Improving Gender Balance

Frequently Asked Questions

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What is a Randomised Control Trial and what does that mean for this project?
In a Randomised Control Trial (RCT), participants are randomly allocated to either a ‘treatment’ group (who receive the intervention) or a control group (who don’t receive the intervention). Outcomes for those two groups are then compared. This means that once your school is recruited, it has an equal chance to end up in either group. If your school is randomised into the control group, you will not be able to access the intervention. Read more about RCTs on the Better Evaluation website here.

How is the programme being evaluated?
Girls’ progression to A-level physics has stayed constant in the past few decades despite several initiatives to increase it. We want to ensure we can observe whether or not this intervention, which
has been trialled on a smaller scale, has a real impact. Randomised Control Trials are the best approach for demonstrating the effectiveness of an intervention, as using random allocation gives each school an equal chance to be in the intervention group and removes any selection bias. Therefore, we will be able to attribute any differences in outcomes between the control and intervention group to the intervention. This evaluation will be conducted independently by UCL Institute of Education.

Separate from the RCT evaluation, there will also be an internal evaluation conducted by the IOP. We will ask schools in the intervention group to provide data on intentions and ask key individuals (Headteacher, Head of Science and IGB link person) to complete a short feedback form each term, to allow us to evaluate and improve the programme.

**What are the benefits to my school?**
If in the intervention group, your school will receive bespoke support by a dedicated IOP Coach, who will spend about half a day per week working with each school.

**What does the intervention actually entail?**
The intervention is bespoke and each school might do different activities in different doses. The first term will be spent researching your school, understanding its context, needs and priorities. The IOP Coach will do this by meeting with key staff, talking to pupils, and looking at data and policies. A programme of support will be drawn up based on this analysis.

The activities included in the programme of support will start once the programme of support is agreed, which will happen by the end of the Autumn term. Some elements will be common to all schools, e.g. meeting with other schools in the network, inclusive teaching workshops and IOP Coach attendance at options evenings and parents evening, to engage the wider school community including parents.

Tailored activities could include:

- Physics CPD
- Staff CPD on inclusive teaching, gender stereotyping, unconscious bias
- Coaching and mentoring for physics staff
- Extracurricular activities and projects with students
- Careers events and workshops
- Assemblies and PSHE lessons on themes related to gender and equality

**Who are the IOP Coaches?**
The IOP Coach is an experienced specialist who will be working with your school on this project. They may be specialists in physics education, gender issues, or both. They will work closely with the wider team of IOP Coaches when specific needs are identified in order to find the person best placed to support.
What will the next year look like if I am in the intervention group?

- Once you have been assigned to the intervention group, your IOP Coach will arrange a meeting with the Headteacher and Head of Science in your school to introduce themselves, tell you more about the programme and start planning for next year.

- During the Autumn term, the IOP Coach will focus on getting to know your schools’ priorities and needs, through data scrutiny and evidence gathering.

- The intervention activities will start once the programme of support is agreed.

What would be expected from my school if I’m in the intervention group?

- You will be asked to appoint a member of staff as a link person in your school, who will act as the main point of contact for the IOP.

- The programme is facilitated by the IOP Coach, but led by the school. We ask schools to commit to the values and ethos of the project and to include a strategic aim to improve gender balance in progression to post-16 study within its SIP (or equivalent). It’s important that members of staff champion the programme and ensure it remains a priority when the IOP Coach is not there.

- Commitment to ensuring that staff and pupils involved in this project will have adequate support and resources, particularly time, to successfully participate in the IGB Programme. This involves some activities/events every term and will include them taking part in the evaluation of the project. The time commitment might vary based on your programme of support.

- You will need to contact parents to inform them of their right to object to their child’s data being processed as part of the analysis of the trial. You also commit to securely providing the Institute of Education with the list of pupils whose parents did not object within two weeks of sending the letter. In the event that you receive no objections in that period, you will only be required to confirm this fact to IOE, and not to send a full list of pupils. Control schools will need to do this too. All data used in the analysis will be anonymous and schools and pupils will not be identifiable.

- As part of our evaluation, we will need to collect some extra data from your school: A-level choice intentions from current year 10 and 11, and a termly feedback form that will go to Headteacher, Head of Science and the IGB link person (if they are not the Head or Head of Science).

What year groups will we be working with?
In year 1, the focus will be on years 9 and 11. In year 2 and 3 (subject to funding) we will broaden the scope to include other year groups too.

What is the role of the IGB link person in school?
The IGB link will act as the main point of contact between your school and the IOP Coach, for example supporting in organising meetings and putting the Coach in touch with relevant colleagues. Ideally, it should be someone with the authority to drive the project forward and ensure it remains on the school’s agenda when the Coach is not there. However, it is not solely the role of the IGB link to champion the project, but of the whole school.
Do you need full sign off from SLT and the Head to go ahead?
Yes, the project requires this higher level sign off and we need the Headteacher and the Head of Science to sign the MOU.

What is the time commitment?
Because of the bespoke nature of the programme, time commitment will vary for each school, depending on which activities will be included in the programme of support. The Coach will work closely with you to ensure that activities fit into the school’s established time structures and planned events as much as possible. However, it is important that schools support the Coach and ensure they are able to deliver the programme of support.

What happens if I am in the control group?
If your school ends up in the control group, you will not be able to access the intervention. Schools in the control group will be included in the final trial analysis, which means we will look at National Pupil Database data for the school, in order to compare the two groups.

Control schools will be first in line for any future roll-outs of the programme and will receive a copy of the report once published.

We currently do some work on gender equality within our school; if we sign up and are allocated as a control school will we have to stop our gender equality work?
No, we understand that school might be doing work on gender equality already, so there is no requirement to stop what you are doing if you are allocated to the control group.

What would be expected from my school if I am in the control group?
The formal Randomised Control Trial evaluation conducted by the Institute of Education will include control schools. Even if you are a control school, you will need to contact parents to inform them of their right to object to their child’s data being processed as part of the analysis of the trial. You also commit to securely providing the Institute of Education with the list of pupils whose parents did not object within two weeks of sending the letter. In the event that you receive no objections in that period, you will only be required to confirm this fact to IOE, without sending a full list of pupils.

When will I know if I am in the control or intervention group?
We will need to finish recruitment and go through the randomisation process before we can let you know which group your school is in. We aim to let you know before the second half of the summer term.

How many schools will be involved in the programme?
80 schools will access the intervention and 80 schools will be in the control group.

How will my school work with the wider Improving Gender Balance network?
Connecting with other like-minded people and other schools committed to the same mission will be an important part of the programme. Each intervention school will be part of a regional network. The size of the regional network will vary, but on average we expect each group to include about 4 schools. Opportunities to network with other schools will be built into the programme.
How long is the programme?
This is a 3 year programme. However, it has currently been funded until March 2020. We are asking schools to commit to the full 3 years, but at the moment we can only guarantee the support until March 2020.

Will this have a cost for my school?
Schools won’t be charged for the programme. This project is entirely funded by the Department for Education, as part of the department’s commitment to supporting the teaching of physics.

When will we know about the funding?
Unfortunately we don’t have a clear idea of when further funding will be confirmed. We think that this might around November time, but we are not in a position to confirm this.

What happens after March 2020?
If funding is not renewed, the support from the IOP Coach will terminate in March 2020. However, you can continue the work you have done with your Coach during the programme and maintain the strategies that have been put in place. The Coach will be able to advise you on next steps.

If the funding is renewed, the programme of support will be revisited and extended for the subsequent 2 years.

How do we know it works?
The Institute of Physics has been leading research on girls and physics for a number of years. All our reports and research can be found on the IOP website. Our research showed the extent to which gender stereotyping can occur in schools, and how it can create barriers to subject choice. A previous set of pilot projects tested different interventions in schools and compared them against one another. The new IGB programme follows from one of these pilot projects, which was designed to be implemented across the whole school, as well as within the physics or science departments. The number of girls taking A-level physics in schools involved in this project more than trebled over two years.