

The role that learning beyond the classroom plays in skills development



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

An annual research project from Children's University Trust

Written by Liam Nolan and Cordelia Howard with data analysis by Sukie Duhra



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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

Learning beyond the classroom: Provision and Participation



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Children's University: Our reach



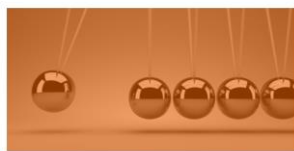
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The impact of learning beyond the classroom



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Learning beyond the classroom: links and recommendations for policy makers



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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 subjects¹) with sports and extra-curricular activities becoming lower priority as budgets get tighter and costs increase². 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 life³. 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.⁴

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.”⁵

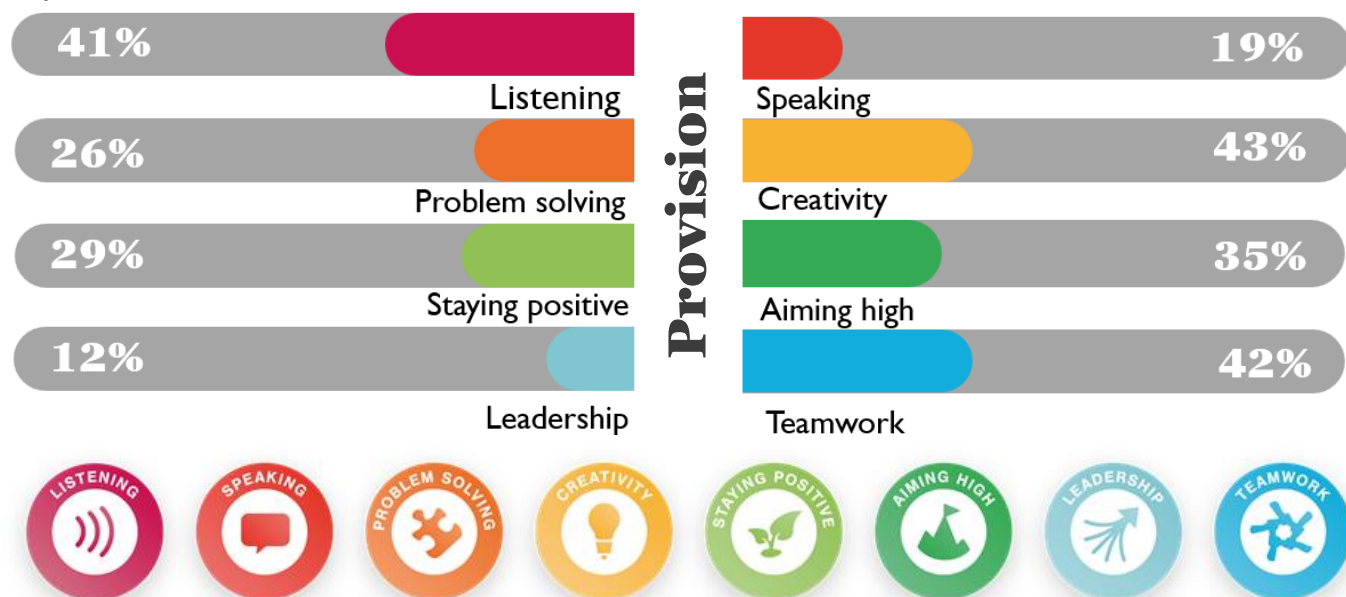
Learning beyond the classroom holds huge potential for helping young people develop the skills they need to be work-ready, have higher life satisfaction, and secure higher income later in life. Our data reinforces this message, and we see that the skills a young person develops from as young as age 5 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 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+¹. 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 survey¹ 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*¹, investigating the links between skill levels in adults and life outcomes. They found that:

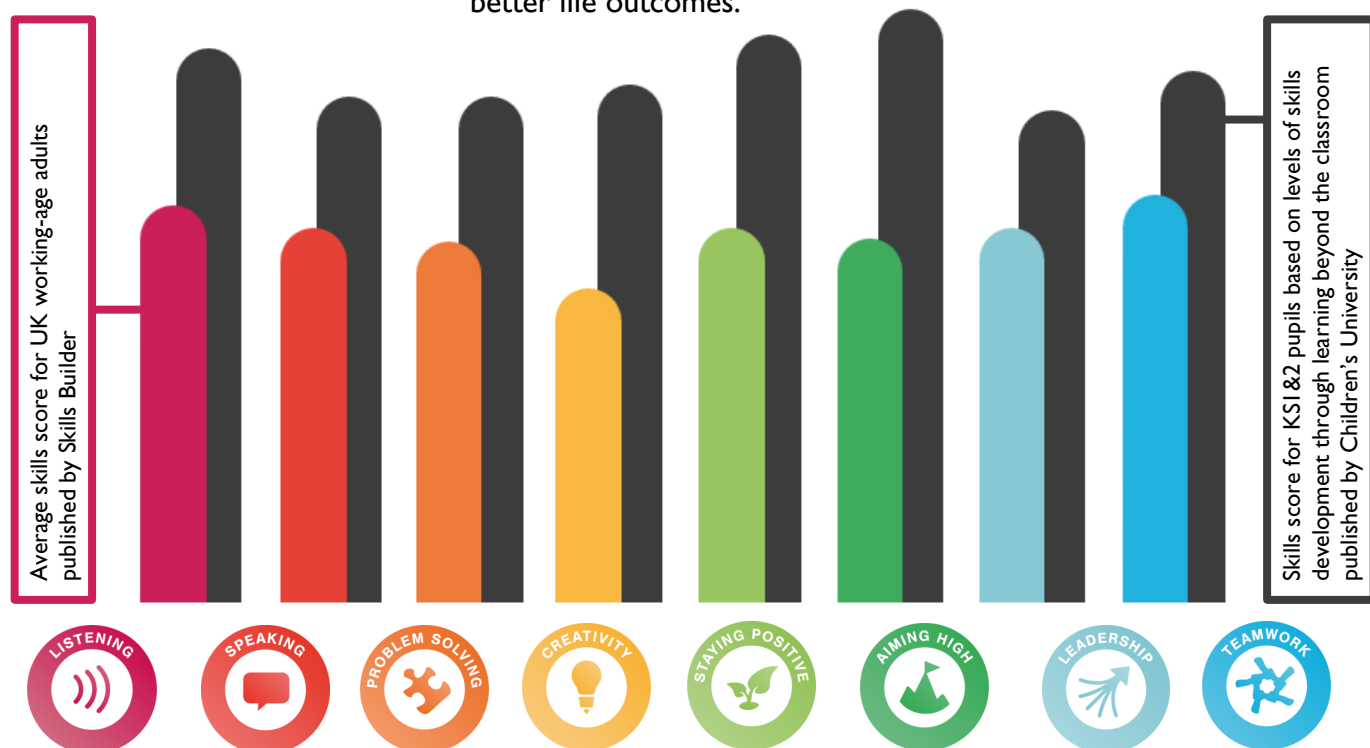
- higher levels of essential skills correlate with higher income
- higher levels of essential skills are related to higher life satisfaction
- building essential skills can increase the probability of being in work or education.

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 Fig. 3.2 p29

The chart below shows the average skills score for UK working-age adults published by Skills Builder² (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](#)



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