**Highest number of females on record taking STEM degrees, despite more boys completing same science subjects at university, according to data**

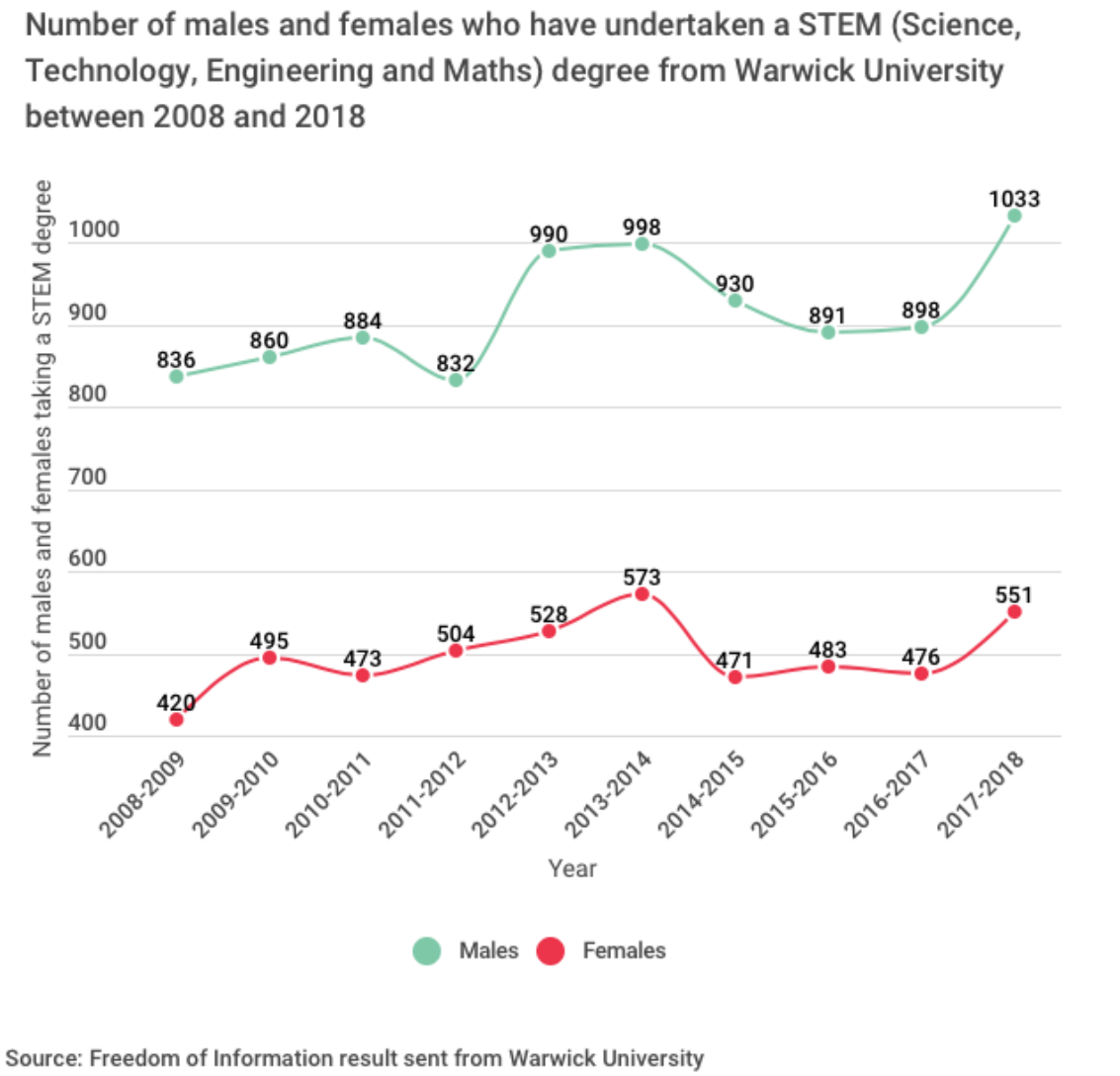
*by Grace Dembowicz*

The number of females taking Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) degrees at Russell Group universities has increased by 10% from 2008 and 2018, figures have shown. Overall however, in that time higher numbers of males have taken the same degrees, with nine boys to every one girl recorded in 2018.

Figures from the 24 Russell Group universities within the UK show an increasing number of young women undertaking a STEM degree since 2008. However, the gender imbalance within the industry appears to have a long way to go, as all Russell Group university's still have a higher number of males studying a STEM degree compared to females. On average across the 24 universities, there are 31% more males than females taking a science related degree.

Warwick University, one Russell Group university, illustrates sparse numbers of girls choosing to complete STEM degrees compared to males. Between 2008 and 2018, the institution saw a 64% increase in the number of girls taking a STEM degree. In that same period however, there was also a 50% male increase, with 590 more male students studying a science degree in 2018 compared to female students.

Speaking to 23 year-old Warwick graduate, Myfanwy, who studied Global Sustainable Development and




International Studies, she explained how STEM has been presented as a ''more employable path to take'' with an association of ''higher levels of employment success, be that wage or aspiration''.

In response to a higher number of boys studying STEM degrees compared to girls, the Warwick graduate said: ''I actually think this has a lot more to do with how the 'traditional female degrees' are viewed rather than a popularity of science degrees''. With underappreciation of the traditional female occupations such as teachers and nurses, ultimately, there is an issue surrounding the ''devaluation and stereotyping of alternative choices''.

According to the UK's only STEM graduate recruitment agency, *STEM Graduates,* 13% of the overall STEM workforce in UK are female. The UN Women's Executive Director, Phumzile MIambo-Ngcuka has highlighted the obvious need to 'break gender stereotypes that link science to masculinity', also adding how, 'science and innovation can bring life-changing benefits, especially for those who are furthest behind – such as women and girls living in remote areas, the elderly and people with disabilities'.

Whilst there are promising shifts of progression for women within the STEM industry, numbers highlight that clearly not enough is being done to actively encourage women in STEM. The industry fundamentally remains male dominated, with the roots of the issue stemming from school and university. The need to address this gender based issue arguably, lies within the education system with a specific focus on defying stereotypes with a clear and simple message: girls are just as capable as boys.