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Equalities and Human Rights Commission
Fleetbank House, 2-6 Salisbury Square
London, EC4Y 8JX

7 January 2019

Dear Equalities and Human Rights Commission

Ref: Draft Strategic Plan - Suggested activities under each priority aim

Please accept this as the submission from the Men and Boys Coalition, a network of over 80 academics, charities and professionals committed to highlighting gender-specific issues affecting the wellbeing of men and boys. This primarily covers the second question area of the three set out on your website

(i) Overall priorities

We would like to place on record our disappointment that the Commission has not included barriers that fail to address a number of areas of inequality that affect men and boys in the UK. These include:

- 1) The high male suicide rate.
- 2) The challenges faced by boys and men at all stages of education including attainment.
- 3) Men's health, shorter life expectancy and workplace deaths.
- 4) The challenges faced by the most marginalised men and boys in society (for instance, homeless men, boys in care and the high rate of male deaths in custody).
- 5) Male victims of violence, including sexual violence.
- 6) The challenges faced by men as parents, particularly new fathers and separated fathers.
- 7) Male victims and survivors of sexual abuse, rape, sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour-based crime, stalking and slavery.
- 8) The negative portrayal of men, boys and fathers.

These are issues that negatively affect men and boys in the UK, yet there continues to be a lack of action, recognition or interest by government alongside key national and relevant sector institutions.

For example, many countries now (Ireland and Australia, most significantly) have a national men's health strategy that covers everything from general health, disease, cancer and mental health (including suicide). Given the fact that over 75% of those who commit suicide are male and that 10,000 men die of prostate cancer every year, these are significant areas in need of address. It is disappointing therefore not to see recognition of this by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission.

(ii) Strategic Goal 2: Boys and Young Men's Educational Underachievement

The most significant omission is under a combination of Strategic Aim 1 (Priority 2) and more so Strategic Goal 2 (To remove the barriers to opportunity, so that people's life chances are transformed).

This area is the under-performance of boys and young men in the UK education system, and the systematic lack of public policy, initiatives and interest at both a national level and also with the whole education system/establishment to address this. There are individual schools, teachers and colleges who are of course undertaking positive work but this is based on individual teacher or school endeavour rather than a whole system approach.

It has come to the point where rather than failing to include this within its three year-strategy (unless of course the Commission now includes this), the Equalities and Human Rights Commission has now to explain to the public why it continues to fail to seek to address this area. This is given the impact it has not just on the individuals, their families and communities but also on wider society and the country as a whole. The areas included in the proposed strategy are of course all worthy and should be included, but to continue to fail to address such a fundamental area of boys and younger mens' educational underachievement is a concern.

In terms of facts, these were included at our sold-out November 2018 conference and are set out in Annex 1. They range from 65,000 fewer males going to university than girls every year, to high levels of school exclusions and the high rate of male student suicide.

They show a clear and systematic level of under-achievement by boys and young men throughout the education system, which is not being recognised let alone addressed. At the conference, featuring presentations from leading educationalists, academics and politics, a 14 point plan was set out. This can be used as a reference:

<http://www.menandboyscoalition.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Creating-a-More-Positive-Future-for-Boys-and-Young-Men-Fourteen-Point-Plan-19.11.2018.pdf>

We would therefore urge, in revising its Strategy, that tackling the underachievement of boys and young men is to be addressed in the next three years. This is clearly a "*barrier to opportunity, so that people's life chances are transformed*". Given that the lack of action by those previously mentioned, who is going to address this clear inequality and barrier to opportunity for the Boys and Young Men in our country if the Equality and Human Rights Commission does not take a leadership role?

Men and Boys Coalition
7 January 2019

Annex 1: Statistics on Boys and Young Men's Education

(1) Key Stage 2

Girls continue to outperform boys. In 2018, the gender gap at the expected standard in reading, writing and maths was 8 percentage points: 68% of girls reached the expected standard compared to 60% of boys.

The gender gap is 8 percentage points for reading, 1 percentage point for maths, 9 percentage points for grammar, punctuation and spelling and 12 percentage points for writing teacher assessment

Department for Education: [National curriculum assessments at key stage 2 in England, 2018 \(provisional\)](#):

(2) GCSEs

62.3% of males received A*-C grades whilst 71.4% of women received the same results – the equivalent of 261,522 more A-C grades being awarded to women than men.

Joint Council for Qualifications: <https://www.jcq.org.uk/Download/examination-results/gcse/2018/main-results-tables/gcse-full-course-results-summer-2018>

(3) A Levels

More women achieved A*-C grades than men (78.7% grades compared to 75.1%), which meant that females received 76,891 more A*-C grades in total than men, due to a greater number of women taking them.

Joint Council for Qualifications: <https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/a-levels/2018/main-results-tables/a-level-and-as-results-summer-2018>

(4) University

In 2008, the gender gap between British men and women attending British universities was 48,000 (a percentage point gap of 12). In 2017 it had risen to 65,000. Over the decade 520,000 fewer British men had taken places at British universities (a percentage point gap of 14).

UCAS: <https://www.ucas.com/file/138996/download?token=Lb4WNafU>

(5) Apprenticeships

In 2016/17, 54% of apprenticeships starts were started by women (262,820) and 46% by men (228,520).

House of Commons Research Library:

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06113>

(6) Teachers

In 2017, there were 34,000 male primary school teachers in England, making up 15% of the total (187,000 female primary school teachers)

There are 76,500 male secondary school teachers, making up 37.5% of the total (127,700 female secondary school teachers)

DfE: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2017>

(7) NEETS

Between January to March 2016, there were 865,000 people aged 16 to 24 classified as NEET in the UK. Of these, 405,000 (47%) were male and 461,000 (53%) were female. They represented 12% of the total population aged 16-24 (11% of males; 13% of females). There are differences in the composition of the male and female populations who are NEET. Most male NEETs (55%) are unemployed, while most female NEETs (66%) are economically inactive, that is, they are not in work and not looking for or available for work

House of Commons Library: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06705/SN06705.pdf>

(8) School exclusions

The permanent exclusion rate for boys (0.15 per cent) was over three times higher than that for girls (0.04 per cent) and the fixed period exclusion rate was almost three times higher (6.91 compared with 2.53 per cent).

DfE:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/726741/text_exc1617.pdf

(9) Suicide

In 2017, there were 4,383 male suicides (75%) and 1,439 among women

BBC: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-45407487>

(10) Student Suicide

There were 213 male student suicides between 2012/13 and 2016/17 compared to 105 female student suicides. This is despite fewer male students. The rate for full time students is 5.0 per 100,000 male students and 1.1 per 100,000 female students.

ONS:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/estimating-suicideamonghighereducationstudentsenglandandwales>