

# The impact of Children's University on the development of essential skills in children aged 11+



## Research and results summary

A project funded by Nesta with support from the University of Sussex

### Children's University...

Children's University is a charity that encourages, tracks, and celebrates learning that takes place beyond the classroom. While curriculum time remains the focus of the formal education system, we know that time spent wisely beyond the classroom holds unlimited potential for life-changing experiences, social mobility, and skills development.

### Children's University Online...

*Children's University Online* is the digital platform that works alongside a paper *Passport to Learning* as a child's record of participation in validated activities. Children collect stamp codes for each activity they join, and schools and Children's University partners can see data around participation, as well as other information that activities are tagged with, including skills, categories of learning and employer engagement.



### More than 5,000 activities to choose from...

Using the Children's University framework, our delivery partners and schools validate learning opportunities for children in whatever form they take. These activities must match our criteria of being voluntary and containing elements of structured learning. They must also take place outside of the formal classroom curriculum. For children, this means that through Children's University they can participate in activities in their own school but beyond the classroom (lunch time and after-school clubs), as well as within their local community (libraries, sports clubs, museums and other local destinations) alongside activities at home (self-led, online or downloadable) and activities run by our national partners (retailers such as Pets at Home, and with organisations like Forestry England). As of December 2020, there are more than 5,300 activities validated to choose from. Each child's journey through our programme is as unique as they are.

## A common language and experience...

In order to bring consistency of experience for children and to ensure that the impact felt through participation in varying activities is comparable, we use a consistent shared language around categories of learning and skills.

## Skills Builder...

When it comes to skills, Children's University is a member of the Skills Builder Partnership, using their clearly defined set of eight essential skills.



The receiving, retaining and processing of information or ideas



The oral transmission of information or ideas



The ability to find a solution to a situation or challenge



The use of imagination and the generation of new ideas



The ability to use tactics and strategies to overcome setbacks and achieve goals



The ability to set clear, tangible goals and devise a robust route to achieving them



Supporting, encouraging and developing others to achieve a shared goal



Working cooperatively with others towards achieving a shared goal

We believe, along with hundreds of other schools, charities, employers and educators, that using Skills Builder's Universal Framework provides children and young people with a common language to use when talking about their own skills development. All 5,300+ activities validated and listed on *Children's University Online* are tagged with up to three of the Skills Builder essential skills in agreement between the activity provider and Children's University.

## Research into our impact on the development of essential skills in children aged 11+...

With the support of Nesta's Future Ready Fund, Children's University set out to interrogate skills development in participants aged 11+. By building a survey mechanism into *Children's University Online*, we wanted to evaluate the skills used and the skills improved as reported directly by children. We set out to find:

- the percentage of respondents that felt they used the skills our validation stated;
- the percentage of respondents that felt they did use the skill that our validation stated and felt they improved;
- of those that did improve, what percentage stated that they felt they had 'strongly improved'

## Results...

With the support of the University of Sussex, Children's University built a survey for children aged 11+ that offered bespoke questions for each activity regarding the skills tagged. Results showed a picture of general skills use and improvement, along with the chance to compare each of the 8 skills independently. Results were as follows:

### All skills



Used the skills we 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 %

## Recommendations...

Based on the findings of this project we have specific recommendations for stakeholders within education and the Children's University Programme.

### For schools...

- There is significant evidence that participation in Children's University has a direct impact on children's use and improvement of essential skills. Sign up to get involved with Children's University [childrensuniversity.co.uk/get-involved](https://childrensuniversity.co.uk/get-involved)

### For Children's University Trust...

- Replicate this research annually to monitor change and reflect ongoing changes in *Children's University Online* and the educational landscape
- Increase levels of Skills Builder branding and information within *Children's University Online* so that skills use and improvement become a more prominent feature for all children
- Provide additional training and clarification around Skills Builder for all Children's University delivery partners
- Encourage local partners to discuss skills development with learning providers as part of the validation process and actively encourage providers to discuss skills as part of their activity delivery with child participants

### For Skills Builder...

- Share the findings of this report with members of the wider Skills Builder Partnership
- Work with Children's University Trust on a replication of this research annually

## Further reading...

- Children's University can be found online at: [childrensuniversity.co.uk](https://childrensuniversity.co.uk)
- Skills Builder can be found online at: [skillsbuilder.org](https://skillsbuilder.org)
- The full report and results can be downloaded at: [childrensuniversity.co.uk/evidence](https://childrensuniversity.co.uk/evidence)
- More information about Nesta's Future Ready Fund can be found at: [nesta.org.uk/project/future-ready-fund/](https://nesta.org.uk/project/future-ready-fund/)

