

LOST BOYS

From Boy to Man

July 2026



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About the Centre for Social Justice

Established in 2004, the Centre for Social Justice is an independent think-tank that studies the root causes of Britain's social problems and addresses them by recommending practical, workable policy interventions. The CSJ's vision is to give people in the UK who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantages and injustice every possible opportunity to reach their full potential.

The majority of the CSJ's work is organised around five "pathways to poverty", first identified in our ground-breaking 2007 report *Breakthrough Britain*. These are: educational failure; family breakdown; economic dependency and worklessness; addiction to drugs and alcohol; and severe personal debt.

Since its inception, the CSJ has changed the landscape of our political discourse by putting social justice at the heart of British politics. This has led to a transformation in Government thinking and policy. For instance, in March 2013, the CSJ report *It Happens Here* shone a light on the horrific reality of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK. As a direct result of this report, the Government passed the Modern Slavery Act 2015, one of the first pieces of legislation in the world to address slavery and trafficking in the 21st century.

Our research is informed by experts including prominent academics, practitioners, and policymakers. We also draw upon our CSJ Alliance, a unique group of charities, social enterprises, and other grassroots organisations that have a proven track record of reversing social breakdown across the UK. The social challenges facing Britain remain serious.

In 2026 and beyond, we will continue to advance the cause of social justice so that more people can continue to fulfil their potential.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to those organisations and individuals who have so generously given their time, expertise and experiences to contribute to our research over the past year. Their work on the ground across the UK is inspiring. Innovation and an unflinching commitment in the belief of the inherent dignity of those whom they are working with and for should be a source of great pride for The United Kingdom. These stalwart supporters of boys and young men across Britain are inspiring.

With thanks to those of us who met with us before we launched our State of the Nation report, including:

Betel UK; The Ben Kinsella Trust; LadsNeedDads; Street Connect; The Training Cave; Building Futures Together; Ascend Now; Swinton Lock; Rush House; Families Need Fathers; FAST London; One Eighty; New Beginnings Foundation; Mentell; Boathouse Youth; Oasis Community Centre; The Carpenters Arms; and The Grace Foundation; The Laurel Centre; Get Clean; PEEK Glasgow; Community Link Sheffield; Matter South Yorkshire; The Naked Truth;

We are grateful to those who hosted a Focus Group with those with lived or relevant experience, including: The Ben Kinsella Trust; LadsNeedDads, New Beginnings Foundation; Djangoly Learning Trust Multi Academy Trust; Boathouse Youth; The Carpenter's Arms; and Limehurst Academy.

We would further like to thank those who responded to our initial Call for Evidence, that fed into the State of the Nation report, including: Catch 22; Women's Community Matters; Power2; Dr Sanjiv Nichani OBE; The Exaireo Trust; M10 Missions; The Meads Educational trust; Helping Hands Community Trust; Leicestershire cares; OASIS Community Church, Centre & Gardens (Worksop); Home-Start Horizons; Male Allies Challenging Sexism; Building SelfBelief CIO; Action For Children; Kids Kabin; Cardiff City FC Community Foundation; Swan Youth Project (Norfolk) Ltd; Grace Foundation; Passion for Learning CIO; The Children's Foundation; St- Edmunds Society; Eric Knows CIO; The Lampstand Group; The Game Change Project; Weston College; Boys Impact UK; and Lighthouse Residential Homes; and ten other anonymous UK Charities

We are also grateful to the 100 small charities that attended two Big Listens we hosted in Newcastle and Leeds respectively and those that attended online interviews. These include:

Action for Children; Action for Sport; Back on the Map; Boost Talent; Bradford AP Academy; Building Futures Together; Building Self Belief; Children NE; Citizens Advice Gateshead; Club Doncaster Foundation; Coalfields Regeneration Trust; Community Campus 87; Cumbria Youth Alliance; Doncaster Refurnish; Elmore School; Emerald; English Football League; Family Gateway; Focus 4 Hope; Football Beyond Borders; Foundation Futures; Freuds; Getting Clean; GIPSIL; Greggs Foundation; Grimm and Co; Health Professionals for Safer Screens; Help for Health; Henshaws; Hinge Centre; Home for Good; If U Care Share Foundation; Keith Howard Foundation; Key Community; Kids Kabin; Kingdom Wrestling; Leeds United Foundation; M10; Manchester Womens Aid; Marie Collins Foundation; MCR Pathways; Mentoring Plus; Money Buddies; NE Youth; Newcastle University; NEYDL; Nigel Wright Recruitment; North Yorkshire Youth; Northumbria Police & Crime Commissioner; Northumbria Police and Crime; Northumbria VRU; NTWCF; Number 11; Off the Grid CIC; Offploy; One in a Million; Our Way Leeds; Parent and Child Together NE; Positive Futures; Power of Women; Power2; Projects 4 Change; PTMWA; QED Foundation; Quilter Cheviot; Reach Mentoring; Recycle Y'Bike; Reece Foundation; RFA; Rush;

Samares Investments; Sir James Knott Trust; SNAPS; Society Matters CIC; St Aidan's Catholic Academy; St Aidan's Catholic Boys' School; Staying Put; Sunderland Youth Work; Sunshine People; Talk Listen Change; Talk Your Walk; Tandem; TDI; The Children's Foundation; The Corner House Youth Project; The Human Edge, The Lighthouse Project; The Market Place; The Moses Project; The Oswin Project; The Recruitment Junction; The Send Foundation; The Valley Project; Three13; Together for Sheffield; UK Acumen Academy; Unity Poverty in Action; University of Bradford; Wallsend Boys Club; Wallsend Children's Community; West Yorkshire Police; Woodshed Workshop; Woodsmith Foundation; Worth Foundation; Yorkshire Cricket Foundation; Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership; Youth Focus North East; Youth Worker; YWOP

We would also like to thank those organisation and individuals who met with us, before our Lost Boys: Boyhood report, including: Man & Boy; Big Kid; Equi-Law; Tender; Both Parents Matter; Health Professionals for Safer Screens; Catzero; Kick; Boys Impact; Fulham Boys School; English Football League; Chapter 2; Building Futures Together; Djanogly Learning Trust; Camden Family Hub; University of Bradford Local Activity Partnerships Team; SOFEA; Lads Need Dads; Busy Bee; Institute for the Science of Early Years and Youth; M10 Missions; New Beginnings; Boathouse Youth; Kindred Squared; Dallaglio Rugby Works; Reach Mentoring; Fatherhood solutions; James Ray; Dr Sanjiv Nichani; Warren Farrell; Erika Komisar; Brad Wilcox;

We would also like to extend our thanks to those who attended or contributed to our event at the Senedd, including: We Mind the Gap; Arts4Wellbeing; Bulldogs Boxing and community; Coalfields Regeneration Trust; Learning Disability Wales; Llanrumney Hall Community Trust; Stephens and George Charitable Trust; Purple Shoots Business Lending Ltd.

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**THE
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Foreword

There is a simple truth at the heart of this report: boys need guidance.

Not vague sympathy or slogans, as politics and society are often quick to give. Not a list of everything they are doing wrong. Guidance. A clear, positive account of what a good life can look like, and the practical steps that can help them get there.

For too long, we have failed to offer that. We have told boys what not to be, and not what they should become. We have been nervous about using words like duty, discipline, commitment, restraint, and service. We have too often left young men to find their own way through a culture that gives them endless stimulation, but very little direction.

As a father of two sons, I know this is not enough. It is also something I learnt in my own childhood. I come from Heatheryfold and I'm one of five children raised by a single mum. I then joined the military a year after leaving school. Life in the Marines was demanding and acted as a crucible. It had high standards with clear expectations. We were instilled with the Commando Spirit, the four ideals of courage, determination, unselfishness and cheerfulness in the face of adversity. And it was formative. It gave me discipline, purpose, mentorship, and an ecosystem of good men around me.

Obviously, my path isn't for everyone, and I wouldn't want it to be. But we must recognise that for a lot of boys, expectations are low or absent, purpose feels far off, and they have fewer relationships with older men than young men ever have before. That evidence is reflected in these pages and is often uncomfortable. Boys are now often shaped by what they see on their screens; a cluttered and confused tapestry of everything from pornography and gambling to gaming and influencers, long before any man has offered them a better path.

If we want to really solve this challenge of the 'Lost Boys' then we cannot shy away from these truths.

This report is a step in the right direction because it attempts to give boys a positive social script. They need advice. They need institutions and men to help them grow up. They need a vision of adulthood that dares to actually give them, a generation of boys so often dubbed lost, lazy, and irresponsible, responsibility.

While I do not necessarily agree with everything in this report, I admire the simplicity of approaches like the 'Success Sequence', and the genuine attempt to offer boys something that we can all get behind: finishing school, getting a job, and building a committed relationship. That should not be controversial. It should be the minimum we are willing to offer.

If we want better men, we must help boys become them.



Al Carns

MP for Birmingham Selly Oak

Executive Summary

Since first launching out Lost Boys work 18 months ago, the UK has begun a national conversation about the problems facing boys and young men. There have been political debates, news stories, documentaries, TV series, adverts and campaigns. New organisations and champions have emerged and the dial is beginning to shift.

But too much of it continues to focus on the problems. Phrases like “toxic masculinity” and the “manosphere” are now staples of public parlance but we still too often fail to recognise the quirks, contributions, and positive attributes of young men. At best, this leads us to misunderstand them; at worst, it leads us to demonising them. On top of this it creates a script for young men that is a series of “do nots” rather than providing a positive and ambitious vision for what being a man can be.

Lost Boys: From Boy to Man is our attempt to re-instill hope, guidance, and purpose in the lives of boys and young men in the UK. And with that in mind we have based not just the first recommendation, but the entire structure of this report, on the Success Sequence.

The Success Sequence is an evidence-based script for young people that tells them how to avoid poverty, attain a higher household income, and build strong relationships. The four clear steps of the sequence are: finish school (up to at least GCSEs), get a job, get married, and then have children if you want.

US studies show that 97 per cent of those who followed the entire sequence were not poor when they reached adulthood, while 86 per cent of those who either followed all the steps or were “on track” (those who are not yet married and without children but have finished their education and are in full-time work) were in the middle- or top-income groups. Our own data supports this finding for the UK population.

CSJ analysis of Understanding Society found that among 28-34-year-olds, 87 per cent of those who completed education, entered employment and then got married were in the middle or top third of the household income distribution, almost identical to the US figures. Additional polling of over 2000 people, commissioned for this report, showed a similar result. It found that for men who followed the Success Sequence, 69 per cent described themselves as on stable financial footing versus just 28 per cent for those with no coherent sequence.

With this evidence in mind, this report includes not just the advice for boys themselves to try and follow this sequence, but recommendations for wider policy and culture that would enable boys to take it. We look at school, employment, and the transition from adolescence into early manhood: instilling responsibility and building lasting relationships, and a family.

We also include a summary section on the role of technology, which constitutes a new arena, now permeating all schools, workplaces, and relationships and is therefore also profoundly relevant to all three.

In essence, the Success Sequence is about giving boys and young men a positive social script. Boys need fewer lectures about restrictive behaviour and negative masculinity, and more guidance about what a good and stable life could look like. The sequence is also incredibly appealing because it is grounded

in data. It gives boys a vision of what their future could look like and how they can achieve it, with the importance of work and stable relationships embedded within it.

We do not claim that this is a panacea to boys' woes, or the only way to cultivate 'positive masculinity'. But it is a start. We urge others who share our aim – those longing to help boys thrive – to either get behind this or offer a viable alternative: something that offers boys hope, guidance, and purpose. The gauntlet has been thrown.

School

The first step of the Success Sequence requires boys to finish school, putting considerable responsibility on them. But there are changes we can make to the education system that would better support them in this endeavour. Recommendations include;

- › The introduction of a new Right to Sport for all secondary school pupils, would give at least two hours of extracurricular sport each week.
- › Schools should make greater use of male teachers, coaches, pastoral workers, mentors, visitors and local professionals.
- › Open a new route for 16-year-olds to leave formal education, conditional on having a fulltime work contract and meeting certain GCSE requirements.
- › Reforms to GCSE retakes, mitigating the endless cycles of academic failure.

Employment

Work is one of the clearest routes out of drift and into responsibility. Currently, hundreds of thousands of young men are neither earning nor learning. To support young men in the second stage of the sequence, recommendations include:

- › Scaling ideas such as the "Microjobs" scheme, which offers small, paid, and supported opportunities for young people to try work, build CV material, habits, and soft skills.
- › Expand the Youth Jobs Grant to make it work more like a Future Workforce Credit. This Credit would provide 30 per cent of a NEET's annual salary to employers, half upfront and half after six months of continued employment.
- › Reduce the structural cost of employing young people.
- › A competitive 12-month military service year for 18-year-olds as a prestigious alternative route after school.

Growing up

Good transitions from adolescence to manhood will not happen in a vacuum. Encouraging boys to build responsibilities, and a family life has been made more difficult by the lack of fathers and role models that boys in the UK have. Traditional male spaces – pubs, churches, youth clubs, labour unions – have all seen significant declines in the past half century. Boys are still seeking the direction and affirmation of older men. If they cannot find it in their homes, schools, and communities, they will often look for it elsewhere. With this in mind recommendations include:

- › The government match-fund a new proof-of-concept Youth Infrastructure Fund, backed by private philanthropy, to rebuild long-term, sustainable funding for community groups.
- › A move away from online dependency and towards real-world spaces.
- › Cultural changes that encourage parents to push their children to leave home by their twenties for at least one year, or charge rent if they stay.
- › Fully transferable tax allowances and a wedding grant for those on lower incomes to enable and support marriages.

The online world

No change in the lives of teenagers has been as dramatic as the encroaching universality of the online world. Teenagers are now tech-natives. We cannot look after boys and young men well if we do not seriously engage with their online habits. Therefore, recommendations on this include:

- › Parents should be discouraged from buying their child a smartphone until the age of 16, and that all phones and screens should be kept out of bedrooms.
- › Parents should set clearer limits on gaming time, spending and night-time use.
- › A Safe Pornography Code should be introduced, under-18s should be banned from using VPNs, AI tools likely to be used by children should be age-gated, and generative AI platforms should be regulated where they create, curate or communicate pornographic or sexualised content.
- › Gambling firms should not be allowed to stream live sports on their platforms.
- › Banning social media for under-16s.

Some of these recommendations are direct calls on government. Others are cultural changes that will require businesses, media, parents and individuals to change their behaviour. But we do not claim to have a monopoly on good ideas. Many of these recommendations have come directly from the grassroots – the teachers, youth workers, parents, and boys themselves. And they do all share one thing in common: they are trying to help boys. Taken with our Boyhood report, these 65 recommendations all attempt to shift the dial on how we can best understand and support boys and young men. Because when our boys thrive, our whole society benefits.

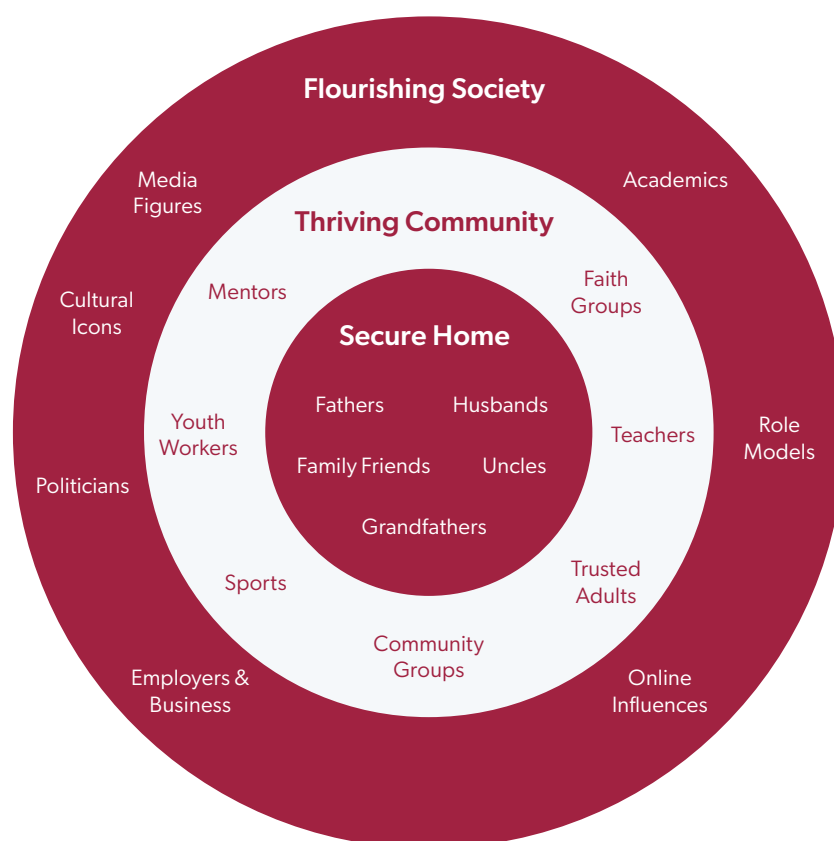
Introduction

This has been a good year for men and boys. Not because all their problems have been solved, but because they have, at long last, begun to be shared.

Our Lost Boys work has been guided by the assumption that to improve the lot of young men, we must address three areas of influence: homes, communities, and society, as figure 1 shows below. While we certainly have a long way to go, there is real cause for optimism.

Events in March 2025 catapulted the movement into the mainstream. Our Lost Boys: State of the Nation report launched on the 5th of March, followed by the release of the highly acclaimed series 'Adolescence' on the 13th of March. Just six days later, Sir Gareth Southgate delivered the Dimpleby lecture in which he referred to the CSJ's report and called for action to rescue Britain's Lost Boys. This serendipitous series of events helped to confirm what, until then, many people have described as a 'nagging feeling': something was going wrong with our boys.

Figure 1: Concentric spheres of male influence



Home: Government has committed to rolling out Best Start Family Hubs across England, backed by more than £900 million over three years, with the aim of having hubs in every local authority by 2028. This is a good start that should continue to go further. It is also clear that fatherhood has moved up the cultural agenda, with the BBC dedicating an entire week to fatherhood. Screen exposure in the early years at home has also moved positively with the government announcing new screentime guidance for parents of under-5s after our report, *Boyhood*, reported that over 800,000 children under 5 were using social media.¹

Community: The House of Commons has debated the attainment and engagement of boys in school multiple times. Grassroots initiatives such as GOAT Boys in Basingstoke are great examples of local men stepping up to help local boys.² This initiative is now scaling to schools across the country. Over 100 charities came together to discuss how best to support boys and young men at our Big Listen events. Philanthropists stand prepared to match-fund an initial £50 million that can be expanded and invested into an endowment if the concept itself is successful.³

Culture: A new Labour Group for Men and Boys has been launched in Parliament. The Prime Minister has promised a national summit on men and boys, with the Deputy Prime Minister tasked with leading the Government's work in this area. The Government has also published England's first Men's Health Strategy, explicitly recognising some of the key challenges facing the health of men and boys. Steven Bartlett used his profile on the second biggest podcast in the world, *The Diary of a CEO*, to profile the *Lost Boys: State of the Nation* report, bringing this conversation into the mainstream.

And yet there is still a lot of work to be done.

Polls vary in their findings about how young men and women feel about the world around them and even each other. A recent poll by the *New Statesman* found that young men were twice as likely to have a very positive view of young women than young women were to have of young men (38 per cent vs 18 per cent). Moreover, young women were also three times more likely to hold a negative view towards young men than young men had towards them (21 per cent vs 7 per cent).⁴

Certain truths are often shared: both feel disillusioned and poorly represented. The International Women's Day survey suggests that half of UK young women think that life will be better for them than it was for their parents. Less than a third of men feel the same.⁵ Half of 18-24-year-old men say that men are too often shown by the media as "a bit pathetic"⁶. 41 per cent of 17-21-year-olds feel that girls and young women are not well represented in the media.⁷

Of course, these are the views of young men who have already lived through babyhood and boyhood and been shaped by their families, schools, communities and online influences. We address the problem and potential solutions of these early years for boys in our recent report *Boyhood*. But whether the experience of boyhood has been positive or negative, adolescent boys and young men face unique challenges. As boys approach manhood, many seek a 'script' or role models to follow. Too often in an age of epidemic fatherlessness and siloed online culture 'masculinity' is seen as negative or toxic, leaving young men confused about the journey into manhood. The image of the disenchanted, disenfranchised teenage boy is the caricature that is at the forefront of the public's mind when it comes to discussions about *Lost Boys*. And it is this cohort whose situation we seek to address in this report.

1 'New Analysis: 800,000 under-5s Using Social Media', CSJ, *The Centre for Social Justice*, n.d., accessed 8 May 2026, <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/newsroom/under-5s-using-social-media>.

2 GOAT Boys, 'GOAT Boys - Empowering Young Men', accessed 8 May 2026, <https://www.goatboys.co.uk/>.

3 *Lost Boys: Mentors and Role Models*, n.d.

4 'Recent Polling', Merlin Strategy, accessed 8 May 2026, <https://www.merlinstrategy.com/recent-polling>.

5 Ibid.

6 Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2709 adults from 14 to 17 February 2025, including a boosted sample of 18 to 24 year-olds.

7 'State of Girls Rights', Plan International UK, accessed 20 April 2026, <https://plan-uk.org/state-of-girls-rights>.

The Success Sequence

The Success Sequence gives boys a simple and achievable account of how to build a stable adult life. The four clear steps of the Success Sequence are: complete your education (up to at least GCSEs), get a full-time job or have a spouse who does, get married, then have children if you want. Given the significant delays in both marriage⁸ and having children today,⁹ the Sequence also measures those who are 'on track' – those who are not yet married and without children but have finished their education and are in full-time work.

Boys are often given a long list of things not to do: don't be too physical, don't be too loud, don't watch porn, don't gamble, don't be lazy, don't get involved with the wrong crowd. Much of this is necessary. But it is not sufficient. A culture built on what not to do leaves boys without a positive social script to follow. Even positive messaging such as 'be yourself' or 'be kind' fails to provide tangible direction to boys wondering what the point of GCSE Maths is. Nor is it about shaming those whose lives take a different path or pretending that everyone faces the same barriers. But the essence of the sequence is simple and achievable, no matter who you are or where you come from. Furthermore, the understandable inability of some to achieve these steps to any degree does not diminish the value of the sequence itself.

The sequence makes both economic and common sense, telling boys age-old, uncontroversial truths. Do well at school. Get into work. Build a strong relationship. Then, from this security, build a family. There are three key reasons why the Success Sequence is a good idea: it provides a script to a generation who are longing for one, it gives a clear path away from poverty and towards the middle- or top-income distributions, and it ingrains stable, high-quality relationships as something to aspire to.

The evidence

The evidence base for the Success Sequence is strong and varied.

US evidence

The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and Institute for Family Studies found that Millennials in the US who followed the Success Sequence were far more likely to avoid poverty by the ages of 28-34. In their study, 97 per cent of those who followed the entire sequence were not poor,¹⁰ while 86 per cent of those who either followed all the steps or were "on track" were in the middle- or top-income groups. Considering this, various states in the US have integrated the teaching of this sequence into school curricula.¹¹

The AEI study also accounted for structural disadvantage. Compared with the baseline of 97 per cent for all Millennials who followed the sequence, 94 per cent of Millennials who grew up in lower-income families and 95 per cent of those who grew up in non-intact families were also not poor. On top of this, for those who did not go to college but finished high school, worked, and married before having children, 95 per cent are not poor by their mid-30s.

8 'I Do?', CSJ, *The Centre for Social Justice*, n.d., accessed 7 May 2026, <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/i-do-marriage>.

9 'Baby Bust: Helping Families Realise Their Dreams of Parenthood', Family, *The Centre for Social Justice*, n.d., accessed 7 May 2026, <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/baby-bust>.

10 Defined in this report as living below the federal poverty line. The Millennial Success Sequence: Marriage, Kids, and the 'success Sequence' Among Young Adults. Accessed: <https://www.aei.org/research-products/working-paper/millennials-and-the-success-sequence-how-do-education-work-and-marriage-affect-poverty-and-financial-success-among-millennials>

11 See, for example: Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Mississippi, among others.

Understanding Society Analysis

However, because the US context, while containing similarities, is different, we analysed similar evidence in the UK too. It is noteworthy that CSJ analysis of Understanding Society found that among 28-34-year-olds, 87 per cent of those who completed education, entered employment and then got married were in the middle or top third of the household income distribution, almost identical to the US figures.¹² Similarly, for those who were On Track – finished education and entered employment but not yet married or had children – 80 per cent of people were in the middle and upper third.

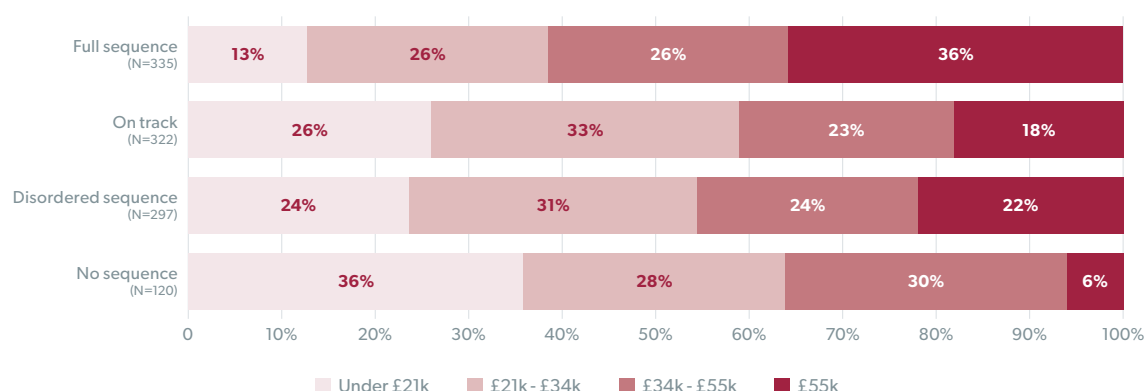
UK Polling

We also conducted polling to ascertain more information about UK individuals' sequencing of events, how this was reflected in their household income, and how it impacted their financial comfort.¹³

It showed that for men who followed the Success Sequence, 69 per cent described themselves as on stable financial footing versus just 28 per cent for those with no coherent sequence.

Additionally, for those who had completed the sequence, 87 per cent had a household income above £21k. Over six in ten of these individuals had a household income above £34k. This compares with just over four in ten of those "on track" and just under four in ten of those who did none of the sequence. Looking at the reverse, those who were "on track" were twice as likely to have a household income below £21k compared to those who completed the sequence. And those who had no sequence were three times as likely to be in this bottom group.

Figure 2: Household income distribution by the completion of different stages of the Success Sequence – adults aged 25-64¹⁴



12 Completion of education is defined as the highest qualification obtained by the individual is at least at GCSE level. An individual's household income is calculated as the average of net household labour income adjusted for household size and inflation when observed in an Understanding Society wave between the ages of 28 and 34. The inflation adjustment is made using the consumer price inflation time series. 'CPI Index 00: All Items 2015=100', ONS, accessed 3 June 2026, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/timeseries/d7bt/mm23?referrer=search&searchTerm=d7bt>.

13 Methodology: Whitestone surveyed 2,108 UK adults online from 22nd to 24th May 2026. Data were weighted to be representative of all adults. Whitestone is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.

14 Disordered sequence refers three distinct categories that people self-selected into: Education - Marriage - Work - Children (5 per cent); Education - Children before stable work or marriage (12 per cent); "Other pattern" – this will include people who have done some but not all of the four milestones in various combinations and orders that didn't fit the specific sequences listed in the survey. It likely includes people who are divorced and remarried, those who had children in multiple relationships, those who never had stable employment, and other complex life trajectories. (83 per cent)

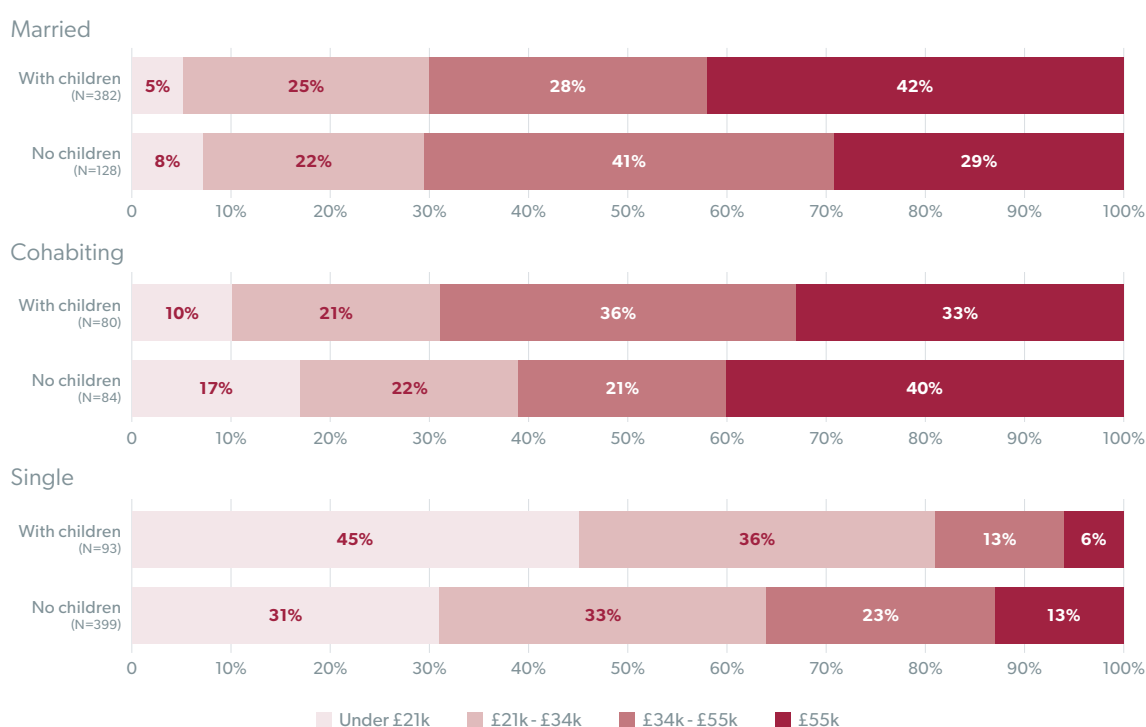
Relational emphasis

Our polling also allowed us to analyse the impact of relationships with education, and the impact of a respondent's childhood stability on current financial comfort.

Figure 2 below shows that those who are married with children are the least likely to be on household incomes of under £21k (6 per cent). The rate was seven and a half times lower than single people with children (45 per cent). Of course, this measures household income, so it is unsurprising that single people fare worse. But the married group were also around half as likely to be in this income bracket compared with the cohabiting group, both with and without children.

Moreover, our polling found that of the group that reported living the most comfortably ("living comfortably" or "doing alright"), marriage was more important than higher education: Marriage without a degree beat a degree without marriage (61 per cent and 56 per cent, respectively). It is worth noting that the best position in this poll was to have both a degree and be married (66 per cent), but the ordering was consistent: degree + married is best, followed by no-degree + married, then degree + not married, with no-degree + not married in the lowest position.

Figure 3: Household income distribution by relational status and children



Limitations

There are a few difficulties that cropped up during this polling which we will outline below. Within each pool of evidence (The AEI data, Understanding Society, and our polling) different problems were raised. The American data was the most solid due to the strength of their datasets, but the US context is different to the UK one. Understanding Society provided a solid UK-based statistical analysis, but the sample size was often sporadic due to dropouts in the longitudinal study. Our polling gave more accurate depictions of the order of events, demographic breakdowns, and relevant other responses, but it has the potential to have a self-selection bias and differing understandings of the questions. Yet, despite these challenges, the basic truth that the Success Sequence works remains. There is too much data and too many similarities between the various methods to ignore it.

Age group in the polling

Our polling data includes a variety of ages and therefore, despite its weighting, could be skewed by the older proportion who are more likely to have both completed more stages of the sequence and have higher income levels.

However, when we just measure men and women aged 25-34, the sequence becomes more pronounced: only one in twenty households who follow the full sequence sit below a £21k household income, over six times the rate of those who did not complete the sequence (32 per cent). Moreover, 84 per cent of those who completed the sequence had an income higher than £34k. This compares with 65 per cent of those "on track", 52 per cent of those who completed the sequence in a different order, and 41 per cent of those who completed none of the sequence. Furthermore, of just men aged 25 to 34, those who had completed the sequence were almost three times as likely to report being in a positive financial position compared to those who had not (86 per cent compared to 33 per cent). It is interesting that the findings of following the sequence were more pronounced for younger groups.

Level of education

The polling data included in Figure 1 includes those who have completed any stage of education (after GCSEs) and therefore lumps those with just GCSEs and those with a doctorate together.

Yet, when we measured just those whose highest qualifications were GCSEs, the pattern of the sequence persisted. Those who completed none of the sequence were two and half times more likely to have a household income under £21k than those who completed the full sequence (49 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively). They were also three times less likely to be earning over £55k. Again, this was a significantly smaller sample size than that produced in figure 1.

Benefit income

It is worth noting that the household income question asked respondents to report their total household income, which will include any benefits they receive. The charts therefore mix earned income and benefits income together. Clearly, this means that some income figures will be artificially elevated and the true gap between different groups on *earned* income is likely larger than the charts show. However, given the reality that most households are claiming some kind of benefit (e.g. child benefit), it was difficult to fully remove the equalising impact of this.

School

There are a few areas within the school system where boys are struggling. The key areas we identified include the persistent gender gap, school exclusions, plummeting levels of reading for pleasure, a sense of belonging at school, including how this relates to school exclusions, access to sports and extracurricular activities, and a pupil's line of sight to life after school. By a ratio of almost three to one (56 per cent to 20 per cent) the public feels that the school system is failing to develop and nurture this generation of boys. This rises to 66 per cent of 18-24 males and 64 per cent of 18-24 females.¹⁵ The best place to start in better supporting boys is the beginning of their school journey. But obviously, this misses those boys in secondary school now. What follows are a few recommendations and ideas aimed to soften what can often feel like a one-size-fits-all system.

It is worth noting that we will also be releasing more publications in our Rewiring Education series that aims to improve technical education in this country. Technical education is a brilliant, though often underappreciated, alternative to the academic route. Additionally, a more hands-on, industrial form of education with routes into work would appeal to a large portion of young men across the UK. This Lost Boys report also touches on some wider cultural changes we can make, such as reducing the school leaving age. The next Rewiring Education report will look more deeply into how we can rebalance our education system and create a genuine technical pathway for young people. For many boys, this change can't come soon enough.

The Success Sequence

RECOMMENDATION 1

Schools should include teaching on the Success Sequence as part of RSHE lessons.

Pupils in RSHE are currently taught about consent, contraception, healthy relationships and online harms. They are less often taught how education, work, commitment, marriage and parenthood fit together, and how this can impact their future income and relational satisfaction. This is especially crucial now as so many young people are growing up without strong models of stable work, committed relationships, or present fatherhood.

Boys need fewer lectures about restrictive behaviour and negative masculinity, and more guidance about what a good and stable life could look like. Ideas like the Success Sequence are a good place to start.

We do not claim that this is a panacea to boys' woes, or the only way to cultivate 'positive masculinity'. But it is a start. We urge others who share our aim – those longing to help boys thrive – to either get behind this or offer a viable alternative: something that offers boys hope, guidance, and purpose.

¹⁵ Lost Boys: State of the Nation, n.d.

Reading

This year is the National Year of Reading.¹⁶ It is the third national year of reading that the UK has held (the previous years were 1998 and 2008). This comes at an important time for young people, and especially young boys. As we mentioned in our original State of the Nation, young boys have never had such low rates of reading for pleasure as they do now. In 2024, they were at their lowest rate on record: 34.6 per cent for all 8–18-year-olds, or 28.2 per cent for just boys.¹⁷ In the following year, the trend worsened: 32.7 per cent for all 8–18-year-olds, or 25.7 per cent for just boys.¹⁸ Unfortunately, three quarters of boys are now unlikely to read for pleasure.

Gender and age were the most significant variables as to whether young people enjoyed reading. To summarise, the biggest decline in enjoyment was found in teenagers between the ages of 11 and 16, and the gap between boys and girls was significant and present across all ages. Interestingly, there was very little difference in reading for pleasure between those on free school meals and those who were not.

This will have enormous knock-on impacts. Greater reading levels will result in higher cognition levels and better critical thinking capabilities. Reading is also one of the greatest ways to produce and develop empathy in individuals as they place themselves in the shoes, thoughts, and emotions of a character. On a more basic level, reading is the key to unlocking opportunity in the future. Those who struggle with basic literacy will struggle to make the most of many opportunities later in life. Bearing this in mind, it is a tragedy that over half of prisoners are functionally illiterate with a reading age below 11.¹⁹ Many major initiatives across government - from education, primary prevention, and criminal justice – would benefit from a more literate generation. For more information on this, see our submission to the inquiry into reading for pleasure by the Education Select Committee.²⁰

The best way to ensure that young people read is to make sure that they are interested in what they are reading and they enjoy the process of reading itself. The difficulty with this is that it does little to suggest what we can do to encourage more reading in young people, besides allowing them to read what they are interested in and making sure they don't find the process of reading too cumbersome. It presents a few related problems, too: firstly, it suggests that we have been failing to give children reading that is appropriately targeted to their interests; secondly, that we have not sufficiently trained young people to be able to progress through a book in a way that is enjoyable; and, thirdly, that we have not made a strong case for reading as a pleasurable way to pass time.

This last point is especially important and leads to one of two important solutions. We cannot talk about levels of reading on the one hand without addressing the arch-nemesis of the book: the screen. Screens, of course, have their place. They are important and are not going anywhere. However, the constancy of notifications and the addictiveness of the algorithm are clear additional barriers to the patience, peace, and quietness required to sit and read a book. We must be intentional in offering young people times and spaces that are screen-free. We are essentially offering them fruit and cake at the same time, telling them that they should try the fruit, but leaving the decision to them.

16 National Year of Reading 2026 | Go All In, n.d., accessed 27 April 2026, <https://goallin.org.uk/>.

17 'Reading For Pleasure Research', National Literacy Trust, accessed 27 April 2026, <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/children-and-young-peoples-reading-in-2024/>.

18 'Children and Young People's Reading in 2025', National Literacy Trust, accessed 27 April 2026, <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/children-and-young-peoples-reading-in-2025/>.

19 'Prison Education Statistics 2019 - 2020', GOV.UK, accessed 27 April 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-education-statistics-2019-2020>.

20 'Reading for Pleasure - Committees - UK Parliament', 5 March 2026, <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/9456/reading-for-pleasure/publications/>.

The second important area for reading is the role of role modelling. This, vitally, must be at home and school. Currently, fewer than half of parents with children under five (45.9 per cent) read with their children daily. This is a drop of 20 percentage points since 2019.²¹ On top of this, 2.5 million children in the UK have no father figure at home, representing one in five of all dependent children. And, as we have outlined previously, there are significantly more women than men within the school environment. As such, young boys growing up today are less likely than ever to see a man reading. Naturally, this will impact their perceptions as to whether they see reading as something that men do.

In response to both challenges - screens and male role models – the solutions are included in the online and male spaces section. For further ideas, see this²² submission from the CSJ to the Education Select Committee, which goes into more detail, though with a more primary and early years focus.

Exclusions

RECOMMENDATION 2

Introduce a House system to all British primary and secondary schools.

Research shows that humans generally bias their friendships towards people who are like them and therefore often don't encounter people who have different experiences from theirs.²³ Policies that encourage mixing among pupils can be useful in breaking this cycle and can afford pupils from different backgrounds the opportunity to learn from each other. Existing studies show that this can increase social mobility amongst those on the lowest incomes and we believe it is likely to encourage role model identification.²⁴ We therefore recommend that all schools in Britain that do not already have a House system introduce one and host house-specific events to encourage mixing across different pupils, regardless of their educational ability or background.

A recommendation like this addresses part of the root of exclusion by explicitly cultivating a culture of inclusion. For further recommendations regarding exclusions, see our termly exclusions tracker²⁵ where we track the trends in exclusion numbers and rates. We also offer our key recommendations to tackle these challenges, including: delivering an urgent review of behaviour standards, the introduction of a national inclusion framework for schools and local academy trusts, an Engaging with Parents and Families toolkit, and the publication of guidance on national standards for high quality internal alternative provision, among others.

21 'Parents' Support for Young Children's Literacy at Home in 2025', National Literacy Trust, accessed 27 April 2026, <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/parents-support-for-young-childrens-literacy-at-home-in-2025/>.

22 'Reading for Pleasure - Committees - UK Parliament'.

23 Raj Chetty et al., 'Social Capital II: Determinants of Economic Connectedness', *Nature* 608, no. 7921 (2022): 122–34, doi.org/10.1038/s41586-022-04997-3.

24 Ibid.

25 'Education', The Centre for Social Justice, accessed 21 April 2026, <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/about/the-five-pathways/educationalfailure>.

Sports

Sport is massively underused. We hear time and again what a great tool sport can be to engage young men. Of course, not every boy loves sport, and lots of girls do too. But it is impossible to ignore how many charities we spoke to who are using a huge range of sports to engage young men. In many ways sport also act as a Trojan horse by which these organisations can embed trusted adults in the lives of young people. It is also no coincidence that private schools do nearly three times as much sport as state schools.²⁶ Sport is something that schools need to be equipped to give both resources and attention to.

'Disproportionate numbers of young men we work with experience challenges of motivation and ambition through school and employment and are spending too long indoors, online and away from exercise, fresh air, conversation and exploration.'

Chief Officer, Kids Kabin

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Government should announce a new Right to Sport for all secondary school pupils, underpinned by new funding to unlock five hours of extracurricular activity for every pupil in secondary schools in England. The Right to Sport would see all pupils participate in a minimum of two hours of extracurricular sport per week, on top of PE time already scheduled on the curriculum.

Sport can engage young people in their school environment and previous CSJ research has shown that 14 – 17-year-olds who are rarely or never absent from school are 2.3 times less likely to engage in low-level crime or antisocial behaviour compared to those that are sometimes or always absent.²⁷ Currently, 1 in 5 parents report that their primary or secondary school-aged children do no enrichment activities in the average week. This Right would provide them with five hours of extracurricular enrichment activities a week, two hours of which are sport, providing vital moments that encourage socialisation and the building of lifelong emotional skills.

The estimated cost of this policy – which provides 190 hours of sport for each of the 3.6 million secondary school pupils – is just under £1.38 billion. We recognise that this policy comes at a significant cost at a time when government finances are not plentiful. A fully costed plan and suggested funding source can be found in Game Changer.²⁸

RECOMMENDATION 4

Official guidance should suggest that all school sports should be held on a Wednesday afternoon.

26 'A Level Playing Field: Equalising Access to Sport and Exercise for Young People after Covid-19', The Centre for Social Justice, accessed 10 April 2026, <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/a-level-playing-field-equalising-access-to-sport-and-exercise-for-young-people-after-covid-19>.

27 'Game Changer: A Plan to Transform Young Lives through Sport', The Centre for Social Justice, accessed 10 April 2026, <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/game-changer>.

28 Cent. Soc. Justice, 'Game Changer'.

DfE should recommend that official sports matches take place on a Wednesday afternoon where possible, setting up a Wednesday afternoon culture for sports and physical activity that can continue throughout school.

In doing this, not only does the time become more clearly distinguished for sport, but it could promote more inter-school sports as they all hold the same time free for sports and activities. This would also help support those particularly sporty children at school who may have to miss lessons for different fixtures or events as the days on which sport takes place are often sporadic. Our qualitative evidence also outlined how extracurricular events or sports are great ways of engaging parents who were less likely to connect with the school.

This change could also soften the transition that some children feel between school and university. Such an adjustment would be subtle but would be felt most acutely by those who are least likely to go to university: in 2023/24 only 13.8 per cent of White working-class boys progressed to higher education by age 19, still the highest level on record (by 0.1 per cent.).²⁹ This compares to the average pupil on free school meals (FSM) progression rate of 28.9 per cent, and a non-FSM progression rate of 49 per cent.³⁰ Familiarity with a variation of 'BUCS Wednesdays' could help support children from more deprived areas feel more comfortable with university life.

Case Study: Shinsei Academy³¹

What it is: *Shinsei Academy is an alternative provision based in Oldham that offers part-time placements for secondary school pupils that are at risk of permanent exclusion or have been permanently excluded from mainstream school. Pupils eligible for Shinsei Academy have an EHCP for either SEND or SEMH needs. It is unique among alternative provision because it combines full-contact martial arts training in Boxing, Kickboxing, Muay Thai, MMA and BJJ with the rigour of GCSE English and Maths. Unlike most other APs, Shinsei Academy doesn't take pupils for 'days out' and doesn't organise regular 'socialisation' sessions – which ultimately means trips to bowling alleys, walks in the park, cinema visits etc.*

Currently, Shinsei Academy works with 15 young people across the week. The pupils all have a range of needs including ADHD, Autism, Oppositional defiance, Tourette's and EBSA.

Why? *Shinsei Academy is deeply concerned with the idea of 'Anomie' - social instability resulting from a breakdown of standards and values - within society and increasing social disconnection. Once excluded from school, a child loses their connection to anchors that ensure they adhere to social norms and behaviours. Without societal anchors that are taught within the school and at home, disengagement from the community at large is likely to prevail. Pupils that attend Shinsei Academy travel together, they eat together, they train together, they learn together and they socialise together. By doing this, the academy binds young people together in a positive sense and teaches them social intelligence, social norms and the benefits of a cohesive community.*

All pupils that attend Shinsei Academy have had some form of familial breakdown – this may include divorce, bereavement, care orders etc. Only one pupil that attends Shinsei Academy lives with their biological father – though most have regular contact. Many of the pupils have 'blended' families that have come together later in life – with children from different relationships coming together. For some of the pupils in this case, this has created stability where there wasn't before.

29 'Release Home - Widening Participation in Higher Education', accessed 14 April 2026, <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education/2023-24>.

30 Ibid.

31 'Shinsei Academy', Shinsei Academy, accessed 28 April 2026, <https://www.shinseiacademy.co.uk>.

What they do: All the pupils are picked up from their homes and arrive at the building around 9am. They travel together. There, they have a light breakfast of toast, hot drinks and pastries. When pupils have finished, they then go into the martial arts section of the day. The pupils then have a break where they can eat again. Pupils then have their academic lesson. Because pupils are worn out and tired, there is a short window where the effects of the vigorous exercise are strongest. The pupils are full of endorphins, their cortisol is low and they are able to sit more easily and focus on tasks. After around 45 minutes, the effects of the training begin to wear off, and the pupils start to become restless. It's then time to spar again.

The routine is fixed each day. Pupils understand what is expected of them at every minute of the day. There are no 'grey' areas like in school so pupils feel safe within this routine.

Figure 4: Regular Timetable at Shinsei

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
8:00 - 9:00	Pick up and Breakfast	Pick up and Breakfast	Pick up and Breakfast	Pick up and Breakfast
9:00 - 9:50	MMA Technique (Striking and Grappling)	Kickboxing (Technique)	Boxing (Technique)	Kickboxing (Technique)
9:50 - 10:05	Break	Break	Break	Break
10:05 - 10:50	Maths	English	Maths	English
10:50 - 11:40	MMA Sparring and Drills	Kickboxing Sparring and Drills	Boxing Sparring and Drills	Kickboxing Sparring and Drills
11:40 - 12:30	Drop offs	Drop offs	Drop offs	Drop offs

The teachers: There is a mixture of male and female teachers and coaches at the academy. The female side is made up of three female coaches and a female counsellor. The impact of these women is twofold: it challenges their perception of what females can do – in a physical sense - and shows the boys a different view of femininity.

The male staff are also clearly positive male role models for the pupils to look up to. Some of the young people have even started to imitate the hairstyles of one teacher, alongside wearing the clothes and equipment that he donated to the group. Another, a professional MMA fighter, provides coaching and mentoring sessions that allow the boys to relate to a trusted adult in a way that many would struggle with when it comes to their teachers or family members. In their mentoring sessions, they cover topics such as consent, boundaries, sexuality and masculinity. The pupils also appreciate that this coach is a professional fighter, father and partner, and has been in trouble with the police in his younger years like many of them. With the male members of staff, they often ask for advice about things happening outside of Shinsei Academy.

Chris, the founder, said:

“The landscape within education is very challenging and many of the pupils we work with have fallen foul of a system that is struggling to cope with the demands of SEND and rising exclusions. The pupils we work with are just as aspirational as any pupil in a mainstream school, they are just as intelligent and they are just as sensitive. They challenge the stereotype of what an excluded pupil is and what they can achieve.

We do not shy away from academic rigour, and we don’t allow our pupils to believe that all they are good for is a trip to a driving range. We want all of our pupils to understand the value of education and the way in which it can be used to improve their lives.”

Teachers

When asked whether a male or female teacher has had the biggest impact on them, 66 per cent of boys said female.³² This is perfectly reflective of the current teaching workforce (at secondary school) which could indicate that the impact of gender on the quality or relational strength of teachers and pupils is not particularly important. Having a good teacher is more important than having a male teacher. There is also little evidence that having teachers of a certain gender significantly improves outcomes. However, it remains that boys being able to see men in their everyday lives is important and schools should be an important mechanism to achieve this. We discuss the importance of this more in the Male Spaces chapter below.

RECOMMENDATION 5

We should encourage more men to work in or be present around schools.

Schools are well placed as areas for men to be consistently present in the eyes of young boys. While teachers are the obvious choice, good male role models can also be encouraged in roles such as cooks, caretakers, sports and PE coaches, special visitors or speakers. Quotas, however, are not the best way to do this; men who want to join the teaching workforce should absolutely be encouraged and supported to do so. As a society, and particularly in schools, we need to think creatively about how to encourage more men to engage in the lives of boys. Schools are often at the forefront of this work and taking this wider approach could shift the dial.

Through our research we have seen a variety of creative ways to help achieve this outcome. In one scenario, KICK, an organisation that provides pastoral support and sports or dance coaches to schools, ended up recruiting a 75:25 male-female split of their coaches. This ratio was despite KICK’s initial intention of a 50:50 male-female split. This was in response to the sheer number of schools who requested, where possible, for more male support staff, in part because these schools had struggled to recruit enough men themselves. It also supported schools to improve the diversity of their school contexts where the workforce is often predominantly female. In doing this, the children are given access to adults

32 Voice of the Boys | Male Allies UK, 29 October 2025, <https://www.maleallies.co.uk/voice-of-the-boys-report/>.

who aren't teachers, within the safety of the school grounds and timetable. KICK has grown significantly in the past 5 - 10 years, reflecting the rising demand for services like this that provide a physical and pastoral element in schools.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Government should help monitor and support the implementation of Lad Pods in schools for children with absent fathers. Outcomes should be measured and if successful, scaled nationally.

Lad Pods is an in-school intervention developed by Lads Need Dads specifically for Year 7 boys growing up without a father or consistent male role model. It provides a small-group setting where boys can access emotional tools, supportive relationships, and positive male role models - all situated within the school day. The programme itself is delivered over 12 weekly sessions within school. Sessions address core themes such as emotional literacy, stress, anger, communication, self-worth, relationships, empathy, and role models. The Lad Pod groups are intentionally small (up to 8 boys) to encourage trust and expression.

This intervention is also uniquely designed to be led by the school's own male staff (trained teaching or pastoral team members) with support from trained facilitators. This differs from many interventions that rely on external facilitators. In doing this, the Lad Pod approach builds internal capacity and sustainability and ensures a consistent positive male presence that stays with the boys across their school journey, rather than depending on short-term external providers.

Early evidence from pilot settings shows promising outcomes. Boys showed improved emotional regulation and mental wellbeing, greater engagement with school and peers, increased confidence, self-belief and classroom focus. There were also positive shifts in behaviour and academic engagement. The sessions are also beneficial for the male teachers and pastoral staff who deliver them. Staff report that involvement in Lad Pods enhances their sense of value, purpose and fulfilment in their role, with many describing it as a highlight of their week.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Schools should be creative in pursuing initiatives and organisations, such as M10 Missions, that connect young people with mentors and role models.

We need to better connect young people into networks of professionals and capitalise on the goodwill of those who want to help be a part of the solution. M10 Missions delivers careers programmes that equip and prepare students for success in life after school. As part of their wider work, M10 also has a Boys Network.³³ This network connects men in business to students in school. They use their experiences in work and wider life to mentor students by offering one hour to one student once a month for ten months.

Interventions like this are important as they instil a sense of vision into the curriculum. Boys often need a line of sight to understand the relevance of their work; they need to be better shown the applicability of what they are learning. Currently, much of their school experience can feel irrelevant to their local context. This is particularly true for boys who don't have strong social networks at home. And when

33 'M10 | Become a Mentor', accessed 28 April 2026, <https://www.m10.org.uk/mentors>.

both home and school are devoid of places or people to aspire towards, setting an aspirational vision is difficult. Connecting working men in the community to boys in school provides this link. These men do three key things: they provide a supportive and critical voice to help the boys understand the importance of engaging with school; they are a touchpoint into the world of work that can often feel far off; and they give good advice: M10's topics for discussion range from budgeting and interview preparation to conflict resolution and emotional intelligence.

"Boys seem less likely to think about career progression - instead wanting to 'earn £2 a brick as a bricklayer' or '£200k on the oil rigs' or '15k a month as a YouTuber...' rather than seeing a path where you work your way up the ladder. This makes sticking in at school all the more difficult."

Stacy Riley, Managing Director of M10 Missions

Lowering the School Leaving Age

At the age of 16, children in England have three options after their GCSEs: stay in full time education, start an apprenticeship, or work or volunteer 20 hours or more a week alongside part-time education or training.³⁴ For those in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, children can leave school. Currently, 36.9 per cent go into further education, 35.2 per cent go to a school sixth form, 12.9 per cent go to a sixth form college, 3.3 per cent go into a sustained apprenticeship, and the remainder of the gap is filled by 'unknown' and 'other' categories.

There is also a growing sense that the economy is not working for young people. This is in part compounded for boys and young men who also experience the messaging that they have certain privileges within the labour market regarding both pay and rates of employment. This is of course true for their father's generation, and possibly the boys themselves in the future. But here and now it is a picture they struggle to recognise. Not only are young people as a whole struggling with nearly one million now classified as NEET, often battling to join the jobs market, but for those under 26, women are now out-learning, out-working, and even out-earning young men.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Open a new route for 16-year-olds to leave formal education, conditional on having a full-time work contract and attaining at least a 4 in their English and Maths GCSE

For many boys a decade of formal education is enough. A further two years in mostly classroom-based study is not the right answer. Not only can the education system be difficult for them to engage with, but full-time supported work as a viable alternative should be encouraged. Furthermore, by making this conditional on hitting certain GCSE requirements, the incentives to pass GCSEs increase. Allowing 16-year-olds the opportunity to go out of school and into work makes GCSEs an explicit step into the next stage of adulthood.

34 'School Leaving Age', GOV.UK, accessed 8 May 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/know-when-you-can-leave-school>.

Disengaged boys that we have spoken with are not lacking in ambition. Rather, they lack a clear line of sight between what they are doing now and what adulthood could look like. On top of this, we often do a poor job of speaking to the most sensitive nerve in the body: the pocket nerve. Where GCSE lessons can feel difficult or abstract, offering clear routes into wages and progression is appealing to many boys. Imagine, for example, explaining to a young person that if they worked 35 hours a week from 16 – 22 while many of their peer’s progress through education they could earn well over £100,000 pre-tax, all the while avoiding vast student debt. Arguments that talk to the pocket nerve of boys offer two important things. Firstly, they are an incentive to work. Seeing the significant sums of money that one could soon earn is a major motivator for a generation of young people at risk of becoming NEET to get into the workforce. Secondly, it would make significant inroads towards putting the non-academic routes into adulthood more prestigious.

This recommendation should be paired with a clear carrot and stick.

The carrot should take the form Recommendation 14, as in the Employment section. Introducing a Future Workforce Credit would incentivise employers to recruit and upskill NEETs aged 16-24. Doing this leaves fewer young people on the employment scrapheap. It would be especially important after a reduction the school leaving age to support the movement of young people who would want to go straight into work at 16.

Different countries also differ substantially in the way they support young people. We should consider similar styled relief in the UK to the international comparisons below. Doing so would be a clear signal of support from government towards the younger generation, and maximise youth employment

- › **Poland – “PIT Zero” for under-26s:** young adults under 26 are exempt from personal income tax on employment earnings up to PLN 85,528 per year.³⁵ This protects earnings for young adults from tax almost up to the median salary. It costs an estimated £500 million per year.³⁶
- › **Malta – proposed under-30 early-work exemption:** Malta’s Labour Party has proposed exempting young people from income tax on the first €30,000 earned during their first three years of work or self-employment.³⁷
- › **Hungary – under-25 personal income tax allowance:** young people under the age of 25 are exempt from personal income tax payments up to the national average wage. In 2021, this was estimated to cost HUF 140 billion, or £340 million.

The stick to go with this policy involves restricting UC Health claims for young adults and reforming of PIP.

RECOMMENDATION 9

The Government should follow through with its plans to delay access to UC Health until a claimant is aged 22 or over.

35 ‘3.6 Integration of Young People in the Labour Market’, accessed 8 May 2026, <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/poland/36-integration-of-young-people-in-the-labour-market>.

36 ‘Nie Masz Jeszcze 26 Lat i Pracujesz? Sprawdź, Ile w Tym Roku Zarobisz Na Zerowym PIT’, 3 January 2020, <https://tn24.pl/biznes/pieniadze/zerowy-pit-dla-mlodych-2020-ile-zarobia-w-tym-roku-osoby-do-26-roku-zycia-ra997565-ls4510800>.

37 Lovin Malta, ‘No Tax On First €30K For Young Workers In New PL Pledge’, Lovin Malta, 28 April 2026, <https://lovinmalta.com/news/local/no-tax-on-first-e30k-for-young-workers-in-new-pl-pledge/>.

RECOMMENDATION 10

The Government should rebalance the welfare system by reforming PIP and UC to reinvest £1 billion in front-line support for people with mental health conditions.

The savings generated from this reform would provide significant capital to invest in expanded treatment. A £1 billion expansion of NHS Talking Therapies could facilitate 1.47 million additional courses of treatment (or roughly 300,000 extra courses per year), which has been proven to improve mental health conditions and help people into work. For more detail on these policies, see our report, *Wasted Youth*.³⁸

GCSE retakes

One of the most significant barriers to progression in the education system is attaining a 4 in English and Maths GCSE. On the one hand, standards matter. Basic literacy and numeracy qualifications help young people read forms, engage with employers, manage money, or navigate public services. Diluting the standard would therefore be a mistake as it could end up certifying competence somewhere it may not exist.

But the present retake system is also failing too many boys. In 2025, only 17.9 per cent of 17+ year old boys taking English GCSE achieved a grade 4.³⁹ This also does not account for disadvantage. Government ethnicity data shows that only 42.9 per cent of FSM-eligible pupils achieved grade 4 or above in both English and maths in 2022/23, compared with 71.6 per cent of non-FSM pupils.⁴⁰ Therefore, it is probably the case that pass rates for retakes are significantly lower than 20 per cent for poorer boys.

Introduced in 2014 the current retake policy requires that students who have not achieved a grade 4 pass in English or maths GCSE by age 16 to continue to work towards these qualifications for future education places to be funded. Students who achieve a grade 3 must retake their GCSE, while students with a grade 2 or below can either take a functional skills level 2 or resit their GCSE.

RECOMMENDATION 11

Limit compulsory retakes, then move pupils onto an alternative literacy and numeracy route.

After two failed attempts per subject students could be moved onto a Functional Skills or modular route unless a teacher judges that another GCSE attempt is genuinely likely to succeed. This would end the demoralising treadmill of repeated failure where the success rate for pupils is so low. Alongside this, we could expand modular English and maths GCSE awards. AQA's Unit Award Scheme allows learners to receive certificates for completed units within a GCSE framework, thus building up a portfolio.⁴¹

38 Cent. Soc. Justice, 'Wasted Youth'.

39 Billy Camden, *GCSE Resits 2025: Pass Rates Stable amid Entries Surge*, 21 August 2025, <https://feweek.co.uk/gcse-resits-2025-english-and-maths-pass-rates-stable-amid-entries-surge/>.

40 *Lost Boys: State of the Nation*.

41 'AQA | Unit Award Scheme | What Is It?', accessed 8 May 2026, <https://www.aqa.org.uk/programmes/unit-award-scheme/about>.

Expanding this route would allow Government to support pupils to bank progress in appropriate and transferrable English and Maths skills.

RECOMMENDATION 12

Bring the adult apprenticeship English and maths flexibilities down from 19 to 18.

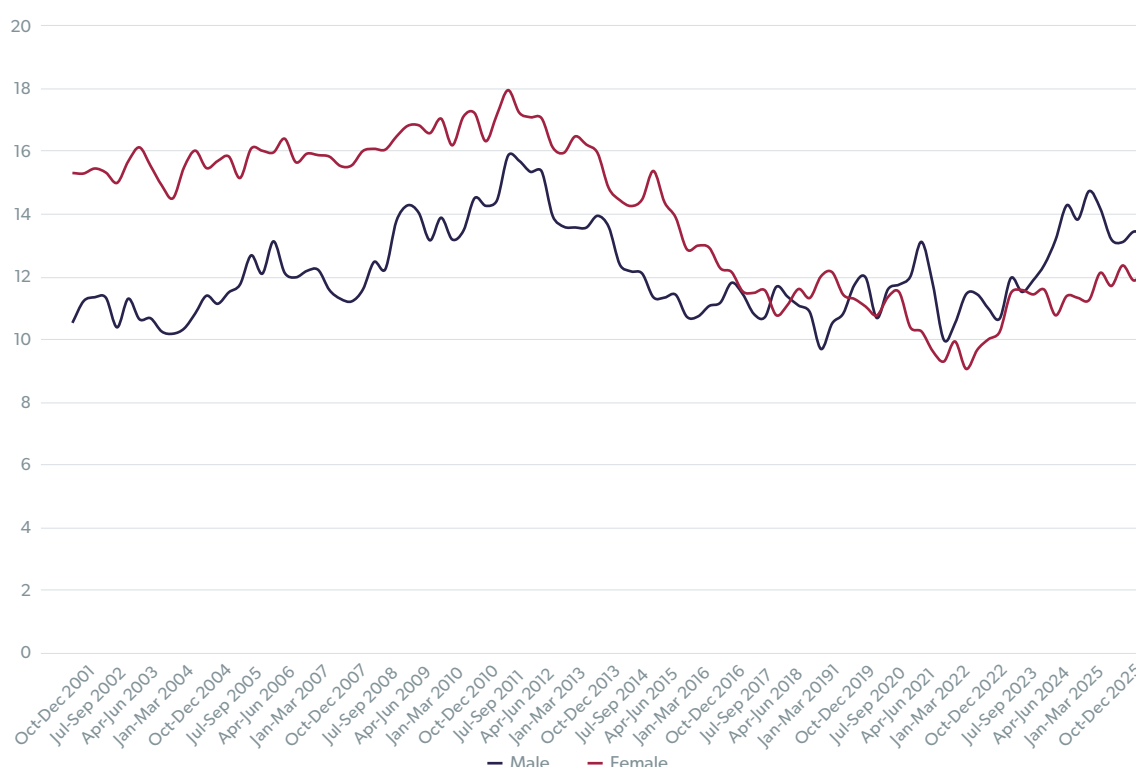
Alongside the retake recommendation, Government should bring the adult apprenticeship English and maths GCSE flexibilities down from 19 to 18. Government has already made English and maths more flexible for apprentices aged 19+, allowing employers to decide whether these qualifications are required as part of the training plan. But 16-18 apprentices still face the previous, stricter requirements. Extending the flexibility to 18-year-olds would help prevent GCSE failure blocking otherwise work-ready young people from completing apprenticeships.

Employment

One of the starker findings in our State of the Nation report was that, at the time of writing, the NEET rate for young men had surged by 40 per cent since Covid, whereas for women it had increased by just seven per cent.⁴² More recent data suggests that, while young men are still more likely to be NEET, the gap between young men and women is now narrower and continues to fluctuate on a quarterly basis (see Figure 5 below). Looking at only those aged 18-24 accentuates the NEET rate, too: in October to December 2025 this rate sat at 15.2 per cent (15.7 per cent for men and 14.7 per cent for women). For those aged 16-24 the rate was 12.8 (13.3 for men and 12.2 for women).

It is worth noting that this gender divergence is the tail end of the trend towards greater female employment and labour force participation. Historically, women have been far less likely to be economically active, employed, or in the education system. Given the push for increased female labour force participation, and the rising age of first childbirth, it is to be expected that young male and female NEET rates will converge. Whilst this is clearly good news for female employment and opportunity, we must also be aware of the consequences for young men of falling rates of employment relative to young women.

Figure 5: The Percentage of men and women aged 16-24 who are NEET, 2001 - 2025⁴³



⁴² Lost Boys: State of the Nation.

⁴³ 'Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) - Office for National Statistics', accessed 23 March 2026, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/unemployment/datasets/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneettable1>.

We need to take the time to examine the causes for this development.

The NEET trends for men and women moved broadly in step from 2016-2020. This is arguably a sign of genuine, matched equality: no gender more or less likely to be earning or learning after GCSEs. Yet, since then, the long-term trends have continued while the picture has got steadily worse for both sexes. Put another way, it is bad for both, but slightly worse for men.

Both young men and young women are competing in a difficult job market. Recent national insurance and minimum wage hikes have made employing people more expensive. Younger, less experienced workers have felt this shift acutely.

As it has become easier to claim benefits for low-level mental health conditions, and as the income differential between benefits and after-tax minimum-wage salaries narrows, it has become easier for young adults to opt out of work.

Private rent on the average-priced home now costs over a third of the median household income in England.⁴⁴ Of course, most young people won't be earning the median household income, so they are forced to either stay at home for longer, claim government support, or simply pay a much greater share of their income into the rental abyss. Add to this imbalanced work incentives, where one million people on combined benefits receive over £2,500 more than someone working full-time on the national minimum wage.⁴⁵ It is no wonder that young people are struggling to get on and up the career ladder.

Clearly, the above explanations do not cover everything and will be felt by both men and women.

Young women also have other barriers to employment and education that they face and, generally, we are good at articulating these. One author noted that, "women have always been significantly more likely to care for family members or children, impacting their ability to work."⁴⁶ (Research shows that, in 2012, almost three quarters of NEET women were inactive for this reason, but this had fallen to around 20 per cent in 2025).⁴⁷ Alan Milburn's recent review also noted that in the past, "a much larger share of youth inactivity was accounted for by young women looking after their children. That number has fallen significantly in England, from over 240,000 people in the early 2000s to less than 100,000 in recent years". They are also "1.3 times more likely to be in insecure jobs than their male peers", and significantly more likely than young men to suffer from mental or other health problems.⁴⁸ As the referenced article highlights, younger women were more likely to struggle with their mental health, be in insecure work, and have caring responsibilities. This is certainly not an exhaustive list, but all of these are given as reasons for increasing a young woman's chances of becoming NEET. And because we have recognised these problems, we can begin to produce targeted solutions.

44 'Private Rental Affordability, England, Wales and Northern Ireland - Office for National Statistics', accessed 24 March 2026, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/privaterentalaffordabilityengland/2024>.

45 A full-time worker on the National Living Wage is expected to earn £22,500 after paying income tax and national insurance. In comparison, an economically inactive claimant on Universal Credit (UC) for ill health with the average housing benefit and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) would receive an income of around £25,000. For more info, see here: 'Welfare Pays More than a Job for 1m on Combined Benefits, Think Tank Warns', The Centre for Social Justice, accessed 23 March 2026, <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/newsroom/welfare-pays-more>.

46 Josh Kirby, 'Why Young Women Are Dropping out of Work Much Faster than Men', *The Telegraph*, 12 November 2025, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/money/consumer-affairs/why-young-women-are-dropping-out-of-the-workforce/>.

47 Andy Powell, *NEET: Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training*, 5 April 2026, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn06705/>.

48 Kirby, 'Why Young Women Are Dropping out of Work Much Faster than Men'.

But it is more difficult to ascertain specific reasons why men seem to be dropping out. A common refrain we heard in the months after releasing the State of the Nation was: *“you’ve explained that many young boys aren’t in school or the workplace, so where are they?”* The answer is, generally, at home or online.

There are two main explanations: that young men remain much more likely to be unemployed than young women,⁴⁹ and the UK’s transition to a service-based economy. This latter point has resulted in a decline in the availability of traditional jobs in male-dominated sectors (agriculture, construction, and manufacturing, for example). These industries used to contribute over 40 per cent of UK output in 1970 but amounted to just 16 per cent of UK GDP in 2023.⁵⁰ As we mentioned previously, de-industrialisation has impacted families, communities and regions differently, but the foremost effect has been on male employment.

But other answers for why young men are particularly struggling in the workplace *now* remain vague and theoretical. After all, this economic transition has been happening for half a century; men and women have both had time to adapt. What follows are a few theories as to why this could be, outside of the major economic arguments.

1. Male sedation theory

The male sedation theory suggests that young people, particularly young men who are much more prone to addiction, are not being pushed out of the workforce so much as they are withdrawing from it. Akin to a Huxleyan future, engaging with the harsher realities of life becomes less appealing as easy alternatives pacify more difficult, and often more well-meaning, desires. The widespread, frictionless, and cheap availability of pornography, streaming, and online gaming are the modern-day Soma. These activities steal away time for outdoor activity or socialisation; they are the new chief consumers of young men’s attention.

Interestingly, this theory has been noted, though not endorsed, by some commentators as a socially ambiguous trend. In his observation of working men in the US, Eberstadt notes that previous periods of history with high unemployment and inactivity for younger men – albeit lower than current levels – had resulted in significant social disruption.⁵¹ As more men moved out of the workforce, antisocial behaviour rose. The devil made work of idle hands, especially those fuelled by testosterone. Yet what we are seeing today paints a different picture. Contrary to headlines, the Crime Survey of England and Wales suggests that overall crime has fallen in the past few decades,⁵² despite more young men sitting outside education and the workforce. In this sense, porn, gaming, and streaming, have acted as a cushion, dampening the typical effects of disengaged men. And it does make sense: access to the workforce gets harder while access to these ‘sedatives’ gets easier. Clearly, this is a deeply unambitious vision for the future of many men.

49 Powell, *NEET: Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training*.

50 *Lost Boys: State of the Nation*.

51 Nicholas Eberstadt, *Men Without Work: America’s Invisible Crisis* (Templeton Foundation Pr, 2016).

52 ‘Fraser Nelson | Data | Crime’, accessed 24 March 2026, <https://frasernelson.com/data/crime/>.

2. Graduates and degree requisite jobs:

Author David Goodhart has argued in his book, *Head Hand Heart: The Struggle for Dignity and Status in the 21st Century*, that 40 per cent of all jobs are now graduate-only.⁵³ This shift has been especially notable within certain industries that did not previously require degrees – policing, nursing, social work, or teaching, for example – but were typically sustained through apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and internal progression.

Given that the ratio of boys to girls at university is now 2:3 at the same time as university attendance has risen for both, it could be that access to the labour market is just a simple downstream result of higher rates of university attendance by young women.

The Prime Minister's reprioritisation of education away from purely targeting university admissions and moving towards apprenticeships and vocational training is laudable. As such, whatever the degree of truth in the claim that employment is simply downstream of graduation, we would endorse a much greater emphasis in on-the-job training and apprenticeships. For too long we have understated the value of vocational training and overstated the value of academic degrees. Indeed, five years after qualifying in their early twenties, a higher level (L4) apprentice earns almost £12,500 more than a student graduating from a low-value university course. The same apprentice earns £5,000 more than the average graduate.⁵⁴ They also have no student debt. It is a shame, therefore, that for every three British young people opting for a university course, just one received vocational training. By contrast, in the Netherlands this ratio is two-to-one, and in Germany, one-to-one.⁵⁵

Moreover, as more young people live with their parents for longer, for reasons already mentioned, this theory, paired with the Male Sedation Theory, could also explain in part why it is that young men are taking three years longer than young women to fly the nest, delaying independence and prolonging adolescence.⁵⁶

3. The way we talk about boys and girls

Writers such as Caitlin Moran have argued that modern feminism worked through the twin levers of policy and culture. Messaging that celebrates womanhood, encourages girls to be ambitious, and reframes gender norms occurred at the same time as policy change. Overall, great progress has been made in the past century in this area. Now, those like Moran are reframing this narrative and asking whether equivalent positive messaging for boys can emerge.⁵⁷

In policy areas such as Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), there is a very delicate balance to be struck between addressing real harms and avoiding narratives that unintentionally portray masculinity itself as problematic. The VAWG strategy is sorely needed: in the five years leading up to 2023, cases of VAWG increased by 37 per cent,⁵⁸ and this government have the admirable aim of halving VAWG in a decade.⁵⁹

53 David Goodhart, *Head Hand Heart: The Struggle for Dignity and Status in the 21st Century* (Allen Lane, 2020).

54 'Stop Churning out Graduates and Start Training Workers, Urges New Report', The Centre for Social Justice, accessed 25 March 2026, <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/newsroom/stop-churning-out-graduates-and-start-training-workers>.

55 'Rewiring Education', The Centre for Social Justice, accessed 25 March 2026, <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/rewiring-education>.

56 There is also a case to be made that this may link to the UK's plummeting birth rates. See here: 'Baby Bust: Helping Families Realise Their Dreams of Parenthood', The Centre for Social Justice, accessed 25 March 2026, <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/baby-bust>.

57 The Sacred, *Have Boys Been Left behind by Feminism?* | Caitlin Moran, 2025, 00:52, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4GRj4L9E>.

58 'Call to Action as VAWG Epidemic Deepens', National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), accessed 25 March 2026, <https://news.npcc.police.uk/releases/call-to-action-as-violence-against-women-and-girls-epidemic-deepens-1>.

59 'Freedom from Violence and Abuse: A Cross-Government Strategy', GOV.UK, 3 February 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/freedom-from-violence-and-abuse-a-cross-government-strategy>.

But we are also now in a situation where 41 per cent of 6th form students have been told that “boys are problem for society”.⁶⁰ In response to the strategy, which identified sending boys on courses to tackle misogyny in schools,⁶¹ the BMJ have identified that one of the challenges facing the government is that while the current strategy “aims to tackle the “root causes” of misogynistic abuse, its argument relies on circular logic by claiming that misogyny itself is the cause of abuse.”⁶² They continue, arguing that “identifying the root causes requires further understanding of the life experiences that draw boys towards misogynistic ideologies, what social factors facilitate involvement, and what political or commercial forces exploit and profit from encouraging misogyny. Without serious consideration of these drivers, boys will remain vulnerable to extremist messaging.”⁶³ This is not out of step with the government messaging, per se, as they write that, adjacent to the VAWG strategy, they are seeking to “build a positive, aspirational agenda for men and boys”.⁶⁴

“[Boys] are seen as toxic and so seem to start at a score of minus 1. With a reduction in traditional male roles it feels as if many people are asking “What is the point of young men?” and just seek to calm them down.”

Youth Worker, Leicester

But it will be a difficult balancing act. The impact of words (culture and messaging) and actions (policies) are different, too. However, to have a meaningful impact it is important that there is alignment in the language that is used towards boys and young men and the actual policies that shape their environment. Our report, *Men in Culture*, sought to understand part of this dilemma by asking whether portrayals of masculinity had substantively changed for the worse in the past few decades, and whether this could have impacted boys own view of themselves.⁶⁵

If girls have been effectively “talked up” and empowered through the language of feminism for several decades, then two questions arise for boys: could negative language have had an inverse effect on younger men, and can similarly positive messaging be developed that affirms a sense of value, purpose, and responsibility inherent in masculinity?

4. Role models

A key refrain in response to the *Lost Boys* work was that more positive male role models were sorely needed. Any response to this must take two forms: how can we support children who do not have these role models – often, but not always, the father - and how can we arrest or reverse the number of children who are facing this problem? A failure to engage with both challenges will simply result in another generation of *Lost Boys*. One key reason a vacuum of role models could impact young men at work is through the lack of a social template. Ambition is so often based on visibility: if you boys do not see men at home or the community, engaging with them in schools, interacting with women positively, being consistent and available, or holding down a job, envisioning such a future for themselves will require a

60 *Lost Boys: State of the Nation*.

61 ‘Violence against Women and Girls Strategy: Boys to Be Sent on Courses to Tackle Misogyny in Schools’, BBC News, 17 December 2025, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c9qednjzww1o>.

62 Brandon Sparks and Louis Bachaud, ‘Boys at Risk of Radicalisation Must Be Approached with Compassion, Not Suspicion’, *BMJ* 392 (February 2026): s345, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.s345>.

63 *Ibid*.

64 *Freedom from Violence and Abuse: A Cross-Government Strategy to Build a Safer Society for Women and Girls Volume 1 Strategy*, n.d.

65 ‘Men in Culture’, The Centre for Social Justice, accessed 25 March 2026, <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/men-in-culture>.

greater degree of abstraction than for those who do. You cannot be what you cannot see. When near half of teenage children don't have both parents at home, and this generally results in the father moving out, and only a third of secondary school teachers are men, these male role models for boys become scarcer.⁶⁶ Simply having a father at home is not a silver bullet, as the quote below shows, but it is more likely to help than hinder. This is especially the case when that model is consistent, loving, and active in the life of a boy.

"We had a particular young man who joined us at 22 having left school at 16 and not attended college or worked since then, and when asked what he had done in that time it was being on a computer until early hours which got him into a pattern of late sleeping and this made it difficult to secure employment or a study opportunity, he lived with a parent, in this case a father who didn't work so didn't have a good role model."

Charity Worker, Birmingham

Microjobs

Zink is a Buxton-based charity, and a previous CSJ award winner,⁶⁷ dedicated to addressing and preventing poverty by tackling unemployment, homelessness, and isolation. Set up in 2015, their focus is empowering individuals by involving service users as volunteers, fostering resilience and community support. Programmes include a foodbank, employability coaching, and wellbeing activities that enhance mental health and skills. Zink helps people build confidence and ultimately achieve financial and social independence.

Zink also has a pilot programme providing paid work experience for four hours a week, referred to as 'Microjobs'. Microjobs enable long-term unemployed people and those with addictions to transition into work more easily. Zink helps 120 clients with employment based support a year and have a 45 per cent job outcome rate. Of the group they help, 20 per cent started training, 20 per cent took up volunteering, and 60 per cent reported an overall improvement in their health and wellbeing.

Analysis of the Microjob project by the University of Sheffield, for example, has showed that Zink's impact has been in boosting the confidence of their service users in three areas: their own abilities, their ability to sell themselves in interviews, and their place in the labour market. This is in direct response to tackling some of the beliefs often prevalent in unemployed individuals: that there are no jobs available, that they will be rejected by an employer, and that they are unable to retain a job. It also helps to give people building blocks for their CV; charities tell us that CV building workshops often fall short because those wanting to work lack the basic materials to build with – qualifications, interpersonal and communication skills, and experience.

Nearly half of Microjob holders moved into mainstream work within six months. This outcome is extraordinary considering that the proportion of unemployed benefit claimants nationally who move into work each year has fallen from 30 per cent in 2014-2015 to 20 per cent in 2021-2022.⁶⁸

66 'Lost Boys: Boyhood', The Centre for Social Justice, accessed 17 March 2026, <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/boyhood>.

67 'CSJ Awards 2025 - CSJ Foundation', accessed 7 April 2026, <https://csjfoundation.org.uk/awards/2025>.

68 "'Work First' Can Work Better | Joseph Rowntree Foundation", 19 February 2024, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/work/work-first-can-work-better>.

RECOMMENDATION 13

Government should analyse the benefits of Microjobs and support the scaling of other local initiatives with similar underpinning principles.

This scheme needs to be paired with access to jobs and professional role models. While the Microjob framework is a great example of local innovation, it must have routes into work for those it is helping. It is all well and good getting paid work experience, especially for those who have little or none, but the impact is limited by the availability of work at the other end. This framework also needs to be relational: those who acquire a Microjob are supported by work coaches and given examples of professional role models to learn from. Any similar work scheme should ensure that these two criteria are always present.

NEET Tax credits

This government has recently announced a form of NEET tax credits to employers. This will cover a significant part of the cost of employing a NEET young person.

The new “Youth Jobs Grant” means that businesses will receive £3,000 for every young person they hire between the ages of 18-24 who has been on Universal Credit and looking for work for six months. Over three years it aims to support 60,000 young people.⁶⁹ The £3000 covers 25 hours per week of fully subsidised six-month paid work. For the young people in question, they receive the relevant minimum wage and funded wrap around support.⁷⁰

This is a strong investment into young people starting their career, especially as the overall number of NEETs now exceeds 1,000,000.⁷¹ This volume of young people classified as NEET is a huge problem, and it is compounded by the lifetime cost of becoming a NEET: leaving the workforce in your 20s can result in a loss of £1 million in lifetime earnings - with the state incurring a similar cost.⁷²

We welcome this change. But government should not stop there.

RECOMMENDATION 14

The Government should introduce a Future Workforce Credit to incentivise employers to recruit and upskill NEETs aged 16-24.

The Credit would be set at 30 per cent of an employee’s salary. It would be worth approximately £5,850 for a 19-year-old employee working full-time (37.5 hours), more than the apprenticeship incentive and NICs relief combined. The Credit would be paid in two halves: the first upfront and the second after six months with proof of the NEETs continuing employment. To be eligible, the employee must be aged 16-

69 ‘Major Employment Drive to Help Unlock 200,000 New Jobs and Apprenticeships for next Generation’, GOV.UK, 18 March 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-employment-drive-to-help-unlock-200000-new-jobs-and-apprenticeships-for-next-generation>.

70 Ibid.

71 ‘Welfare 2030’, The Centre for Social Justice, accessed 8 April 2026, <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/welfare-2030>.

72 ‘Keep Britain Working: Final Report’, GOV.UK, accessed 8 April 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keep-britain-working-review-final-report/keep-britain-working-final-report>.

24 and not have been in education, employment or training for at least three months before recruitment. They must have been resident in the UK for at least three years. Employers would apply to HMRC for the Credit when hiring a NEET. HMRC would verify NEET status by cross-referencing PAYE returns, data from the National Pupil Database and Individual Learner Records, and DWP records. This will require a data sharing agreement between HMRC and the relevant departments.

In our Wasted Youth report we outlined a Future Workforce Credit to incentivise the hiring of NEETs. The Credit would pay employers 30 per cent of a NEETs annual salary, half upfront and half after six months of continued employment. It would cost £670 million but bring £765 million in additional tax revenues and welfare savings.⁷³ So, while similar in principle to the Youth Jobs Grant, a few of the differences included:

1. **Bigger:** The Credit would be worth £5,850 for a 19-year-old working full-time on minimum wage, not £3000.
2. **Faster:** The individual was required to not have been in education, employment or training for at least three months, not six.
3. **Deeper:** To capture those NEETs categorised as 'other', who are not claiming welfare support but are also not working, individuals do not need to be claiming benefits to be eligible for the Credit. This is key as a significant chunk of the NEET population fit into this category.
4. **Wider:** We estimate that the Credit would increase the number of NEETs moving into employment by over 115,000, not 60,000 over three years.

Another reason why tax credits are recommended is because they provide the best response to counteract low levels of employment endured by young people. To raise the supply of jobs the simplest solution is to lower the costs of employment. This can be done, for example, through either lowering the minimum wage or lowering employers' National Insurance contributions. While the employment effects of minimum wages are often modest in aggregate, they do have a generally negative relationship with employment rates and, importantly, are much more prone to hit those on the margins, particularly younger and less experienced workers.⁷⁴ The difficulty for the government, however, is that they have done the reverse to both. That does not stop the Youth Jobs Grant being a good measure. But it should indicate to government that, if they want a sustainable, long-term solution to youth inactivity and unemployment they should investigate wider employment costs, like employers' National Insurance contributions and wage inflation.

Youth Employment in the long term

In the long run, the priority should be to reduce the structural cost of employing young people. That means avoiding further increases in the youth minimum wage and allowing it instead to adjust downwards in real terms. The central issue for young workers is not primarily hourly pay. Rather, it is access to jobs, or too few hours available.

While in-work poverty deserves attention, it is often temporary. For starters, of those who were not working and living in poverty, entering employment resulted in 70 per cent of them exiting poverty, and fewer than 10 per cent of individuals who are in employment are in relative poverty. As such, work

73 'Wasted Youth', The Centre for Social Justice, accessed 8 April 2026, <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/wasted-youth>.

74 Harvey Nriapia, 'Reopening the Minimum Wage Debate', Free Lunch, *Financial Times*, 9 April 2026, <https://www.ft.com/content/1ece1558-0ddb-4159-a0dc-c276826807f3?syn-25a6b1a6=1>.

is recognised as “perhaps the most effective individual driver of movement in and out of poverty”.⁷⁵ Of course this is not a catch-all: the relative poverty rate among working households – not individuals – stood at 18.4 per cent in 2019-20.⁷⁶ The majority (around 70 per cent) of those leaving in-work poverty do so through progression: pay rises, promotions, job transitions, and working more hours. So, while in poverty snapshots are helpful, they often miss the flow of individuals and households in and out of poverty. When it comes to individual young people, their greatest risk is exclusion from the job market altogether.

Alongside pay and progression, entry-level employment provides the skills, habits, and experience that drive future earnings. ONS data shows that between 2007 and 2020, 41 per cent of people who had been out of work for up to three months returned to work within the preceding three months. This proportion reduced to 28.5 per cent for those who had been out of work for up to six months, and 23.3 per cent for those who had been out of a job for six to nine months.⁷⁷ The longer people remain out of work, the harder it is to bring them back in. This impact is slightly lower for young people, but it is felt more acutely in future earnings where a scar from early unemployment in one’s youth results in a drop in earnings at age 42 of 12 to 15 per cent.⁷⁸ In pricing young people out of the labour market, we risk entrenching inactivity at precisely the stage where early attachment to work matters most – for pay, progression, attachment to the labour market, and the cultivation of vital soft skills.

It is for these reasons that reducing the structural costs of employing young people should extend beyond those on Universal Credit. A broader reduction in employers’ National Insurance contributions for young workers would lower hiring costs across the board and expand opportunities, rather than narrowly targeting specific groups.

For many young people, the binding constraint is the catch-22 of needing experience to get a job but needing a job to gain experience. Policy should be designed to break that cycle by making it easier, not harder, to take on inexperienced workers.

Military service

There are over 1 million young people who are classified as NEET in the UK.⁷⁹ There is also a need for young men to invest in something bigger than themselves that serves a valuable purpose. At the same time, the Armed Forces face their own personnel challenge. We are currently in the most volatile international environment in recent memory. And, in 2025, all three branches of the UK Armed Forces were below target, with a total gap of 8,590 personnel.⁸⁰ These are separate problems, but a well-designed service year could speak to both.

RECOMMENDATION 15

Introduce a competitive 12-month military service year for 18-year-olds.

75 Paul Gregg and Emma Tominey, *The Wage Scar from Youth Unemployment*, n.d.

76 Jonathan Cribb et al., ‘Why Has In-Work Poverty Risen in Britain?’, *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics* n/a, no. n/a (n.d.), <https://doi.org/10.1111/obes.70027>.

77 ‘Which Groups Find It Hardest to Find a Job Following a Period out of Work? - Office for National Statistics’, accessed 9 April 2026, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/articles/whichgroupsfindithardesttofindajobfollowingaperiodoutofwork/2021-03-30>.

78 Gregg and Tominey, *The Wage Scar from Youth Unemployment*.

79 ‘Young People out of Work, Training and Education Edges Closer to One Million’, BBC News, 26 February 2026, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c62gzl2y-124o>.

80 Esme Kirk-Wade, *UK Defence Personnel Statistics*, 30 April 2026, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7930/>.

Government should introduce an optional, selected military service year for around 15-20 per cent of 18-year-olds, paid at apprenticeship rate and linked to post-service employment, apprenticeships or further training. The scheme should be open to young men and women but actively marketed towards young men. Participants would receive military training, physical conditioning, travel across the UK, skills, discipline, mentoring and a clear sense of national belonging.

This scheme should be based on the Norwegian model. Around 9,000 young Norwegians complete compulsory military service annually, normally involving a 12-month initial service period before reserve or National Guard assignment. Because it is selective and screens for both motivation and competence it holds a prestige status. The difficulty with this, however, is that it could end up just recruiting competent and confident young people who are less likely to need the benefits of this service. Because of this, approaches to recruitment should be broad, accounting for class, region, race, and family background where possible.

Promisingly, pilot schemes for similar ideas have begun. The MOD's new Armed Forces "gap year" Foundation Scheme has recruited an initial 150 under-25s in March, offering paid experience and training across the Army, Royal Navy and RAF.⁸¹ Ministers are hoping to expand this to more than 1,000 participants if successful. The pilot scheme has been earmarked to cost £13m.⁸² It will also not involve active deployment or require participants to remain in the military afterwards.

Expansions of this scheme should not be designed as a dumping ground for struggling boys. The offer should be simple: one year serving your country, developing key soft skills, and learning responsibility. In our foreword to the first Lost Boys report, our chief executive wrote that the "deeper truth is that too many boys are growing up without the guidance, discipline, and purpose they need to thrive". Recommendations such as this directly target the root of this.

81 'Armed Forces to Launch "Gap Year" Scheme for Young People to Bolster Skills and Leadership', GOV.UK, accessed 7 May 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/armed-forces-to-launch-gap-year-scheme-for-young-people-to-bolster-skills-and-leadership>.

82 'Written Questions and Answers - Written Questions, Answers and Statements - UK Parliament', accessed 7 May 2026, <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2026-01-07/103960/>.

Growing up

It is entirely possible for boys in the UK to reach their teenage years without meaningfully engaging with an older man.

Children now have almost a one in six chance of not living with their father when they are born (16 per cent).⁸³ There are also significant age and geographical related spreads within this data. For example, for mothers under the age of 25 or for those in more deprived local authorities, like Knowsley, the rates are as high as one third (37 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively). Likewise, in less deprived areas and births within the age ranges of 25-40, the percentages are significantly lower.⁸⁴

Regarding the more fragile relationships, data from the Millenium Cohort study shows that in the five years following a birth to a single mother, the most likely outcome for a child was that they were still in a lone-mother family (42 per cent).⁸⁵ Of the remaining single mothers, one quarter partnered with the child's father (26 per cent), one in five mothers had been in a partnership in the intervening years but were no longer in one were (19 per cent), and the remaining 13 per cent had a new partner. Of married parents, 88 per cent were still married and living together when their child was aged 5. Of parents who were cohabiting at the child's birth, 67 per cent were still living with each other five years later. For the children growing up in lone parent households the presence of a consistent and positive male is more likely to be missing than present.

Moving from the home to school, a third of primary schools do not have a male teacher; overall the percentage of primary school teachers who are men is just 15 per cent.⁸⁶ And the rate for secondary schools is not much higher, sitting at one third.⁸⁷

Add to this the huge drop in the number of youth workers in the past decade (a decrease of one third) and it is not difficult to see how a boy may grow up in an environment devoid of any form of a significant male presence.

Boys and young men will be exploring the important and necessary question of what it means to be a man today. And to help guide, encourage, challenge, and recognise them, men are needed. There is something within the quality of masculinity that uniquely qualifies older men to be those who shape and form younger men. Much of the work of the Lost Boys report has been an attempt to quantify a feeling that something is going on with men, a hidden crisis of masculinity. But, regarding male spaces and the transition of a boy to a man, individual statistics are not directly comparable. Rather, these reports should be taken as a collective to paint as wide a picture as possible of the life of a young boy growing up today. It is from this birds-eye view that the formation of a boy becoming a man requires other men surrounding him. Because while the voices of women are important, they cannot be the only voice that boys and young men hear. Besides, boys are clearly still seeking the direction and affirmations of older men, as we have seen with the rise of the manosphere.

83 CSJ analysis of birth registration data using the number of live births by registration types 'sole registration' and 'joint registrations different address'. Source: 'Births by Parents' Characteristics - Office for National Statistics', accessed 21 April 2026, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/datasets/birthsbyparentscharacteristics>.

84 Ibid.

85 Kathleen Kiernan et al., *Families and Inequalities*, 2022.

86 'Trends in the Diversity of Teachers in England', *Education Policy Institute*, n.d., accessed 21 April 2026, <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/diversity-of-teachers/>.

87 Ibid.

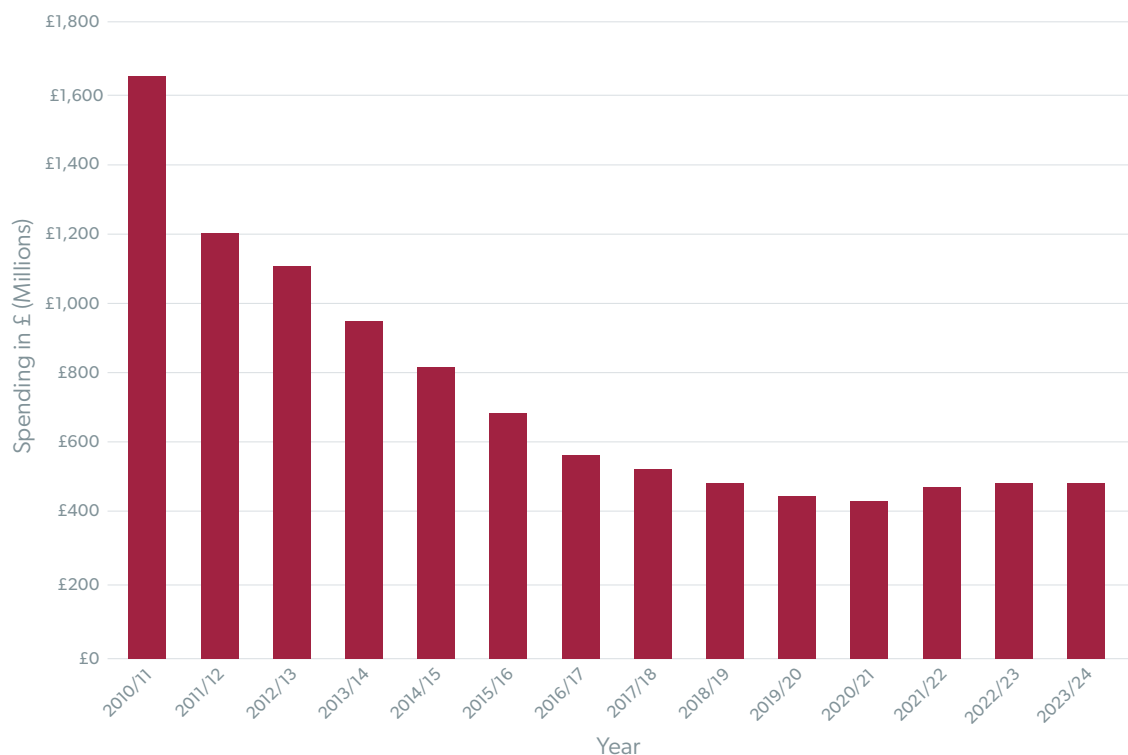
We must make a concerted effort to ensure that each boy has access to a positive male role model. This represents a profound challenge. It is also one that government will struggle to answer. Government has many important levers to pull, within the tax system or social support structures like Family Hubs, for example. But this will require a more social, cultural shift in the way that men take responsibility for the communities and children around them. Reframing the original premise – that young boys need access to good men – could sound something like: men must make take the responsibility to make themselves available to the boys around them.

This represents a rearticulation of the social contract - what we owe to one another - with a distinct call to men. And this is not a new responsibility. Engraved on the base of Nelson's Column in Trafalgar square are the words, "England expects that every man will do his duty". Unlike then, this call is not for war, but for provision. Throwing out the familiar but increasingly distant traditional masculine stereotype of provider-protector may have inadvertently counterbalanced this duty. Whether we like the old model or not, we cannot continue without men stepping up to provide for the next generation of boys.

Men's spaces

The most obvious spaces for boys and young men to meet are youth clubs. Yet, in the past 15 years, they have been decimated. The figure below shows the spending on young people's services by Local Authorities in this time. Naturally, this has resulted in a significant retreat of the sector: the number of youth workers has fallen by over one third (to 1,662) and there are 1,000 fewer youth clubs than there were 15 years ago.⁸⁸

Figure 6: Local Authority spending on young people's services in 2023/24 prices



88 'Beyond the Brink', YMCA England and Wales, n.d., accessed 10 April 2026, <https://ymca.org.uk/beyond-the-brink/>.

RECOMMENDATION 16

The Government should match-fund a new proof of concept Youth Infrastructure Fund. Private philanthropists are prepared to match-fund an initial £50 million fund that could be expanded and invested into an endowment if the concept itself is successful. We propose the creation of a new, proof-of-concept fund and vehicle set up by but located outside of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport to harness private philanthropic investment to expand support for community groups across the country.

Youth services can offer young people an opportunity to meet others, make friends, and identify role models organically by participating in the life of their community. But the sector is in a perilous state. Insufficient and ad hoc funding have resulted in a significant decline in the number of youth workers and clubs. This recommendation would go a significant way in securing long-term, sustainable funding, a key challenge identified by hundreds of the small charities that fed into this report.

Friendship

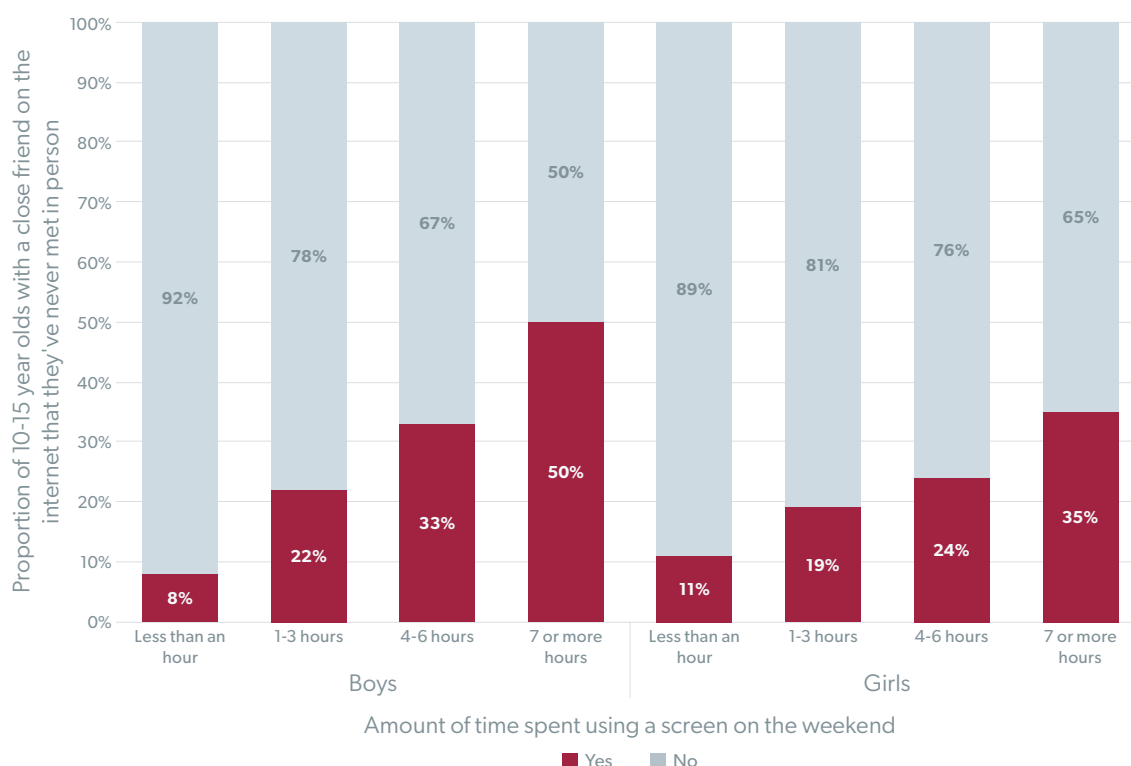
Recent CSJ research on tackling loneliness found that of those aged 18-24, 70 per cent say they feel lonely at least some of the time. This contrasted sharply with those over the age of 65 where it was just over four in ten adults, falling to around three in 10 of over 75s. Unfortunately, the most 'connected' generation in history feel the most disconnected.

When looking at the role, importance, and cultivation of friendship for young men, there are a few key areas to discuss: online spaces, real world spaces, and activities. Boys and young men need to move away from online dependency, towards real world spaces, and get involved in extracurricular activities or sports.

Our most recent Lost Boys report on Mentoring outlined the detrimental impacts upon friendship that spending too much time online can have. One impact is the increased likelihood of having a friend that you only relate to on the internet. Figure 7 below shows that one third of boys aged 10 – 15 who spend four to six hours using a screen over the weekend say they have a close friend that they have never met in person. This rises to half of those who spend more than seven hours. The extra concern with this data is that the average 13-14-year-old now spends 4 hours a day online, and this does not include games consoles, and a child's time online rose by nearly a whole hour (for the whole sample aged 8-14) when it came to weekend usage.⁸⁹ This therefore suggests that the more extreme timings on figure 7 are far from uncommon.

89 'Children's Passive Online Measurement', [Www.Ofcom.Org.Uk](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-habits-children/childrens-passive-online-measurement), 26 June 2025, <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-habits-children/childrens-passive-online-measurement>.

Figure 7: Proportion of children (aged 10 – 15) that say they have a long-term friend they've never met by amount of time spent on interacting with others on the internet



Source: CSJ Analysis of Understanding Society Youth Survey (Wave 14)

The relationship between high screen use and online relationships raises a few problems. Firstly, it is a significant safeguarding risk. Secondly, it also takes away the in-person interactions that are so key to early development: maintaining eye contact, reading body language, hugs and handshakes, ending conversations and starting new ones, small talk, handling awkwardness or disagreement; these subtle but vital skills are in danger of not being cultivated. Early evidence also suggests that conscientiousness is significantly declining amongst younger people, while neuroticism, carelessness and the propensity to be easily distracted is rising.⁹⁰ But, on a more human level, it is also sad because online relationships are not the same as in person ones.

Research has also proven what many instinctively know: that subjective wellbeing is influenced through real-life friends and not online networks. A large Canadian study of 5,000 respondents by researchers at the University of British Columbia found the number of real-life friends is positively correlated with subjective well-being even after controlling for income, demographic variables, and personality differences. The researchers found that doubling the number of friends in real life has an equivalent effect on well-being as a 50 per cent increase in income.⁹¹ The same could not be said of online networks whose size was largely uncorrelated with subjective well-being.

We must make this argument more clearly to a younger generation who are unlikely to know any different, or potentially even lack the discipline or motivation to put themselves out there into inherently more difficult and risky situations. Time spent online involves an obvious opportunity cost: the more time spent

⁹⁰ John Burn-Murdoch, 'The Troubling Decline in Conscientiousness', *Financial Times*, 8 August 2025.

⁹¹ John F. Helliwell and Haifang Huang, 'Comparing the Happiness Effects of Real and On-Line Friends', *PLOS ONE* 8, no. 9 (2013): e72754, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0072754>.

online, the less time spent meeting others in-person. As such, the question of importance is: are in-person friendships better than online ones? The answer is a resounding yes.

In a discussion around parenting children in this online age, Jonathan Haidt explained:

"We've got to send them out into the world to play and have adventures, even though that's kind of scary for us. We have to overcome our own fears and give our boys the kind of childhoods that their fathers or grandfathers had, at least to the extent that we can..."

We all feel anxious about letting our kids out, letting them out of our control, letting them out of our view. But we have to do what's best for the kids, not what's best for our own feelings. And we have to overcome our anxiety if we want to give our kids a chance of overcoming their anxiety.

*We have to let them grow up, take small risks by themselves without us there, to discover that they can do it."*⁹²

So, the challenge now for adults and policymakers is how we can help young men and boys to make and maintain friendships. Because each boy and each environment surrounding a boy is unique this cannot be prescriptive. However, there are a few key principles that may help cultivate the soil.

1. Friendship is intentional and takes effort

This means that boys will need to put themselves out there and take risks. We should be encouraging this risk-taking but valuable behaviour. Taking this initiative will often mean being the one to check in with older friends, not waiting for them to do it. Where there is a narrative that effort = uncool, we should question it.

"When my son was a teenager, video games dominated much of his friends' spare time. My son would have loved to play more sport, but he found it difficult to meet people who wanted to play."

Former Secondary School Governor

2. Friendship for men and boys is often side-by-side

Generally, men find it easier to relate side-by-side than they do face-to-face (though this is of course a tendency rather than a rule).⁹³ It is also perhaps part of the reason why certain social prescriptions, take fishing, for example, are having provably positive and scalable effects for veterans with conditions like PTSD.⁹⁴ In recognition of this, boys and young men need spaces and activities that are available to them where they can sit 'side-by-side'. And while this should not be the main point, these can become places to be vulnerable and share. Using different mediums to connect - a shared interest, game, or space - can help take away the pressure a boy might feel if or when he wants to talk or 'open up'. One recent article

92 'EXCLUSIVE: Dr. Jonathan Haidt Is Leading a Parenting Movement—Here's What He Wants You to Know About Technology and Kids' Mental Health', Parents, accessed 8 April 2026, <https://www.parents.com/next-gen-winner-jonathan-haidt-11774151>.

93 Barbara A. Winstead, 'Sex Differences in Same-Sex Friendships', in *Friendship and Social Interaction*, ed. Valerian J. Derlega and Barbara A. Winstead (Springer, 1986), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4612-4880-4_5.

94 'A Nature-Based Intervention to Improve Mental Health | University of Essex', accessed 20 April 2026, <https://www.essex.ac.uk/research-projects/a-nature-based-intervention-to-improve-mental-health>.

on social prescribing quoted a recipient, Stephen, on how it felt more approachable going fishing than it did talking to a therapist. He said that “People know what you’re talking about. It’s not like sitting across a desk from someone in a suit and tie who has no idea.” Taking away pressures and expectations is often precisely what is needed.⁹⁵

“[There is] a lack of opportunity to engage in structured male activity that doesn’t cost money if you don’t have it. So if you can’t talk to anyone, or it’s awkward or embarrassing to, then take the route of least resistance and the next best thing is to either distract yourself with games or go looking for answers online. Some gaming can be re-affirming - group adventures such as Star Wars or Marvel can bring like-minded males together in friendship groups. But if you don’t have real personal friendships it can introduce them to undesirable activities with others”

Lia Nici, Self Employed Community Worker, Grimsby

3. Friendship should be based on what we share

Friendship for the sake of friendship is unlikely to work. The condition of having a friend is that we want something else besides that friend; we have common interests, likes and dislikes, or shared insights, for example. But cultivating this requires opportunities. If young boys do not have any chances to connect around shared interests, or, more probably, have a range of prospective activities to find out what they do and do not like, it limits their opportunities to friendship based on fewer commonalities: their homes, their schools, or their online worlds. C.S Lewis summarised it as follows: “*The typical expression of opening Friendship would be something like, “What? You too? I thought I was the only one.”*”⁹⁶

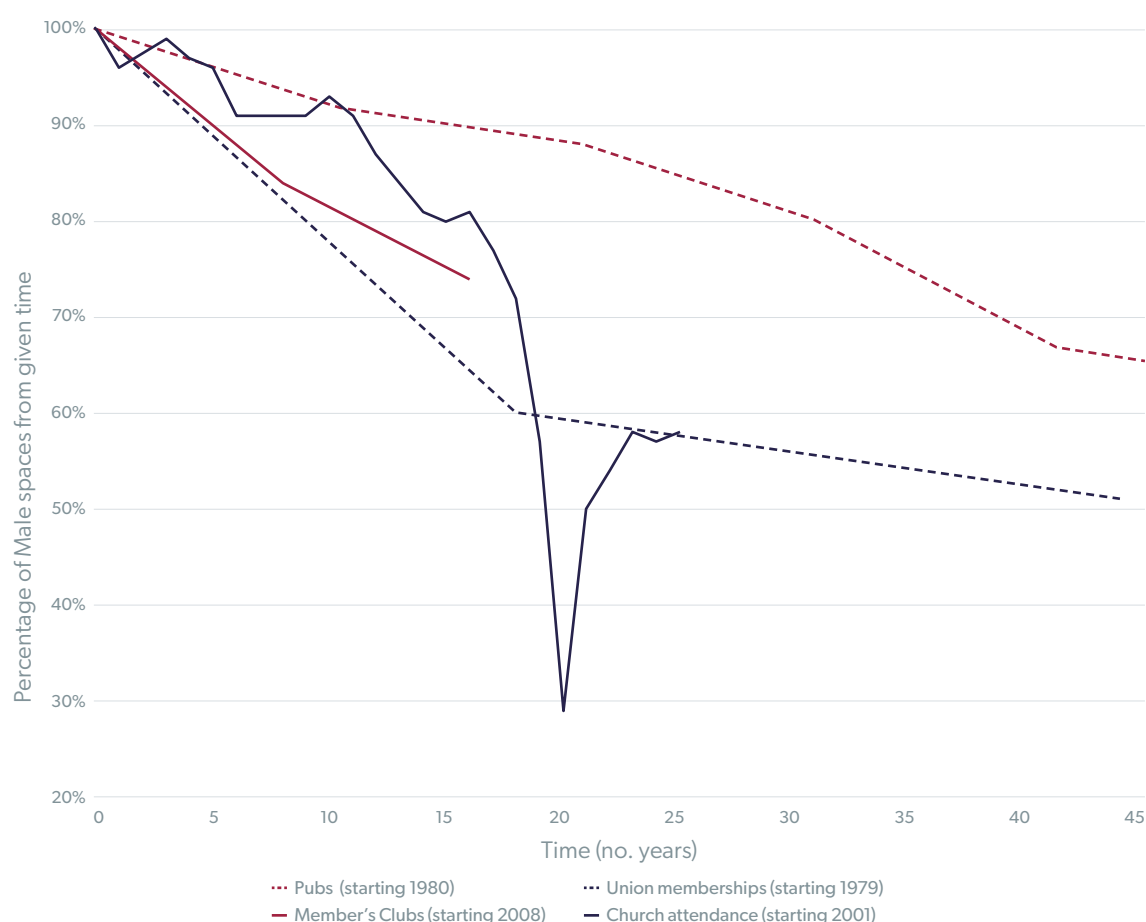
Mentoring

The role of intergenerational relationships within male spaces are vital. Yet the traditional places that men went to meet with other men are on the decline, and this is not just limited to youth clubs. These places formed the natural basis for modelling and mentoring between older and younger men. Alongside this they provided accountability and trust between men, vital qualities needed to empower men to tackle the challenges that they go through. Pubs, unions, clubs, churches, and other groups, all have significantly retracted in the number of buildings or memberships.

⁹⁵ ‘The Doctor Will Send You Fishing Now’, *Bloomberg.Com*, 12 March 2026, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2026-03-12/what-is-social-medicine-doc-tors-prescribe-friendship-group-activities>.

⁹⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, First edition (HarperOne, 2017).

Figure 8: Change in percentage of Male spaces over time



- › **Pubs: Down 29 per cent in 35 years** - The number of pubs fell from 63,400 in 1990 to around 45,000 in 2024, a decline of 29 per cent.⁹⁷
- › **Union memberships: Down 49 per cent in 46 years** - Trade union membership has roughly halved since its 1979 peak, falling from 13.2 million to 6.7 million, a decline of 49 per cent.⁹⁸ Interestingly, in 2024, the number of male employees in union membership declined by 104,000 in the private sector and 67,000 in the public sector. In contrast, female membership increased by 47,000 in the private sector and by 87,000 in the public sector.⁹⁹
- › **Member's Clubs: Down 26 per cent in 16 years** - Club premises certificates in England and Wales fell from 17,600 in 2008 to 13,000 in 2024, a drop of 26 per cent.¹⁰⁰
- › **Church attendance: Down 42 per cent in 25 years** - The Church of England average all age weekly attendance fell from 1,205,000 in 2001 to 702,000 in 2024, a decline of 42 per cent.¹⁰¹

97 'BBPA and Frontier Economics - Impact of Recent Economic Trends on Pubs and Breweries | BBPA', accessed 22 April 2026, <https://beerandpub.com/policy-campaigns/bbpa-and-frontier-economics-impact-of-recent-economic-trends-on-pubs-and-breweries>.

98 'Trade Union Membership, UK, 1995 to 2024: Statistical Bulletin', GOV.UK, accessed 22 April 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-union-statistics-2024/trade-union-membership-uk-1995-to-2024-statistical-bulletin>.

99 Ibid.

100 'Alcohol Licensing, England and Wales, April 2023 to March 2024', GOV.UK, accessed 22 April 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/alcohol-licensing-england-and-wales-april-2023-to-march-2024>.

101 'Resources, Publications, and Data', The Church of England, accessed 22 April 2026, <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/data-services/resources-publications-and-data>.

Taking an average of these spaces, there has been a 1.2 per cent decline per year for 30 consecutive years.¹⁰²

These places – though not the *raison d'être* – provided a sense of solidarity in the shared experience of being a man. In fact, one young respondent to our call for evidence (aged 11-14) thought that one of the reasons that it might be harder for younger men to do well at work was because “*it is hard for [boys] to be themselves around older men.*” These spaces are so key because they provide the presence of older men to younger men, and because they teach younger men how to act in social settings with older men. The young man in this instance had also never lived with both of his parents.

As these spaces have declined there has been a drop in the social infrastructure available to men. It is perhaps why organisations such as Andy’s Mans Club, Men’s Shed’s, or Mentell have had such success in recent years. They were, and are, filling a gap that had been left gaping for too long. These initiatives are worth championing and protecting. To argue whether women should be ‘allowed’ access too is to defeat the point.¹⁰³ These must be spaces where men can be with men. The vast majority of our social and public spaces should rightly be shared by both men and women, but spaces for women to support women and men to support men are just as important.

‘Boys are being repeatedly told that they are either too violent, or too masculine or as a 21-year-old told me last month who is studying Art and Music that “I have to be aware of my white male privilege that my opinions and contextualisations may not be valid.” Where and how are young boys and men being given the space to understand what it means to be a man in a modern world?’

Self-employed community worker, Grimsby

There is also a case to be made that we do little to tangibly support young boys master the dramatic changes that they go through during puberty. The enormous influx of testosterone, what it does to the body, the mood, and even a boy’s propensity for risk, can remain poorly explained to boys. Testosterone explains a large part of why boys are, generally, more likely to externalise their problems than girls.¹⁰⁴ Helping boys to channel these more aggressive or competitive drives into positive achievement and a strong sense of responsibility is a must.

Unfortunately, many are quick to accuse such statements as gendered expectations and stereotypes or explain them away via ‘social conditioning’ that young boys go through. Such biological essentialism, they argue, is harmful as it limits boys understanding of what they can be, particularly those who don’t fit the traditional stereotypes. There are truths within this: masculinity was never meant to be understood as a restrictive label. But the principles associated with masculinity are just that: principles, not practices. Ultimately there are billions of ways to be a man. However, biological denialism is just as dangerous as biological essentialism. Boys will be boys because it is what they are. Good men are needed to help them on their journey from being a boy to becoming a man. And, more importantly, a good man.

We will be doing more work on two adjacent themes to male spaces in the future: the role of initiations and a list of good practise organisations.

¹⁰² An average decline of 36 per cent and an average time span of 30 years.

¹⁰³ “We Put the Pressure on to Join Men in Sheds”, BBC News, 22 April 2025, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cg5qd9l3094o>.

¹⁰⁴ Cent. Soc. Justice, ‘Lost Boys’.

On initiation, our society is impressed with the notion that boys suddenly become men. However, the mechanism for understanding why, or what causes this change, is unclear. Is it hitting 18 years old? Owning your own home? Getting married? Having sex? Buying your first pint? Some form of initiation is present in almost every culture, worldwide. For us in the UK, it is difficult to pinpoint at what stage we expect a young boy to be recognised - by himself and others – as a man and take up the ensuing responsibilities.

On good practise, a common response to our Lost Boys work was what people could do in their local area. Although the scale of our research was national, ultimately local solutions and local people will be the key to turning the dial on this issue. School leaders, grass root charities, regional initiatives, and parents, are grasping the nettle on this, and we will try to amplify their hard work. Sharing these ideas will bring scale to ideas ripe for growth and provide insights for people working in different settings as to what the most appropriate interventions could be for their area.

Starting Adulthood earlier – encouraging responsibility

Encouraging boys to fly the nest

The average boys now spend their first quarter century living at home.¹⁰⁵ By this age only one quarter of girls were still living at home. In fact, between the age of 21 and 22, three and a half years earlier, the average girl has flown the nest.¹⁰⁶ When looking at all young men (age 20-34), over one-third still live with their parents, compared with less than a quarter of females (34.9 per cent and 22.3 per cent, respectively).¹⁰⁷ Parents, and prospective parents, are increasingly in it for the long haul.

Analysing this data presents a few challenges. Firstly, the reasons that are often given for explaining why so many young people are delaying leaving home fail to account for gender. Explanations range from the high cost of housing or rent to higher rates of unemployment and caring responsibilities.¹⁰⁸ But such difficulties, particularly housing, are an open market for both young men and women. (There are arguments to be made that being unemployed or having caring responsibilities are much more gendered: men are more likely to be unemployed, and women are more likely to be carers)¹⁰⁹. Secondly, this has been the case for a long time. Census data from 1851 shows that the average woman would leave the home just after her 18th birthday, with men following around the age of 21.¹¹⁰ By the early twentieth century it had increased by two to three years for both.

Leaving home is an important milestone in life, and setting up your own is the natural next step. Two significant ways young people take this step today are by going to university or forming a relationship.

105 'Families and Households in the UK - Office for National Statistics', accessed 20 April 2026, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2025>.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.

108 'More Adults Living with Their Parents - Office for National Statistics', accessed 20 April 2026, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/moreadultslivingwiththeirparents/2023-05-10>.

109 However, the proportion of adult children (a person aged over 18 years who is living with their parent) who are carers "has not been a contributing factor to the overall increase in the number of adult children in the previous decade" (ibid). The change in adult children's unemployment rates as a factor is less clear.

110 'The Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, Cambridge', accessed 20 April 2026, <https://www.campop.geog.cam.ac.uk/blog/2025/03/20/still-living-with-mum-and-dad/>.

Nearly half of young people now go to university.¹¹¹ But concealed within this is the significantly higher number of women than men. In 2024/25, there were 375,000 more women than men in undergraduate and postgraduate enrolment for those whose permanent address was in the UK (1,268,630 and 893,450, respectively).¹¹² For most young people, going to university means leaving home and moving into halls or other shared accommodations.

Regarding relationships, recent CSJ analysis has shown that the rate of marriage is now a third higher for pensioners than it is for men in their early twenties.¹¹³ For all those in their twenties, the marriage rate is down 90 per cent over the last 50 years.¹¹⁴ And while marriage has been on the decline, cohabitation has been rising. The rate of 25 to 29 year-olds who were living together but not married or in a civil partnership was just over half in 2011 but was almost three-quarters a decade later.¹¹⁵ The age gap between men and women who marry has remained relatively stable over the last century at around 2.5 years.¹¹⁶ As such, however couples do partner up, it is likely that the man is older.

So why does this matter? On an individual level, moving out of your parent's house builds resilience and independence. It forces young people to take responsibility for themselves but also acts as the launching pad for encouraging the service of others. Living with friends or a partner, instead of family members, acts as an incentive for young people to clean up after themselves, cook for others, share communal spaces, or take on the organisation of a shared house. Of course, these lessons can happen at home, but responsibility laying on the children is much less common.

The benefit of these lessons compound on society. For starters, responsible men make better partners. Better partners are more likely to become husbands, and more husbands means more fathers.¹¹⁷ With the UK's fertility rate at record lows, we cannot ignore men.¹¹⁸ Responsibility also flows into local communities. Currently, among men over 45, only one in 20 are involved in a volunteering capacity in a local sports club.¹¹⁹ This proportion plunged to one in 100 in parts of the country, like the West Midlands.¹²⁰ Responsibility is rarely taught. It is given. Encouraging young people to fly the nest is one of the surest ways to build a sense of responsibility.

RECOMMENDATION 17

Parents should be encouraged to support their children to leave the home by their 20s for at least one year, or charge rent if they stay.

Charging rent builds independence and responsibility. Where children or adult children are already financially contributing to the household this is less applicable. The act of regular payments can be a good way to learn financial responsibility, and, if rent is not 'needed' by parents, such payments could be re-invested towards the future of the young people.

111 Paul Bolton, *Higher Education Student Numbers*, 14 April 2026, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7857/>.

112 'Who's Studying in HE? | HESA', accessed 20 April 2026, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he>.

113 'I Do?', The Centre for Social Justice, accessed 20 April 2026, <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/i-do-marriage>.

114 Ibid.

115 'Our Changing Population Is There for All to See | National Statistical', accessed 20 April 2026, <https://blog.ons.gov.uk/2024/04/12/our-changing-population-is-there-for-all-to-see/>.

116 Máire Ní Bhrolcháin, 'The Age Difference at Marriage in England and Wales: A Century of Patterns and Trends', *Population Trends*, no. 120 (2005): 7–14.

117 Cent. Soc. Justice, 'Baby Bust'.

118 Lara Spirit, 'Fewer Women Are Having Babies — Are "Immature Men" to Blame?', accessed 20 April 2026, <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/politics/article/why-women-are-not-having-babies-0s0nsrbbp>.

119 *Lost Boys: Mentors and Role Models*.

120 The number for the West Midlands should be used with caution due to a smaller sample size.

The reason why, where possible, leaving for one year - 'boomeranging' - is important is because it allows young people to be adventurous and experience the world outside the direct protections of home. It also provides security as young people know that they have a place to return to.

Parents are best placed to support the individual needs of their children. Yet there is also undoubtedly a trend where adolescence, particularly for young men, is being extended. Leaving the family home and standing on your own two feet is one of the best ways to naturally 'grow up'. This of course does not mean that support must go from one hundred to zero. There are ways of giving support to young people even as other support is taken away, in this case housing. Living nearby, providing financial assistance, and maintaining regular contact are all good things for parents to do.

There are also important exceptions where young people should stay. Saving for a house deposit, having certain disabilities that require more support, or having duties of care are all understandable reasons for this trend to occur.

Ultimately, the line lies in intentionality. Is the young person there for a reason (a deposit, a disability, or a duty), or have they drifted into this situation because of a lack of any real purpose to leave? It appears that, largely, more young men are drifting into adulthood unintentionally because they can.

Some of our charities also outlined to us the higher rates of co-dependency that they come across in many single parent households. For the boys in this situation, it often meant they felt that they had to become the 'man of the house'; they would feel a duty to help look after their mother. Other times, a sense of guilt for leaving their mother alone would hold them back from moving on. Many of their mothers had previous experience of childhood trauma, domestic abuse, coercive control, abandonment, poverty, and chronic stress, and this would often put a subconscious pressure on these boys to support or protect their mothers however they can. For the mothers, their attachment to their boys could be more fiercely exclusive and protective than normal. Dr Anna Machin, an evolutionary anthropologist and fatherhood expert, outlines that mothers' and fathers' attachment styles tend to differ. Where a mother's attachment is more based on exclusive nurturing towards their children, a father's attachment style often relies on stimulation or challenge. More colloquially, mothers try to change the world to fit the child, and fathers try and change the child to fit the world. Thus, fathers tend to more naturally induce resilience in children.¹²¹ Where households were less prone to have fathers present, the trend of adult children rose significantly higher than others.

ONS data also reflects this. In 2023, 46 per cent of all lone parent families had adult children in the home. This compared to one fifth of families where parents are living together with children (21 per cent) and 38 per cent for those who are married or in a civil partnership with children.¹²² So, while single parent families were significantly more likely to have adult children at home, married couples were also clearly more likely than the average.

121 'Fatherhood Is Not a Side Quest: Dr. Anna Machin on Raising Boys & Saving Society - To Be A Boy | Podcast on Spotify', Spotify, accessed 23 April 2026, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/28Cn31vd9pA1RhnhBDyImO>.

122 'More Adults Living with Their Parents - Office for National Statistics', accessed 23 April 2026, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/moreadultslivingwiththeirparents/2023-05-10>.

Marriage

Marriage has dropped off a cliff in the UK. Recent CSJ analysis has shown that the marriage rate among men and women in their twenties is down 90 per cent over the last 50 years.¹²³ For those in their early twenties it is down over 97 per cent in 50 years.¹²⁴ This matters because marriage is a public commitment encouraging responsibility, stability, mutual sacrifice and love. For young men especially, marriage can be one of the clearest transitions into adulthood: it asks a man to order his life around another person, and often around future children.

The aim of policy should not be to force people young men or women into marriage, nor to imply that every marriage is good or every unmarried relationship bad. Rather, it should recognise two things: that marriage confers clear benefits to individuals and society, and that there is a significant difference in outcomes by relationship type. At present, the state offers very little practical encouragement for couples who want to marry, despite the benefits. The current Marriage Allowance allows a spouse or civil partner to transfer £1,260 of unused personal allowance, reducing the couple's tax by up to £252 a year. This is too small to signal much about the social value of marriage, let alone change incentives.

RECOMMENDATION 18

Introduce a transferable tax allowance for married couples.

Government should make up to 100 per cent of a married/civilly partnered person's personal allowance transferable to the other partner in the couple. Restricting this to formal unions provides a financial incentive for more people to formalise their partnerships thus increasing relational stability and providing potential children with a more secure environment to grow up in. It would also recognise marriage as a household commitment, not just two individuals sharing an address.

RECOMMENDATION 19

Government should cover up to £650 of the costs of weddings for couples on lower incomes.

Wedding costs should not be a barrier to forming a stable family. We have previously proposed support of up to £650 towards the administrative, legal and booking fees for lower-income couples, contingent on taking part in marriage preparation.

Other countries support marriage even more explicitly. China has marriage leave in with some provinces offer up to 30 days off in the year after marriage. Singapore uses housing allocation to support young married couples and families. Their Family and Parenthood Priority Scheme sets aside up to 40 per cent of Build-To-Order flats and 60 per cent of Sale of Balance flats for eligible first-time families and young married couples.

Ultimately, there are a variety of interventions that the UK could follow. But the principle should be to make marriage easier and more desirable.

¹²³ Cent. Soc. Justice, 'I Do?'

¹²⁴ Ibid.

The online world

In the past decade, no other change in the lives of teenagers has been as dramatic as the encroaching universality of the online world. Teenagers are now tech-natives. We cannot, therefore, look after boys and young men well if we do not seriously engage with their online habits.

It is worth reading this section as a complement to the Male Spaces chapter. Restrictions, bans, or limitations on the online world for young people are necessary but can appear harsh. Male Spaces, however, examines how we can secure more and better alternative outdoor spaces for young people. So, while one hand looks to diminish the influence of online spaces, the other offers a better alternative.

Smartphones

Children aged 13-14 spend an average of 4 hours a day online. This figure does not include games consoles or account for the fact that over the weekend the average rises by nearly a whole hour.¹²⁵ For those aged 18-24, the average was 6 hours 20 minutes a day online.¹²⁶ The vast majority of this time over both age groups is spent on smartphones.

But sheer time is not the only important thing. The top contenders for where this time is spent are Snapchat, YouTube and TikTok. When combined, they account for over 60 per cent of a 13-14-year-old's time online. Messaging apps such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp together make up just 7 per cent, or 15 minutes a day.¹²⁷ Moreover, almost half (49 per cent) of UK 8-14-year-olds used YouTube late at night in a given week (between 23:00 and 04:59).¹²⁸ Thus, clearly the quality and quantity of time on smartphones are problems.

The impacts of screentime persist beyond screens. Healthy sleep schedules are disrupted; teachers, aside from facing rising behavioural challenges in schools,¹²⁹ are also faced with the immense difficulty of having to navigate problems within their classrooms that have occurred outside the school gates; year-wide WhatsApp groups for children are proliferating, far from any adult supervision; hardcore porn is more accessible to children than sweets; and the relentless ping or buzz of notifications is incessant as the average Gen Z person can receive up to 208 notifications a day – or one every eight minutes.¹³⁰

RECOMMENDATION 20

Parents should be encouraged not to buy their child a smartphone until the age of 16.

125 'Children's Passive Online Measurement', [Www.Ofcom.Org.Uk](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-habits-children/childrens-passive-online-measurement), 26 June 2025, <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-habits-children/childrens-passive-online-measurement>.

126 'Online Nation', [Www.Ofcom.Org.Uk](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/online-habits/online-nation), 28 November 2023, <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/online-habits/online-nation>.

127 We did not include Snapchat here as, despite it being predominantly a messaging-based platform, it has a host of other capabilities including short-form content, filters, and IA companionship capabilities. Source: [Www.Ofcom.Org.Uk](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-habits-children/childrens-passive-online-measurement), 'Children's Passive Online Measurement', 26 June 2025.

128 [Www.Ofcom.Org.Uk](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-habits-children/childrens-passive-online-measurement), 'Children's Passive Online Measurement', 26 June 2025.

129 'School Exclusions Tracker', Education, *The Centre for Social Justice*, n.d., accessed 5 May 2026, https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/school-exclusions-tracker_apr26.

130 'Phone Anxiety and Constant Admin: Why "Do Not Disturb" Is the Latest Loved Feature for Gen Z', *musicMagpie*, accessed 5 May 2026, <https://www.musicmagpie.co.uk/phone-anxiety/>.

Young people's childhood should not be inextricably tethered to smartphones. Rather, young people's online experience should be just a small part of growing up, outweighed by time outdoors, in social settings, and other enriching activities. It is up to parents, as the foremost and best protector of their child, with the government's support, to firmly make this case. Smartphone Free Childhood, a campaign group of hundreds of thousands of parents across the UK aiming to help families delay smartphones and social media together, recommends different phones for children by age.¹³¹ Suggestions like this are a good starting point.

Government can also support this through influence in best-practice guidance, infrastructure (schools and NHS Trusts), and campaigns. Our report, *Boyhood*, recommended screen guidance for children under the age of five and the government did so within a month.¹³² This was a positive step in helping equip parents with best-practice for raising their children. Similarly, government should work with parents to endorse best-practice recommendation for parents that tackle head-on the impacts of smartphones upon childhood.

RECOMMENDATION 21

Phones and screens should be kept out of bedrooms.

Nearly 4 out of 5 (78 per cent) of parents of children aged 11-16 said that one of their children has a device with internet access in their bedroom.¹³³ Knowing this, it is surprising that the number of children and young teens logging onto their phones at night-time is as low as it is (around half). However, it is likely that this is because the rates of phone ownership increase rapidly through this cohort. The average is therefore, probably, made up from much lower rates for 8-9 years-olds and much higher rates for children over the age of 12 – over 97 per cent of whom now own their own smartphone.¹³⁴

There is a host of obvious issues related to this: irregular sleeping; access to adult content; pressures to send or receive explicit material; safeguarding or grooming concerns; shortened attention spans; cyberbullying; higher risk of myopia and depression and anxiety. Of course, most of these existed in some form or variant before the smartphone. But all have been aggravated by it.

Most of the above issues are also not exclusive to night-time. But the strongest argument against this recommendation is, probably, that of children's privacy. Yet there is little more private than one's smartphone (and fewer people who know you better than your algorithm). Texting, scrolling, gaming, or reading on one's phone can still be completely private even in the company of another. What will be reduced, however, is the propensity for risky behaviour; a child or teen using their phone in a communal space is far less likely to engage in impulsive or unsafe activities.

All in all, there is little to no benefit to a child if they are allowed to have their smartphone in their bedroom. As with Recommendation 20, government should work to empower parents to enact actions like this that best protect children.

131 'What Is the Right Age to Get My Child a Smartphone? | Questions | Smartphone Free Childhood', accessed 5 May 2026, <https://www.smartphonefreechildhood.org/resource/what-is-the-right-age-to-get-my-child-a-smartphone>.

132 'New Screen Time Guidance for Parents of Under-5s', GOV.UK, accessed 5 May 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-screen-time-guidance-for-parents-of-under-5s>.

133 'One in Seven Parents Are Not Confident They Know What Their Children Are Seeing or Hearing Online | Ipsos', 31 March 2025, <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/one-seven-parents-are-not-confident-they-know-what-their-children-are-seeing-or-hearing-online>.

134 *Lost Boys: State of the Nation*.

Suicide

The rate of suicide is at a 25-year high. For males, the suicide rate in England and Wales remained relatively unchanged in 2024 at 17.6 suicide deaths registered per 100,000 people. For females, the rate was also steady, remaining at around 5.7 per 100,000, around three times lower than for men.

RECOMMENDATION 22

Ripple should be piloted and scaled across schools and public areas in the UK.

Ripple is a digital intervention tool that works by using innovative technology to intercept harmful online searches related to self-harm and suicide. When a harmful search is made, users will first be guided through a filter of breathing exercises and then very simple, uncluttered and calmly presented strategies, forums, helplines and mental health services they can access both now and in the longer term, accompanied by messages of hope and encouragement to keep safe.

The deployment of the Ripple Browser Extension is free of charge to individuals, parents, guardians, educational establishments and charitable organisations. It is also available for businesses and commercial organisations, though this does have a cost, which helps fund the charity's wider aims, including free access to the aforementioned categories.

Most suicides do not occur in public spaces. This is especially true in schools. But the point of a Ripple extension is not solely crisis intervention. Many individuals, including Josh, the inspiration behind Ripple, spent time online researching methods to take their own lives. And, alongside the 100,000+ searches already intercepted, 32 people have attributed this intervention to saving their lives.

Ripple is already being used by Premier League football clubs, universities, large corporations, and many other organisations. Supporting its further roll-out would be a great thing.

RECOMMENDATION 23

The media should talk less and more carefully about suicide.

Talking more about suicide, and particularly the method, can lead to higher rates of suicide. This is termed the 'Werther Effect', after the 1774 novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which triggered imitative suicides after publication. The World Health Organisation's 2023 media guidance also suggests that widely disseminated stories of death by suicide are often followed by more suicides.¹³⁵ Similarly, a major BMJ meta-analysis found that media reporting of celebrity suicides was associated with a 13 per cent increase in suicides shortly afterwards, and where the method was reported, deaths by the same method rose by 30 per cent.¹³⁶ Other examples are even more stark. In Vienna, Austria, one report found that when the media began to issue shorter notes, "which were rarely published on the front page, and sometimes suicides were not reported at all" in place of the "previous scandalising and dramatic articles"

¹³⁵ 'Preventing Suicide: A Resource for Media Professionals, Update 2023', accessed 8 May 2026, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240076846>.

¹³⁶ Thomas Niederkrotenthaler et al., 'Association between Suicide Reporting in the Media and Suicide: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis', *Research, BMJ* 368 (March 2020): m575, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m575>.

there was a decrease in subway suicides and attempts by 75 per cent for five years after the new media guidelines.¹³⁷

Positive stories about overcoming adversity or suicidal crisis can have a positive effect on suicide rates.¹³⁸ Likewise, discussing serious issues that influence suicidal ideation – mental health problems, debt, family breakdown, or addiction for example – is important and can be helpful in destigmatising the challenges many people go through. Equally, the sharing of difficulties or grief is important. However, the key point of better messaging must be to make suicide less socially available.

The ‘manosphere’

The manosphere describes an international collection of online communities including websites, forums, blogs, and social media accounts that discuss the issues relating to men, masculinity and men’s role in society.¹³⁹ Most people currently understand and experience it through the lens of Louis Theroux’s *Into the Manosphere*, released on Netflix on the 11th March, 2026, almost exactly a year after Netflix’s *Adolescence*. As we have long said, Andrew Tate, the most prominent incarnation of the manosphere, is a symptom of the problem, not the cause.

And yet, the reach and impact of the manosphere is undeniable. With almost every child owning their own smartphone by secondary school and boys being more likely to be pushed such content, commentary is warranted.

One recent poll suggested that the young men most likely to engage with men and masculinity influencers were: “white, older, employed full-time, university-educated and residing in high-income households”, though nearly two-thirds of the young men surveyed were regularly engaging with men and masculinity influencers.¹⁴⁰ So, the most likely regular users of the manosphere are richer, white, older, and highly educated. These are not the truant, law-breaking, inactive, and troubled young men we are as concerned with. In this sense, the Manosphere becomes more and less problematic. It is less problematic because those most likely to watch it are, generally, not hurting or hurting others. It is more problematic because it means that the smaller number of more disadvantaged and disenfranchised boys are possibly more prone to the messaging.

Arguably, the problem is therefore less about the content – though intermittently woven messages of misogyny are still obviously bad – and more about boys’ contexts. A boy with a safe, loving home, who enjoys school, feels capable and has hope for the future, will probably be fine whether he engages with the Manosphere or not. It is the boys and young men who do not have these assurances to whom the messages of the Manosphere become more alluring.

There are a few key things that we can share with boys and young men regarding this content:

1. These men do not know you: they create content for clicks and revenue. Their message may be aligned with your needs, but the profit incentive perverts their intention. Therefore, do not take their word as gospel.

137 G. Sonneck et al., ‘Imitative Suicide on the Viennese Subway’, *Social Science & Medicine* (1982) 38, no. 3 (1994): 453–57, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(94\)90447-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(94)90447-2).

138 ‘Preventing Suicide’.

139 ‘Educate Against Hate - Explainer Series’, *Educate Against Hate*, n.d., accessed 16 April 2026, <https://www.educateagainsthate.com/resources/educate-against-hate-explainer-series/>.

140 ‘Young Men’s Health in a Digital World’, accessed 16 April 2026, <https://uk.movember.com/movember-institute/masculinities-report>.

2. These men do not know your context: Generalisations are only useful generally. They can be helpful guiding principles, or for understanding how the world might work. However, they must be carefully contextualised and translated into one's own context.
3. Social media relies on outrage, not truth: The medium is the message. Whether or not what someone is saying online is true is no longer the most important thing. For content creators, the incentive is profit. For the platforms themselves, their intention is attention.

We also need to be much more open about properly engaging with the content of the manosphere. If we reject the messaging wholesale then we risk alienating this generation of boys who see and experience the world in a way that is often much more closely aligned to how online influencers describe it than how parents, educators, or policymakers might. As such, there are a few points below worth bearing in mind.

The manosphere often tells the truth: ideas around hypergamy, relationships, or men as victims are often bandied around online. We need to resist throwing out discussions like this wholesale and stop worrying so much that engaging in these topics will result in raising a generation of misogynistic, uncritical boys. Where there are kernels of truth, we must be open to acknowledging them. Boys are not fools. By rejecting questions, or stigmatising topics of conversation, we leave curious boys with unanswered questions. Naturally, the internet will provide an answer in our stead.

The manosphere is a spectrum: Recent writing around the so-called 'gentlemanosphere' has made the strong case that using the catch-all term of the manosphere neglects some of the valuable messaging that can come from the content, and, more importantly, the good examples that can be found in this online ecosystem.¹⁴¹ As we have often argued, offering a positive vision of masculinity will require us to look at boys' homes, communities, and the wider culture. This must include the online world. Measured, mainstream, and well-evidenced examples of men can be found online, and it does them and boys a disservice when we bracket them all together.

'Before internet access was available, we were raised by our families and those our parents deemed suitable to invest in us and share thoughts and ideas. Whilst these weren't always healthy, parents, on the whole, knew what the influences and narratives were that were being shared with their children. Now, the world is raising our kids, and boys are trying to navigate what is reality, what are good opinions, what is toxic and what is healthy'.

MD, M10 Missions – Stacy Riley

This is also a relatively new trend, unlike the other categories we defined in the State of the Nation report. The advent of personalised technology and smartphones occurred nearly two decades ago; the relative underachievement of boys in education is a 30-year problem; the presence of fathers at home has been on the decline since the 70s; relative male unemployment and inactivity is a 50-year trend; crime has always been a male-dominated issue; and men have always been more likely to take their own lives. Important and obvious as it is, algorithms – and the manosphere – represent a new problem within the online world. It therefore cannot be the *only* thing that society focuses its attention on when looking at the challenges facing boys and young men.

¹⁴¹ Ari David Blaff, 'The Rise of the Anti-Manosphere', *The Dispatch*, 13 April 2026, <https://thedispatch.com/article/manosphere-williamson-boys-men-health-brooks/>.

Gambling

The nature of gambling in the UK is shifting. There has been a long-term transition from place-based and in-person betting towards more online spaces. This is most clearly seen through a slight decrease in the number of gambling premises and betting shops (around one and two per cent drops, respectively) and the significant increase in the profits of the remote casino, betting and bingo sector (a 13 per cent rise in one year).¹⁴²

Nearly one third of 11-17-year-olds have reported spending their own money to gamble, with boys more likely than girls to engage in this behaviour (34 per cent vs. 27 per cent).¹⁴³ Within this cohort, four in five have seen gambling advertised. Positively, nearly 99 per cent of children are not problem gamblers, and the top reason for gambling was that it is 'fun'.¹⁴⁴ Gambling seems not to be a vice for most young people.

Nevertheless, the next age cohort, 18-24, are by far the most likely to meet the threshold for problem gambling. For those who gambled, the rate of problem gambling at this age sits at 10.2 per cent, far higher than the 2.7 per cent average of all adults.¹⁴⁵ NHS data also suggest that young men are around three times more likely to have problem or at-risk gambling behaviour than young women (14 per cent vs. 5 per cent).¹⁴⁶ It is a cause for concern that there is a pipeline forming from the early adoption of seemingly innocuous gambling behaviour which is opening a gateway for more problematic usage at the age of 18. Moreover, boys are more likely than girls to see adverts related to gambling across various platforms such as YouTube (53 per cent of boys, compared with 31 per cent of girls) and at sports events (57 per cent of boys, compared with 37 per cent of girls).¹⁴⁷

This problem persists. Research suggests that for each problem gambler, six other individuals, encompassing a total of two million people, are harmed by "the breakup of families, crime, loss of employment, loss of homes and, ultimately, loss of life."¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, a Citizens Advice survey of 'at-risk' gamblers found that three-quarters of respondents had debt from gambling and over one-third of families could not cover essential costs due to a family member's gambling problem.¹⁴⁹

This government has proved itself willing to tackle these harms by increasing duties on remote gambling in its most recent budget, at the same time as leaving most in-person gambling taxes alone.¹⁵⁰ This is a good move and reflects two important points: that certain types of gambling are increasing more than others, namely online betting, and that these variants are more associated with the growing harms of problematic gambling.

The Gambling Act came into effect in 2007. It was, and still is, the primary legislation that regulates all forms of gambling in the UK. The main issue with this Act is that it was drafted in 2005 and therefore had a premises-based model in mind. The government had missed, by a matter of months, the roll-out of the iPhone and the widespread transition to the online world.

142 'Industry Statistics - Annual Report - Financial Year April 2024 to March 2025 - Official Statistics', Gambling Commission, accessed 6 May 2026, <https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/publication/industry-statistics-annual-report-financial-year-april-2024-to-march-2025>.

143 'Young People and Gambling 2025: Official Statistics - Headline Statistics', Gambling Commission, accessed 18 March 2026, <https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/manual/young-people-and-gambling-2025-official-statistics/ypg-2025-executive-summary-headline-statistics>.

144 Ibid.

145 'Gambling Survey for Great Britain (GSGB)', Gambling Commission, accessed 18 March 2026, <https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/about-us/statistics-and-research/gambling-survey>.

146 'Adults' Health-Related Behaviours', NHS England Digital, accessed 18 March 2026, <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/health-survey-for-england/2024/adults-health-related-behaviours>.

147 Gambl. Comm., 'Young People and Gambling 2025'.

148 'Not a Game: A Call for Effective Protection from the Harms of Gambling', Addiction, *The Centre for Social Justice*, n.d., accessed 6 May 2026, <https://www.centre-forsocialjustice.org.uk/library/not-a-game-a-call-for-effective-protection-from-the-harms-of-gambling>.

149 Ibid.

150 'Budget 2025', GOV.UK, accessed 18 March 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/budget-2025-document/budget-2025-html>.

RECOMMENDATION 24

Ban gambling advertising in football spaces likely to be seen by children.

The current “whistle-to-whistle” ban restricts TV betting adverts around pre-watershed live sports. However, it does not affect shirt sleeves, pitch-side boards, stadium signage, social media or sponsorship spillover, all of which have significant influence. A survey of 18,000 people suggests that there is strong support for increased regulation of gambling advertising, including a ban on advertising pre-watershed (78 per cent) and at sporting events (58 per cent). Over half of people supported a total ban on gambling advertising in the UK (53 per cent).¹⁵¹

RECOMMENDATION 25

Gambling firms should be banned from streaming live sports on their platforms.

In attempts to make placing bets as seamless as possible, many gambling platforms now offer live sports as a feature on their website.¹⁵² Watching sport and gambling on it simultaneously is legal and unavoidable, however, gambling platforms need not make these situations so seamless. Small actions like this disincentivise such risk-taking behaviour.

Gaming

Gaming is great fun for many boys and young men. It is also not a bad thing. The challenge is how to stick to the maxim of ‘everything in moderation’ when many boys and young men are now spending significant time, energy, and money on this activity. Analysis from the National Centre for Gaming Disorder shows 90 per cent of those referred were male and that the three most popular games were Fortnite, Minecraft, and Call of Duty. Their sample of nearly 400 referrals had an average of 10 hours gaming per day. In-game purchases were present in one in six gamers. The average in-game expenditure at the point of referral was £4,500. Of the sample, nearly half (46 per cent) were aggressive, and one-third were physically violent to family members when interrupted from gaming.¹⁵³

Besides the obvious addictive and fun nature of most games, gaming offers boys opportunities for competition and mastery. Through ranking systems or levels, games allow boys to directly compete with one another. They also provide spaces for tangible progression and tracked improvement, therefore giving boys and young men the ability to prove to themselves that they are becoming masters at something.

The three major concerns with gaming are the online communication, excessive usage (in some cases up to 14 hours a day), and possible safeguarding concerns.

151 ‘Annual GB Treatment and Support Survey 2024’, GambleAware, accessed 18 March 2026, <https://www.gambleaware.org/our-research/publication-library/articles/annual-gb-treatment-and-support-survey-2024/>.

152 ‘Live Streaming FAQs’, accessed 6 May 2026, <https://help.bet365.com/s/en/sports/live-streaming>.

153 Theodore Piper et al., ‘The National Centre for Gaming Disorders – the Demographic Profile and Clinical Characteristics of Individuals Accessing Our Service’, *BJPsych Open* 10, no. S1 (2024): S203–S203, <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjo.2024.507>.

RECOMMENDATION 26

Parents should agree clear limits on gaming time, spending, and night-time use.

Like removing smartphones from bedrooms, there is little to no tangible benefit to having access to a gaming device in a child's bedroom, besides their own desire for one. Setting clear boundaries about appropriate use – regarding both the time and place of gaming – is imperative.

RECOMMENDATION 27

Ofcom should continue to enforce regulations surrounding gaming communities and platforms.

Last year, Steam, a publicly available gaming site with over 132 million active monthly users, released the game *No Mercy* for over a week. The case received significant scrutiny as the role of the protagonist was to “become every woman's worst nightmare.” The promotional material for the game includes graphic quotes such as:

*“After catching your own mother betraying your father, you uncovered the true nature of women, especially her... Never take ‘no’ for an answer... F*** your mom, f*** your auntie, and even f*** your friend's mom. Why not?*

Already a fan favourite in the NSFW Game Incest community.

Take what's yours and show No Mercy.”

Thankfully, this is no longer available on Steam, though it can still be downloaded online. Cases like this are important as they show the type of content is available to find online and how extreme sexualised and misogynistic content appears through mainstream gaming channels before removal. Government has since stressed that in-scope gaming platforms must remove illegal content and protect children from harmful content under the Online Safety Act. Parents and the Government should be alert to the dangers of content like this online.

Porn

Boys and young men sit in a culture where they watch porn every day or most days.¹⁵⁴ Most of this porn is violent,¹⁵⁵ and the top reasons for watching it (besides the top reason of being horny) are stress or boredom (50 and 40 per cent, respectively).¹⁵⁶ Many 18-year-old boys will have been watching porn for a whole decade before they become legal adults. It is therefore no surprise that our polling found that 70 per cent of 18-24-year-old women and 62 per cent of 18-24-year-old men believe that its widespread

¹⁵⁴ *Lost Boys: State of the Nation*.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁶ Tim Jacobs et al., ‘Associations Between Online Pornography Consumption and Sexual Dysfunction in Young Men: Multivariate Analysis Based on an International Web-Based Survey’, *JMIR Public Health and Surveillance* 7, no. 10 (2021): e32542, <https://doi.org/10.2196/32542>.

availability is bad for men. Similar proportions said the same about its impact on women and that it is undermining relationships between the sexes.

Over one third (35 per cent) of those aged 16-34 have been strangled during sex. For those over 55 years old, it drops to 2 per cent. One in eight titles on the homepages of the most popular porn websites described sexual violence (to a new user), with sexual activity between family members the largest category of abusive content. In September 2024, 24 million people visited undressing websites, according to social network analysis company Graphika.¹⁵⁷ The Crime and Policing Act 2026 has begun to tackle some of these issues. The Act has criminalised pornography depicting strangulation or suffocation and so-called “incest porn”. It has also banned “nudification tools” used to create synthetic non-consensual intimate images.

Ultimately, while boys and young men have personal and private access to the internet, generally via mobile phones, pornography will be a live issue for them. Because of this, awareness of the pornographic ecosystem that boys exist in is vital for parents, teachers, youth workers, and policymakers. Relationships are also vital. Policy changes can be effective but appropriate conversations with parents or friends about this content are important. Finally, it is clearly too easy for boys to watch porn, and we should continue to take more steps to make it more difficult.

The best solutions to this would be removing smartphones and challenging the narrative that watching pornography is a normal or accepted part of male adolescence. Short of this, there are a few other tweaks below.

RECOMMENDATION 28

Introduce a Safe Pornography Code.

Online pornography should be subject to a clear statutory safety code, bringing it closer into line with the standards already applied to offline adult material. The first recommendation in the Bertin review into online pornography recommended that pornographic content that would be illegal to distribute in physical formats should also be treated as illegal content on online platforms. At present, there is a regulatory gap between what would be refused classification offline and what can still be accessed online.

RECOMMENDATION 29

Ban under-18s from using virtual private networks (VPNs).

Access to pornography was restricted in 2025, following the continued failure of sites hosting pornographic content to stop children accessing it. These restrictions have worked. Pornhub reported a 77 per cent drop in visits to its site,¹⁵⁸ and Ofcom have fined multiple companies for failing to “use highly effective age assurance to prevent children from readily accessing that content.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ ‘A Revealing Picture’, Graphika, accessed 6 May 2026, <https://graphika.com/reports/a-revealing-picture>.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Pornhub Says UK Visitors down 77% since Age Checks Came In’, BBC News, 31 October 2025, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cgkz3m3re1zo>.

¹⁵⁹ Ofcom Fines Porn Company £1.35m for Not Having Age Checks, [Www.Ofcom.Org.Uk](https://www.ofcom.org.uk), 23 February 2026, <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/protecting-children/ofcom-fines-porn-company-1.35-million-for-not-having-age-checks>.

However, because different countries have differing levels of online protections for children, these restrictions can be easily bypassed using a VPN. There are certainly good reasons for the use of VPNs – security, for example – but they are also a clear loophole for young people to access deeply inappropriate and harmful content.¹⁶⁰ And, should a form of social media ban for under-16s be enacted, they might well use them for this too.

As with all restrictions online, many are reluctant to enact them for fear of losing their own data, privacy, or online protection. There is often a slight inconsistency in this argument as we all give our data to different companies or platforms daily. Logging on, accepting website cookies, even scrolling on social media results in a handover of data. Age verification is also only required on sites hosting adult content. The real problem, then, is the trustworthiness of some websites compared to others. But this is easily bypassed in one of two ways. Either we should not use untrustworthy sites, or these sites must engage with trusted third-party age-verification sites. Ofcom has outlined seven different methods of age verification.¹⁶¹ They argue, *“In the UK people are familiar with having to prove their age in the offline world to buy age-restricted goods like alcohol and tobacco. Age checks to access online pornography are just the same. It will help stop children from encountering pornography online, in the same way that a child should not be able to simply walk into a shop and buy a pornographic DVD or magazine.”* It is now easy for companies and individuals to safely verify age online without risking personal data. VPNs have a role to play, but not for children.

AI

AI is now a constant presence online. ChatGPT had 252m UK web visits last August alone.¹⁶² The roll-out of AI has reached the stage where 30 per cent of keyword search queries give AI-supported summaries, and over half of people (53 per cent) say that they often see them.¹⁶³

Among boys aged 16-24, almost nine out of ten boys used a generative AI model in the past year.¹⁶⁴ The reasons cited by younger teens (aged 8-15) for using such models included “Just chatting” (28 per cent), “Seeking advice” (18 per cent) and “emotional support / therapy” (6 per cent).¹⁶⁵

There are benefits to the adoption of AI tools, but there are also risks. The main risks we have identified for young people are social isolation, graphic content, and the erosion of critical thinking. We should not allow AI bots to act as proxies for conversations with friends and families. Rather, the case should be made that in-person friendships are the way forward. Graphic content is also available on popular online AI platforms with insufficient age-gating, as we outlined in our previous report, *Lost Boys: Boyhood*. And new data suggests that using large language models (LLMs) to help with work had negative effects. In fact, for those in the MIT study who used the LLM, “participants performed worse than their counterparts in the Brain-only group at all levels: neural, linguistic, and scoring.”¹⁶⁶

160 ‘VPNs Top App Store Charts as UK Age Verification Kicks In’, BBC News, 28 July 2025, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cn72yjdj70g5o>.

161 ‘Age Checks for Online Safety – What You Need to Know as a User’, [Wwww.Ofcom.Org.Uk](https://www.ofcom.org.uk), 26 June 2025, <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/protecting-children/age-checks-for-online-safety-what-you-need-to-know-as-a-user>.

162 ‘Online Nation’, [Wwww.Ofcom.Org.Uk](https://www.ofcom.org.uk), 28 November 2023, <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/online-habits/online-nation>.

163 Ibid.

164 *Lost Boys: State of the Nation*.

165 Ibid.

166 ‘Project Overview < Your Brain on ChatGPT’, MIT Media Lab, accessed 6 May 2026, <https://www.media.mit.edu/projects/your-brain-on-chatgpt/overview/>.

RECOMMENDATION 30

Age-gate AI tools likely to be used by children.

AI platforms should not be available to children. While they are unlikely to go anywhere in the future, the best preparation a child can have to use this tool is protection from it now. Unhindered neural and social development until at least the age of 16 gives children more time to develop the critical faculties needed to best use a tool like AI in the future. Early exposure does not create digital literacy. A better approach would be less passive engagement online (scrolling, for example) paired with more taught and supervised digital skills development, in schools or under supervision.

Ofcom has also confirmed that some AI chatbots fall under the Online Safety Act, but also that some chatbot-only services may sit outside current regulation if they do not search, host user-to-user content, or generate pornography.¹⁶⁷ That gap should be closed.

RECOMMENDATION 31

Generative AI platforms should be regulated immediately where any part of the model can communicate, create or curate pornographic or sexualised content, in line with other platforms that host pornography.

AI platforms and their CEOs have indicated their shift towards pornographic and sexualised content.¹⁶⁸ The time for government to be proactive has passed; it must immediately react by introducing strong measures to properly regulate online platforms.

In *Lost Boys: Boyhood*, the CSJ conducted a short experiment to access adult content through two mainstream generative AI platforms. In both instances we did not set up an account and used the basic models available online to anyone. For more detail on the conversation see *Boyhood*, page 59 and Appendix Two.

Any young and curious child – as all children are – who comes across a similar news article and is curious enough to talk to this AI model about it, is now vulnerable. These children, like us, don't need to suggest anything more than a willingness to talk, and one affirmative response. After this, the AI can do the rest.

Social Media Bans

The Prime Minister has now announced social media will be banned for under 16-year-olds in the UK. Social media restrictions are a live debate in British politics. The Government's ongoing consultation is also looking to restrict other parts of the internet such as gaming and AI chatbots, and promote more positive and educational content alongside stronger parental controls. Changes in recent years such as

¹⁶⁷ 'AI Chatbots and Online Regulation – What You Need to Know', [Www.Ofcom.Org.Uk](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/illegal-and-harmful-content/ai-chatbots-and-online-regulation-what-you-need-to-know), 18 December 2025, <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/illegal-and-harmful-content/ai-chatbots-and-online-regulation-what-you-need-to-know>.

¹⁶⁸ Dylan Butts, 'OpenAI's ChatGPT Will Soon Allow "erotica" for Adults in Major Policy Shift', [CNBC](https://www.cnn.com/2025/10/15/erotica-coming-to-chatgpt-this-year-says-openai-ceo-sam-altman.html), 15 October 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/10/15/erotica-coming-to-chatgpt-this-year-says-openai-ceo-sam-altman.html>.

the Online Safety Act, age verification for pornography, school phone restrictions and proposals such as VPN bans all point to the same problem: children have been allowed to access an internet designed for adults for too long. The smartphone is also the gateway to many of the harms outlined elsewhere in this report: pornography, gambling, gaming disorders, online influencers, AI companions, and the algorithm.¹⁶⁹

RECOMMENDATION 32

Government should proceed in banning social media for Under 16s

The risks far outweigh the rewards when children use social media. A ban is not about saying that social media has no redemptive features. Rather, it is about protecting children from its addictive nature until they have a better ability to regulate and protect themselves. The depressing analysis below shows the extent to which childhood, and now adulthood too, has transitioned online. When it comes to a healthy childhood, it is vital that we diminish the influence of online spaces while also offering a better alternative.

“Gen Alpha faces the highest screen time of any other group... Thanks to growing up online and even using computers in classes at school, today’s kids are looking at spending, on average, 37 years of their lives online, which is more than 46.6% of their entire lifetime or 65% of their lifetime that they are awake.”¹⁷⁰

The difficult question is whether a ban on social media would work. Australia is the obvious test case. From December 2025, many major platforms have been required to stop under-16s from having accounts. Early evidence shows that platforms have removed or restricted access to around 4.7 million accounts identified as belonging to under-16s.¹⁷¹ Major platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and Instagram have all seen their child users drop by half. This is far from a total ban but also far from a failure. After a ban the expectation should be that most children are no longer accessing these sites. However, given the overwhelming evidence of risk for young people, kicking half of them offline immediately is still vastly better than nothing.¹⁷² As the e-safety commissioner of Australia said: “just like other safety laws we have in society, success is measured by reduction in harm and in re-setting cultural norms”. Through a ban in Australia, both measures are underway.

There is also a risk of children moving to less visible and less regulated spaces. As such, any regulation or bans on social media must be holistic. This includes holding tech companies to account for having effective age verification and supporting parents with information and parental controls. On top of this, parents cannot solve this alone when every other child has a smartphone. Government should support parent pacts, school-wide norms with public health messaging that makes delaying smartphones normal.

169 ‘Growing up in the Online World: A National Consultation’, GOV.UK, 2 March 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/growing-up-in-the-online-world-a-national-consultation>.

170 ‘How Much Do We Rely On WiFi?’, accessed 8 May 2026, <https://bionic.co.uk/business-connectivity/guides/how-much-do-brits-rely-on-wi-fi-2024/>.

171 ‘Platforms Restrict Access to 4.7 Million under-16 Accounts across Australia | eSafety Commissioner’, accessed 8 May 2026, <https://www.esafety.gov.au/newsroom/media-releases/platforms-restrict-access-to-47-million-under-16-accounts-across-australia>.

172 Gary Hill, ‘More than 60% of Australian Children Still Using Social Media despite Ban for Under-16s, Research Shows’, *Molly Rose Foundation*, 13 April 2026, <https://mollyrosefoundation.org/more-than-60-of-australian-children-still-using-social-media-despite-ban-for-under-16s-research-shows/>.

Full List of recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1

Schools should include teaching on the Success Sequence as part of RSHE lessons.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Introduce a House system to all British primary and secondary schools.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Government should announce a new Right to Sport for all secondary school pupils, underpinned by new funding to unlock five hours of extracurricular activity for every pupil in secondary schools in England. The Right to Sport would see all pupils participate in a minimum of two hours of extracurricular sport per week, on top of PE time already scheduled on the curriculum.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Official guidance should suggest that all school sports should be held on a Wednesday afternoon.

RECOMMENDATION 5

We should encourage more men to work in or be present around schools.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Government should help monitor and support the implementation of Lad Pods in schools for children with absent fathers. Outcomes should be measured and if successful scaled nationally.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Schools should be creative in pursuing initiatives and organisations, such as M10 missions, that connect young people with mentors and role models.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Allow 16-year-olds in England to leave formal education by 16, in line with Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

RECOMMENDATION 9

The Government should follow through with its plans to delay access to UC Health until a claimant is aged 22 or over.

RECOMMENDATION 10

The Government should rebalance the welfare system by reforming PIP and UC to reinvest £1 billion in front-line support for people with mental health conditions.

RECOMMENDATION 11

Limit compulsory retakes, then move pupils onto an alternative literacy and numeracy route.

RECOMMENDATION 12

Bring the adult apprenticeship English and maths flexibilities down from 19 to 18.

RECOMMENDATION 13

Government should analyse the benefits of Microjobs and support the scaling of other local initiatives with similar underpinning principles.

RECOMMENDATION 14

The Government should introduce a Future Workforce Credit to incentivise employers to recruit and upskill NEETs aged 16-24.

RECOMMENDATION 15

Introduce a competitive 12-month military service year for 18-year-olds.

RECOMMENDATION 16

The Government should match-fund a new proof of concept Youth Infrastructure Fund. Private philanthropists are prepared to match-fund an initial £50 million fund that could be expanded and invested into an endowment if the concept itself is successful. We propose the creation of a new, proof-of-concept fund and vehicle set up by but located outside of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport to harness private philanthropic investment to expand support for community groups across the country.

RECOMMENDATION 17

Parents should be encouraged to support their children to leave the home by their 20s for at least one year, or charge rent if they stay.

RECOMMENDATION 18

Introduce a transferable tax allowance for married couples.

RECOMMENDATION 19

Government should cover up to £650 of the costs of weddings for couples on lower incomes.

RECOMMENDATION 20

Parents should be encouraged not to buy their child a smartphone until the age of 16.

RECOMMENDATION 21

Phones and screens should be kept out of bedrooms.

RECOMMENDATION 22

R;pple should be piloted and scaled across schools and public areas in the UK.

RECOMMENDATION 23

The media should talk less and more carefully about suicide.

RECOMMENDATION 24

Ban gambling advertising in football spaces likely to be seen by children.

RECOMMENDATION 25

Gambling firms should be banned from streaming live sports on their platforms.

RECOMMENDATION 26

Parents should agree clear limits on gaming time, spending and night-time use.

RECOMMENDATION 27

Ofcom should continue to enforce regulations surrounding gaming communities and platforms.

RECOMMENDATION 28

Introduce a Safe Pornography Code.

RECOMMENDATION 29

Ban under-18s from using virtual private networks (VPNs).

RECOMMENDATION 30

Age-gate AI tools likely to be used by children.

RECOMMENDATION 31

Generative AI platforms should be regulated immediately where any part of the model can communicate, create or curate pornographic or sexualised content, in line with other platforms that host pornography.

RECOMMENDATION 32

Government should proceed in banning social media for Under 16s

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The Centre for Social Justice
Kings Buildings
16 Smith Square
Westminster, SW1P 3HQ

www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk
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