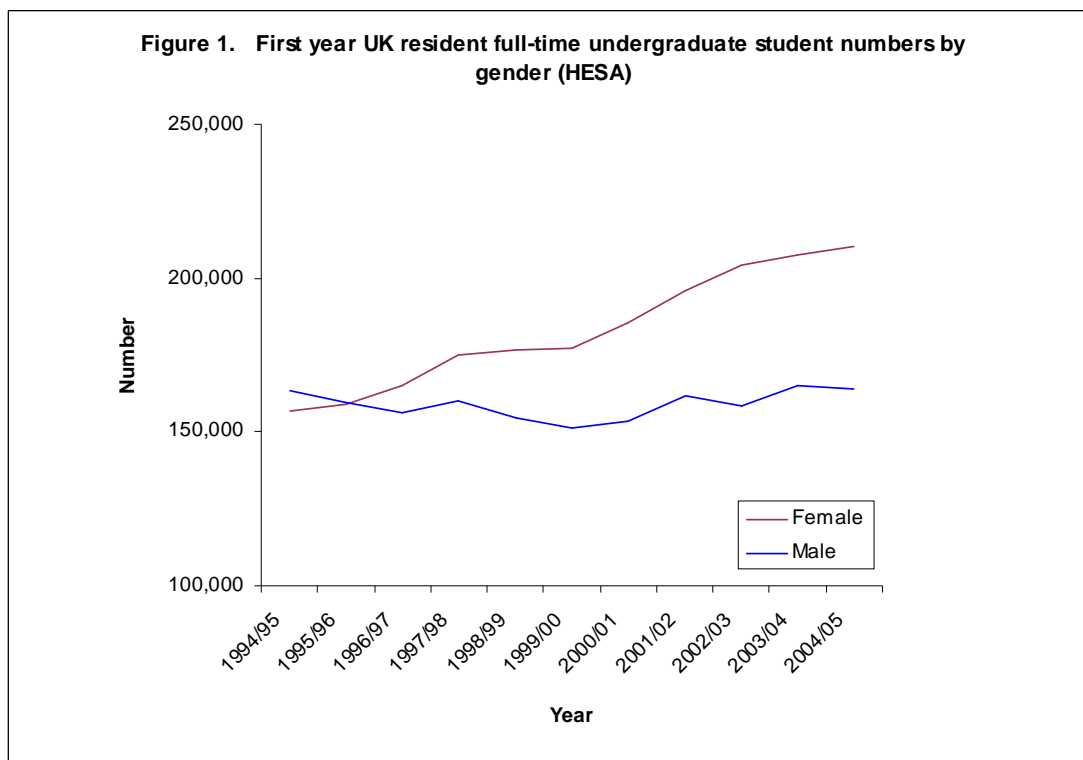


Aimhigher East Midlands Boys into HE Programme
By Dr Neil Raven

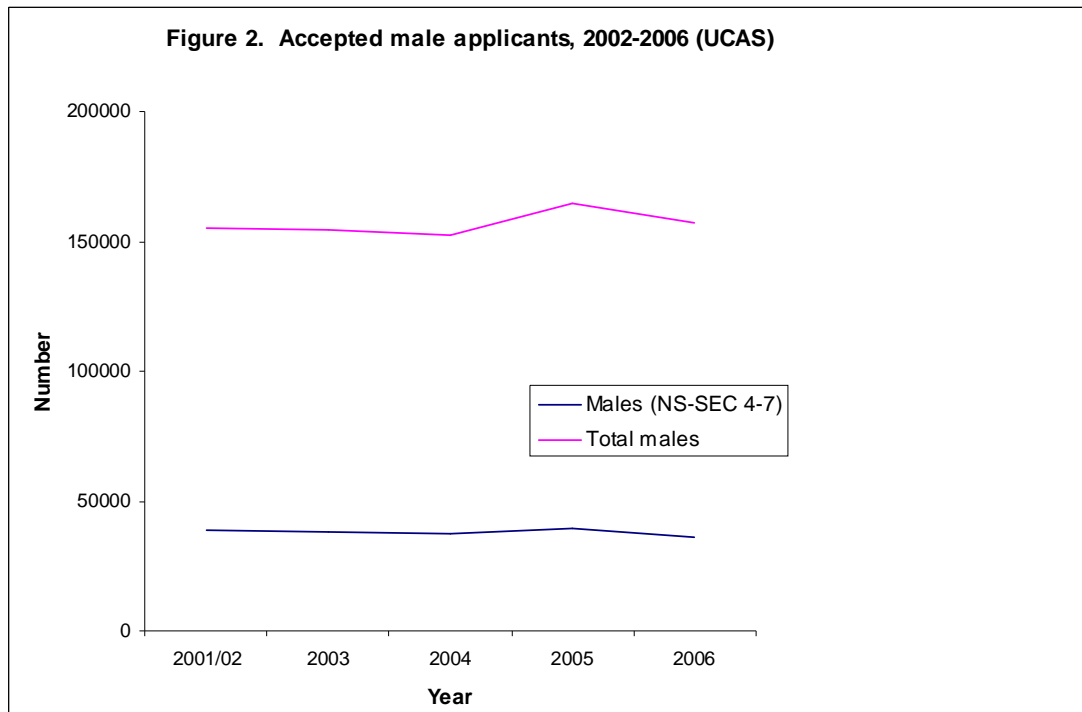
The nature and scale of the challenge faced in attracting more boys into higher education can, in part at least, be illustrated in figure 1



Source: http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_datatables&Itemid=121

The last ten years have seen a steep increase in the number of first year, full-time female undergraduates. In 1994/95, the figure was 157, 018; by 2004/05 it had increased to 210,115. In comparison, the number of male first year, full-time undergraduates has show little expansion. In 1994/95, the figures was 163, 500; ten years later is was 163, 900. Consequently, a visible gender gap can be seen to have opened up since the mid-1990s. It is a trend that has begun to attract popular comment. Henry, for example, talks about growing concerns over girls 'dominance at university'. Elsewhere, reference is made to boys

shunning university.¹ However, such discussions often fail to recognise that the male population is not homogeneous and that the real challenge is to be found in the disaggregated figures.



Source: http://www.ucas.com/he_staff/stat_services1/stats_online/data_tables/

Figure 2 suggests that boys from lower socio-economic backgrounds (National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification 4-7) are far less likely to progress to higher education than boys from more affluent backgrounds. Indeed, boys from lower socio-economic backgrounds made up less than 14 per cent of all accepted applicants in 2005/06. Whilst not a particularly clear trend, over the last four years we have seen a slight fall, in absolute terms, in the number of boys from these poorer backgrounds amongst accepted applicants. We also know that these boys are less likely to progress to HE than their female counterparts. The number of girls from these groups going to HE has increased in recent years, widening the gap between the two.

¹ J. Henry, 'Worry over girls' dominance at university', *Sunday Telegraph* (July 7, 2007), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/07/08/nedu208.xml>, Anon, 'Concerns as boys shun university', *BBC News Online* (January 30, 2007), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/6314055.stm>. See also A. Frean, 'Girls much keener than boys to go to university', *Time Online* (August 28, 2007). http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/article2337378.ece

However, there is also a growing recognition amongst practitioners and academics that something needs to be done. Indeed, it has recently been argued that the 'biggest problem' 'confronting' universities today is in 'getting working class boys into HE'.²

It is against this backdrop that the Aimhigher East Midlands Boys into HE Programme has been established. The programme has three broad objectives:

- To learn more about the barriers to HE progression faced by boys from lower socio-economic groups. This will be achieved by means of research, including practitioner interviews, and workshops, and focus groups with the young people themselves.
- To compile a practitioner information bank of good practice. This is being achieved by collecting case studies from across the country of activities that have proved successful at engaging with and raising the aspirations of boys.
- The third objective is to contribute, ourselves, to the development of such good practice. This objective is being achieved through the funding of nine innovative projects across the East Midlands (potential to be rolled out).

To discover more about the BiHE programme, and our progress in each of these three areas, visit the Boys into HE section of the Aimhigher East Midlands website (www.aimhigher-eastmidlands.ac.uk), or contact Dr Neil Raven, Projects Manager, Aimhigher East Midlands: n.d.raven@lboro.ac.uk; 01509-223461.

² Quote from Philip Brown. See M. North, 'Too cool for school and it's downhill from there', *The Times Higher Education Supplement* (25 February 2005), http://www.thes.co.uk/search/story.aspx?story_id=2019905