



DEBATE PACK

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Educational performance of boys

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Summary

There will be a debate on the Educational performance of boys in Westminster Hall on Tuesday 6 September 2016 at 4.30pm. It will be led by Karl McCartney.

Girls generally outperform boys throughout primary, secondary and higher education.

This briefing includes relevant statistics, media comment, parliamentary coverage and links to reports.

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The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. Statistics

1.1 Key Stage 2

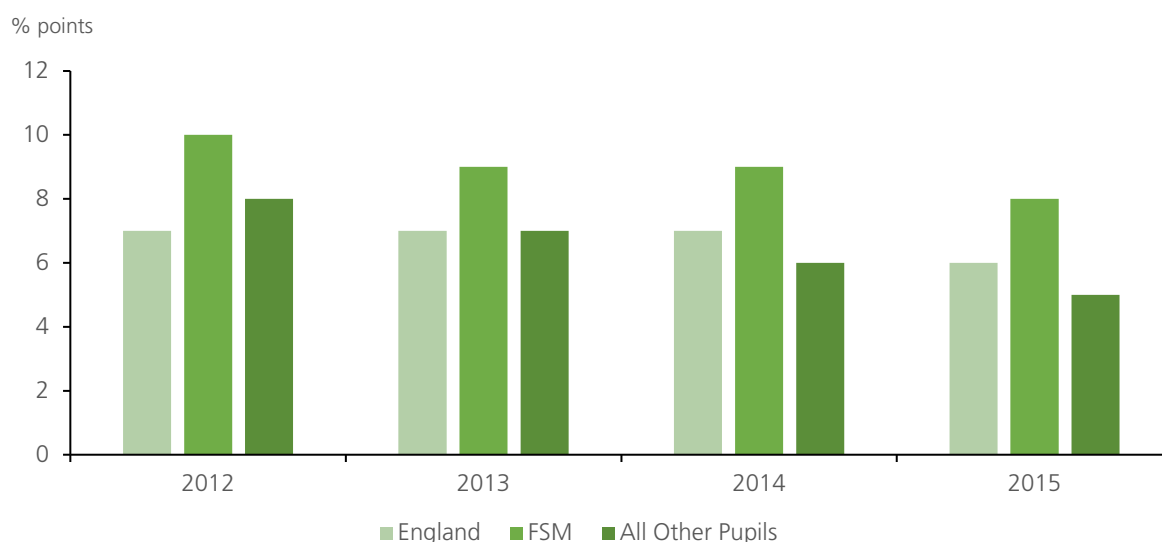
At Key Stage 2 girls generally outperform boys on the main measure of attainment -the proportion of pupils achieving level 4 and above in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2015, in England, 77% of boys achieved this standard compared to 83% of girls. The gap was 6 percentage points, down from 7 points in each of the previous three years.

Further information is available [here](#) on the gender gaps at key stage 2 (pp. 12-13).

The chart below shows the gender gap by free school meal (FSM) eligibility from 2012 onwards.

Gender Gap in favour of girls achieving level 4 and above in Reading, Writing and Maths at Key Stage 2, 2012-15

England, State Funded Schools



Source: *National curriculum assessments: key stage 2, 2015 (revised)*

Since 2012, girls who are eligible for FSM outperformed boys eligible for FSM by a greater margin than those not eligible for FSM. The gap though has been reduced since 2012 from 10 percentage points to 8 points in 2015. The gender gap among pupils not eligible for FSM was 5 percentage points 2015 down from 8 percentage points in 2012.

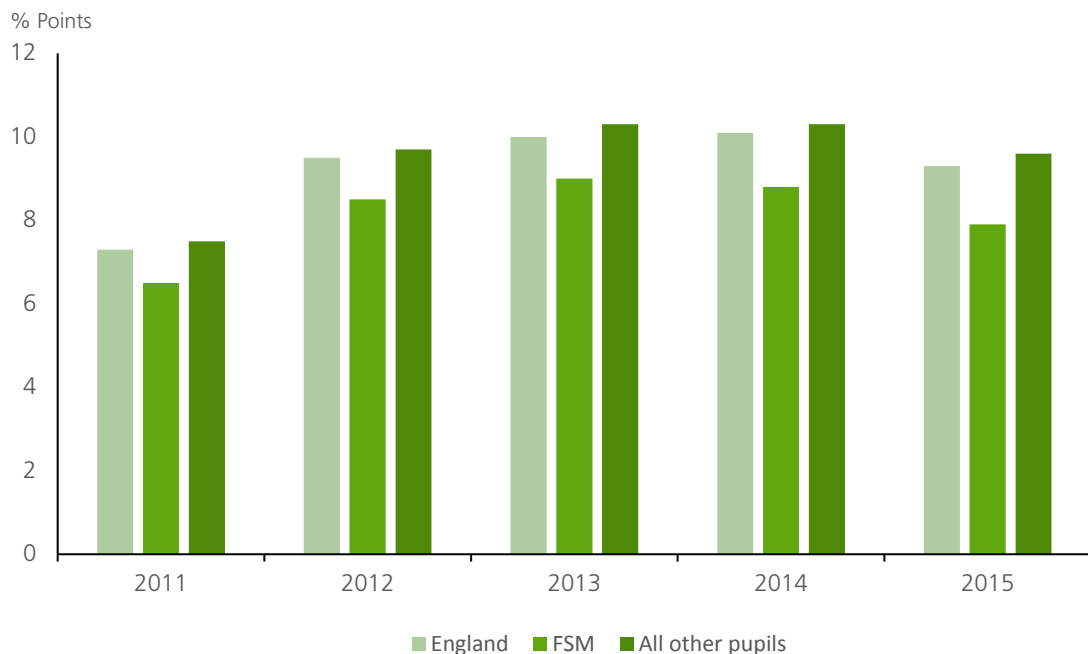
In terms of ethnicity, in 2015, girls outperformed boys across the major ethnic groupings where the gap on the headline indicator ranged from 5 to 6 percentage points. It was smallest for Asian and Chinese students (5 points) compared to White, Mixed and Black pupils (6 percentage points). Girls outperformed boys in each ethnic subgroup in 2015.

1.2 GCSEs

Girls also outperform boys in headline GCSE results. The gap in those achieving 5+ grades A*-C including English and Maths in state-funded schools was 7.3 percentage points in 2011 (54.6% boys and 61.9% girls) and increased to 10.0 points in 2013 (55.7% boys and 65.7% girls). In 2014 a change in the methodology was implemented which excluded many equivalent qualifications, reduced the value of others, and excluded retakes. Despite this the gap remained broadly constant at just over 10 points, before falling to 9.3 points in 2015

The chart below shows the gender gap on this headline indicator since 2011 broken down by FSM eligibility.

Gender Gap in favour of girls achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs including English & Maths
England, State Funded Schools



Sources:

Revised GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2014 to 2015

GCSE and equivalent attainment by pupil characteristics: 2014

Since 2011 the gender gap has been *smaller* among pupils eligible for FSM, but it has increased over time, from 6.5 percentage points in 2011 to a peak of 9 points in 2013. The gap among those not eligible for FSM peaked at 10.3 points in 2013 and 2014.

In 2015 girls outperformed boys on this headline indicator across all the major ethnic groupings. The gender gap ranged from 7.7 points among Asian students to 12.5 points for Chinese students. The next largest gap was for black students (11.2 percentage points) followed by white pupils (9.5 percentage points) and then those defined as mixed (7.8 percentage points). Girls outperformed boys in each the ethnic subgroup in 2015 with the largest gap among Black Caribbean students at 13.1 points.

2. Press articles

Times, 18 August 2016

[Gender gap narrows for highest exam results](#)

Sky News, 17 August 2016

[University Gender Gap Reaches Record High](#)

Over 90,000 more women applied for a university course this year than men, while the number of male applicants fell.

Independent, 9 August 2016

[Girls do better than boys at school because they're morning people, study suggests](#)

This year, some 94,000 more girls than boys applied to British universities, but would that change if school started in the afternoon?

Independent, 18 July 2016

[Young people are the most disengaged with education in the north of England, report finds](#)

Report comes on the day another reveals boys are almost twice as likely as girls to have fallen behind by the time they start school.

Telegraph, 17 July 2016

[Boys should be treated 'more like girls' to stop them falling behind at school](#)

Independent, 24 June 2016

[White working class boys miss out on university places because they 'choose welfare' over aspirations, says top charity founder](#)

Generating Genius founder Dr Tony Sewell told education leaders that schools must do more by way of creating clubs and societies to aid the 'continuity of intervention' in disadvantaged communities.

Telegraph, 3 June 2016

[Girls set their sight on university at 13](#)

The Guardian, 3 June 2016

[Girls more positive about university than boys, new study finds](#)

Study finds that by year 9 almost 65% of girls thought it was 'very important' to go to university, compared with 58% of boys

Independent, 3 June

[Growing gender gap in university admissions already present at age 13, says Sutton Trust report](#)

Report comes weeks after Ucas head warns gap between rich and poor 'will be eclipsed' by gender gap within just 10 years.

Times Educational Supplement (TES), 3 June 2016

[University gender gap can be traced back to the age of 13](#)

As early as Year 9, girls are much more likely to think a degree is important, Oxford University study finds

Times Educational Supplement (TES), 26 May 2016

[Why let the facts get in the way of a good story? Women will always be blamed for boys' underachievement](#)

Telegraph, 12 May 2016

['Universities should set targets for recruiting men to address embarrassing gender gap'](#)

Guardian, 12 May 2016

[UK's university gender gap is a national scandal, says thinktank](#)

Report calls for efforts to recruit more male students, including a 'take our sons to university day'

Independent, 11 May 2016

[Young, white men not performing as well as women in higher education, says Hefi report](#)

Head of Ucas warns rich and poor gap 'will be eclipsed' by gender gap 'within a decade'

Guardian, 4 February 2016

[Young men miss out as university gender gap remains at record levels](#)

Telegraph, 5 January 2016

[Our education system must stop ignoring its bias against boys](#)

Telegraph, 5 January 2016

[Boys education 'ignored by Government policy', warns Ucas chief](#)

Independent, 6 January 2016

[Head of Ucas expresses concern as recent data reveals gender gap in UK higher education is widening](#)

Comments made on same day Ucas releases data showing there to be more women than men in two thirds of courses.

Times Educational Supplement (TES), 17 December 2015

[Thousands of men 'missing' from university education](#)

Telegraph, 16 December 2015

[Gender gap at university widens, figures show](#)

Guardian, 11 November 2015

[Number of white working class boys taking AS or A-levels 'shockingly low'](#)

Guardian, 13 October 2015

[Boys trail girls in literacy and numeracy when starting school](#)

Guardian, 27 August 2015

[Boys overtake girls in maths GCSE as coursework dropped](#)

Telegraph, 20 August 2015

[GCSE results 2015: Boys catching up with girls as pupils opt for more digital-based courses](#)

Guardian, 18 August 2015

[What does the university gender gap mean for the future of our society?](#)

3. Press releases

The Sutton Trust

[At age 13, girls more likely than boys to believe that going to university is important](#)

3 June 2016

The growing gender gap in university admissions is already apparent by the age of 13, when girls are more likely than boys to believe that going to university is important, according to a report published by the Sutton Trust today. Researchers from Oxford University found that by the age of 15 or 16 aspiring to go on to higher education makes a big difference to A-level choices, particularly for disadvantaged students.

Drawing on data from more than 3,000 young people who have been tracked through school since the age of three for the Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE) project, *Believing in Better* by Professor Pam Sammons, Dr Katalin Toth and Professor Kathy Sylva at the University of Oxford, explores how a young person's aspirations and attitudes towards university affect their academic outcomes after GCSE.

15 and 16 year olds with similar GCSE results were twice as likely to go on to do three A-levels if they saw university as a likely goal for them. Disadvantaged students were less likely to think they will go on to university than their more advantaged peers, with only 27% having high aspirations compared with 39% of their better off peers.

The researchers found that even in Year 9 (age 13/14) girls had more positive attitudes towards university than boys. Almost 65% thought it very important to go to university, compared with 58% of boys. Over half of all the Year 9 pupils surveyed (61%) thought it was very important to get a degree compared with only 13% who said it was of little or very little importance. Around one in 10 girls felt it was not important to get a degree, but among boys the proportion declaring university of little importance was 15%.

As well as attaching importance to a university degree, the researchers also found that students who believed it was a likely goal for them were more likely to carry on with academic study after GCSE. Over 60% of students who believed it was very likely that they would go to university took three or more A-levels and three quarters of those who felt they were not at all likely to go to university did not continue onto an academic route.

Today's research identifies a number of factors that are important in shaping pupils' aspirations and their own belief in their abilities. These include attending a more academically effective primary school, a well-resourced secondary school and being encouraged to spend time on homework.

University entry data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency shows that only 19% of students from the poorest fifth of neighbourhoods enter higher education compared with 45% of those from the richest fifth of neighbourhoods. 46% of girls enter higher education compared with 36% of boys.

The Sutton Trust runs programmes to help raise the aspirations and attainment of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including Sutton Scholars which supports bright pupils from the age of 11. To help level the academic playing field, the researchers and the Sutton Trust are calling for more support for students from poorer homes including:

- Support to encourage reading for pleasure, educational trips and out-of-school studying opportunities that can promote attainment for disadvantaged students at all ages, and especially those who were found to be high attaining at age 11. Enrichment vouchers should be funded through the pupil premium for both primary and secondary pupils.
- More opportunities for disadvantaged pupils to go to the best schools – those rated outstanding by Ofsted – with fairer admissions policies linked to free school transport.
- Disadvantaged children should be given the opportunity to attend good pre-school settings with staff qualified to degree level.
- Additional encouragement and support for disadvantaged pupils to enable them to engage in self-directed study, do sufficient homework and read more books, the activities that provide extra academic dividends and are linked to aspirations and self-belief. Schools should provide such opportunities where they are unlikely to be available at home.

Sir Peter Lampl, Chairman of the Sutton Trust and the Education Endowment Foundation, said today:

“Today’s report shows us how important it is to raise the aspirations and self-belief of pupils from poorer homes, particularly boys. We need to offer more support to disadvantaged young people throughout their education so that they are in a position to fulfil their potential after GCSE. Crucially it shows that both aspirations and attainment matter for pupils, so it is vital that schools support both particularly for their poorer pupils.”

Professor Pam Sammons, lead author of the report, said today:

“Our research shows that students’ belief in themselves and their aspirations are shaped by their background. However, positive beliefs and high aspirations play an additional and significant role in predicting better A-level outcomes. These findings points to the practical importance for schools and teachers of promoting both self-belief and attainment as mutually reinforcing outcomes.”

Professor Kathy Sylva, the report’s co-author, added: “The higher aspirations of girls in comparison to boys may be linked to their greater A-level success and gaining admission to university.”

NOTES TO EDITORS

- The [Sutton Trust](#) is a foundation set up in 1997, dedicated to improving social mobility through education. It has published over 170 research studies and funded and evaluated programmes that have helped hundreds of thousands of young people of all ages, from early years through to access to the professions. The Sutton Trust runs summer schools with St Andrews and Edinburgh universities with places for 250 students each year.
- [Believing in Better](#) by Professor Pam Sammons, Dr Katalin Toth and Professor Kathy Sylva, from the Department of Education at the University of Oxford, draws on data from a longitudinal study of more than 3,000 young people which started when they were aged three in 1998. This is the third in a series of reports for the Sutton Trust from the Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education project. This first, [Subject to Background](#), was published in March 2015 and the second, [Background to Success](#), was published last November. For more on EPPSE please go to ioe.ac.uk/research/153.html
- The sample for this research is drawn from the Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education Project, a major large-scale, longitudinal study of the progress and development of children from pre-school through to post-compulsory education in England. It has investigated various aspects of pre-school, primary and secondary school provision that shape children's attainment, progress and development over successive phases of education since the age of three. To identify students who form the more 'disadvantaged' group in the sample, we used multiple individual measures like free school meal (FSM) status, family socio-economic status (SES) based on parents' occupations, parents' salary, parents' educational qualifications, parents' employment status, and indicators of neighbourhood disadvantage based on home address post code that measure 'place' poverty, including the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) and the Index of Multiple Deprivation – (IMD). IDACI represents the percentage of children in each Standard Output Area (SOA) that live in families that are income deprived.

UCAS

[UCAS data reveals the numbers of men and women placed in over 150 higher education subjects](#)

5 January 2016

UCAS today completes the annual publication of its scheme-level data on admissions to full-time undergraduate higher education in the UK in 2015.

UCAS today completes the annual publication of its scheme-level data on admissions to full-time undergraduate higher education in the UK in 2015.

You can access and download the full [2015 end of cycle datasets \(link is external\)](#) here.

This data follows our analysis of trends and equality of access to higher education published in the [End of Cycle Report \(link is external\)](#) on 17 December 2015.

The data resources enable anyone with an interest in those applying and being accepted to higher education to do their own research. They are published in downloadable .pdf and .csv format.

For effective comparison, where possible, the data sets range from 2015 to 2006, but in some cases the time-series is shorter.

In total over 1.5 million data points are freely available to download today, a slight increase on the number published in 2014.

Included in the data are the numbers of men and women accepted to over 150 higher education subjects, showing there are more women than men in two thirds of courses. UCAS showed last month that UK women are 35% more likely to go university than men – the sex-gap widening to a record level.

Mary Curnock Cook, UCAS' Chief Executive said today: "Girls are doing better throughout primary, secondary and higher education than boys; poor, white boys are the most disadvantaged group in entry to higher education and the gap is getting bigger.

"The focus on White working class boys in the Higher Education Green Paper as part of the wider aim to widen university participation from all under-represented groups is a really important signal of change.

"But no amount of outreach by universities will work if boys are still too far behind when they come out of secondary education."

Today, we also publish information on how the attainment level and types of qualifications held by applicants choosing and progressing to university have changed over the years (A level, BTEC, SQA).

The data focusing on applicants and acceptances (individuals, in both cases) to UK higher education include:

- Age
- Sex
- Ethnic Group
- UK country and English region
- Students applying to UK HE through UCAS from around 100 countries of the world
- Students with a declared disability
- School type (Academy, Further Education, Grammar, Independent, State)
- Acceptance Route (Firm Choice, Insurance Choice, Clearing, Extra, Adjustment)
- Background (POLAR3 – An area-based measure of advantage/disadvantage) by UK country and by sex
- Qualifications held (A Level, BTEC, SQA)
- A Level points by background, sex, ethnic group and UK country.

The data on subjects is slightly different and includes applications (choices - one person can make up to five choices) and acceptances (individuals):

- Country of university or college accepted/applied to (by age, sex, UK country, EU/non-EU region of domicile)
- Detailed subject group accepted/applied to (by age, sex, UK country, EU/non-EU region of domicile).
- Deferred entry

Acceptances and applications for specific universities and colleges will be published on 21 January this year. These will also be split by age, sex, ethnic group, subject group, qualification type, and region.

Notes to editors:

Scotland

For people living in England, Wales and Northern Ireland UCAS covers the overwhelming majority of full-time undergraduate provision so the statistics on acceptances or entry rates can be taken as being very close to all recruitment to full-time undergraduate higher education. In Scotland there is a substantial section of provision that is not included in UCAS' figures.

This is mostly full-time higher education provided in further education colleges which represents around one third of young full-time undergraduate study in Scotland, and this proportion varies by geography and background within Scotland. Accordingly, figures on entry rates or total recruitment in Scotland reflect only that part of full-time undergraduate study that uses UCAS.

There were also changes to the scope of the data recorded in UCAS scheme in 2015 for Scotland (including teacher training courses in Scotland moving from the dedicated UCAS Teacher Training Scheme into the main UCAS scheme) that are estimated to account for around 3,800 of the increase in total UK acceptances. This gives a like-for-like increase in placed applicants of 16,100 (3.1 per cent).

4. Parliamentary questions

[Pre-school Education: Finance](#)

Asked by: Robertson, Mr Laurence

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will ensure that the review of fair funding for early years education includes steps to close the gender attainment gap at age five.

Answering member: Caroline Dinelage

The Government published a consultation on an Early Years National Funding Formula and changes to funding for the three- and four-year old free entitlements to childcare on Thursday 11 August. The consultation focuses on creating a fair and transparent way of distributing Government funding to childcare providers. Our proposals set out the means by which every child in receipt of the free entitlement attracts funding to meet their individual needs, regardless of their gender. We rely on the early years profession to spend the money appropriately to meet those needs.

We are making a significant investment in early years education – the expenditure on the free entitlements alone will rise by 38% over this Parliament. Our investment supports the continued increase in the number of qualified staff and the number of providers rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. More than 80% of children are reaching the expected communication and language skills by age five, but we will continue working with the sector until every child gets the high quality education they deserve.

05 Sep 2016 | Written questions | 43415

[Education: Equality](#)

Asked by: McCartney, Karl

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what steps the Government plans to take to ensure equality of educational attainment between boys and girls at all key stages.

Answering member: Nick Gibb

Our goal is to deliver educational excellence everywhere, so that every child and young person can achieve to the best of his or her ability. Girls' key stage 2 results are better than ever and their entries to mathematics and science A levels have increased by more than 12,000 since 2010. We continue to consider what more needs to be done to support equality in educational attainment, in particular the justified concerns about white working class boys.

14 Apr 2016 | Written questions | 904445

[Education: Equality](#)

Asked by: Caulfield, Maria

To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, if she will take steps to ensure that there is equality of educational achievement between girls and boys in schools.

Answering member: Nick Gibb | **Party:** Conservative Party |

Department: Women and Equalities

Evidence shows that girls outperform boys on average at the end of primary and secondary school. The attainment of boys has been improving in primary school: in 2015, 77% of boys achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2, compared to 71% in 2012. Nonetheless, more remains to be done to raise levels of achievement amongst boys at all key stages.

While girls have higher attainment, they are still less likely than boys to pursue further study beyond the end of secondary school in subjects such as mathematics and physics – although the number of girls entered for A levels in these particular subjects has risen by 13 percent and 16 percent respectively since 2010.

In addressing these issues, we have placed high expectations at the heart of our school system through our new curriculum and reformed exams – and our new accountability system will reward those schools that encourage every child, boys and girls alike, to achieve their best. We are committed to delivering educational excellence everywhere so that every child, regardless of gender or background, can reach their potential.

02 Mar 2016 | Written questions | 27848

[School Attainment Levels](#)

Asked by: Will Quince (Colchester) (Con):

What assessment she has made of the difference in levels of attainment between boys and girls at school. [902381]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Nicky Morgan): Thanks to our reforms and the hard work of teachers across the country, more pupils—boys and girls—are getting the education they deserve. Girls outperform boys on average at both primary and secondary school, but while girls have higher attainment, they are less likely to pursue subjects such as physics and maths. As Education Secretary, I am aware of all those issues and determined to tackle them.

Will Quince: I thank the Secretary of State for that response, but the sad reality is that, in 2014, 10% fewer boys attained A* to C at GCSE, including maths and English. What steps will she take as Minister for Women and Equalities and Education Secretary to close this gender gap and help boys to achieve their full potential?

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important issue. There is certainly more that we need to do to tackle underachievement

among boys, especially among white working-class boys, I am sorry to say. The Chancellor has committed to the pupil premium, worth £2.5 billion, for the rest of this Parliament; a quarter of white British boys are eligible for that funding. We need to do more to explain to young men the careers that are out there and why they will need skills such as maths, but we also need to think about parental engagement—a lot of the messages will come from home that education is very valuable and that boys as well as girls need to focus in school.

[...]

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Has my right hon. Friend considered whether the disparity between the numbers of male and female teachers, especially in primary schools, is affecting the attainment level of boys?

Nicky Morgan: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Young people benefit from strong role models, and we have an excellent workforce in our primary schools, with 82% of teaching in those schools rated good or outstanding. I would like to see more male teachers; equally, I would like to see more female headteachers in our secondary schools.

26 Nov 2015 | Oral questions | 602 c1480-1

[Pre-school Education: Basic Skills](#)

Asked by: Lord Storey

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they will take to reduce attainment gaps in literacy and numeracy between boys and girls in pre-school education in the short and long term.

Answering member: Lord Nash

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is the statutory framework for all early years providers¹. The EYFS seeks to provide quality and consistency in all early years settings, so that every child makes good progress, attainment gaps are reduced and no child gets left behind. The EYFS specifies areas in which early years providers must support children to develop, including literacy and numeracy. It is the responsibility of early years providers to identify and meet the learning and development needs of the children attending their setting. The EYFS requires providers to carry out ongoing assessment of children's development and needs and should address any learning and development needs in partnership with parents and/or carers, and any relevant professionals.

The Department for Education is increasing the level of required English and maths qualifications for members of the early years workforce. This will ensure that all those working with young children have the right

¹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2

skills to support all children to achieve appropriate levels of literacy and numeracy.

1. We have published guidance on Teacher's Standards (Early Years) which includes a requirement for Early Years Teachers to demonstrate a clear understanding of synthetic phonics and strategies for teaching early mathematics. The standards also require Early Years Teachers to plan and adapt education to cater for the needs of individual children, to make accurate assessments to inform children's learning and development and to promote equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice.
2. Early Years Teachers must pass the same professional skills tests as trainee school teachers and must have GCSE English and maths at grade C or above on entry to training courses.
3. NCTL published new, more robust, criteria for level 3 qualifications in July 2013 – the "Early Years Educator" criteria. They set out the minimum requirements for the knowledge, understanding and skills which learners must demonstrate during assessment for their qualification to be considered qualified at level 3. The criteria include a requirement for qualifications to include a focus on recognising and meeting the individual learning and development needs of children.
4. From 1 August 2014, Government funding of Level 3 Early Years Educator training courses through the Skills Funding Agency will require trainees to have GCSEs in English and maths, at grade C or above, on entry. The EYFS has been amended to require staff holding a new Early Years Educator qualification to have achieved GCSEs in English/English Language and maths, at grade C or above, in order to count in the staff ratios at level 3. From September 2014, GCSE English and maths, at grade C or above, will be required on exit from a level 3 early years apprenticeship. This is an interim measure to support the sector in reaching the higher standards required. From August 2015, the GCSEs in English and maths, at grade C or above, will be required on entry to an early years apprenticeship.

The Department is also working with experts in the voluntary sector and charitable organisations to support work in these key areas. We have funded English and Maths Champions programmes through the National Day Nurseries Association to spread good practice in teaching literacy and numeracy in the early years.

We are investing £1.4m in the Early Language Development Programme – which has so far helped well over 100,000 parents and family members to spot problems and get support with their children's speech and language. This work is being led by I CAN, the children's communications charity. We are also investing almost £1m in the work of the Literacy Trust to develop a model to improve targeting and engagement of the most vulnerable families by staff in Children's Centres and support volunteers to improve children's early literacy and language skills.

5. Reports and further reading

Save the Children, [*The Lost Boys*](#), July 2016

The Sutton Trust, [*Believing in Better*](#), June 2016

Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), [*Boys to Men: The underachievement of young men in higher education – and how to start tackling it*](#), May 2016

PISA, OECD, [*The ABC of Gender Equality in Education: Aptitude, Behaviour, Confidence*](#), 2015

Education Committee, [*Underachievement in Education by White Working Class Children*](#), HC 142 2014-15, June 2014

OECD, *Closing the Gender Gap Act Now*, 2012

- [*Executive summary*](#)

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