



Skills Builder
Reflecting on
essential skills

2023-24

The role that learning beyond the classroom plays in skills development



The State of The Nation 2023

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





The role that learning beyond the classroom plays in skills development



The State of The Nation 2023

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 Duira



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 2023 reports are informed by data from:

- 70,000 children
- 19,400 activities
- 704,000 hours of recorded participation.

Since 2021 our State of the Nation Reports have offered up an analysis of over 1 million hours of participation in learning beyond the classroom.

To download the rest of our reports, visit:

childrensuniversity.co.uk/stateofthenation

Learning beyond the classroom: Provision and Participation



The State of The Nation 2023

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 Duira



The impact of learning beyond the classroom



The State of The Nation 2023

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 Duira



Children's University: Our reach



The State of The Nation 2023

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 Duira



Learning beyond the classroom: links and recommendations for policy makers



The State of The Nation 2023

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 Duira



Contents

The role that learning beyond the classroom plays in skills development.....	
<u>Introduction</u>	4
<u>What we know about skills and learning beyond the classroom</u>	5
<u>What children tell us</u>	6
<u>Skills development and age</u>	7
<u>Qualitative feedback</u>	8
<u>Links between learning beyond the classroom and skills in later life</u>	9
<u>Summary of findings</u>	10
<u>Want to take action or learn more?</u>	11

Thank you for reading

Now join the conversation online



[@CU_Trust](#)
[#CUStateoftheNation](#)



contactus@childrensuniversity.co.uk



childrensuniversity.co.uk/stateofthenation

The role that learning beyond the classroom plays in skills development



“The space beyond the classroom provides the perfect opportunity for children to develop essential skills. 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.

This report is the third State of the Nation Report from Children’s University and represents the millionth hour of learning beyond the classroom to be fully analysed through the lens of skills development. The Skills Builder Team commend the brilliant work that Children’s University are doing to make essential skills accessible for so many more children..”

**Tom Ravenscroft
Founder & CEO
Skills Builder
November 2023**



The role that learning beyond the classroom plays in skills development

Introduction

“The environments and opportunities that are so rich for skills development outside of the curriculum are under threat and, therefore, so too is the level of skills and work and life readiness that young people so need to develop.”

As the cost-of-living-crisis works hand in hand with school budget challenges, education leaders in primary and secondary schools are having to cut spending and resource on extra-curricular learning more than ever¹. This is despite the fact that our data shows that children and young people are more reliant on schools to deliver learning opportunities beyond the classroom². These cuts are having a direct impact that is already felt and, without action, will have a longstanding impact on a generation of pupils.

For the children living through these cuts, the result is a greater focus than ever on knowledge over skills, as the classroom curriculum takes greater precedence than ever on learning beyond the classroom. The environments and opportunities that are so rich for skills development outside of the curriculum are under threat and, therefore, so too is the level of skills and work and life readiness that young people so need to develop. Despite all these cuts and challenges, schools are relied on more than ever to provide.

In the most recent Education and Skills Survey from the CBI³, 94% of businesses reported having skills gaps that they needed to address. They also reported that less than 50% of businesses were confident about being able to hire to meet their needs. This gap in need and skills will only be exacerbated if we do not focus on essential skills in young people. One of the most effective and impactful ways to do this is through an investment and a focus on opportunities for learning beyond the classroom.

For the past three years, Children’s University has been very clear in evidencing that learning beyond the classroom holds huge potential for helping young people develop skills. The variety of new places, faces and spaces they can access directly relates to their development and improvement of the skills they need to be work-ready, have higher life satisfaction, and secure higher income later in life. We work closely to ensure that our evidence relates directly to Skills Builder’s industry-leading Essential Skills Framework. Together we paint a strong and hard to challenge picture of the importance of learning beyond the classroom and its role in skills development.

Footnotes:

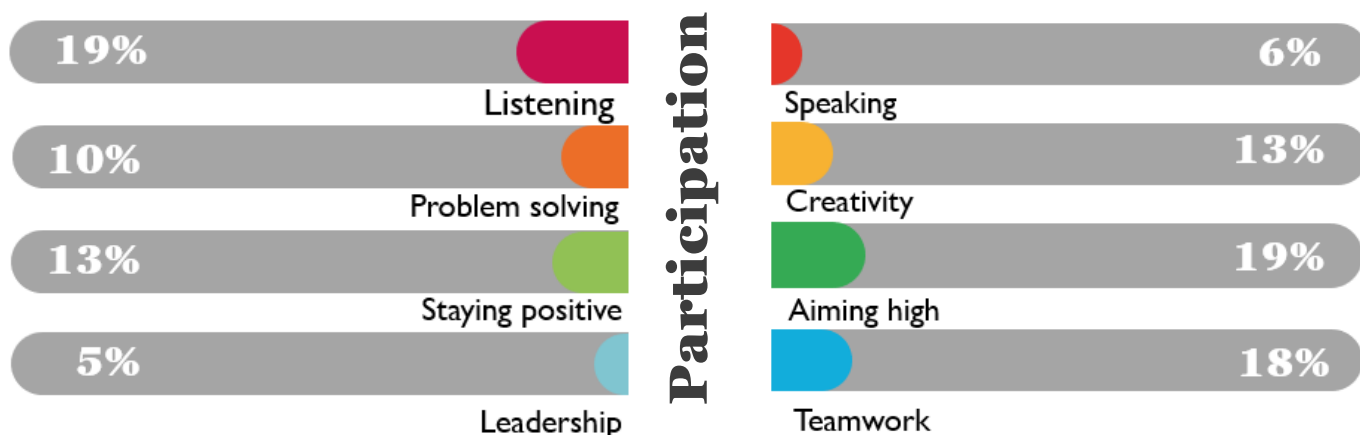
1. <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/school-funding-and-pupil-premium-2023/>
2. See p9 above
3. <https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/skznxy0q/education-and-skills-survey-2022.pdf>
p4

What we know about skills and learning beyond the classroom

Looking at provision, we analysed the profile of 19,400 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 19,400 activities but reviewing instead the participation levels, we can see how skills are actually used. Analysing over 704,000 hours 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 25% of activities that are available give children and young people an opportunity to develop problem solving skills, only 10% of participation is in these activities. Similarly, creativity is associated with 41% of activities available, yet only makes up 13% 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 tell us

All activities (19,400) registered on Children's University Online are tagged with up to three skills by the learning provider. Between September 2022 and August 2023 children were surveyed directly about the impact that learning beyond the classroom had on their skills use and development. Based on more than 16,000 individual skills reflections, children told us:



Used the skills we said they would use

89 %

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

94 %

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

53 %

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 %

91%

53%



90 %

94 %

52 %



85 %

94%

51%



90 %

95 %

55 %



84 %

93 %

49 %



78 %

94 %

54 %



88 %

94 %

52 %



89 %

95 %

57 %

Skills development and age

During the 2022-23 period outlined above, we surveyed all children participating in Children's University. This is a range of ages (more on our participant profiles and ages can be found in the section below titled, 'Children's University: Our Reach') and shows a generalised picture based on 16,000+ instances of skills reflection by participants. Below you can see how this compares to past surveys looking at specific age groups.

All ages

Surveyed 2022-23



Used the skills we said they would use

89 %

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

94 %

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

53 %

Children aged 5-11 (Key Stage 1 & 2)

Surveyed 2021-22



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 %

Children aged 11+ (Key Stage 3+)

Surveyed 2020-21



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 %

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 used the skill problem solving when I came across a difficult piece of homework and I found a way to overcome it.”

“It’s always important to help lead a team in football. We worked hard together and encouraged each other throughout the games and training. I was able to support other members of the team.”

“I made up my own piece of music on the guitar which meant that I could use my creativity skills.”

“My weekly swimming lessons are helping me gain confidence and doing things on my own. We help each other in our lesson group if some of us struggle with something.”

“Me and my friend were partners and at first I didn’t want to work in a group but now I realise how important it is.”

“My grandad is polish, he is also helping me speak polish, so we use creativity by singing songs to help me remember the words.”

“We help each other to use our creativity, by encouraging each other. Helping each other to come out of our shells if we are shy.”

“I tried my best in Football Club and I helped score a few goals. I improved by not giving up because the other team was winning and even though we lost a few times, I was still proud.”

“I stayed positive and stopped worrying about secondary school”

“I was able to tell my family members why I loved them. It helped me think in a positive way and feel happy.”

“I was the youngest there so had to really listen to the more complicated instructions and watch the older children to see what to do.”

”

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

“There is a correlation between this progress we report in children and the average national adult skill level.”

Each year Skills Builder publish their *Essential Skills Tracker*¹, investigating the links between skill levels in adults and life outcomes. They report that:

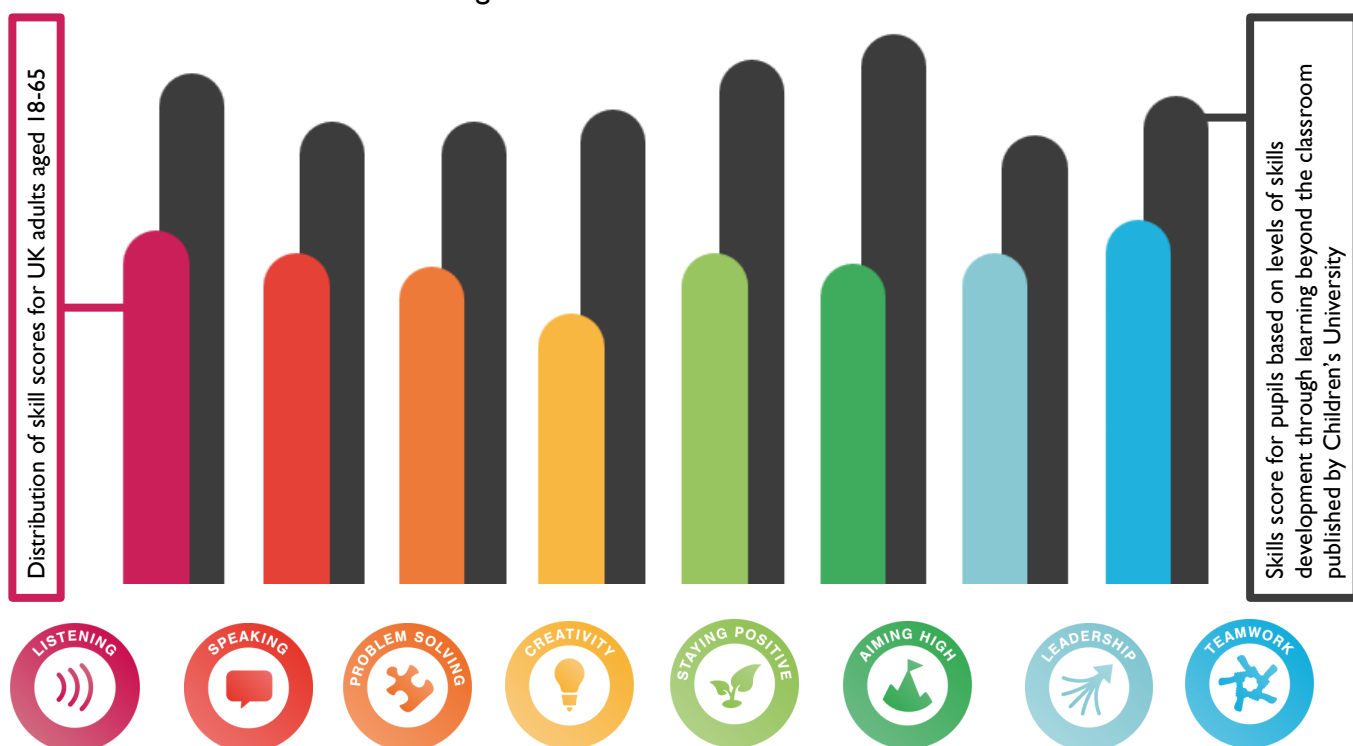
- higher levels of essential skills correlate with higher income
- higher levels of essential skills are related to higher life satisfaction
- building essential skills can increase the probability of being in work or education.

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

The chart below shows the average skills score for UK adults aged 18-65 published by Skills Builder² (coloured bars) against the 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 the progress we report in children 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.

Footnotes:

1. <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/file/essential-skills-tracker-2023>
2. https://assets-global.website-files.com/5ab25784c7fcbff004fa8dca/64073cd121e6c7c38ba13f49_Essential%20Skills%20Tracker%202023.pdf Fig. 0.3 p17



Summary of findings

- 1. Children consistently report that learning beyond the classroom has a positive impact on their skills development.**
- 2. The impact of learning beyond the classroom on skills use and improvement is reported at higher levels for older (11+) children.**
- 3. The average distribution of skills scores in adults aged 18-65 as reported by Skills Builder can broadly be seen to be mirrored in children as reported by Children's University. The opportunities available to young people as children can be seen to have a life-long impact and hold potential to shape this distribution in future generations.**
- 4. There remains a gap between the skills provision and participation levels in the activities validated by Children's University. More can be done to ensure learning providers are consistent and clear in their understanding and communication of skills outcomes for their activities.**
- 5. Speaking and problem solving remain the lowest level of the skills reported as developed by children through learning beyond the classroom. Organisations like Children's University and those working in the space beyond education can do more to focus on these skills.**



Want to take action or learn more?

Join the Skills Builder Partnership

The Skills Builder Partnership is a global movement of employers, educators, and impact organisations working together to ensure that one day, everyone builds the essential skills to succeed. All members 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 2023 [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

