

Cambridge AS & A Level · Sociology 9699 · Notes

Gender and educational attainment A2

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What you need to know

By the end of this topic you should be able to:

1. **Explain how gender socialisation affects attainment:** how the way girls and boys are brought up (by families, the media, reading material and schools) shapes their attitudes to learning, their subject choices and how long they stay in education.
2. **Explain how wider social changes affect gendered achievement:** changes outside school such as feminism, equality laws, new jobs for women and new family patterns, which have raised **girls' expectations**, and the decline of traditional men's work, which has led to talk of a **crisis of masculinity**.
3. **Explain gender and subcultures:** how groups of boys and girls in school build ideas of what it means to be a "real" boy or girl, and how these groups raise or lower effort and results.
4. **Explain teacher expectations and gendered behaviour in the classroom:** how teachers' stereotypes, the attention they give, the way they discipline and the advice they offer can treat boys and girls differently, and how pupils respond.

Exam questions ask why one gender does better or worse, how schools favour girls or boys, and whether gender still matters, so you also need to weigh gender against class and ethnicity and to judge how far its influence has changed.

Understand it

The pattern to explain

Gender refers to the social and cultural expectations attached to being male or female (masculinity and femininity), as opposed to biological sex. Sociologists study gender and attainment because the pattern has changed so much within living memory, which suggests social causes rather than natural ones.

- **In many richer countries girls now outperform boys** at school-leaving exams, in most subjects, and more young women than young men go to university. In the UK the gap opened in the late 1980s and has stayed. International tests show girls ahead in reading almost everywhere, while boys keep a small lead in mathematics in some countries.

- **Subjects remain gendered.** Even where girls achieve more overall, boys are far more likely to take physics, engineering and computing, and girls to take languages, the arts, health and caring subjects. These choices lead to different careers and pay later.
- **In many low-income countries the pattern runs the other way.** In parts of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, girls are less likely than boys to finish secondary school, because of early marriage, domestic work, school fees, distance to school and safety.
- **Gender does not act alone.** In most countries the gap between pupils from rich and poor homes is several times larger than the gap between girls and boys. Middle-class boys still do far better than working-class girls.

So there are two puzzles: why girls have overtaken boys in many places (and why some boys underachieve), and why gender still shapes subject choice, careers and, in some societies, access to school at all.

Gender socialisation and attainment

Gender socialisation is learning the behaviour that a society expects of each sex. It begins in the family (primary socialisation) and continues through school, peers and the media (secondary socialisation). The prerequisite note on socialisation explains the process; here the focus is on its effect on learning.

- **Toys, games and activities.** Oakley described how parents shape gender through **manipulation** (encouraging behaviour seen as suitable, discouraging the rest) and **canalisation** (channelling children towards "gender-appropriate" toys and activities). Construction kits and outdoor games may build spatial and technical confidence in boys; dolls, reading and talking games may build the language and caring skills that later help girls in reading and in written subjects.
- **Reading and the media.** Lobban analysed children's reading schemes in the 1970s and found that boys were shown in active, adventurous roles and girls in a narrow set of domestic ones. Later studies of textbooks in several Asian countries (**Islam and Asadullah**) still found women under-represented and shown mostly in the home. Children who only see men as scientists and leaders may not imagine those futures for themselves.
- **Parents' expectations.** Where a family expects a daughter to marry young and run a home, it may see less point in paying for her secondary schooling, especially if money is short and sons are seen as future earners. In other families, parents now expect daughters to have careers and push them as hard as sons.
- **Habits that schools reward.** Many girls are encouraged at home to be quiet, tidy, cooperative and patient; many boys are allowed to be more boisterous and competitive. Classrooms tend to reward the first set of habits, so the same socialisation that once limited girls' horizons can now help their results.
- **Early attitudes.** Norman and colleagues found that by the time they started school, girls and boys already had different ideas of what suited them, learned from family and media.

Evaluation. Socialisation explanations show that differences are learned, not innate. But they can make children sound passive; many pupils reject the roles they are offered, and socialisation itself changes as families and the media change.

Wider social changes and changing female expectations

Many of the biggest causes of girls' improvement lie outside school. When you use them, always say **how** the change reaches the classroom (more motivation, different subject choices, staying on longer).

1. **Feminism.** The women's movement since the 1960s challenged the idea that a woman's place is in the home and raised girls' self-esteem and ambitions. Over time a generation of mothers, magazine writers and teachers grew up with these ideas, so girls heard at home, on screen and in class that a career was normal for a woman, and sexist practices in schools were questioned.
2. **Equality laws.** In the UK, the **Equal Pay Act (1970)** and **Sex Discrimination Act (1975)** made it unlawful to pay women less for the same work or to turn them away from jobs and courses because of their sex. Many other countries have similar laws. When qualifications pay off for women in the job market, girls have a stronger reason to gain them.
3. **Changes in employment.** Manufacturing jobs have declined while the **service sector** (offices, health, education, retail, finance) has grown. Many of these jobs need qualifications and have been open to women, giving girls visible routes into paid careers and more women as role models in professional life.
4. **Changes in the family.** Higher divorce rates, more lone-parent families headed by women and more dual-earner couples show girls that they may need to support themselves and their children. Women's earnings now matter to most households.
5. **Changing female expectations.** **Sharpe** interviewed working-class girls in London in the 1970s and again in the 1990s. The earlier girls ranked love, marriage and children first; the later girls put careers and being able to support themselves first and were wary of depending on a man. **Beck** links this to **individualisation** in a **risk society**: in an uncertain world of insecure jobs and fragile relationships, each person must build their own life, so young women see their own qualifications as their safety net. **Francis and Skelton** describe today's girls as planning their own futures: they want to earn their own money and make their own way rather than rely on a partner, and they see qualifications as the means to do it.
6. **Mitsos and Browne** brought these together: they argued that girls' success came from changing attitudes inspired by feminism, new job openings in services, girls' greater effort and motivation, and changes in assessment.

Limits of the change. Change is uneven. **Archer** and colleagues found that some working-class girls built their identities around glamour, relationships and early motherhood, which gave them status among friends but clashed with school. In many societies traditional expectations of early marriage still cut girls' schooling short.

The crisis of masculinity

The **crisis of masculinity** is the idea that traditional male roles, such as breadwinner and manual worker, have lost their place, leaving some men and boys unsure what being a man now means.

- The decline of mining, factory and heavy industrial jobs removed the secure manual work that many working-class boys once expected to walk into, often without qualifications.
- **Mac an Ghail** argued that working-class boys who could no longer look forward to a breadwinner role felt anxious about their identity, and some made up for it with a tough, macho style in school.

- Some boys see little point in school if the jobs they want no longer exist, or if the jobs that do exist (service work involving care and communication) feel "feminine". This lowers motivation and aspirations.
- Boys may also be overconfident, believing they can succeed without effort, while girls tend to underestimate themselves and prepare harder.

Evaluation. Critics say the idea is exaggerated: men still dominate the highest-paid jobs, middle-class boys do well, and boys' results have also risen over time, only more slowly than girls'. The "crisis" is mainly among working-class boys, so it is as much about class as gender.

Inside school: feminisation and the gendered curriculum

The feminisation of education is the claim that schools have come to value qualities linked with femininity and to sideline those linked with masculinity.

- **Female teachers.** Most primary teachers in many countries are women. Some argue that boys lack male role models who show that learning is "for men too"; others reply that research finds pupils care more about a teacher's quality than their sex.
- **Assessment.** **Gorard** found that the gender gap in England widened sharply when GCSEs, with more coursework, began in 1988. Work marked over months favours pupils who plan ahead, redraft and hand things in on time; a single high-stakes exam gives more credit to the pupil who crams and takes risks on the day. Because girls are more often brought up to be diligent and organised, a shift towards coursework tilted results their way. When coursework was reduced, the gap narrowed only a little, so assessment is one cause, not the whole story.
- **Valued behaviour.** Schools reward sitting still, listening, cooperating and following rules. **Sewell** argued that boys are penalised for traditionally masculine traits such as competitiveness and physical energy, and that the curriculum and coursework had become too "feminised".
- **Equal opportunities policies.** Schools have deliberately reduced barriers for girls. The **GIST** (Girls Into Science and Technology) project in the early 1980s, and later **WISE** (Women Into Science and Engineering), used female scientists as visitors and girl-friendly teaching. The **National Curriculum (1988)** in England made science compulsory for all pupils to 16, so girls could not drop it. Reading schemes and textbooks have been rewritten to show women in a wider range of roles.

The **gendered curriculum** means the formal and hidden messages that certain subjects and careers suit one sex. **Kelly** argued that science was taught as a "masculine" subject, with examples and equipment drawn from boys' interests and boys dominating practical work. **Colley** found that subject choice follows gender images: subjects involving care, expression and group work are seen as feminine, while those involving machines, numbers and competition are seen as masculine. Careers advice, work-experience placements and what staff expect can push pupils further along these lines.

The **hidden curriculum** (what pupils learn from the way school is organised, not from lessons) can carry gender messages too:

- the jobs held by staff (men as head teachers and science teachers, women as classroom assistants and caterers);
- separate uniforms, sports, queues or tasks for boys and girls;

- who gets asked questions, who is praised for what, and how misbehaviour is punished;
- which pupils are pushed towards which options at 14 or 16.

Teacher expectations and classroom interaction

Teachers are not neutral. Interactionists show how their expectations of boys and girls shape what happens in lessons, through **labelling** and the **self-fulfilling prophecy** (pupils come to act out the label, so it comes true).

- **Boys get more attention.** **Spender** recorded lessons and found that boys took up most of the teacher's time and talk, often because they were noisier and demanded it. Even teachers who tried to share attention equally gave boys more.
- **Girls are less visible.** **Stanworth** studied A-level classes and found that teachers knew boys' names better, expected boys to go further, and gave them more attention; the girls underestimated their own ability and were less likely to speak up.
- **Boys are disciplined more.** **Francis** found that boys received more attention, but much of it was criticism; teachers held lower expectations of boys' behaviour and were stricter with them. In many countries boys are far more likely to be excluded from school.
- **Different labels.** **Jones and Myhill** found that primary teachers tended to see boys as likely underachievers and girls as high achievers, even when their results were similar. Girls who were struggling could go unnoticed, while boys could be written off as lazy but bright.
- **Double standards.** **Reay** studied a primary class and found that the girls' friendship groups were judged differently by teachers. When a girl broke the rules, staff tended to read it as a sign of bad character, sly or manipulative; when a boy broke the same rules, it was shrugged off as boys being boys. Girls therefore paid a higher price for stepping out of the "good girl" role.
- **Effects.** Positive labels for girls (hard-working, mature, reliable) can raise their confidence and results. Labels for boys (disruptive, lazy) can lead to lower sets, more punishment and resentment. But labels can also harm girls who do not fit the "good girl" image, and quiet girls may get too little help.

Evaluation. Many of these studies are small, qualitative and some are dated (from the 1970s and 1980s, when girls were behind); teachers today are trained to watch for gender bias. Pupils also resist labels: a boy labelled lazy may work to prove the teacher wrong.

Gender and subcultures

A **subculture** is a group with its own norms within the school. Many pupil subcultures are organised around ideas of masculinity and femininity, and peers often police them closely.

Boys' subcultures.

- **Hegemonic masculinity (Connell)** is the dominant ideal of manhood in a society: tough, competitive, heterosexual and not openly emotional. In school it can make hard work look unmanly.
- **Willis's "lads"** in a working-class school rejected study as for "ear'oles" and valued "having a laff" and manual work as real men's work.

- **Mac an Ghaill** identified four groups of boys: the **macho lads** (anti-school, tough, working-class), the **academic achievers** (worked hard, aimed for professional careers), the **new enterprisers** (chose vocational and business subjects) and the **real Englishmen** (middle-class, appeared to succeed without visible effort). Masculinity took different forms, and only some were anti-school.
- **Jackson** found that "laddish" boys protected themselves from the fear of failure by appearing not to try: if you never work, you can blame failure on not caring rather than on lack of ability. Being seen to work hard was "uncool" and "girly".
- **Epstein** found that boys who worked hard risked homophobic abuse from other boys, which pushed them to hide their effort.

Girls' subcultures.

- **Pro-school groups.** Many girls form friendship groups that support work and share effort; reading, talking and cooperation fit school well.
- **Reay** found different "girlhoods" in one primary class, including "nice girls", "girlies", "tomboys" and a group modelled on a girl band, with different relations to teachers and boys.
- **Jackson** also found **ladettes**: girls who adopted loud, drinking, anti-work behaviour. Teachers tended to see this more negatively than the same behaviour in boys.
- **Lees** found that girls' behaviour was policed by their sexual reputation: being labelled for dressing or acting "wrongly" controlled girls and made them guard their image, sometimes at the cost of speaking up in class.
- **Archer** and colleagues found that working-class girls who invested in hyper-feminine styles (hair, nails, boyfriends) were seen by teachers as not serious about learning, and clashed with the school.

How subcultures affect attainment. Anti-school boys' groups cut effort and invite punishment; laddish norms spread beyond the working class. Pro-school girls' groups raise effort. Teachers' reactions to whole groups can harden the divide. Subcultures also overlap with class and ethnicity: the most anti-school groups are often working-class boys.

Gender, class and ethnicity together

Intersectionality means that gender combines with class and ethnicity, so a pupil's experience depends on all three.

- **Gillborn and Mirza** found that the gaps by class and by ethnicity in England were much larger than the gap by gender.
- Girls outperform boys in nearly every ethnic and class group, but the size of the gap varies: it is widest among working-class pupils and some ethnic groups (for example Black Caribbean girls do much better than Black Caribbean boys).
- Middle-class boys achieve far more than working-class girls, so "girls are ahead" is true only within groups.
- Teachers' stereotypes are often a mix of gender, class and ethnicity: Black boys seen as threatening, Asian girls as passive, working-class girls as uninterested in learning.

Perspectives on gender and education

- **Functionalists** and the **New Right** see education as a meritocracy: if girls now do better, that shows opportunities are open and talent and effort are rewarded. The New Right worries about boys' underachievement and links it to feminised schools and absent fathers.
- **Liberal feminists** stress the progress made through equality laws and school policies and want to finish the job (for example more girls in STEM).
- **Radical feminists** argue that education is still **patriarchal** (run in the interests of men): men hold the top posts, girls face sexual harassment, the curriculum centres men's achievements, and girls' better grades do not turn into equal pay or power.
- **Marxist feminists** link gender inequality in education to capitalism's need for a cheap, flexible female workforce and for unpaid work in the home.
- **Interactionists** focus on classroom labelling and pupil subcultures.

Key facts and formulas

There is no formula list in Sociology. "Learn it" means you must remember it.

Key term	Status
The pattern: girls ahead of boys at school-leaving exams and in university entry in many richer countries; subjects still gendered; girls behind in access in some low-income countries; class gap larger than gender gap	Learn it
Gender socialisation: manipulation and canalisation (Oakley), reading schemes (Lobban), textbooks (Islam and Asadullah), early attitudes (Norman), parents' expectations	Learn it
Wider changes: feminism, Equal Pay Act (1970) and Sex Discrimination Act (1975), growth of the service sector, family change, female role models	Learn it
Changing female expectations: Sharpe (1970s and 1990s girls), Beck (individualisation, risk society), Francis and Skelton, Mitsos and Browne	Learn it
Crisis of masculinity: decline of manual work, loss of breadwinner role (Mac an Ghail), low aspirations, overconfidence	Learn it
Feminisation of education: female teachers, coursework (Gorard), valued behaviour (Sewell); equal opportunities: GIST, WISE, National Curriculum (1988)	Learn it
Gendered curriculum (Kelly, Colley) and hidden curriculum (staff roles, uniforms, interaction, option choices)	Learn it
Classroom interaction: Spender (boys' attention), Stanworth (girls less visible), Francis (boys disciplined more), Jones and Myhill (labels), Reay (double standards); labelling and self-fulfilling prophecy	Learn it

Key term	Status
Subcultures: hegemonic masculinity (Connell), Willis's lads, Mac an Ghaill (macho lads, academic achievers, new enterprisers, real Englishmen), Jackson (laddishness, ladettes), Epstein, Lees, Archer	Learn it
Intersectionality (Gillborn and Mirza); perspectives: functionalist, New Right, liberal, radical and Marxist feminist, interactionist	Learn it
Paper 3: Question 1 $2 \times 2 = 4$; Question 2 $2 \times 4 = 8$; Question 3 $2 \times 6 = 12$; Question 4 essay 26	Learn it

How to do it

We have tagged 28 questions for this topic (2021–2025, all from Paper 3), 23 different (five Paper 31s repeated a Paper 33 question). None mix two types.

Question type	Questions
Explain two ways or reasons gender affects attainment or school experience (8 marks)	12
Evaluate or assess a view on gender and attainment (essay)	6
Give two arguments against a view on gender and education (12 marks)	5
Describe two ways schools treat or favour girls and boys (4 marks)	5

1. Explain two ways or reasons gender affects attainment or school experience (8 marks) (12 questions)

Usually Question 2. Asked (counting tagged questions): how teachers' perceptions or stereotypes of gender affect pupils (3, one a repeat); how wider social changes have affected girls' attainment (2); why gender stereotypes might influence attainment (2, one a repeat); why girls might be advantaged in schools (1); why boys may be disadvantaged at school compared with girls (1); how primary socialisation leads to gender differences in attainment (1); how a person's gender may influence their attainment (1); how the hidden curriculum may influence girls' performance (1, a 9-mark part (a) in the older June 2021 Paper 34 format).

Each way is marked out of 4 (points-based, not levels):

- Point** (1): state the way in one sentence, for example "Teachers may expect boys to be disruptive".
- Explain** (1): show how it changes results or experience, for example "boys expected to cause trouble are watched and punished more, which builds resentment and cuts effort".
- Material** (1): name a study, sociologist, concept or theory, for example Francis.
- Link** (1): say **how** that material backs the point, for example "Francis found that boys got more of the teacher's attention but most of it was telling-off, which shows that teachers' expectations shaped how boys were treated".

Write two separate paragraphs, one per way. Keep **gender** in every sentence, and match the question's angle:

- **Wider social changes** questions want causes **outside** school (feminism, laws, jobs, family change, Sharpe, Beck, Francis and Skelton). Feminisation of schools or teacher labelling gains nothing unless you tie it to a change in society. Describing how girls used to be held back also gains nothing: the question asks what changed.
- **Primary socialisation** questions want the family and early childhood. Good material: what a girl or boy sees adults at home doing (who earns, who cooks, who reads); the stories, screens and games they meet before school (Lobban, Norman); Oakley's manipulation and canalisation; the community's view of when a girl should marry or start work, and whether the family thinks a daughter's schooling is worth paying for. School factors are not credited.
- **Teachers' perceptions or stereotypes** questions want what teachers do: labels (Jones and Myhill, Reay), attention (Spender, Stanworth), discipline (Francis), setting and subject or career advice (Colley), and the self-fulfilling prophecy.
- **Stereotypes and attainment** questions can use the stereotypes held by teachers, by parents or by pupils themselves. From pupils: a boy who thinks real boys don't work hard (Jackson), or who believes he is clever enough not to revise; a pupil who drops a subject they were good at because it "belongs" to the other sex (Kelly, Colley). From teachers: girls overlooked because they are quiet (Stanworth), or blamed more harshly when they misbehave (Reay). From parents: spending less on a daughter's education if her future is seen as being in the home.
- **Girls advantaged / boys disadvantaged** questions: think in terms of who teaches (a mostly female staff), how work is judged (coursework, Gorard), what behaviour earns praise (Sewell), how teachers see each sex (Francis, Jones and Myhill), what pupils' own groups value (Jackson, Mac an Ghaill), what happens outside that changes boys' outlook (crisis of masculinity), and which policies set out to help girls.
- **Hidden curriculum** questions: who does which job in the school, what pictures and stories in books show, who gets the teacher's time, what is expected of each sex in dress and sport, and where pupils are pointed at option time, each tied to girls' results.

2. Evaluate or assess a view on gender and attainment (essay) (6 questions)

Question 4 (26 marks) since 2021: gender has little influence on educational attainment today (2, one a repeat); gender differences in attainment are mainly due to what happens in schools (2, one a repeat); gender is the most important influence on attainment (1). The June 2021 Paper 34 asked, in the older format, whether gender is more important than ethnicity (1, a 16-mark part (b)).

The 26-mark essay is marked **AO1** knowledge and understanding 10, **AO2** interpretation and application 6, **AO3** analysis and evaluation 10, so $10 + 6 + 10 = 26$. The older 16-mark part used three bands (0–6, 7–11, 12–16), where the top band needs explicit assessment. Both reward the same things.

1. **Introduction** (two or three sentences): define gender and attainment; give the pattern (girls ahead in many richer countries, behind in access in some poorer ones, subjects still split); name the debate.
2. **Two sides**, 4–5 paragraphs each, every paragraph built as point, named evidence, and what it shows **about the exact view**.
3. **Conclusion**: how far the view holds, for whom and where; intersectionality gives the strongest judgement.

Plan for "gender has little influence on attainment today" (or "gender is the most important influence", reversed). Think of the debate as three questions you put to the evidence.

Is the gender gap small next to other gaps?

- Supports the view: Gillborn and Mirza's analysis shows class and ethnic gaps several times wider than the gender gap, and a middle-class boy is still far more likely to succeed than a working-class girl. Functionalists would add that if girls can now overtake boys, the system rewards ability whatever a pupil's sex.
- Challenges the view: a small average gap can hide large effects inside groups. Working-class boys and Black Caribbean boys fall furthest behind girls of their own background, so gender changes how class and ethnicity work rather than vanishing.

Have the old barriers gone?

- Supports the view: Sharpe's 1990s girls, Beck's individualisation and Francis and Skelton's career-minded girls show that girls' ambitions now match boys'; laws against sex discrimination and policies such as GIST, the compulsory science of the National Curriculum and rewritten reading books removed many obstacles that schools once put in girls' way.
- Challenges the view: equal access is still not the rule worldwide. Where families pay fees or need daughters at home, or expect early marriage, girls leave school earlier, so in those societies gender is still one of the strongest influences of all. Radical feminists add that even where girls get better grades, men still hold the top posts in schools and later earn more.

Does gender still steer what happens in school?

- Challenges the view: boys' underachievement is itself a gender effect. Laddish subcultures (Jackson, Mac an Ghaill), the crisis of masculinity, feminised assessment (Gorard, Sewell) and stricter discipline of boys (Francis) all work through gender. Girls' and boys' subject choices still split along gender lines (Kelly, Colley), which shapes which qualifications each gains. Teachers' labels still differ by gender (Jones and Myhill, Reay).
- Supports the view (by weighing): some of these studies are small or dated, and girls' gains over a single generation show that gender's effect can shrink fast when society changes.

End with a judgement such as: gender's influence has **changed form** (from barring girls to slowing some boys and channelling subject choice) more than it has disappeared, and how much it matters depends on class, ethnicity and country.

Plan for "gender differences are mainly due to what happens in schools". Sort material into **inside** and **outside** school.

- **Inside school (for the view):** classroom attention and labelling (Spender, Stanworth, Francis, Jones and Myhill, Reay); feminised assessment and staffing (Gorard, Sewell); gendered curriculum, hidden curriculum and careers advice (Kelly, Colley, Lobban's reading books used in school); pupil subcultures (Jackson, Mac an Ghaill, Epstein); equal opportunities policies that raised girls' results (GIST, National Curriculum).

- **Outside school (against the view):** family socialisation (Oakley, Norman); changing female expectations (Sharpe, Beck, Francis and Skelton); feminism, laws and the service-sector job market; the crisis of masculinity rooted in the decline of manual work; the media; and global contrasts, where poverty, fees and early marriage decide girls' schooling before teachers are involved.
- **Evaluation:** the two interact. Subcultures form in school but draw on masculinity learned outside it; coursework helped girls only because many had been socialised to work steadily. Schools changed partly because society changed (feminism reached teachers). Pupils resist labels, so in-school processes are not deterministic.

Plan for "gender is more important than ethnicity": put gender evidence (girls ahead in nearly every group, gendered subjects, classroom interaction) against ethnic evidence (racism, labelling and setting of some groups, as in the ethnicity note), compare the sizes of the gaps, and conclude group by group.

Evaluation moves that lift the mark:

- **Which girls, which boys?** Never write "girls do well" or "boys fail" without saying which ones.
- **Gender's effect can point either way:** boys' underachievement and girls' barriers in some countries are both evidence that gender still matters.
- **Link inside and outside school** rather than listing them.
- **Criticise the evidence:** dated classroom studies (Spender, Stanworth) from when girls were behind; small qualitative samples; statistics that show a gap but not its cause.
- **Use your own society:** national results, policies or cultural expectations are credited.

3. Give two arguments against a view on gender and education (12 marks) (5 questions)

Question 3. Views quoted: gender no longer influences attainment (3, one a repeat); the education system advantages males (1); boys and girls are treated equally in school today (1).

Each argument is marked separately out of 6 by levels: 1–2 for a bare point, 3–4 for a clear point whose material is not fully linked, **5–6** for a clear, developed argument supported by concepts, theory or evidence, with its relevance stated.

1. Write **two** separate paragraphs ("The first argument against this view...", "A second argument...").
2. Make each a different, broad argument.
3. Back each with named material and explain how it works.
4. End each with a sentence that turns it back on the view in its own words ("so the system does **not** simply advantage males").
5. Write nothing in support of the view: only arguments against are credited.

Which counter-arguments fit which view:

- **Against "gender no longer influences attainment":** the strongest line is that the gap still exists, only reversed; if girls and boys of the same class reach different results, something linked to gender is at work. Explain it from boys' side (laddish peer groups, Jackson, Mac an Ghail; the collapse of manual work behind the crisis of masculinity; a style of assessment that suits girls, Gorard) or from the classroom

(Jones and Myhill on labels, Francis on discipline, Stanworth on quiet girls). Or look at what pupils study: physics and computing stay male, caring subjects female (Kelly, Colley). Or look abroad, where many girls still leave school early. Intersectionality gives a further argument: a pupil's sex changes how much their class or ethnic background holds them back. Take care with Sharpe: her later findings show girls' ambitions rising, which on its own supports the view; use her only to show that girls' expectations are still shaped by gender roles, or that gender's influence has changed direction.

- **Against "the education system advantages males"**: start with results, since in many countries boys now leave school with fewer qualifications than girls, so any advantage is not showing up where it counts. Then show the school itself favouring girls: mostly female staff, coursework (Gorard), rewards for compliance (Sewell), warmer expectations of girls and tougher discipline of boys (Francis). Add deliberate efforts to open science to girls, such as GIST and compulsory science in the National Curriculum. Then turn to boys' own culture (Jackson's laddishness, the crisis of masculinity), which holds many back. A different kind of argument says the system's biggest bias is not about sex at all: Gillborn and Mirza show social class dividing pupils far more sharply, and functionalists argue that a modern economy cannot afford to waste girls' talent, so schools have every reason to develop it.
- **Against "boys and girls are treated equally in school today"**: only **in-school** treatment counts, so use teacher attention and discipline (Spender, Francis), labels and double standards (Jones and Myhill, Reay), the gendered and hidden curriculum and careers advice (Kelly, Colley), feminised assessment, and peer policing (Epstein, Lees). Show that the unequal treatment is still current, not only something from the past.

4. Describe two ways schools treat or favour girls and boys (4 marks) (5 questions)

Question 1. Asked: ways schools can be seen as feminised (1); ways schools advantage girls (1); ways schools disadvantage boys (1); changes in schools that have improved girls' achievement (1); how the hidden curriculum can reinforce gender stereotypes (1).

1. Write two bullet points.
2. For each: **identify** the way (1), then one sentence showing **how** it favours, harms or reinforces (1). Saying only "this reinforces stereotypes" is not enough.
3. No introduction and no study needed.

For example: "Most teachers are women (1): boys may see learning as something women do and have few men to show them that studying fits being male, so they may put in less effort (1)."

Ways to choose from, sorted by the part of school they come from. Pick two from different parts, and say which way each one cuts for the question asked (feminised, favours girls, harms boys, or reinforces a stereotype).

- **Who works in the school.** Classrooms, especially for younger children, are staffed mainly by women, so boys may meet few men who treat reading and study as normal (**feminised, harms boys**), while girls see women as capable professionals (**favours girls**). At the same time men are more often heads and science teachers and women assistants and cooks, which teaches who leads and who serves (**hidden curriculum**).

- **How work is assessed.** Coursework and assignments spread over months reward planning and redrafting, which suits pupils raised to be diligent, more often girls (**feminised, favours girls, harms boys**).
- **What behaviour earns praise or punishment.** Sitting still, listening and cooperating are rewarded; loudness, physical energy and showing off are punished, so boys who act out a tough image clash with the rules and are excluded more (**feminised, harms boys**).
- **How teachers see each sex.** Expecting girls to be reliable gives them encouragement; expecting boys to be idle or disruptive can lead to lower sets, less demanding work and a self-fulfilling prophecy (**favours girls, harms boys**). Over the years teachers have also shed older beliefs that girls were less able (**change that helped girls**).
- **What is taught and shown.** Books that once showed women only at home have been rewritten with women as scientists and leaders (**change that helped girls**); where old images remain, they reinforce stereotypes (**hidden curriculum**). Separate uniforms, sports and jobs for each sex send the same message.
- **Deliberate policies.** Making science compulsory to 16 and running schemes such as GIST and WISE keep girls in subjects they might once have dropped (**change that helped girls, favours girls**). Advice at option time can still steer girls to caring work and boys to technical work, and can leave boys with little encouragement in arts and caring subjects (**reinforces stereotypes, harms boys**).
- **Pupils' own groups.** Schools where hard work is seen as unmanly let anti-school boys' groups grow (**harms boys**).

For "changes in schools", use only things schools did differently; girls' rising ambitions outside school are not credited.

Worked examples

Example 1

Describe two ways that schools may steer pupils into gendered subject choices. [4]

- **Careers advice (1):** if advisers suggest nursing or teaching to girls and engineering or computing to boys, pupils may choose options to match those futures rather than their strengths (1).
- **How subjects are taught (1):** if science lessons use examples from cars and machines and boys take over the practical work, girls may feel the subject is not for them and drop it when they can (1).

Two ways, each identified and described: **4 marks**.

Example 2

Explain two ways the crisis of masculinity may affect boys' educational attainment. [8]

The first way. Boys may have lower aspirations because the jobs that once defined working-class manhood have disappeared (1). If a boy believes there is no secure manual work waiting for him, and the jobs on offer in shops, offices and care feel unmanly, he may see little reason to work for qualifications (1). Mac an Ghaill's research supports this (1): he found that working-class boys who could no longer expect to become breadwinners were anxious about their identity, and some turned to a macho style that made schoolwork look pointless (1).

The second way. Boys unsure of their masculinity may prove it by rejecting school (1). Being seen to work hard can be mocked as "girly", so boys may mess about, skip homework and avoid asking for help, which lowers their results (1). Jackson's study of laddishness shows this (1): boys protected their status by appearing not to try, which also gave them an excuse if they failed, so their effort and grades fell (1).

Each way has a point, an explanation, named material and a link: $2 \times 4 = 8$ marks.

Example 3

'Girls now have the same chances in education as boys.'

Using sociological material, give two arguments against this view. [12]

Argument 1. The first argument against this view is that across much of the world girls still face barriers to staying in school that boys do not. Where secondary school costs money, a household that can afford to educate only one child often picks the son, seeing him as the future earner, while a daughter's labour in the home or a betrothal arranged in her teens ends her schooling first, and textbooks there often show women mainly as wives and mothers (Islam and Asadullah). Feminists see this as patriarchy shaping who is given an education. Where these pressures remain, girls' chances depend on their sex, so girls do **not** have the same chances as boys. **Level 3 (5–6 marks).**

Argument 2. A second argument is that even where girls achieve higher grades, schools still channel them into a narrower range of subjects. Kelly argued that science is presented as masculine, and Colley showed that pupils' choices follow images of subjects as suited to one sex, while careers advice can reinforce this. As a result far fewer girls take physics, engineering or computing, which limits their routes into well-paid careers. Having good grades but in a restricted set of subjects is not the same chance, so the view is wrong. **Level 3 (5–6 marks).**

Two clear, developed arguments, each with named material and a closing link to the view: **12 marks.**

Example 4

Evaluate the view that boys' underachievement is mainly caused by the feminisation of schools. [26]

Introduction. In many countries boys now gain fewer good qualifications than girls, though the gap is smaller than the class gap and affects working-class boys most. The feminisation argument blames schools; other explanations point to changes in society and to boys' own subcultures.

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Staffing:** most primary teachers are women, so boys may lack male role models who make learning look masculine.
- **Assessment:** Gorard found that the gap widened when GCSE coursework began, as steady, organised work suits how many girls are raised.
- **Valued behaviour:** Sewell argues that schools punish masculine energy and competitiveness and reward compliance, so boys are disciplined more (Francis).
- **Labels:** teachers expect boys to underachieve (Jones and Myhill), which can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Against the view (AO3).

- **However**, coursework was cut back and the gap barely closed, so assessment cannot be the main cause.
- **Male teachers:** research finds pupils care more about how good a teacher is than about the teacher's sex, which weakens the role-model argument.
- **Outside school:** the crisis of masculinity (Mac an Ghaill) and loss of manual jobs lowered some boys' aspirations before they reached the classroom; girls' rising ambitions (Sharpe, Beck) explain much of the gap from the other side.
- **Boys' own subcultures:** laddishness (Jackson) and homophobic policing of effort (Epstein) come from masculine peer norms, not from female teachers.
- **Intersectionality:** middle-class boys do very well in the same "feminised" schools, so class matters more (Gillborn and Mirza).
- **Feminists** reply that schools are not truly feminised: men still hold most senior posts and boys still take most of the teacher's attention (Spender).

Conclusion. Feminised assessment and expectations may add to boys' difficulties, but the main causes lie in how masculinity interacts with class and the job market, and in girls' changing goals. Feminisation is a contributing factor, not the main cause.

How it would be marked. A wide range of detailed points with named sociologists (AO1 9–10), applied throughout to "boys' underachievement" and "feminisation" (AO2 5–6), and each argument weighed to reach a justified conclusion (AO3 9–10). In the exam, make each bullet a full paragraph.

Common mistakes

- **Answering with the past.** Writing only about how girls were held back decades ago does not answer questions on today's schools or on what has **changed**. Use older studies only to show change, or say why they may still apply.
- **Mixing inside and outside school.** A question on wider social changes gains nothing from feminised schools or teacher labelling; a question on changes **in schools** gains nothing from girls' rising ambitions; a primary socialisation question gains nothing from school factors. Read which side the question is on.
- **Using evidence that supports the view in a "two arguments against" question.** Sharpe's later girls show that ambitions have risen, which agrees that gender matters less. Only use material that challenges the view.

- **Not saying how.** In Question 1 many answers name a way ("textbooks", "female teachers") and stop. The second mark needs a sentence showing how it favours girls, harms boys or reinforces the stereotype.
- **No material in Question 2.** A point with no named study, concept or theory can earn at most 2 of each 4 marks. Answers that cram two or three points into one paragraph also develop none of them.
- **Losing the gender focus.** General points about the hidden curriculum, labelling or subcultures score nothing unless they say what happens to girls or boys.
- **Evaluation by list.** Placing class and ethnicity beside gender without comparing them does not evaluate. Say which gap is larger, for whom, and how they combine.

How to get the marks

- **"Describe two..." (4 marks):** two bullet points, each identified and then described in one sentence showing **how**. No introduction, no study needed.
- **"Explain two..." (8 marks):** for each way, **point, explain, material, link**: four separate marks. Use a separate paragraph for each way.
- **"Using sociological material, give two arguments against this view" (12 marks):** two separate, developed arguments, each with named material and a closing sentence on why it weakens the quoted view.
- **"Evaluate..." (26 marks):** AO1 10 for a wide range of detailed points with concepts and research; AO2 6 for applying them to the exact wording ("little influence", "mainly", "in schools"); AO3 10 for explicit, sustained evaluation and a justified conclusion. A good account of the other side with no weighing stops at the 7–8 band for AO3.
- **Sociological material** for this topic: Oakley, Lobban, Norman, Islam and Asadullah, Sharpe, Beck, Francis and Skelton, Mitsos and Browne, Archer, Mac an Ghaill, Gorard, Sewell, Kelly, Colley, Spender, Stanworth, Francis, Jones and Myhill, Reay, Connell, Willis, Jackson, Epstein, Lees, Gillborn and Mirza; concepts such as gender socialisation, feminisation, gendered curriculum, hidden curriculum, crisis of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, individualisation, labelling, self-fulfilling prophecy, patriarchy and intersectionality.
- **Use examples from your own society:** national exam results by gender, school policies, and local expectations about girls' and boys' futures are credited.

Quick check

1. What do Oakley's terms manipulation and canalisation mean? Give an example of each.
2. Give two changes outside school that have raised girls' attainment, and say how each reaches the classroom.
3. Name Mac an Ghaill's four groups of boys, and say which was most clearly anti-school.
4. Why might a "laddish" boy choose to look as if he is not trying, according to Jackson?

5. Which sociologist is linked to each idea? (a) Working-class girls' priorities shifting from marriage to careers between the 1970s and 1990s. (b) The gender gap widening when coursework-based exams began. (c) Boys taking up most of the teacher's time in class. (d) Teachers seeing boys as likely underachievers and girls as achievers even with similar results.

Answers

1. Manipulation is encouraging behaviour seen as suitable for a child's sex and discouraging the rest, such as praising a girl for being neat. Canalisation is channelling children towards "gender-appropriate" toys and activities, such as giving boys construction kits and girls dolls.
2. Any two, each with its link: feminism (raised girls' ambitions, so they work harder); equality laws (qualifications now pay off for women, so they are worth gaining); growth of service-sector jobs (careers open to qualified women, so girls stay on); family change such as divorce (girls expect to support themselves, so they value qualifications).
3. Macho lads, academic achievers, new enterprisers and real Englishmen. The macho lads were most clearly anti-school.
4. If he never appears to work, failure can be put down to not caring rather than lack of ability, and he avoids being seen as "uncool" or "girly".
5. (a) Sharpe. (b) Gorard. (c) Spender. (d) Jones and Myhill.

Past questions to try

- [9699/32/O/N/22 Q2](#): explain two changes in wider society that may have affected girls' attainment.
- [9699/31/M/J/23 Q2](#): explain two ways primary socialisation can lead to gender differences in attainment.
- [9699/32/F/M/23 Q1](#): describe two changes in schools that have improved girls' achievement.
- [9699/33/O/N/23 Q4](#): essay on whether gender differences in attainment are mainly due to what happens in schools.