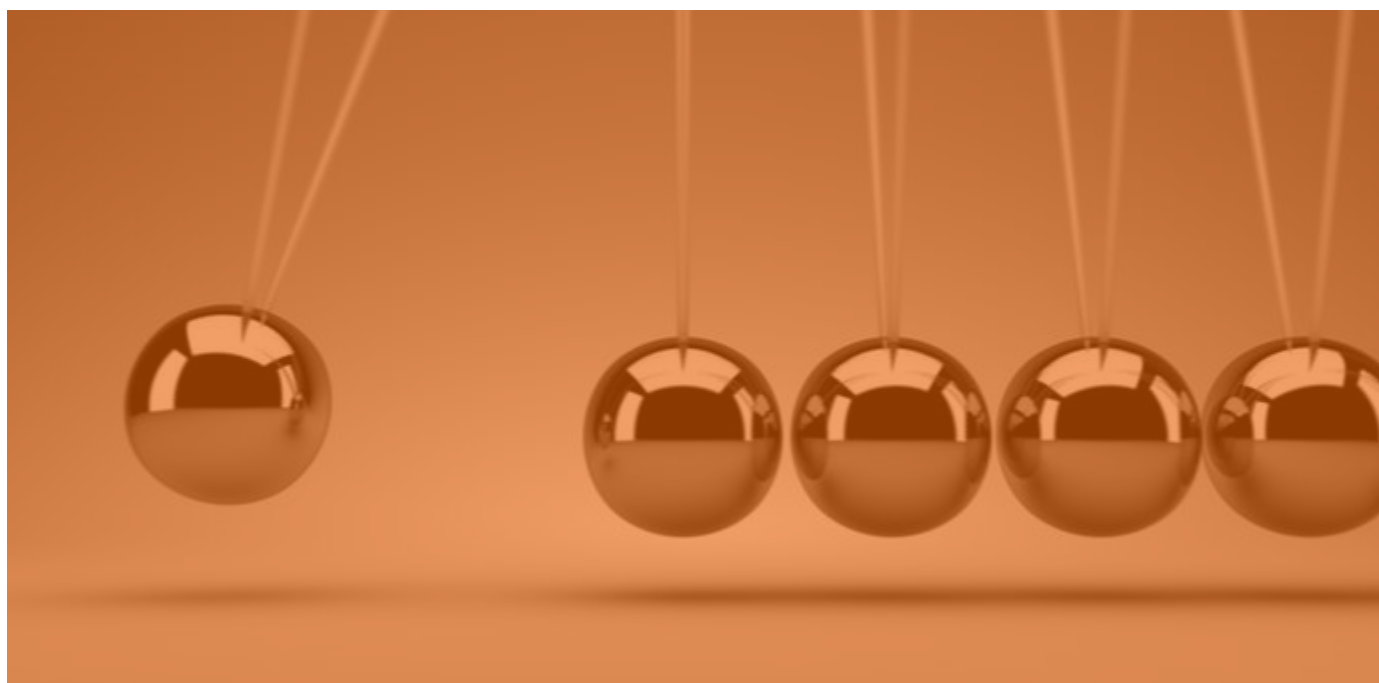


# **The impact of learning beyond the classroom**



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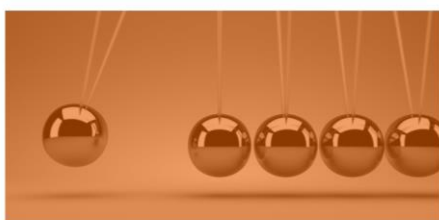
## **The State of The Nation 2022**

**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 support from Sukie Duhra

## The impact of learning beyond the classroom



### The State of The Nation 2022

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Written by Liam Nolan and Cordelia Howard with support from Sukie Duhra



**This report is one of 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.

To download the rest of our reports, visit:

[childrensuniversity.co.uk/stateofthenation](https://childrensuniversity.co.uk/stateofthenation)

### Children's University: Our reach



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



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



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# 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](#)

