IOP projects on gender balance: An update

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An outline of the session

- Summary of our current projects on gender balance in physics, and some of the findings so far
- Discussion in groups: how can these findings be applied in your own work with schools?

Percentage of female entrants in A2 Physics, 1985-2014
Project summary: Improving Gender Balance

- A DfE funded pilot project aimed at identifying effective ways to encourage girls to continue studying physics post-16
- Running from April 2014 – March 2016
- Project Officers support a group of 20 Partner Schools
- Each school takes one of three approaches:
  - Strand A: Supporting girls
  - Strand B: Supporting teachers
  - Strand C: Whole school support
Strand A: Supporting girls

Girls are typically less confident and willing to take risks 'Science capital' affects subject choice

- Work with schools to set up groups for girls in KS3-4
- Inform girls about gender issues around confidence and subject choice
- Leadership skills and work on resilience
- Attempt to create science capital by building a relationship with volunteers

“The reality is: sometimes you lose. And you're never too good to lose. You're never too big to lose. You're never too smart to lose. It happens.”
Strand B: Supporting teachers

Gender stereotypes affect how teachers and students view physics and respond to physics lessons

- Lesson observations with detailed feedback
- Offer CPD, advice and support:
  - Unconscious bias training
  - Practical advice on techniques and content
  - Guidance on careers info, displays and events
Strand C: Whole school support

Progression of girls to A-level physics is linked to progression to other gendered subjects

The culture of schools as a whole is likely to be affecting students’ subject choice

- Speaking to staff across all subjects and students
- Setting up and supporting student groups with an interest in gender equality
- Developing lesson plans and resources for PSHE
- Supporting careers provision and events
Interim evaluation

- The qualitative evaluation shows positive effects in schools:
  - A: Girls are becoming more confident
  - B: Teachers are changing their practice in the physics classroom
  - C: Staff and students report a reduction in gendered language and improved careers provision
- But: is it ‘too late’ to have an effect on girls’ subject choice?
- Very few of the female students interviewed were considering taking A-level physics
Improving Gender Balance: Next steps…

- Final terms of work in the IGB schools
- Setting up legacy work so that the projects continue to have an impact
- Conference for participating schools to mark the end of the project and share experiences
- Production of project report and resources for wider distribution
- Project evaluation and planning for the next stage
Project summary: Opening Doors

- A shorter term project, funded by the Government Equalities Office, that aims to produce a good practice guide on gender equality for schools
- Running from June 2014 – October 2015
- Working with two networks of five schools, to arrange:
  - A series of network meetings
  - Site visits to each school, followed by a confidential report
- Findings from the individual reports to be distilled into the good practice guide
- Launch event for the report in October 2015
Main areas for improvement

- Schools not incentivised to look at gender issues
- Staff awareness of unconscious bias and gender issues as part of classroom management
- Use of language by both students and staff, making sure that sexist or gendered comments are sanctioned as strongly as racist or homophobic language
- Engaging parents and students with gender issues
- Careers and options advice, particularly on subject difficulty
Identified good practice

- Strong PSHE programmes taught by a dedicated team that cover sensitive topics such as:
  - representation of men and women in the media
  - consent in sex education
  - prejudice in the workplace and the glass ceiling
- Responsibilities in senior leadership that consider gender issues
- Support from governors including equalities impact assessment reviews of all internal and external policies
- Student led equalities group taking on issues – “equalistaff awards”, feminist groups
Opening Doors: Next steps…

- Development of the Good Practice Guide
- Producing the launch event in October
  - To bring together representatives of all the fields doing research into gender equity in schools with practitioners
  - Cross-discipline: NOT a science / physics event
Discussion in groups