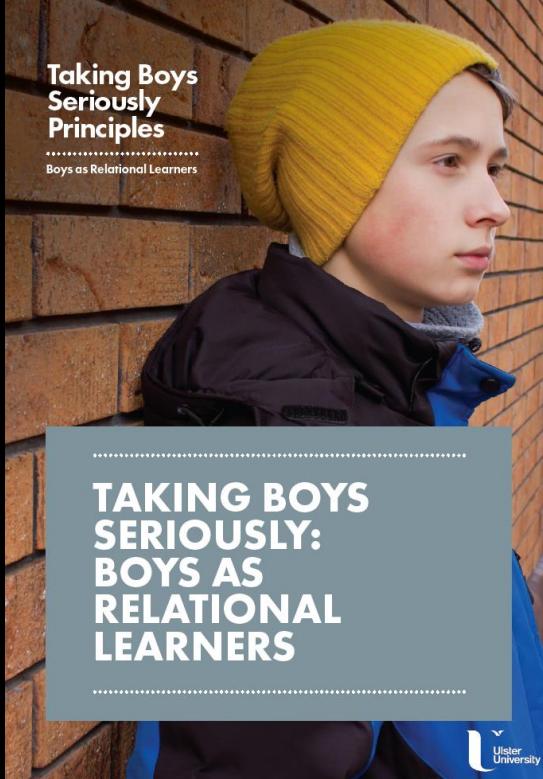


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I feel like it would be used more against me. I feel like you know, the bullying and torment would definitely go up quite a bit for I guess, you know, something stupid like writing how I feel on a page....

(Blower & Rainford, 2023)

Progressed into a partnership



- #1 **RECOGNISE THE PRIMACY OF RELATIONSHIP**
- #2 **DEMONSTRATE DIGNITY AND RESPECT**
- #3 **UTILISE A 'STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH' TO LEARNING**
- #4 **CHALLENGE AND AFFIRM MASCULINE IDENTITIES**
- #5 **PROMOTE POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH**
- #6 **IDENTIFY BLOCKS TO BOYS LEARNING**
- #7 **CONNECT BOYS LEARNING TO CONTEXT**
- #8 **ENGAGE MEANINGFULLY WITH BOYS**
- #9 **ENABLE CREATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS**
- #10 **VALUE THE VOICE OF BOYS**

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The partnership worked

- Closed FSM Boys and Girls attainment gap in 2023 GCSE exams
- Decreased number of young men being removed from the classroom
- Decreased the number of behaviour events recorded for young men
- Decreased number of young men being internally excluded
- Decreased the number of young men



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We banged on doors

Deneen Kenchington FCCT • 1st
Deputy Headteacher, Educational Researcher, NPQH Candidate
4w • 5

So grateful to have presented alongside [Oli McVeigh](#) at tonight's meeting for [#dorsetboysimpacthub](#) at [Arts University Bournemouth](#). It was amazing to hear from [Dr Alex Blower](#) about the reasons behind w



You and 17 others

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Deneen Kenchington FCCT • 1st
Deputy Headteacher, Educational Researcher, NPQH Candidate
2mo • 5

Big smiles from [Dr Alex Blower](#) and I as we attended CASH today at [#livingstoneacademy](#) to discuss the impact of Being a Boy from [Arts University Bournemouth](#) and the impact Alex's work has had on ...more



You and 18 others

1 comment • 3 reposts

Deneen Kenchington FCCT • 1st
Deputy Headteacher, Educational Researcher, NPQH Candidate
4mo • 5

[lex Blower](#) speaking about his amazing work. So grateful for the impact that this has had at [Ferndown Upper School!](#) A massive thank you myself, [Oliver McVeigh](#) and our boys!

Cumberland Lodge
1,353 followers
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How can young men overcome the stereotype of not being able to talk about their feelings and vulnerabilities?

Join us to our 10-minute podcast with [Dr Alex Blower](#) who shares his story: <https://lnkd.in/e8gahpK6>



merging leaders

And although they were expressing feelings within the poems, 0:30

Dr Alex Blower

5

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Dorset Boys Impact Hub



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The Cornerstone Academy
The best in everyone™
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Glenmoor Academy
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High Achievement – High Standards
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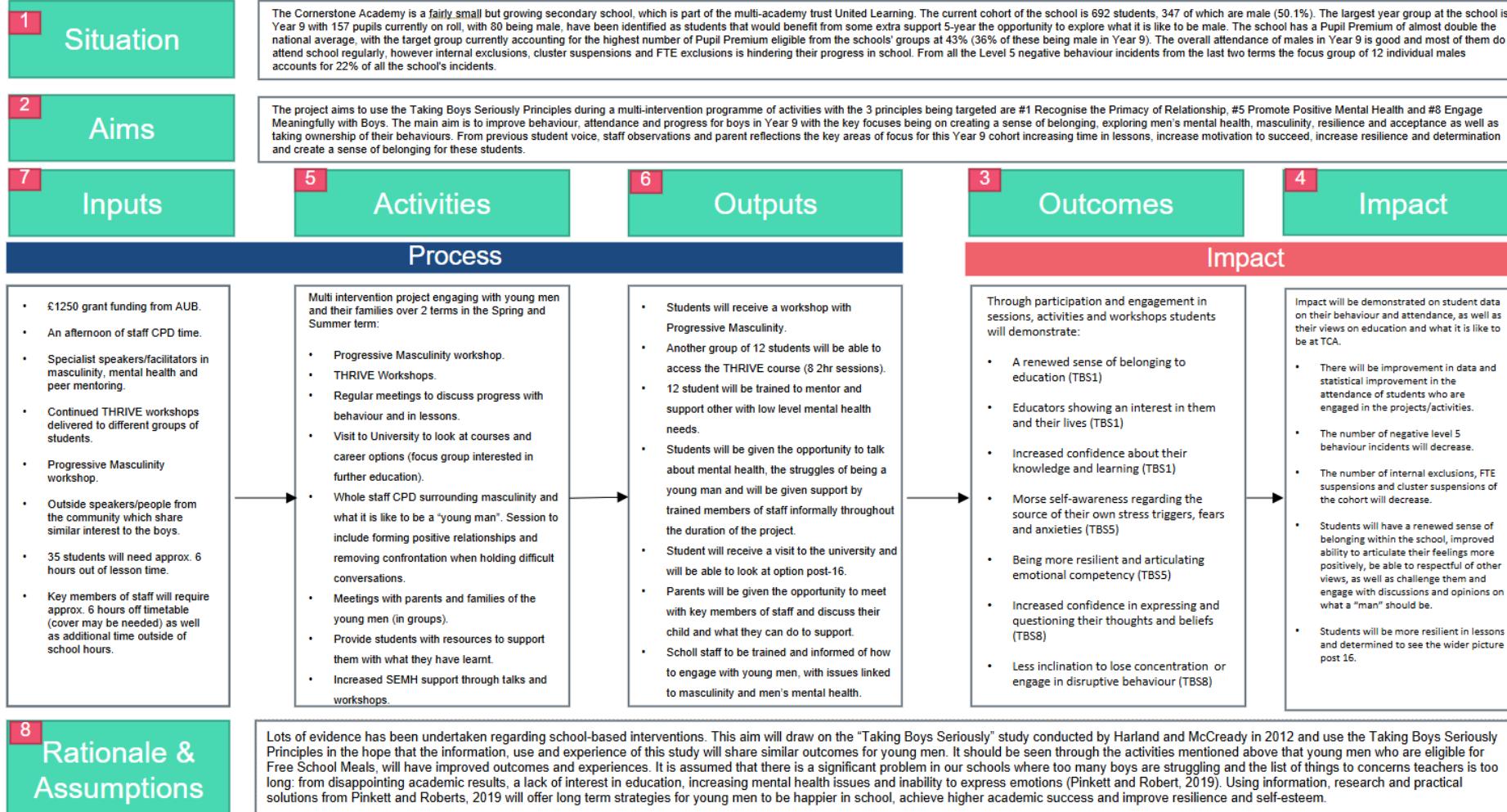
Dorset Boys' Impact Hub

- *Convene key stakeholders, driving effective practice in support of the educational outcomes of boys who are in receipt of Free School Meals at a regional level*
- *Develop understanding of the challenges facing our young men in their particular geographic, social and historical context*
- *Research the issues, learn, and disseminate effective practice*
- *Through the national hub network, contribute to developing the evidence base of effective practice in supporting the educational outcomes of boys who are eligible for Free School Meals.*
- *Work together to develop activity, pilot new approaches and learn from one another*

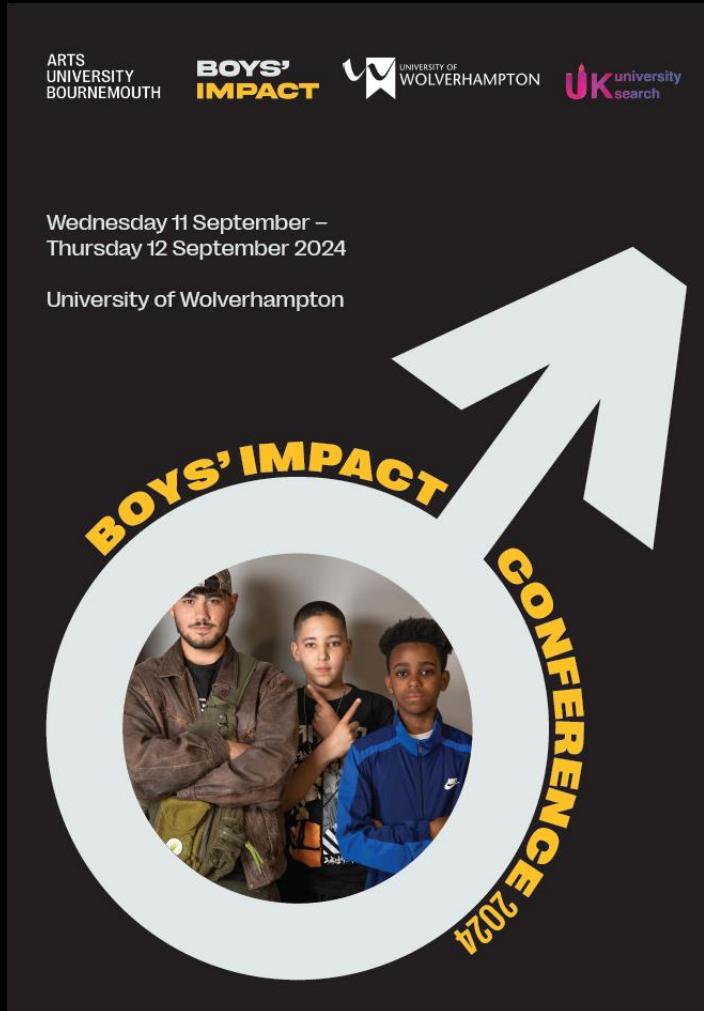
The work to date: Locally



Transforming Access
and Student Outcomes
in Higher Education



The Work to Date: Nationally



BOYS' IMPACT

The Work to Date: Nationally



Dorset Boys' Impact Hub

Chaired by: Dr Alex Blower, Research Fellow, Arts University Bournemouth; Deneen Kenchington, Deputy Headteacher, Ferndown Upper School

[CONTACT THE HUB](#)



Greater Manchester Boys' Impact Hub

Chaired by: Helen Lord, Head of Greater Manchester Higher; Melanie Wicks, Executive Principal, Stamford Park Trust; Jack McGeehan, Social Action Coordinator, Salford Foundation.

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Northern Ireland Boys' Impact Hub

Chaired by: Susan Morgan, Taking Boys Seriously Research Lead, Ulster University

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Portsmouth and Isle of Wight Boys' Impact Hub

Chaired by: Tian Barratt, WP Outreach Manager, University of Portsmouth

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Black Country, Telford and Wrekin Boys' Impact Hub

Chaired by: Natalie Latham, UK Skills, Access and Widening Participation Manager, University of Wolverhampton

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East Anglia Boys' Impact Hub

Chaired by: Darren Mcmorran, Outreach Officer, University of East Anglia

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The PROGRESSIVE
MASCULINITY Program



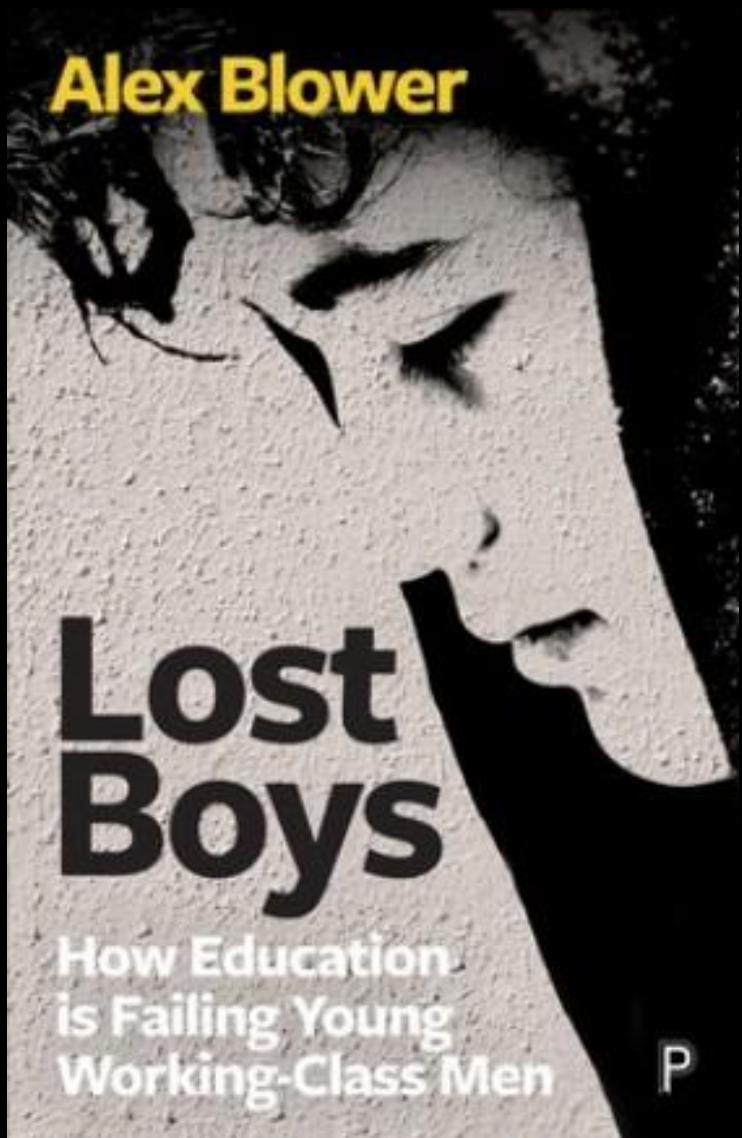
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of York



Boys' Impact is a movement.

We are dedicated to addressing the gap in educational outcomes for boys and young men who receive Free School Meals. As a network of educators, researchers and practitioners, our approach is strengths-based and evidence-led. Boys' Impact exists to create ecosystems in research, policy and practice which enable boys and young men who experience socio-economic inequality to flourish.





With the rise of the manosphere and social media influencers such as Andrew Tate, the outcomes of working-class boys in education, and their behaviour in wider society, is a regular subject of national debate and discussion. Coming in waves, issues related to entrenched disparities in their educational attainment, and an epidemic of misogynistic behaviour in our classrooms, are articulated and rearticulated by politicians, journalists, and educators. An endless cycle of deficit laden blame.

Within all of this, there is a notable lack of space given to the voices of those who feel the consequences of such commentary most keenly, the young men themselves.

Coming in July 2025
Pre order [here](#)