

# Learning Beyond the Classroom: The State of the Nation 2022

**A series of evidence-based reports examining  
the impact and importance of learning beyond  
the classroom in modern Britain**



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An annual research project from Children's University Trust  
Written by Liam Nolan and Cordelia Howard with data analysis by Sukie Duhra

## About these reports

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Thank you for reading Children's University Trust's State of the Nation Reports. These reports are the culmination of an annual research project looking at everything we know about learning beyond the classroom in modern Britain. They are a series of evidence-based reports examining the impact of what goes on beyond the classroom on the lives of children and young people. Based on extensive data collated from a bespoke digital platform, *Children's University Online*, the aim of the reports is to inform and improve provision by providing educators, policy makers and stakeholders of all kinds with a broad set of insights about the current state of learning beyond the classroom in contemporary Britain.

Our 2022 reports are informed by data from:

- 50,000 children
- 12,000 activities
- 310,000 hours of recorded participation.

This document is made up of a series of five reports compiled in one easy to read document. Should you wish to download copies of each section individually, or refer to past State of the Nation Reports or access further reading, please visit [childrensuniversity.co.uk/stateofthenation](https://childrensuniversity.co.uk/stateofthenation)

## Thank you for reading

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# Foreword: Helen O'Donnell, CEO, Children's University Trust



**“Learning beyond the classroom offers children and young people a way to develop skills, build knowledge, discover hobbies, and explore new interests on their own terms.”**

If I were to sum up the world of education policy this past year, the two words that most readily come to mind are change and neglect. Children's University published its first ever State of the Nation Report in July 2021 at what felt like a turning point for education in Britain. After the upheaval and challenges of the previous 18 months (need I introduce Covid 19?) we were ready to start the new academic year on more certain and calm terms after weathering the pandemic's storms. However, just weeks after sending a copy of our report to the office of Gavin Williamson, then Secretary of State for Education, change was afoot. Fast forward to now and there have been a further five Secretaries of State serving under three Prime Ministers.

Consistent leadership and a steady vision from the Department for Education has been absent, while public debate about education feels neglected and overshadowed by political dramas, infighting and cabinet role swapping. While the eyes and ears of those at the top have been distracted by talk of Brexit, NHS funding, energy bills and the ever-worsening cost-of-living crisis, education debate has been raging yet overlooked. Throughout, the good faith and commitment of Britain's teachers and schools has been relied upon to deliver despite all this. As we now publish our 2022 State of the Nation Report looking at learning beyond the classroom, this is the Britain that we're documenting.

“Learning beyond the classroom” is the term we use to describe participation in any structured learning activity outside of the timetabled curriculum. This is inclusive of school-based enrichment and extra-curricular activities, as well as those that take place outside of schools and are run by organisations and individuals with no links to formal education. Importantly, in the context of the change and neglect described above, while this kind of learning falls outside of the core curriculum, this does not mean that it should fall outside of the purview of the Department for Education.

Learning beyond the classroom offers children and young people a way to develop skills, build knowledge, discover hobbies, and explore new interests on their own terms. Ensuring children have the time and space to learn under their own steam - following their own nose and being led by their burgeoning passions - helps them lay down foundations that can support them into adulthood.

It should be a form of learning that is unaffected by the instability and change in the world around them. However, the data and evidence that this report utilises would show otherwise.

# Foreword: Helen O'Donnell, CEO, Children's University Trust

**“At a time when the cost-of-living crisis is putting even greater strain on families than ever before, our data shows that children are reliant on free activities in order to engage in learning beyond the classroom.”**

Our insights from 50,000 children, over 12,000 registered learning opportunities and more than 310,000 hours of participation, paint a picture of learning and opportunities that needs recognition, support and funding if they are to have the impact we know they can.

At a time when 25% of schools are reporting cutting spending on trips and outings, and 20% are cutting spend on sports and extracurricular activities<sup>1</sup>, our data finds that children are reliant on schools to access these kinds of activities.

At a time when the cost-of-living crisis is putting even greater strain on families than ever before, our data shows that children are reliant on free activities in order to engage in learning beyond the classroom.

At a time when 90% of state secondary schools have made cuts in the provision of creative subjects<sup>2</sup>, our data shows a drop in levels of creativity, despite evidence of links between skills development and participation in learning beyond the classroom.

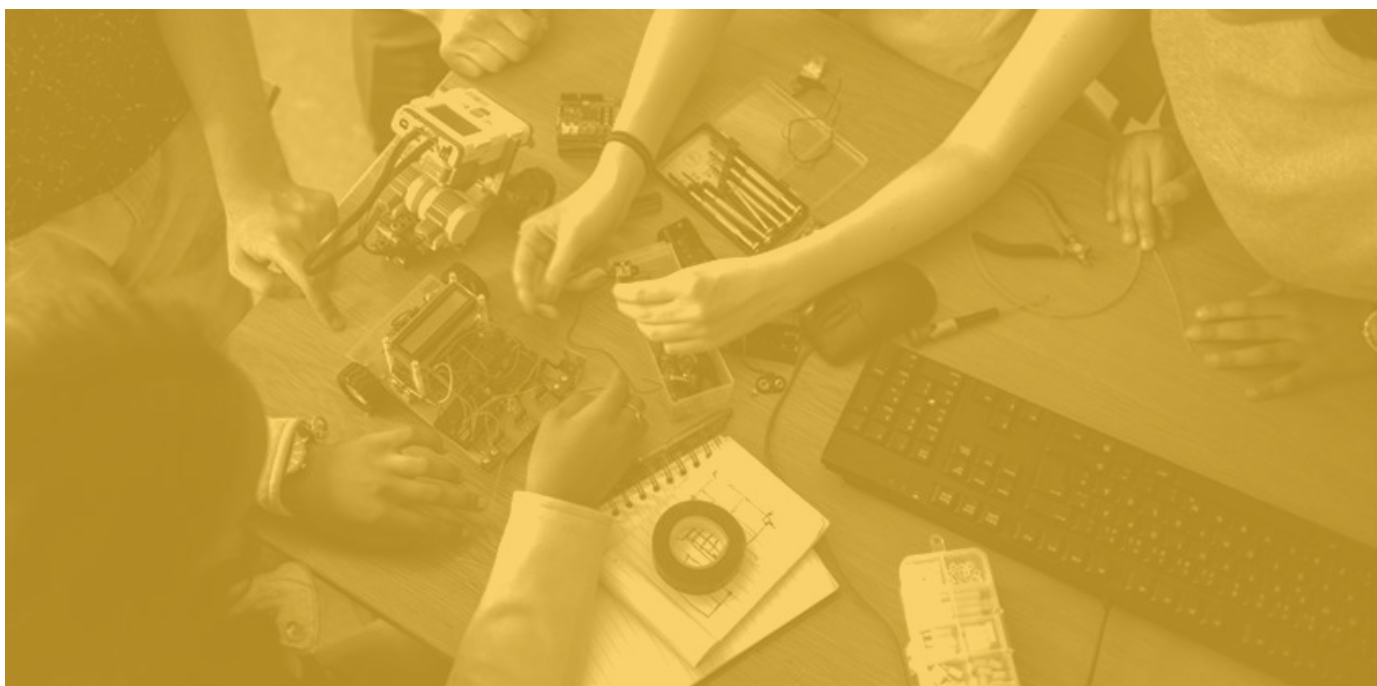
While education feels less of a national priority than it has done for years, and the recognition and demonstrable support for learning beyond the classroom is incredibly low from government policy makers, there is real commitment to this type of learning shown by teachers, parents and organisations. A YouGov poll found that 72% of parents agreed that “all schools receiving extra government funding to provide additional extracurricular activities like sport, drama, music, debating or dance”<sup>3</sup> would be a good idea. Schools, despite the cuts described above, see the value to be found beyond the classroom but aren't funded to encourage it as they should. The cost-of-living crisis isn't just affecting families and households, increasing energy bills are having a devastating impact on school budgets<sup>4</sup>. The need for learning beyond the classroom is huge, but demand is overwhelmingly reliant on the ability of schools to supply it.

What I hope these reports show is that despite the challenges we're all facing, the impact of and appetite for learning beyond the classroom is huge. Children's University is in a unique position as the only organisation collating the information we do and we are desperately keen that this is used to improve provision for all children. In the following pages you will read how we're mapping provision and participation of learning beyond the classroom, and measuring its impact on skills development. You'll see how wide our network reaches, and importantly how much more we could be doing with the right support.

## Footnotes:

1. <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/school-funding-and-pupil-premium-2022/>
2. <https://nuk-tnl-editorial-prod-staticassets.s3.amazonaws.com/2022/education-commission/Times%20Education%20Commission%20final%20report.pdf> p33
3. <https://nuk-tnl-editorial-prod-staticassets.s3.amazonaws.com/2022/education-commission/Times%20Education%20Commission%20final%20report.pdf> p29
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/oct/22/exclusive-90-of-uk-schools-will-go-bust-next-year-heads-warn>

# Learning beyond the classroom: Provision and Participation



**A profile of the activities available for children and young people  
and how they engage with learning beyond the classroom**

# Learning beyond the classroom: Provision and Participation

## Introduction

**“By mapping local provision and the participation of young people, it is our aim that we can inform future provision, highlight barriers to participation, and play a key role in improving accessibility and opportunities for young people.”**

What children do within the classroom is documented, measured and, because of the curriculum, remains uniform across age-groups. However, huge sections of a child’s life fall within the grey area between school, home, community, and their own particular interests. A snapshot of academic classroom achievement is only part of a child’s story. The community assets around a child and the opportunities available to them hold the potential to impact positively on their lives. Similarly knowing what a child does once the school day is over can help educators support them and holds influence on classroom achievement. The combination and contrast between what is available to young people and what they choose to do, or are able to access, tells a unique story for each child.

In February this year, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) published findings from around 6,000 young people across the country. Young people told the DCMS to prioritise three things: regular clubs and activities, adventures away from home, and volunteering opportunities – all activities beyond the classroom. As a result they launched the National Youth Guarantee, thereby pledging that *“By 2025, every young person will have access to regular out of school activities, adventures away from home and opportunities to volunteer”*.<sup>1</sup>

However, despite the pledge to invest £560m, the majority of this will benefit only a few key organisations, and most of it will be focused on those young people of secondary school age. With changes in leadership at the DCMS since the pledge was made and current political unrest, how this pledge will fare to 2025 and be monitored is unclear. What is clear, however, is that the DCMS and others will need a real-time picture of youth provision if their pledge to “every young person” is to be realised.

In the House of Commons Education Committee’s report, *Is the Catch-up Programme fit for purpose?* of May this year, it was recommended that *“The Department must introduce a pilot of optional extra-curricular activities for children to help improve academic attainment and wellbeing”*.<sup>2</sup>

It’s all very well for there to be ‘pledges’ and ‘guarantees’ like this, as well as a public push on wellbeing and mental health for young people post-Covid, but these are empty gestures when no one is looking at the full picture of provision and participation.

### Footnotes:

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-review-summary-findings-and-government-response/youth-review-summary-findings-and-government-response#:~:text=Through%20the%20Youth%20Review%2C%20DCMS,ambitions%20on%20'levelling%20up'>
2. <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/9251/documents/160043/default/> p6

# Learning beyond the classroom: Provision and Participation

**“It is our aim that we can inform provision, highlight barriers to participation, and play a key role in improving accessibility and chances for young people.”**

Children’s University reports on provision and participation data beyond the classroom. No other organisation takes such a consistent and broad approach to learning in this space. The Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted ensure that schools offer enrichment and well-being activities for pupils, but their responsibility ends at the school gates. Community organisations and local authorities support their communities best when assets are mapped and connections are made, but unfortunately this is not standard practice.

As schools recover from the pandemic and reassess priorities in light of spending cuts and soaring energy bills, it falls on organisations like Children’s University to share this data. By mapping local provision and the participation of young people, it is our aim that we can inform future provision, highlight barriers to participation, and play a key role in improving accessibility and opportunities for young people.

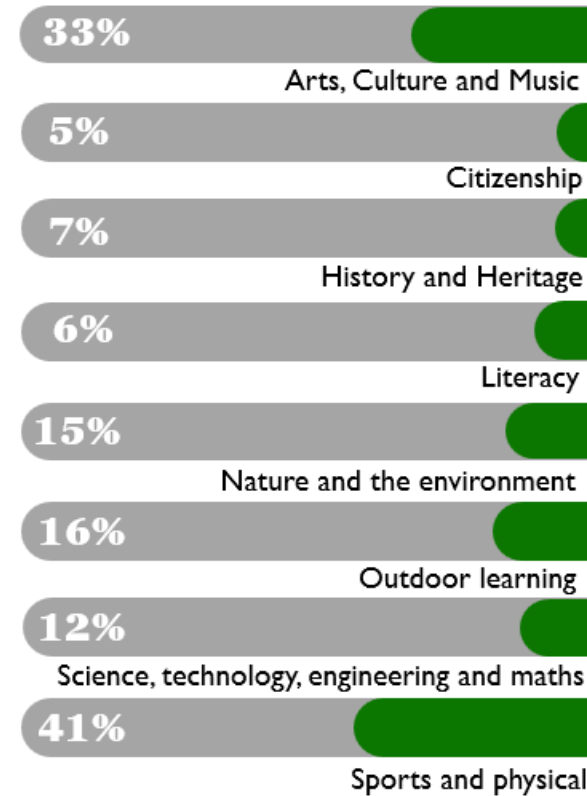
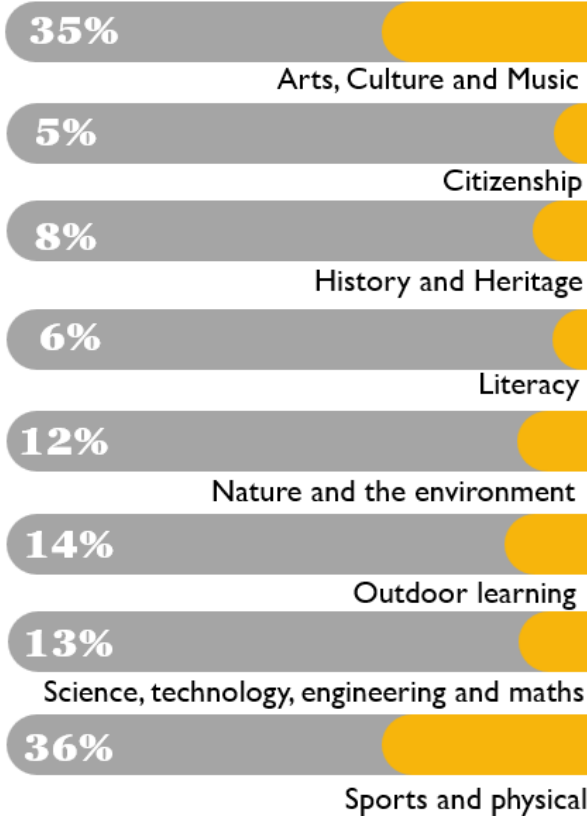
This past year has seen arts pushed further out of the classroom, but what impact does that have on activities beyond the classroom? Financially, families are stretched more than ever, so what does this mean for participation in family learning activities and what paid-for activities children can do? We hope our data set helps raise these questions and more, and, importantly, shines a guiding light towards some of the answers.

On the following pages you will find our data highlighting national provision and participation. To provide this Children’s University has analysed a unique data set of 12,000+ activities, fully profiled and validated (i.e. quality assured). This is what we are talking about when we reference provision. Alongside this, we have analysed over 310,000 hours of participation in these activities, as reported directly by almost 50,000 children. It is this provision and participation data that forms the microcosm of learning beyond the classroom that is detailed and analysed in this report.

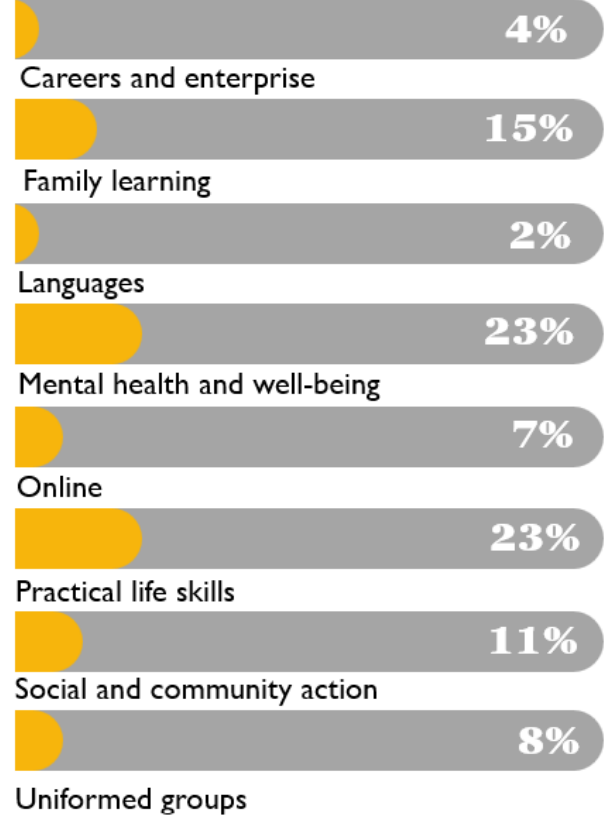


# Categorisation of activities

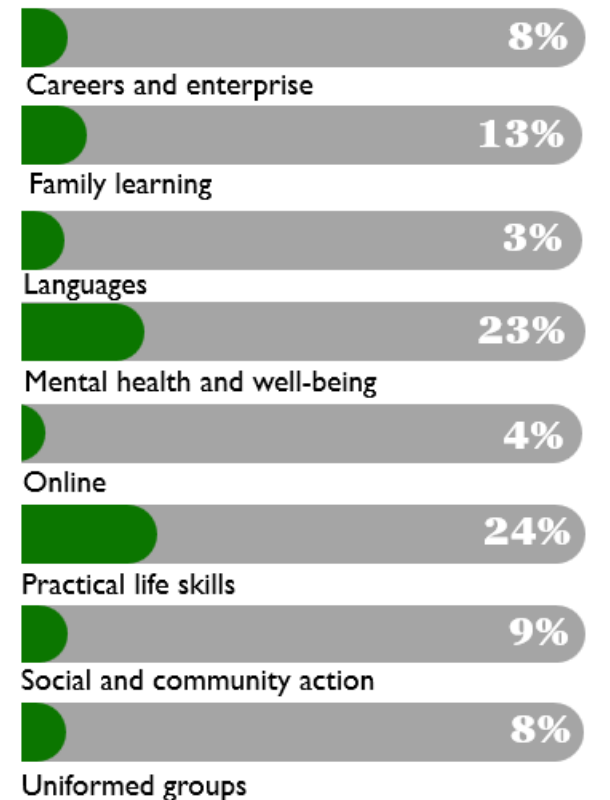
All validated activities are tagged with up to four thematic categories of learning. Using this data we are able to provide a side-by-side look at what activities are available to children (Provision) and how that compares to the activities that children have actually done in the past year (Participation). This data covers the period July 2021 – August 2022. Here we can see the percentage of activities tagged in each category.



## Provision

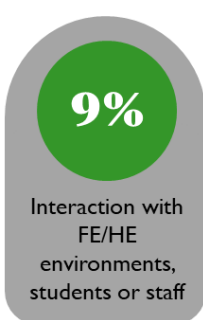
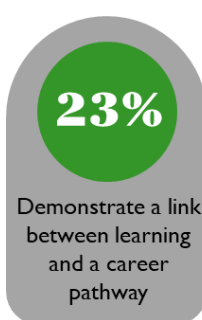
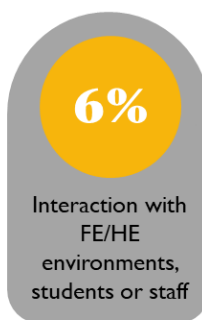
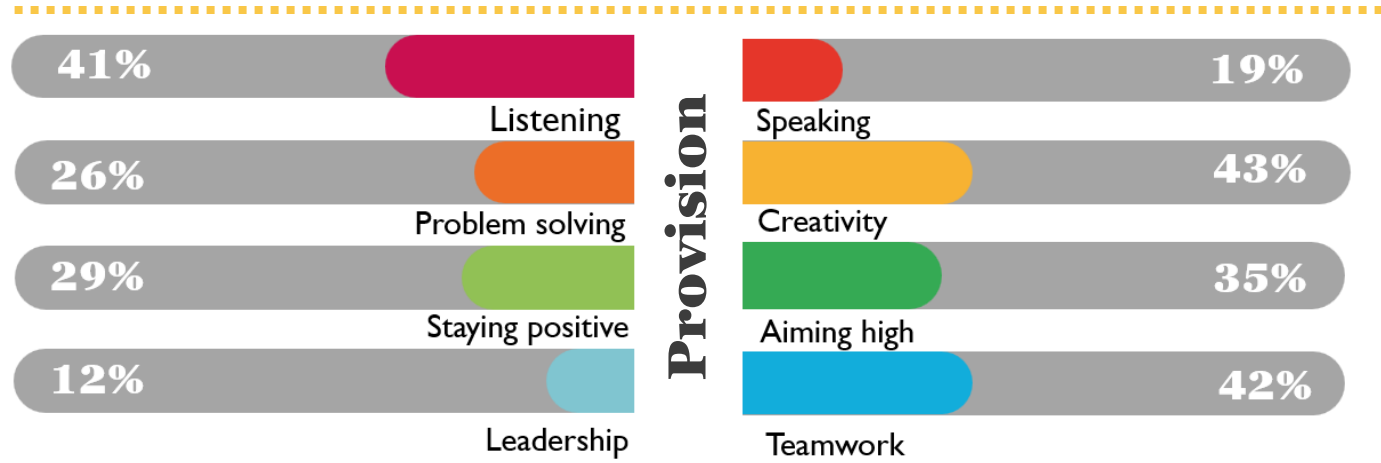


## Participation



# Activities tagged by skills

Just as all activities are tagged with relevant learning categories, so too are they tagged with up to three skills, in line with the 8 essential skills of the Skills Builder framework. These tags reflect the skills that the activity providers believe best link to those that children will use and develop through participation.



## Provision

## Participation

Our activities are also tagged with engagement information in line with the Gatsby Benchmarks 4, 5, 6 and 7 to support best practice careers guidance.

## Location and cost

Children's University validates activities from all manner of providers; from major national partners to local one-person trainers. As well as tagging with learning categories, skills, and Gatsby links, we also record whether activities are free-of-charge or costed, and whether they take place in schools or elsewhere.

### Provision



69%

31%



83%

17%



### Participation

**Our data shows that children are heavily reliant on free activities in order to engage with learning beyond the classroom**

Even though a significant percentage of activities available for children (69%) are free of charge, the cost of some activities is still a barrier. The majority of participation (83%) in learning beyond the classroom is only possible when there is no associated cost to take part.

### Provision



62%

38%



31%

69%



### Participation

**Our data shows that children are reliant on schools in order to engage with learning beyond the classroom**

A wide variety of organisations run activities and opportunities for children beyond the classroom (62% of our validated activities take place outside of schools) yet the majority of participation (69% of it) still happens within schools. There is huge scope to improve access to the myriad of opportunities that exist in communities and beyond schools for our children, and for external organisations to support schools in providing learning activities outside the classroom, lessening the burden on schools to provide extra-curricular enrichment led by teachers.

# Summary of findings

- 1. The gap between skills provision and participation levels could be read as a disconnect in providers' understanding of the role that their work plays in support of learning beyond the classroom**
- 2. If National Youth Guarantee pledges are to be met, DCMS and DfE need to monitor provision of opportunities for young people beyond the classroom, particularly at an earlier age. While it remains unknown how monitoring of provision will be done, this report offers a viable option**
- 3. There needs to be more free activities, or subsidised access to activities through schemes such as activity vouchers for those that need financial support. This is the only way to ensure there is universal entitlement to learning beyond the classroom**
- 4. The impact of investment in focused thematic areas through organisations such as Arts Council England and Sport England is clear in provision levels, but if we are serious about increasing provision of activities in other categories, then similar investment is needed there too**
- 5. Young people are more socially and environmentally conscious than ever, yet there are relatively few opportunities for them to engage beyond the classroom in citizenship and social action**
- 6. Funded opportunities for children to go into businesses and engage in careers-focused learning activities are needed to address young people's understanding of the jobs available, and to support careers education in schools**

# Summary of findings

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- 7. Despite Office for Students (OFS) work and the commitment of Universities to widening access, only 6% of provision links to FE and HE environments. Universities should consider validating all outreach initiatives with Children's University**
  
- 8. The cost-of-living crisis cannot be allowed to further impact children from lower income backgrounds disproportionately in terms of learning beyond the classroom, or to prevent schools from increasing or continuing with extra-curricular provision. There is significant demand for free activities and most children participate in activities provided by schools**

# Want to take action or learn more?

## **Validate your activities**

If you run activities for children and young people, or you know someone who does, you can get these activities validated and added to those that Children's University signposts participants to. This is a great way to add value to your activities and reward participation. Find out more and fill out a basic online form [here](#)

## **Contact your nearest Children's University**

You can find your nearest Children's University online and contact them to find out more about the work they do locally. All Children's Universities are managed by socially-minded and community-based institutions who partner with local businesses, education providers and stakeholders of all kinds. Talk about how you could get involved and find your local contact [here](#)

## **Be a vocal ambassador for our work**

Learning beyond the classroom is key to making a life-changing difference to children and young people. Do share this report and the recommendations it contains. Children's University Trust is keen to ensure that the data we collate is shared with those who can use it to inform and improve provision for all children and young people.

## **Read more**

- To read more about provision and what is available for children and young people, you can read the National Youth Agency's (NYA) National Youth Sector Census results [here](#)
- To read more about the cost-of-living crisis and its impact on education, you can read the Child Poverty Action Group's (CPAG) Cost of the School Day resources [here](#)

# **The role that learning beyond the classroom plays in skills development**



**The impact of learning beyond the classroom on the use and development of essential skills**

# The role that learning beyond the classroom plays in skills development



**“Children’s University do great work towards ensuring that every child has the opportunity to develop the rounded set of essential skills, experiences, and insights that support them to thrive in their lives. This report helps to illustrate the importance of building essential skills, and how a wide range of activities and experiences can enhance formal education.**

**“When we enable children to build these skills and to practice and apply them in so many areas, we really set them up to thrive in the rest of their lives: better able to learn, to build strong relationships, to be resilient, and to have stronger wellbeing.”**

.....  
**Tom Ravenscroft**  
**Founder & CEO**  
**Skills Builder**  
**November 2022**





# The role that learning beyond the classroom plays in skills development

## Introduction

**“Essential skills have long been the poor relation to knowledge in education, yet it is skills that employers want, need and, importantly, are not seeing in school leavers and those entering the world of work.”**

This past year has seen belt-tightening across the board. Schools are increasingly focused on delivering the curriculum with creative subjects at an all-time low (90% of state secondary schools have made cuts in the provision of creative subjects<sup>1</sup>) with sports and extra-curricular activities becoming lower priority as budgets get tighter and costs increase<sup>2</sup>. What this means for children’s learning is that they are more focused than ever on just what happens within the classroom.

However, according to a YouGov poll almost two thirds of parents think that the education system does not adequately prepare young people for work or life<sup>3</sup>. Essential skills have long been the poor relation to knowledge in education, yet it is skills that employers want, need and, importantly, are not seeing in school leavers and those entering the world of work. A survey of businesses for the Times Education Commission by the professional services firm PwC found that 85% of companies either have or expect to have skills shortages in key sectors of the economy.<sup>4</sup>

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) is the UK’s leading business organisation, speaking for some 190,000 businesses that together employ around a third of the UK’s private sector workforce. In their 2021 report, *Skills for an Inclusive Economy*, they wrote: “The CBI has long emphasised the importance of developing broader character and interpersonal skills through education in order to prepare young people for the modern world of work. In light of the pandemic, it is also vital that government reviews assessments and qualifications to ensure they are giving young people the right skills to build successful careers.”<sup>5</sup>

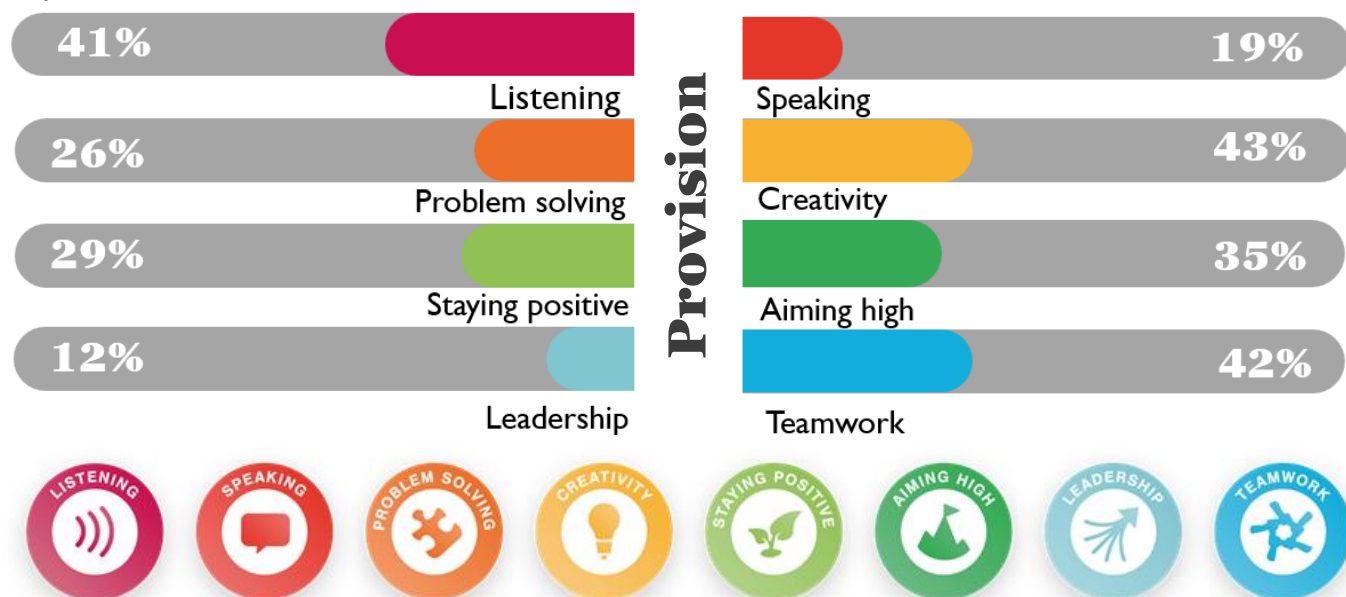
Learning beyond the classroom holds huge potential for helping young people develop the skills they need to be work-ready, have higher life satisfaction, and secure higher income later in life. Our data reinforces this message, and we see that the skills a young person develops from as young as age 5 or 6 are mirrored in the skills levels reported in young adults. Essential skills development needs to be higher up the list of national priorities and as such the impact of learning beyond the classroom should not be ignored.

### Footnotes:

1. <https://nuk-tnl-editorial-prod-staticassets.s3.amazonaws.com/2022/education-commission/Times%20Education%20Commission%20final%20report.pdf> p33
2. <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/school-funding-and-pupil-premium-2022/>
3. <https://nuk-tnl-editorial-prod-staticassets.s3.amazonaws.com/2022/education-commission/Times%20Education%20Commission%20final%20report.pdf> . p8
4. Ibid. p8
5. [https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/7020/12684\\_tess\\_survey\\_2021.pdf](https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/7020/12684_tess_survey_2021.pdf) p41

# What we know about skills and learning beyond the classroom

Looking at provision, we analysed the profile of more than 12,000 activities that have been quality assured and registered as part of the Children's University programme. All of these activities have been categorised and tagged with the essential skills that the learning providers believe their activities help children to develop. By reviewing the percentage of all activities that are tagged with each skill, in line with those of the Skills Builder framework, we can see how opportunities to develop each skill are tied to provision.



Looking at the same set of 12,000+ activities but reviewing instead the participation levels, we can see how skills are actually used. Analysing over 310,000 hours worth of participation in these activities, we can see the percentage of time spent developing each skill. In this way we can see the reality of participation next to provision. For example, while 12% of activities that are available give children and young people an opportunity to develop leadership skills, only 7% of participation is in these activities. Similarly, creativity is associated with 43% of activities available, yet only makes up 21% of participation.



**In short, more needs to be done to break down barriers and encourage participation in these activities. Providers also need to understand the links between their activities and the essential skills that will be developed through participation.**

# What children aged 5-11 tell us (Key Stage 1 & 2)

All activities (12,000+) registered on *Children's University Online* are tagged with up to three skills by the learning provider. Between September and December 2021 children were surveyed directly about the impact that learning beyond the classroom had on their skills use and development. Children in Key Stage 1 and 2 told us:



They used the skills activity providers said they would use

**89 %**

Those that used skills, said **skills had improved**

**86 %**

Those that used skills, said **skills had strongly improved**

**42 %**

## Comparing all 8 skills

Above you can see cumulative results from children about all skills use and improvement, while below this is broken down for each of Skill's Builder's 8 essential skills.



**93 %**

**87 %**

**44 %**



**92 %**

**91 %**

**48 %**



**82 %**

**78 %**

**36 %**



**92 %**

**92 %**

**46 %**



**87 %**

**83 %**

**30 %**



**80 %**

**76 %**

**34 %**



**88 %**

**83 %**

**37 %**



**90 %**

**88 %**

**49 %**

# What children aged 11+ tell us (Key Stage 3 +)

This same survey initially ran between 2019-2020, with a focus on those children aged 11+<sup>1</sup>. Children in Key Stage 3 and beyond told us:



They used the skills activity providers said they would use

**92 %**

Those that used skills, said **skills had improved**

**94 %**

Those that used skills, said **skills had strongly improved**

**73 %**

## Comparing all 8 skills



**90 %**

**100 %**

**83 %**



**88 %**

**93 %**

**75 %**



**89 %**

**100 %**

**83 %**



**94 %**

**97 %**

**72 %**



**84 %**

**91 %**

**63 %**



**100 %**

**100 %**

**71 %**



**100 %**

**91 %**

**75 %**



**89 %**

**94 %**

**65 %**

### Footnotes:

1. This data set was originally published in 2021 as part of a report funded by Nesta. Full report including detailed methodology can be found at: <https://www.childrensuniversities.co.uk/evidence>

# Qualitative feedback

## “Tell us about how you used this skill? Is there anything else you want to tell us about?”

Our skills survey<sup>1</sup> results above are based on quantitative responses linked to a Likert scale. Alongside this, pupils were given the opportunity to provide free-text responses to talk about how they used skills when taking part in specific activities beyond the classroom. Below are some of the anonymised responses:

“

*“I think dance and drama is making me more brave to perform in front of other people. I think I've improved this skill.”*

*“I strongly agree this will help my skills get improved so I get smarter and make me a step closer to getting to college.”*

*“I may not always win, but I have to try and stay positive and remember that I am still improving my skills”*

*“I enjoy going to [this activity] and started off very shy. I have made friends here which has made me overcome the 'new kid' image. The skills I learn during the classes have made me more confident in the wider world.”*

*“We celebrate everyone’s success at gym club. This might be a new skill and ringing the bell or getting a team point for good behaviour.”*

*“I strongly agree that this did require a lot of teamwork as if we didn't practice the songs, dialogues and the steps then the audience (the adults/parents) would not be very entertained or be proud of us.”*

*“It’s taught me that I can talk to my family when I’m grumpy or stressed and what I could do to make the problem be better”*

*“I have auditory dyslexia and language and communication is sometimes tricky. [This activity] helps me use processing skills like coding and problem solving but does so at my pace.”*

**“Although I find it difficult to motivate others during karate I have taken this skill and put into place during rugby training sessions where this is more a 'team' sport.”**

”

### Footnotes:

1. For greater detail on methodology and the survey mechanisms, full details can be found in our initial skills report produced for Nesta: <https://www.childrensuniversity.co.uk/media/1329/full-report-the-impact-of-cu-on-the-development-of-essential-skills.pdf>

# Links between learning beyond the classroom and skills in later life

**“The patterns we see in children as young as KS1 are mirrored in adults. What children do beyond the classroom has a lifelong impact.”**

In 2022 Skills Builder published their first ever *Essential Skills Tracker*<sup>1</sup>, investigating the links between skill levels in adults and life outcomes. They found that:

- higher levels of essential skills correlate with higher income
- higher levels of essential skills are related to higher life satisfaction
- building essential skills can increase the probability of being in work or education.

In light of this, it is important to note that the patterns we see in children as young as KS1 are mirrored in the results Skills Builder see in adults. What children do beyond the classroom has a lifelong impact.

## Footnotes:

1. <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/blog/the-essential-skills-tracker-2022>
2. [https://global-uploads.webflow.com/5ab25784c7fcbff004fa8dca/6225e5d4ecf9d41a117e44c2\\_Essential%20Skills%20Tracker%202022%20vFinal.pdf](https://global-uploads.webflow.com/5ab25784c7fcbff004fa8dca/6225e5d4ecf9d41a117e44c2_Essential%20Skills%20Tracker%202022%20vFinal.pdf) Fig. 3.2 p29

The chart below shows the average skills score for UK working-age adults published by Skills Builder<sup>2</sup> (coloured bars) against the KS1&2 pupils' skills score taken from our Skills Survey above (black bars). The pupils' skill progress is the average number of individuals who reported four or five out of five on a Likert scale for their own progress. There is a correlation between this progress and the average national adult skill level. For children, listening, speaking and problem solving are proportionally equal to the UK working-age adults whereas with creativity, children score much higher than UK working-age adults. The clear implication - supported in other research - is that progress as a child leads to higher skill levels and better life outcomes.



# Summary of findings

- 1. Learning beyond the classroom provides an important way to develop essential skills**
- 2. Not all children are currently able to make full use of the opportunities that are available to them to develop skills beyond the classroom**
- 3. More needs to be done in order to break down barriers to learning beyond the classroom for skills development**
- 4. Children as young as KS1&2 report that they are developing essential skills through learning beyond the classroom**
- 5. For children aged 11+, the positive impact on skills development of learning beyond the classroom is even greater**
- 6. Skills levels recorded in working-age adults can be seen to correlate with skills progress recorded by children learning beyond the classroom from an early age**
- 7. If we are to see the positive outcomes in adults that are associated with higher levels of essential skills, we need to do more at an earlier age beyond the classroom**



# Want to take action or learn more?

## Join the Skills Builder Partnership

The Skills Builder Partnership is a global group of more than 725 businesses, education institutions, and impact organisations. All are committed to using the Skills Builder approach to transform how the world builds essential skills. The Partnership is growing quickly. You can join and benefit from expert support in building and assessing essential skills in your organisation – whether you are a business, education institution or impact organisation. [Find out more.](#)

## Read more

- Read the Skills Builder Essential Skills Tracker 2022 [here](#)
- Read Children’s University’s Skills Impact Report 2021 to find out more about the methodology used to collate the data in this document [here](#)



# Skills Builder

## PARTNERSHIP





# The impact of learning beyond the classroom



**A look at the wide impact that learning beyond the classroom has on children and young people**

# The impact of learning beyond the classroom

## Introduction

**“We need to robustly and rigorously demonstrate the impact that participation in activities beyond the classroom can have far beyond the anecdotal and personal.”**

Anecdotally and personally we all know the difference that time well spent beyond the classroom can have on our lives. From the drama groups building confidence, to the sports teams developing leadership and social skills, to the curiosity that develops into a hobby that turns into a career. However, as long as learning beyond the classroom remains inaccessible to many and opportunities are under-funded or cut elsewhere, we need to robustly and rigorously demonstrate the impact that participation in activities beyond the classroom can have far beyond the anecdotal and personal.

For today's children, success in the future no longer simply comes down to 'doing well at school'. The factors that can impact on a child's chances of success are manifold, complex and interlinked. From the skills they develop alongside their academic achievements, to maintaining good mental health and well-being in an ever-changing world; children have more pressures on them than ever before.

Add to this the unique challenges and issues that have been heightened due to the rapidly changing world of politics that governs formal education, the pandemic, and the unprecedented cost-of-living increases, and there is a perfect storm of barriers, problems and challenges that need to be overcome in order for today's children to succeed as future adults.

The data we gather and the impact we evidence elsewhere in this report is information that has not been gathered purely for data's sake, but to encourage action. We know what we do works, and we want to see a greater take-up of the Children's University offer. We want to see the movement behind us recognising the importance of extra-curricular activities and their impact on all children gather momentum and we want to see more organisations, individuals, and employers join us and contribute to the impact we make. The issues and impact evidenced below are what keep us motivated.

# The impact of learning beyond the classroom

## Learning beyond the classroom and attainment

**“Children taking part in learning beyond the classroom through Children’s University made two additional months’ progress in reading and maths compared to children in the other schools.”**

In 2017, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) published an efficacy study of Children’s University<sup>1</sup>. The randomised control trial looked at the progress of more than 2,600 pupils from 68 schools to test whether extra-curricular activities, including social action, could help to improve pupil attainment and other attitudes and skills, such as motivation, confidence and team-working. The results of the trial showed a direct link between participation in Children’s University and increased achievement in Reading and Maths. Findings included:

- Children taking part in learning beyond the classroom through Children’s University made two additional months’ progress in Reading and Maths compared to children in the other schools. For those eligible for Free School Meals, additional progress in Maths increased to three months’ progress.
- Those in Children’s University schools made small gains in ‘teamwork’ and ‘social responsibility’ compared to children in the other schools.
- Compared to pupils in the control group, those taking part in Children’s University were more likely to select professional occupations as their future aspiration, and to report higher levels of communication, empathy, self-confidence, resilience, and happiness, after the intervention.

The success of the trial was such that in 2018 EEF named Children’s University as one of just 18 Promising Projects<sup>2</sup>. This was followed in 2020 with the announcement of a second larger scale effectiveness trial<sup>3</sup> to see if such results would be replicated at scale. After inevitable pandemic delays, the new trial began in 2022 with over 5,000 pupils from more than 160 schools. The evaluation is due for publication in 2024.

### Footnotes:

1. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/childrens-university>
2. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/childrens-university-re-grant#:~:text=Children's%20University%20is%20listed%20as,cognitive%20outcomes%20in%20other%20schools>
3. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/childrens-university-re-grant>

# The impact of learning beyond the classroom

## Learning beyond the classroom and skills

**“Learning beyond the classroom and its role in skills development is robustly evidenced.”**

With classroom education being largely the domain of knowledge, skills development is a key part of learning beyond the classroom. The breadth of non-curriculum activities for children allows extensive opportunities for the development and improvement of skills. As is documented in greater detail elsewhere in this report, learning beyond the classroom and its role in skills development is robustly evidenced.

In 2021, Children’s University, with guidance from the University of Sussex, published a report looking at skills development in children aged 11+<sup>1</sup>. With the support of Nesta’s Future Ready Fund, Children’s University built a survey mechanism into *Children’s University Online* to interrogate participants about the use of the skills that each activity is tagged with. Each skill was attached to a Likert scale running 1 – 5. 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree. The study set out to find:

- the percentage of students that used the skills we said they would.
- of those that did use the skills, what percentage of those improved?
- of those that did improve, what percentage stated 5 (i.e. Strongly Improved)?

### Footnotes:

1. <https://www.childrensuniversity.co.uk/media/1329/full-report-the-impact-of-cu-on-the-development-of-essential-skills.pdf>

Results (below) showed a direct link between participation in learning beyond the classroom (through Children’s University) and the use and improvement in essential skills development in line with the Skills Builder Framework. When the survey was repeated a year later on younger age groups, the results were similarly positive.

### Age 11+ (KS3)

They used the skills activity providers said they would use

**92 %**

Those that used skills, said **skills had improved**

**94 %**

Those that used skills, said **skills had strongly improved**

**73 %**

### Age 5+ (KS1&2)

They used the skills activity providers said they would use

**89 %**

Those that used skills, said **skills had improved**

**86 %**

Those that used skills, said **skills had strongly improved**

**42 %**

# The impact of learning beyond the classroom

## Children's University's Outcomes for Children

**“Our work is focused on ensuring that every child that participates in Children's University feels positively towards these outcomes.”**

As an organisation Children's University has seven strategic desired outcomes for children. All of our work is focused on ensuring that every child that participates in learning beyond the classroom through Children's University feels positively towards these seven outcomes.

During August 2022, we surveyed participants about these outcomes. 400 respondents rated their feelings based on a Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree alongside each of the seven statements. A breakdown of these results is below. Overleaf are some of the free-text responses given when the same children were asked “why is learning outside of the classroom and outside of lesson time important to you?”

## Survey results

### “Because of Children's University...”

I think learning is fun and is something that I want to keep doing



I now think there are lots of new and different ways that I can learn



I feel confident and believe in myself



I have gained lots of different skills



I know that I can choose what I want to do in the future



I feel more prepared to face new challenges



I know that there are people who are proud of me for what I'm achieving



Strongly Disagree



Disagree



Neutral



Agree



Strongly Agree

# The impact of learning beyond the classroom

## “Why is learning outside of the classroom and outside of lesson time important to you?”

**“I like to learn about other things that I don't learn about in school, like dinosaurs and the universe. I like learning new facts to tell my family.”**

When asked the above question with the ability to give a free-text response, there were a number of common themes that cropped up in reply. The table below shows the percentage of respondents that referenced the following key themes:

| Theme        | Percentage |
|--------------|------------|
| Confidence   | 3          |
| Family       | 3          |
| Being active | 5          |
| New people   | 6          |
| Friends      | 8          |
| Skills       | 10         |
| Fun          | 16         |

The following quotes come directly from some of the 400 children that responded to our survey when asked **“Why is learning outside of the classroom and outside of lesson time important to you?”**:

“

*“Since at school it's the same thing, math, English and topic. Outside of school, can you learn a stunt on a scooter? Yes. Can you learn how to build Lego in school? No.”*

*“Because a couple of years ago I was very shy and wouldn't socialise much, now I love being and playing/learning with other children.”*

*“To help me be the best I can be.”*

*“It is important because we can get better at the things we are doing in the classroom.”*

*“I love doing various activities and I believe sport is very important in life.”*

*“Because outside make us know how to deal when we are outside the school.”*

*“Because we can cater it to our likes and dislikes.”*

*“Because I can concentrate without my friends interrupting.”*

”

# The impact of learning beyond the classroom

## “Why is learning outside of the classroom and outside of lesson time important to you?”

“

*“I think learning outside of the classroom is important because it can mean that you have a wider range of friends and gain some other experiences which you may not get from school.”*

*“To learn skills not taught in a classroom.”*

*“Because I learn through fun activities and some don't feel like learning at all.”*

*“I can learn at my own pace, and can focus on what and where I like to learn.”*

*“It helps me build upon and practice what I have been learning. I get to learn new skills and try things I wouldn't get to do in school.”*

*“Because some children struggle in the classroom like myself and being rewarded for activities outside the classroom make me happy.”*

*“It's good for your mental health.”*

*“It's more fun so we're more likely to take notice of what we're learning.”*

*“It gives you a break from school learning and you get to do stuff you don't do in school”*

*“I like to learn and I like to explore new places. I like to go on adventures with my family and I cannot do that in the classroom.”*

*“So you know what things you are good at not just school work.”*

*“It widens my interests and I get to meet new people.”*

*“It is important to me because at school they teach us education which is great but then outside of school it teaches us skills for later life.”*

*“Learning outside of school helps me to be more confident and makes me feel proud of myself.”*

**“It helps me build upon and practice what I have been learning. I get to learn new skills and try things I wouldn't get to do in school.”**

”

# The impact of learning beyond the classroom

## Additional impact and evidence

**“It is easy from the vantage point of late 2022 to assume the pandemic is behind us, but for the children of school-age that experienced its incredible disruption it is still a looming figure.”**

There is additional evidence to show the positive impact of participation in learning beyond the classroom. Back in 2016 research from the University of Edinburgh<sup>1</sup> found that people who had participated in Scouting or Guiding were less likely to experience mood disorders or anxiety later in life. NatCen and Newcastle University, with funding from The Nuffield Foundation, also published a number of reports investigating how out of school activities help children's learning<sup>2</sup>. They investigated how involvement in different types of activities varies for 5 to 11 year olds from different backgrounds and what this means for their educational achievement. Results showed that after school club attendance was associated with positive academic and social outcomes for disadvantaged children in particular. Organised physical activities were associated with higher attainment and better social, emotional and behavioural outcomes at age 11<sup>3</sup>.

More recently, much has been published about the detrimental effect of Covid on mental health and well-being. In 2021, one in six children in England had a probable mental disorder - an increase from one in nine in 2017<sup>4</sup>. As well as the increased isolation and reports of anxiety in young people, the World Health Organisation (WHO) reported that the pandemic disrupted or halted critical mental health services in 93% of countries worldwide<sup>5</sup>. It is easy from the vantage point of late 2022 to assume the pandemic is behind us, but for the children of school-age that experienced its incredible disruption it is still a looming figure. Formal research may, understandably, be focused on the negative impact of the pandemic, but we have seen the positive impact of learning beyond the classroom on countering its effects. In 2022, when surveying children about skills and Children's University – unrelated to the pandemic – the positive impact of participation in informal learning was clear. Children reported:

*“My whole family was positive with Covid 19, so these activities helped distract me from feeling unwell”*

*“Because of Covid we had to miss a lot of lessons. I lost my confidence during this time and didn't want to go back to swimming lessons. I was scared to go in the deep end. I persevered and tried to stay positive and I have started going in the deep end now. My confidence is growing and I'm trying to stay positive.”*

### Footnotes:

1. <https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/en/publications/being-prepared-guide-and-scout-participation-childhood-social-pos>
2. <https://www.natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/out-of-school-activities/>
3. <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/project/out-of-school-activities-and-the-education-gap>
4. <https://digital.nhs.uk/news/2021/rate-of-mental-disorders-among-children-remained-stable-in-2021-after-previous-rise-report-shows>
5. <https://www.who.int/news/item/05-10-2020-covid-19-disrupting-mental-health-services-in-most-countries-who-survey>



# The impact of learning beyond the classroom

**“It helps you to think, made me laugh and I forgot I was a bit sad.”**

“[When I was] *in isolation, these activities helped me to stay positive no matter what.*”

Covid aside, in the same surveys happiness was a recurring theme, with participation in learning beyond the classroom being linked to making young people happy. One child poignantly fed-back that:

“[This activity] *helps you to think, made me laugh and I forgot I was a bit sad.*”

Similarly, much is documented about the importance of parental and family engagement in education. Again, from the same 2022 surveys, children reported the positive links between their participation and their family relationships.

“*Other than I really loved doing this challenge because I discovered new things about life, when I visited the Museum I spent all day with my dad and I really enjoyed that day.*”

“[Children’s University] *is a good inspiration or guide for parents to get an activity for kids.*”

“[This activity] *taught me that I can talk to my family when I’m grumpy or stressed and what I could do to make the problem be better.*”

“[Learning beyond the classroom] *gets me moving and motivated to get out of the house, and to have some fun doing the activities with my family.*”

“*I like to go on adventures with my family and I cannot do that in the classroom.*”

“[Because of Children’s University] *I get to do cool things with my older sister*”

The value of learning beyond the classroom and its impact on young people is as varied and as full of potential as the opportunities that are available. Making sure that children have access to them is crucial for maintaining the positive change documented above.

While it is true that research and academic evidence is needed to robustly and rigorously demonstrate the impact that participation in activities beyond the classroom can have, these simple and clear messages directly from children must not be disregarded.

# Summary of findings

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- 1. There is robust evidence that learning beyond the classroom has a positive impact on attainment**
- 2. Similarly, there is extensive evidence that learning beyond the classroom has a positive impact on skills development**
- 3. The impact that children self-report about their skills development through learning beyond the classroom increases as they get older**
- 4. Children directly report that engaging with learning beyond the classroom has a positive impact on confidence and preparedness for new challenges**
- 5. Children clearly enjoy participation in activities beyond the classroom and report a clear understanding of its value to them, well beyond it simply being fun**
- 6. Learning beyond the classroom holds potential for strengthening connections between families and their child's learning – more needs to be done to encourage and build on this.**

# Want to take action or learn more?

## **Get your school involved**

If you are a teacher or a parent of a child in an area with an operating Children's University, get in touch with them to find out how your school can get involved. Find your local contact [here](#)

## **Contact your nearest Children's University**

You can find your nearest Children's University online and contact them to find out more about the work they do locally. All Children's Universities are managed by socially-minded and community-based institutions who partner with local businesses, education providers and stakeholders of all kinds. Talk about how you could get involved and find your local contact [here](#)

## **Read more**

- Read about Children's University's evaluations with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) [here](#) and [here](#)



# Children's University: Our reach



**A look at Children's University's digital reach and growth from  
2021 to 2022**

## Introduction

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**“We need to remain focused on capturing the insights and overviews of the learning environment beyond the classroom so that peers, policy makers, and educators of all stripes can call on us as the experts in our field and the holders of valuable live, and growing data sets.”**

Children’s University has been encouraging, tracking, and celebrating children’s participation in learning beyond the classroom since the early 1990s. However, since 2019 we’ve been using a bespoke digital platform to work alongside our paper passports and certificates in order to add value to what we do. The biggest benefit to using digital technology is the data that this allows us to collate, analyse, and share.

We do not want to work alone and want our insights to benefit schools, communities, and other institutions that have children’s best interests at heart. Because of our broad and flexible approach to learning beyond the classroom we are able to paint the picture that no other organisation can, as we hope is evident from our State of the Nation reports.

In 2021, our first ever State of the Nation Report shared insights from a 2-year period and recorded 51,300 hours of learning and contained, what The Sutton Trust called "great analysis and important recommendations". Digital technology making scalability easy means that this 2022 report is based on usage and data significantly higher than previously reported. With an apparent revolving door at the Department for Education (DfE) seeing five Secretaries of State for Education in the time since our last report, it is clear to us that we need to remain focused on capturing and sharing the insights and overviews of the learning environment beyond the classroom so that peers, policy makers, and educators of all stripes can call on us as the experts in our field and the holders of valuable live, and growing data sets. Whatever is going on in the world of education policy, we are committed to ensuring that we can occupy a central role in collating this information to best share with those who make decisions affecting children and young people.

# Headline figures

Children's University Online (CUO) gives us the opportunity to collect data that no one else is. The insights that feed into this report come from:



**49,487\* children**

There are 49,487 children with active accounts on CUO. **This is an increase of 127% from last year's report.**



**1,001 schools**

There are 1,001 schools registered on CUO. **This is an increase of 11% from last year's report.**



**12,171 activities**

There are 12,171 activities currently validated and available for children on CUO. **This is an increase of 92% from last year's report.**



**313,527 hours**

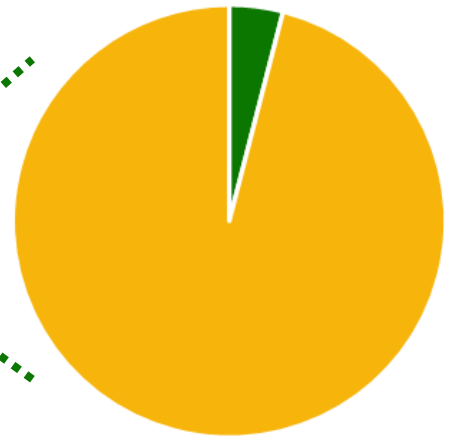
In the past year children have registered 313,527 hours of learning beyond the classroom. **This is an increase of 511% from last year's report.**

\* Online account numbers accurate as of September 2022. In addition to these online users, we had 3,833 participants in Scotland using a previous platform, and we distributed over 27,000 paper passports.

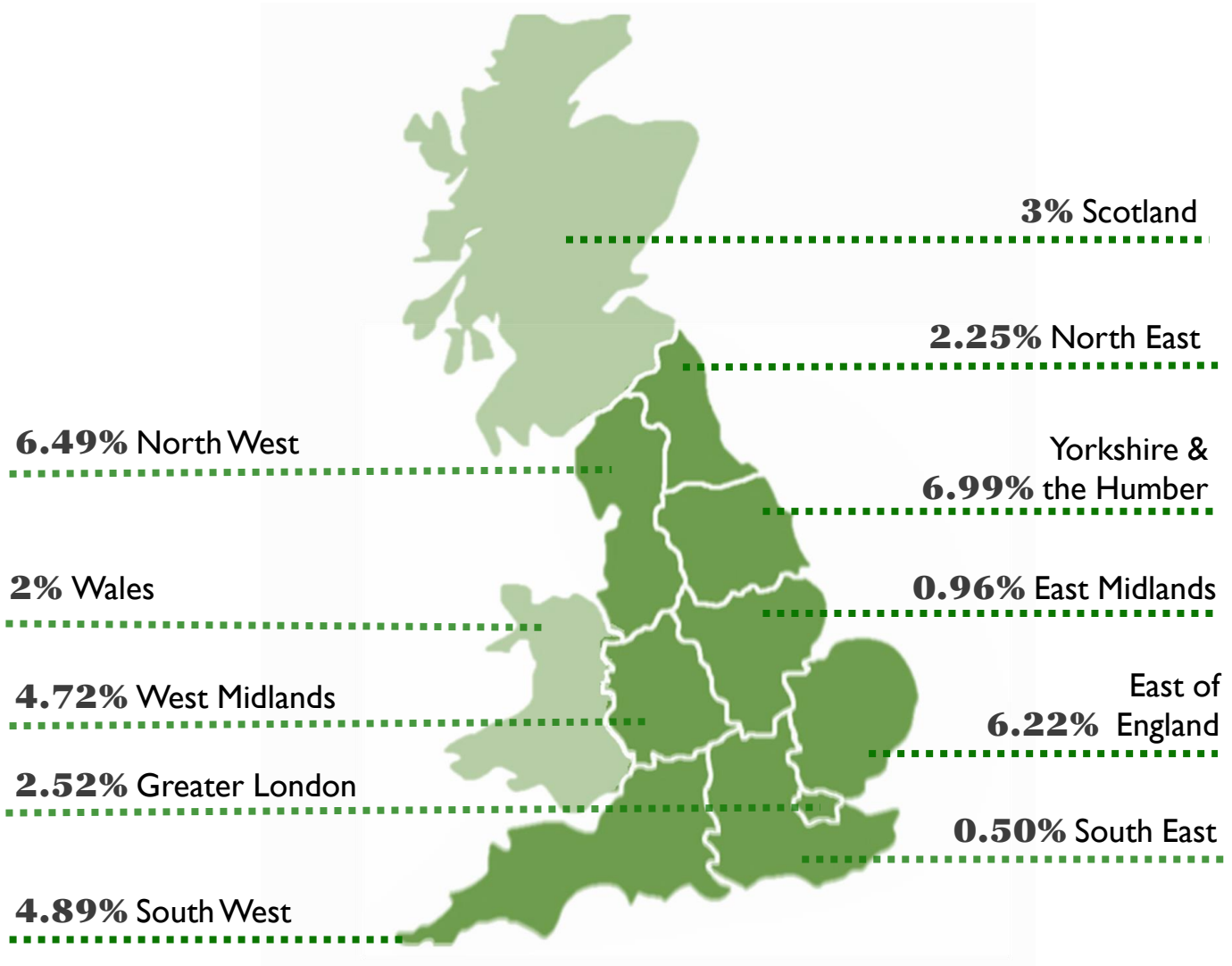
# Children's University and our reach

**In 2021-22 we had 67 partners running Children's University in 96 Local Education Authority Areas**

**We worked in 1,077 schools. This is only 4% of the state primary and secondary schools in Britain**



**As a percentage of schools, our reach into the different regions is as follows:**



This is Children's University's presence in each region as a percentage of the total of state primary and secondary schools in the region.

# Reaching those who need us

**We focus our work where it is needed most. The areas in which we work are often those with unique challenges.**

## **Our presence in English Local Education Authorities (LEAs) with a high proportion of pupils receiving free school meals (FSM)**

We have a presence in 67% of the top 20% of LEAs where the primary school FSM rates are highest



We have a presence in 73% of the top 10% of LEAs where the primary school FSM rates are highest



We have a presence in 23% of the top 20% of LEAs where the secondary school FSM rates are highest



We have a presence in 33% of the top 10% of LEAs where the secondary school FSM rates are highest



## **We have a presence in 60% of the lowest scoring 10% of LEAs on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)**



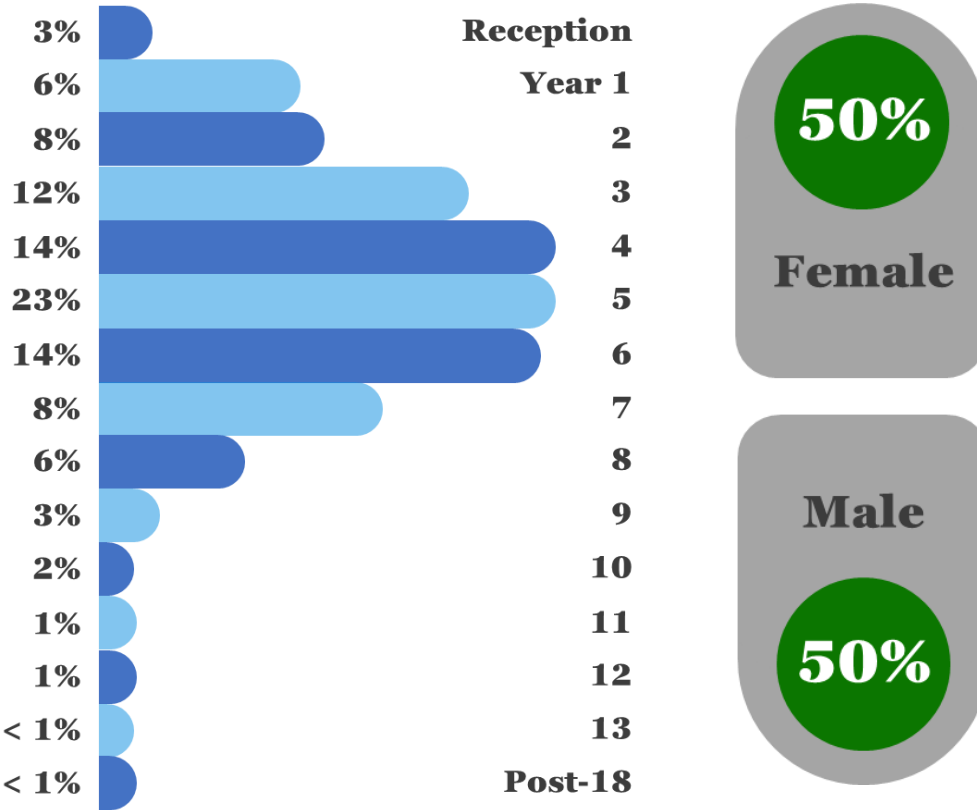
**We operate in 10 out of the 12 Opportunity Areas as well as 64% of the Government's new Levelling Up Areas**





# Our participants

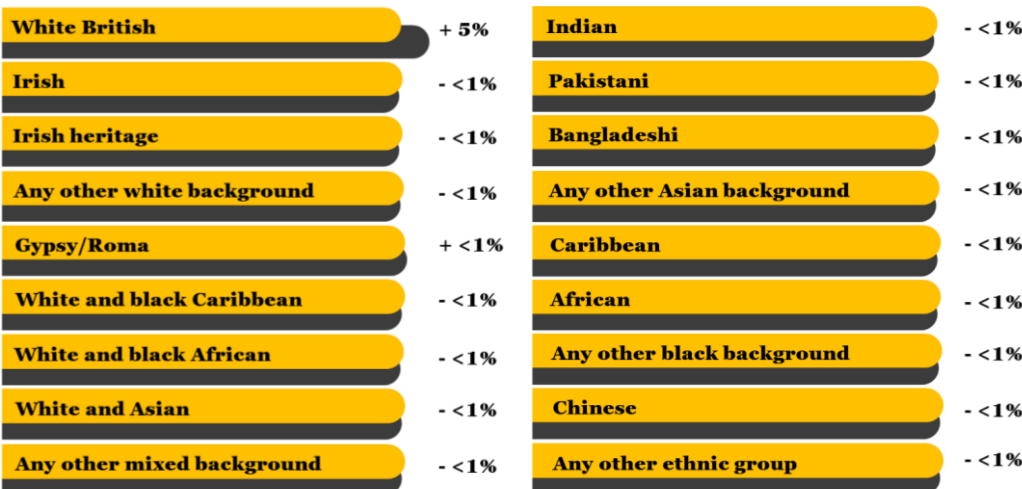
49,487 children from 1,001 schools have user accounts on CUO. This is what we know about them.



## Age and Gender

All schools that register pupils with accounts on *Children's University Online* are able to record the gender of their participants. Not all of them choose to. For the pupils we have gender data for, we have a 50-50 male-female split.

## Participant profiles extrapolated from school-level data



## Ethnicity

We do not directly collect data on Free School Meal eligibility or ethnic background of participants. However looking at public DfE data, we can see at a school level the variances between Children's University participant levels compared to national averages.

**Free School Meals**

**+ 8.3%**

# How participants feel about Children's University

**“86% of respondents were positive in their feelings towards Children's University.”**

During August 2022, we surveyed participants about Children's University. 400 respondents shared their views. All were asked to respond to the question: **“We'd love to know what you think about Children's University. Is there anything you think we should know?”**. 86% of respondents were positive in their feelings towards Children's University. A mixed selection of their responses is below:

“

*“Absolutely brilliant, great for activities to do in the holidays.”*

*“It's really good and motivating to do activities so I can keep adding the hours.”*

*“There are a lot of activities not yet recognised.”*

*“I love Children's University and doing all the challenges. The graduations make me feel very special too.”*

*“It's good to celebrate extra things we do.”*

*“Love the certificates, would like to visit universities or colleges.”*

*“I am enjoying taking part but am currently doing the things I always do. More variety of free activities would be good.”*

*“Need more things for older children.”*

*“It shows my mummy and daddy new activities we can do together.”*

*“Love that it encourages to find new things to do and sparks new interests.”*

*“I love Children's University as it gives me freedom to learn skills I love and also it encouraged me to learn and do educational fun learning out of school.”*

*“I like being able to chose extra clubs after school that I like to do.”*

*“I love it because it gives me opportunities to do things I wouldn't normally do and they are fun to do.”*

**“It is a shame that more clubs don't know that signing up to Children's University is free.”**

”

# Summary of findings

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- 1. Usage of Children's University Online is rapidly increasing. As user numbers grow, so too does the robustness and value of our data on learning beyond the classroom**
- 2. No one else is collecting the data that we are, as broadly and across such a spectrum of learning**
- 3. Children's University's reach across the country is significant, but there is still a long way to go in order to best collate data for all educators and local areas**
- 4. Children's University's presence is greatest in areas where its impact is needed most**
- 5. Participation in Children's University remains predominantly in primary-aged settings. For the impact to grow, greater reach into secondary schools is key**
- 6. The ethnic profile of Children's University participants largely matches that of the average school, with a slight (5%) difference in White British participants**
- 7. Children's University participants are more likely to be eligible for Free School Meals than the national average**

# Want to take action or learn more?

## **Get your school involved**

If you are a teacher or a parent of a child in an area with an operating Children's University, get in touch with them to find out how your school can get involved. Find your local contact [here](#)

## **Contact your nearest Children's University**

You can find your nearest Children's University online and contact them to find out more about the work they do locally. All Children's Universities are managed by socially-minded and community-based institutions who partner with local businesses, education providers and stakeholders of all kinds. Talk about how you could get involved and find your local contact [here](#)

## **Validate your activities**

If you run activities for children and young people, or you know someone who does, you can get these activities validated and added to those that Children's University signposts participants to. This is a great way to add value to your activities and reward participation. Find out more and fill out a basic online form [here](#)

## **Read more**

- Read more about *Children's University Online (CUO)*, the bespoke digital platform built to add value for all stake holders engaged with learning beyond the classroom. It is the user data from this platform that informs this report. Read more [here](#)



# **Learning beyond the classroom: links and recommendations for policy makers**



.....

**A case for increased support and recognition of learning beyond  
the classroom in British education**

.....

# Learning beyond the classroom: links and recommendations for policy makers



**Learning beyond the classroom matters. It is not a nice-to-have. It is a fundamental part of a well-rounded education. These reports clearly restate this.**

The significance of learning beyond the classroom for all children was apparent long before the pandemic, yet historically, and despite all the evidence, it has been allowed to fall between the cracks that lie between government departments, particularly the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The widening gaps between the opportunities for the haves and have-nots have been allowed to fester. The effect of the pandemic on learning loss and the need for educational catch up is clear. Similarly, the extent to which Covid-19 has aggravated inequalities in provision, participation, and impact has been further laid bare. Despite this, learning beyond the classroom is still overlooked in terms of joined up government planning.

There remains a lack of policy focus on genuinely supporting those children and young people who face barriers to learning in this way. In 2022, if we were to ask ourselves whether children from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to access and participate in the kinds of learning and experiences that happen outside of the classroom and the national curriculum, the answer would still be a resounding “No”.

In June 2021, The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) commissioned YouGov to survey parents of pupils in primary and secondary schools in England. According to the survey’s results, one in five (19.6%) parents in England reported that their primary or secondary school children do no enrichment activities in an average week. Parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds were also significantly more likely than those from higher socio-economic backgrounds to respond that their child does no enrichment activities. These results led to the CSJ calling for a new school enrichment guarantee<sup>1</sup> including an extended school day and mandatory enrichment provision.

Regardless of the calls from education experts and well-respected think tanks working to influence policy so that everyone can reach their potential and flourish, and despite there being consensus about the power of learning beyond the classroom to change young peoples’ lives, it never seems quite important enough to result in genuinely impactful, joined-up, and long-term change.

## Footnotes:

1. [https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/CSJ-A\\_Level\\_Playing\\_Field.pdf](https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/CSJ-A_Level_Playing_Field.pdf)

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Recently, we have welcomed the National Youth Guarantee that “By 2025, every young person will have access to regular out of school activities, adventures away from home and opportunities to volunteer” and the funding that accompanies it (although most of this focuses primarily on the 14+ age group and we know learning beyond the classroom needs embedding from a much earlier age).

We have welcomed the Levelling Up agenda and the ‘Missions’ focused on educational attainment, wellbeing, and pride of place and community (where we know learning beyond the classroom has a roll to play).

We have welcomed the inclusion of enrichment and extra-curricular activities in the remit of the DfE’s Pupil Well-being and Mental Health Team, with their supporting role to schools wanting to offer a broad range of enrichment and their focus on evidencing its benefits.

We have welcomed the Holiday and Food Activities Programmes that have taken place and engaged some of the most disadvantaged children during school holidays.

But these four different policy initiatives and their investment come from three separate government departments with learning beyond the classroom falling into each but receiving the laser like focus that is needed of none. If we are to genuinely address inequities in participation and regional disparities in provision, this needs to change.

Part of the problem of course is that there is no legal obligation on schools, from the DfE or Ofsted, to provide enrichment and extra-curricular activities. Yet, the DfE’s own Essential Life Skills (ELS) programme<sup>1</sup> – a £21.75 million project which ran between 2018-2019 in the DfE’s 12 Opportunity Areas, and aimed to improve access to extra-curricular activities (including sports, arts, debating and information technology) for pupils aged 5-18 showed:

- confidence, resilience, team working/building relationships and social and emotional skills were the most common outcomes experienced by young people;
- the regular structure of ELS provision encouraged young people to be more organised and committed – skills that families reported were lacking before; and
- schools reported positive changes in pupil behaviour, attendance, and aspirations that they believed would be sustained.

## Footnotes:

1. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/94256/8/ELS\\_what\\_works\\_paper.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94256/8/ELS_what_works_paper.pdf)

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In 2019, Ofsted included ‘personal development’ in its inspection framework meaning that schools are now expected to give pupils the chance to develop and discover their interests and talents. The new framework also places an emphasis on character (for example, resilience, confidence, and independence). In its 2020 annual report, Ofsted said that one of the notable features of schools that had not improved was that “pupils did not take up extra-curricular activities,”<sup>1</sup> which suggests that Ofsted’s new emphasis on personal development is starting to manifest itself in inspection results.

This is a welcome step forward, but it still isn’t addressing a long-standing lack of engagement with learning beyond the classroom or gaps in participation between the less advantaged and their more advantaged peers.

So, what can we do now to try to inspire change?

The Covid years hit schools hard. By Summer term 2022, while most schools had reinstated some curriculum enrichment activities at lunchtime and/or after school, in some schools, clubs tended to focus on catching up with academic work rather than on pupils’ broader personal development. Some schools had prioritised funding for helping pupils to catch up in academic subjects, which reduced the enrichment activities they could offer. In some schools, fewer pupils were taking part in enrichment activities compared with before the pandemic.

In this environment, many schools had found it a challenge to provide enrichment activities and clubs due to Covid-related staff absence, as well as increased workload caused by staff delivering tutoring and catch-up sessions. Some leaders told the DfE about the rising cost-of-living for families, which may prevent pupils’ uptake of enrichment activities, both for the Summer term and in the future, as well as schools’ ability to subsidise such activities.<sup>2</sup>

Now schools are facing an unprecedented funding crisis. Real-terms funding for schools is in decline, energy costs are spiralling, there is no funding to cover essential pay increases for teachers and support staff. Schools are taking on significant additional financial burdens to support children and families living in increasing poverty. The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) has reported that nine out of ten schools in England will be in deficit next year.<sup>3</sup> With this backdrop, it will become increasingly difficult for schools to support additional activities or for calls from the Times Education Commission and the CSJ to extend the school day to include mandatory enrichment to be implemented.

## Footnotes:

1. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/939834/Ofsted\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2019-2020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/939834/Ofsted_Annual_Report_2019-2020.pdf) p.17
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-recovery-in-schools-summer-2022/education-recovery-in-schools-summer-2022>
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/oct/22/exclusive-90-of-uk-schools-will-go-bust-next-year-heads-warn>



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Now is the time for existing external frameworks which support schools to encourage all children to access learning beyond the classroom, to be helped to step into the breach and to scale up what they already do to reach as many children as possible and to begin to close the gaps.

Now is the time to be ambitious in the use of community wide networks to support all students, especially the most disadvantaged, through enrichment activities.

**Now is the time for government departments to use data and evidence, such as provided in these State of the Nation Reports, to inform policy and practice.**



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## We recommend:

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1. The creation of an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on learning beyond the classroom
2. Cross-department government policy to:
  - create more place-based partnerships between schools and external learning providers. (This could be done under a framework of quality assurance and reporting, using a digital platform which promotes and records provision and participation at a local level, such as Children's University Online)
  - target and prioritise learning beyond the classroom partnerships specifically in Levelling Up Education Investment Areas where we know their impact will be greatest
  - encourage existing successful place-based partnerships to expand into neighbouring places – using the tried and tested rather than reinventing the wheel (such as the development of South Yorkshire Children's University)
3. A government grant scheme subsidising free and low-cost learning beyond the classroom activities for young people accessing youth services, youth organisations in areas of deprivation, and in alternate education provision
4. The extension of the National Youth Guarantee and its funding to incorporate more activity from a younger age, reaching more community and voluntary groups and providers
5. Support for learning beyond the classroom activities to be used to help education stage transitions, with CPD training on learning beyond the classroom made available to teachers and support staff in schools
6. The DfE's Pupil Well-being and Mental Health Team to use the UK-wide dataset and evidence-base provided by Children's University to inform its policies on enrichment and extra-curricular activity
7. The DfE's Pupil Well-being and Mental Health Team follows the Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) lead and promotes the Children's University framework as a proven enrichment and extra-curricular activity 'handbook' to schools

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## We recommend:

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8. The existing Children's University Online platform (which is currently being extended to individual users as well as users in schools) to be used as a central digital platform to give government an understanding of the breadth and quality of available learning options in various parts of the country, and which in turn could inform policy decisions
9. The wide sharing of these State of the Nation Reports across the DfE and DCMS, as well as the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)
10. Children's University to continue working with non-governmental organisations and associations (Skills Builder, Fair Education Alliance (FEA), Foundation for Education Development (FED) and others) to ensure our insights and data is able to support their wider work linked to learning beyond the classroom.



# Thanks

Children's University Trust introduced CUO as a tool to support our network and to gather data to inform reports such as these. Without the patience and understanding of our network of partners as they faced the introduction of new ways of working and the various teething problems inherent in any new digital project, this report would not be possible. Thank you to all existing and former Children's University Managers who contributed in some way.

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Thank you to [The Tech Dept](#) for being understanding, talented and patient digital partners in the build, maintenance and ongoing development of CUO.

Thanks to you for reading this. Should you still be here reading this final page, you are almost certainly engaged enough with the same issues as us to play a part in joining our movement. Do get in touch.

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## Now join the conversation online



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[#CUStateoftheNation](#)



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