




IMPROVING  
**GENDER**  
BALANCE &  
EQUALITIES



**Data guide**  
For secondary  
schools



“Using performance data is one of the most powerful ways of improving gender-equitable outcomes for all pupils”

Taylor (2007) <sup>[1]</sup>

# Introduction

## About this guide

Outcomes for young people in terms of employment and mental and physical health are still too often linked to gender. The aim of this guide is to help practitioners gather and analyse a range of data to support planning approaches to address these persistent gender imbalances. This includes disaggregating data educational settings will already be gathering such as that relating to subject choice, attainment, attendance, learner pathways and positive destinations. We also suggest looking at data relating to the wider ethos of the school such as learner perceptions, behaviour, and opportunities for personal development (and the value placed on these).

## Things to bear in mind

- Data about gender should be looked at in conjunction with other key characteristics including, but not limited to, race, Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) and prior attainment.
- Qualitative data (including learner voice) as well as quantitative data should be examined.
- Caution should be taken when interpreting small samples in order to avoid unrepresentative generalisations.
- Ensure marginalised voices are heard and not lost. Care should be taken not to *just* represent the most 'common' themes in a data sample as this can drown out minority voices.
- Remember that boys and girls do not make up two distinct, homogenous groups. It is important to consider *which* boys and *which* girls each issue will affect the most. This might involve consideration of: which end of the attainment spectrum? Which SIMD quintile or free school meal entitlement (FME)? Which stage in the curriculum? Which area of the curriculum?

**Please note:  
We refer to 'girls' and 'boys' in this guide in order to allow discussion of the impacts of gender stereotypes on all learners. This is not to imply that gender categories are binary or fixed.**

### The story behind the data

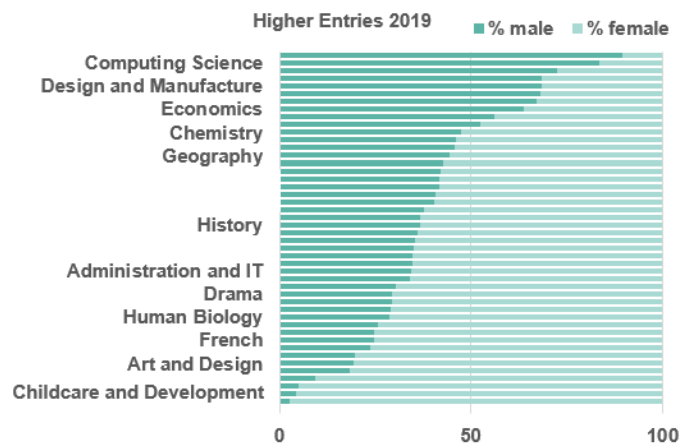
Data, of course, does not in itself improve outcomes. Careful interrogation of the data can be used to identify underlying patterns and, crucially, to inform dialogue

about what is creating and upholding those patterns. Those deeper improvement questions are likely to include reflections on unconscious gendered expectations.

### As a starting point you might wish to consider the following questions:

- To what extent do we have a shared understanding of the importance of disaggregating data by gender?
- How well do we involve a range of perspectives (including a balance of genders) when considering the implications of the data?
- How does the school support parents/carers in understanding gendered patterns in data?

# Choice and self-selection



- **Subject choice at Higher level (see graph<sup>[2]</sup>) is highly gendered.**
- **Post-school intentions are also highly gendered (particularly for health, ICT, science and engineering professions)<sup>[3]</sup>.**
- **Perceptions of how difficult a subject is, and whether it is 'masculine' or 'feminine' can influence learner choice<sup>[4]</sup>.**
- **Engagement with specific out of class activities is often gendered.**

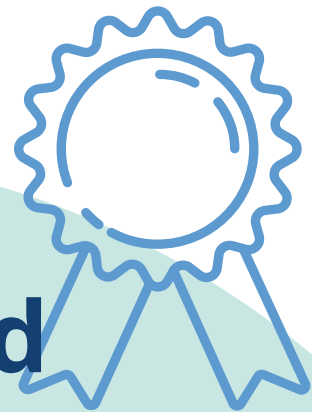
- Examine subject uptake trends for all senior phase qualifications by gender.
- Look at trends over the past 5 years. What are the patterns both within individual subjects and across all subjects at whole school level?
- Are there any gender differences in progression (for example from N5 to Higher) in individual subjects?
- Examine learner pathway data. Is there a particular group who are more likely to follow a college or work-based learning pathway rather than a university pathway for example?
- Investigate the future intentions of learners in more depth. What sectors of employment are they interested in? What roles? What aspirations?
- Investigate learners' perceptions and assumptions about individual subjects. This might include which words they associate with the subject, what jobs they link to subjects.
- Within a particular subject, what is the learners' experience of the topics, contexts for learning and role models?
- Examine who participates in opportunities for personal achievement. This might include clubs, sports, or volunteering. Do these opportunities succeed in broadening outlook for a range of learners?



## Reflect

- o How might perceptions of a subject as difficult or easy influence which subjects will be chosen? Does this affect the gender balance of certain subjects?
- o How might unconscious perceptions and assumptions about a subject or topic, held by teachers and/ or those providing advice on choices, influence learners' perceptions?
- o Are there any gender stereotypical images/phrases in subject choice information or the marketing of different pathways and sectors?
- o How are differences in which areas learners see as 'for them' explored?
- o Consider the priority given to different out of class activities. Does one group tend to get preferential access to space e.g. netball vs football? Are any activities perceived as having a greater value in terms of personal achievement?

"Boys were significantly more likely than girls to report that their teacher expected them to do well in science, and to feel that their teacher cared whether they understood science"<sup>[5]</sup>.



# Attainment and self-efficacy

- **There are gender gaps in attainment. This under-attainment can negatively impact boys or girls in different areas** <sup>[6]</sup>.
- **In schools where gender constructions are less accentuated, boys tend to attain better** <sup>[7]</sup>.
- **Significantly more girls than boys in Scotland agreed with the statement 'when I am failing, this makes me doubt my plans for the future'** <sup>[3]</sup>.
- **Boys and younger age groups have consistently reported higher levels of confidence than older girls** <sup>[8]</sup>.

For the following suggestions, consider disaggregating by gender, race, SIMD and/or Free Meal Entitlement (FME).

- Examine attainment by subject, by achievement of a curriculum for excellence level (ACEL) and Scottish National Standardised Assessment (SNSA) data.
- How well do predicted grades compare to actual grades?
- Look at data on who receives targeted support. What does this reveal about learning needs, behaviour patterns, wellbeing?
- Examine positive destination data. Are there patterns in the types of destination? Are there any groups that are less likely to arrive at a positive destination (for example unemployed and not seeking employment)?
  - In skills profiling, are there any differences in the skills that are suggested?
  - Consider gathering data that could illustrate the self-efficacy of learners by subject.
  - Consider gathering data around who is asked to represent the setting, particularly for pupil voice. Is there diversity in terms of gender, SIMD, race etc.?

## Reflect

- o How might unconscious bias feed into any assumptions and expectations about who might attain highly and who might need more support?
- o How might this bias impact interactions, marking decisions, advice offered and so on?
- o How might this in turn affect a learner's self-belief, confidence and attainment long term?
- o How well does your presentation policy mitigate possible impacts of unconscious bias?

**Self-efficacy is the belief we have in our own abilities, specifically our ability to meet the challenges ahead and complete a task successfully**

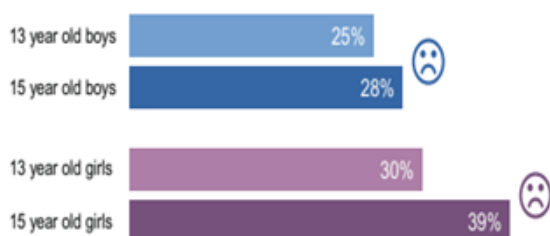
<sup>[9]</sup>

# Health, wellbeing and behaviour



- The decline in girls' mental wellbeing in recent years may be related to substantial gender gaps in factors that relate to mental wellbeing, such as participation in sports and pressure of school work <sup>[10]</sup>.
- Girls appear to be more negatively influenced by school performance and pressure than boys <sup>[8]</sup>.
- Boys also suffer poor mental health and those aged 15 to 19 are two and a half times more likely to die by suicide than girls <sup>[11]</sup>.
- Where learners felt they were shouted at, only boys concluded that this led them to hate school. The girls tended to make excuses for the teachers and blame themselves to some degree for being shouted at <sup>[12]</sup>.
- In 2018/19 boys in Scotland accounted for 79% of total exclusions <sup>[13]</sup>.

- Collect and examine data relating to health and wellbeing disaggregated by gender, race and/or SIMD. This might include nurture data, data relating to mental wellbeing, mental health or support plans.
- Are there aspects of Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, Included (SHANARRI) that are more commonly assessed to be lower for one gender?
- Examine trends in factors that relate to mental wellbeing, such as participation in physical activity and/or how pressure of schoolwork is experienced.
- Examine your behaviour referral and attendance data. Are there any differences or similarities in the nature and number of referrals by gender? Do attendance patterns vary by gender?



## General mental wellbeing of 13 and 15 year old girls and boys

## Reflect

- o How might unconscious expectations about emotional literacy impact interactions with individuals, and advice given?
- o Is there potential (due to unconscious bias) for expecting and accepting, and therefore driving different behaviours from girls and boys?
- o How well are all learners encouraged to participate in physical activity and develop habits of an active lifestyle and/or self-care?

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For further information and support please get in touch:

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For further, practical resources please visit:

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[Insight step by step guide](#)

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