

UFA Young Researchers and Evaluators
Impact Report
December 2017



An introduction from Helen O'Donnell

In October 2017, Children's University had the pleasure of being evaluated by a group of our participants as part of the University of the First Age's Young Researchers and Evaluators programme. As an organisation, it is vitally important that we listen to our beneficiaries and UFA's project enabled just that, providing a direct insight into the opinions and attitudes of those are part of and benefit from Children's University.

Centring on child-led, hands on research and consisting of UFA's youngest ever researchers, the project offers an extracurricular learning experience that not only provides young people with practical research, analysis, and evaluation skills, but also various transferable life skills and attitudes. Led by and alongside two Children's University schools in Birmingham which face real barriers to attainment and achievement, this project has acted as both an evaluation of Children's University's impact and an extension of our own fundamental values and objectives.

I would like to thank UFA for its management and provision of the project and the children from both Colmore Junior School and Clifton Primary for their participation and fantastic work on the research.



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Introduction

As an organisation, Children's University encourages and celebrates participation in extracurricular learning activities for children between the ages of 5 and 14. For their participation, children are rewarded in the form of Children's University credits. Each credit, worth one hour of engagement in a learning activity outside of the classroom, is recorded in the child's Passport to Learning which can be used to track their progress through the Children's University award system. This system is manifested in the form of incremental certificates, awarded at various stages of the child's hourly progress: Bronze (30 hours), Silver (65 hours), and Gold (100 hours) and onwards at the same levels up to 1,000 hours. Once participants are eligible for these awards, they are given the opportunity to attend a graduation ceremony. Co-ordinated at various venues in each Children's University's local area, including Universities and public buildings, these ceremonies are an opportunity for Children's University participants to gain a real sense of achievement and accomplishment for their engagement in out of hours learning and educational activities.

Children's University's fundamental aims are to:

- Encourage and celebrate participation in educational activities outside of the traditional classroom environment
- Raise aspirations of children and families alike through rewarding active participation in learning
- Encourage an appreciation of learning
- Raise educational attainment and attendance amongst children and young people
- Instil positive skills and attitudes in young people, including self-confidence, wellbeing, and communication
- Provide children and young people with the means to improve their life chances



Like Children's University, The University of the First Age (UFA) are an organisation founded on the principles of raising the aspiration of children and families in homes, schools, and communities across the country. To achieve their fundamental goal of improving life chances for young people, UFA aim to provide their participants with valuable skills, attitudes, and leadership qualities via a variety of 'transformational learning experiences'. One such experience, Young Researchers and Evaluators (YRE), offers young people the opportunity to engage in a research project designed to assess and evaluate a facet of their organisation. Based on the principles of hands on, Action Research, YRE provides is child-led and thus its participants with a combination of practical research, analysis, and evaluation skills, as well as many other transferable benefits. UFA have identified these as:

- Gaining a greater sense of pride and satisfaction in solving a problem, and making a change or improvement that benefits other peers
- Developing useful life skills
- Developing good communication skills in being able to relate to children and adults in different ways
- Learning how to work cooperatively with other children from different cultures, gender and age groups in a pupil-led action research team
- Learning how to become a reflective and critical thinker
- Understanding how decisions are made and change happens
- Improving the use and application of multi-media and technology (ICT) when researching a student issue and analysing and presenting data
- Feeling respected, listened to and taken seriously by teachers and other adults in the organisation

Since being founded in 1996, UFA have worked with over 750,000 young people, 5,000 teachers and youth workers, and 2,000 schools and youth organisations. With a well-established and growing presence across the country, and a similar vision and drive to that of Children's University, UFA have been an exciting and rewarding partner to work with.



Overview

UFA's Young Researchers and Evaluators is a child-led research programme run over a number of weeks during which a research project is formulated and completed. The initial two days of the programme consist of teaching the young participants the essential principles of research and evaluation, including key terms, the use of data collection tools, how to frame and formulate a research question, teamwork, and the ethical considerations of primary research. Once this initial training period is completed, the YRE are then given time to complete their research project. Upon completion, the third day of training is provided to teach participants how to analyse and evaluate their data, report their findings, and present these to a team of senior leadership at their organisation or school.

Based on this model, UFA's YRE project in conjunction with Children's University sought to provide an evaluation of the impact and efficacy of Children's University activities using Colmore Junior School and Clifton Primary School in Birmingham. These schools were selected due to the proportion of students facing considerable disadvantage and barriers to attainment and achievement; the very students Children's University seeks to improve the lives of. Conducted over a period of two weeks, YRE groups consisting of a total of 20 Year 5s and 6s were asked to formulate a research question regarding the impact and efficacy of Children's University in their schools. The groups utilised surveys to ask fellow Year 6 students to provide their views on the impact and successes of Children's University's activities in their school. YRE then analysed and evaluated this data, before presenting it to a selection of teachers and school staff in mid-October. As a child-led research project, consisting of YRE's youngest ever participants, this programme was not only exciting for both its novelty and provision of invaluable skills in research and evaluation, but also gave Children's University the opportunity to receive direct feedback from its beneficiaries.

This report will begin by offering a selection of key findings from the YRE project, focusing on areas in which Children's University is succeeding and areas in which research participants identified a need for improvement. Second, the report will offer an in-depth summary of each



group's project, providing an overview of their research question, methods, findings, and recommendations. Finally, the report's conclusion will seek to consolidate this information, highlighting where Children's University is succeeding and in which areas it might consider implementing improvements. For the sake of this report, the YRE groups have been numbered to clearly define their unique projects and approaches.

Key Findings

Successes

- 70% of those asked believed Children's University activities and clubs make a difference to their experience of school, suggesting that the impact of Children's University is far reaching
- 72% of those asked believed that Children's University makes school more fun, suggesting that the impact of Children's University identified above is in fact positive
- 69.4% of those asked believed that Children's University graduation ceremonies make a difference in school, suggesting that Children's University's is successful in its aim to make participation in learning rewarding
- 80.95% of those asked believed that taking part in Children's University helped them in lessons
- 78.57% of those asked believed that their participation in Children's University helped them to be more relaxed in school
- 81.40% of those asked believed that participation in Children's University activities and clubs helped with different lessons, suggesting that the variety of Children's University activities on offer aids in helping children across different subjects
- Further indicators of success identified in the YRE project were ascertained through open questions, these included: an introduction to new activities and knowledge, building of confidence, development of communication skills, reduction in stress and anxiety, and making participation in education fun and rewarding



Areas for Improvement

Through further open questions, the YRE project also identified a number of areas in which Children's University could be improved. These include:

- A wider variety of activities for Children's University participants, including more adventurous, non-traditional physical and sporting activities
- Improved accessibility with more clubs and activities available to disabled students
- Further help with mental healthcare and the reduction of stress and anxiety via the implementation of workshops such as yoga and mindfulness

YRE Group 1 – Colmore Junior School

Choosing to address what difference Children's University activities make to a child's experience of school, YRE Group 1 formulated four research questions:

1. Do Children's University clubs make a difference at school?
2. Do you think Children's University makes school more fun?
3. Do graduation ceremonies make a difference in school?
4. How does Children's University make a difference to you at school?

In order to gather data on these questions, the group opted to survey 50 students attending Year 6 of Colmore Junior School. The group chose to use the online service Survey Monkey to conduct their research due to its provision of percentages for their Yes/No/Not Sure questions and ability to assist in the analysis of results.

Through their research and evaluation, Group 1 found that a total of 70% of students asked believed that Children's University clubs make a difference at their school. This is compared with an answer rate of 12% for 'No' and 18% for 'Not Sure', showing that the majority of those involved in the study feel as though Children's University makes a difference at their school. Building upon this, Group 1's results to their second question show that 72% of those surveyed believe that Children's University makes school more fun. This was compared to



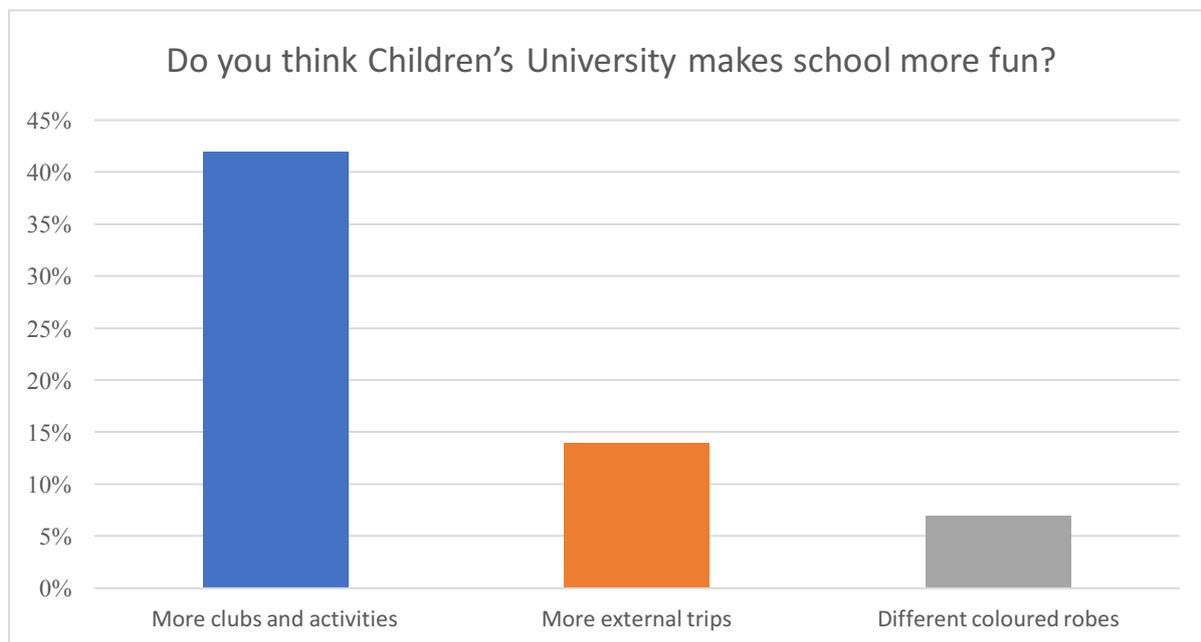
12% for 'No' and 16% for 'Not Sure', suggesting that most participants felt that Children's University makes a positive difference to their experience of school by making it a more fun experience. Regarding graduations, 69.4% of those surveyed answered 'Yes' when asked if ceremonies made a difference to them at school. This was compared to a rate of 16.3% for 'No' and 14.3% for 'Not Sure'. Group 1 also noted that one participant skipped this question.

It is unclear whether this non-answer and the 14.3% answer rate of 'No' were due to those participants having not attended a ceremony or other reasons. Although the high percentage of answers to 'Yes' is superficially positive, it is difficult to ascertain whether the difference to their school experience was deemed to be positive.

For their fourth question, Group 1 identified a number of common and key answers highlighting how Children's University makes a difference, undertaking a thematic analysis of their results. These answers were identified as:

- Graduation ceremonies make a difference
- It rewards learning
- It makes learning fun
- Helps to make friends and communicate
- Variety of activities
- Builds confidence
- Helps relaxation after a hard day

From Group 1's research we can gather that Children's University's activities and clubs for Colmore Junior School Year 6 students are having a positive impact upon their experience of school and education. Particularly regarding the building of confidence, making learning fun, and aiding in the development of communication abilities, it is clear that this impact is also in line with Children's University's primary and fundamental objectives, reflecting our ambition to offer experiences and skills to children who otherwise face barriers to the attainment of them and, resultantly, achievement too.



YRE Group 2 – Colmore Junior School

Group 2 of UFA's YRE chose to address the research question: Does taking part in Children's University clubs help children in lessons? Group 2 again broke their main question down into 4 sub questions:

1. Does taking part in Children's University help you in lessons?
2. Does taking part in clubs help you to be more relaxed?
3. Do the clubs you do help you with different lessons?
4. How do Children's University clubs help you with your learning?

Group 2 also opted to use surveys for their research method, surveying a total of 43 Year 6 students using Survey Monkey in order to help with analysis and avoid the use of paper. Group 2 wrote their fourth question as an open question so that they could gather more detailed data.

Through their research and evaluation, Group 2 found that 80.95% of those asked felt that taking part in Children's University helped them in lessons. Compared to an answer rate of 9.52% for both 'No' and 'Not Sure', this result shows that Children's University activities and



aids in students' learning whilst in the classroom. More specifically, the group found that 78.57% of those surveyed felt as though Children's University helped them to be more relaxed in school, whilst 4.76% answered 'No' and 19.05% answered 'Not Sure'. This result suggests that one of the primary ways in which Children's University activities help children when they are in the classroom is in enabling them to feel relaxed and relieving the anxiety and stress that may result from classroom learning. In asking whether Children's University clubs help with different lessons, Group 2 received an answer rate of 81.40% for 'Yes' and 9.30% for both 'No' and 'Not Sure', suggesting that the majority of respondents felt as though clubs help them across the curriculum, reaffirming Children's University's efficacy in offering varied and diverse benefits in a number of educational contexts.

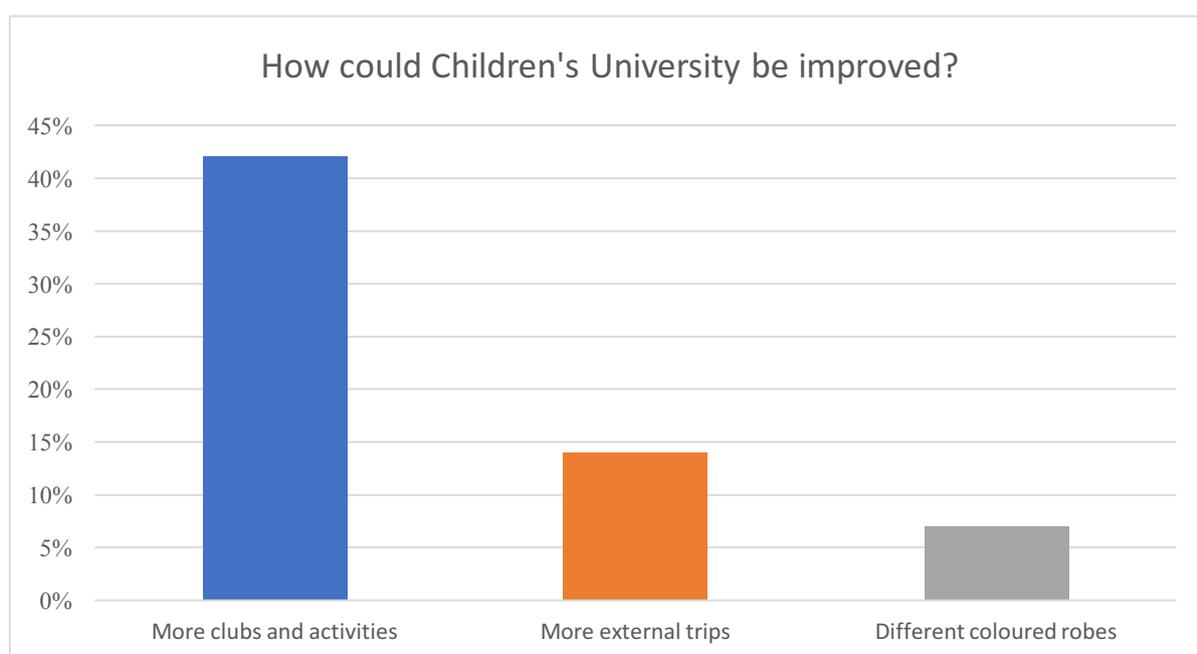
For the fourth question, Group 2 picked a selection of responses they felt were most common and important. These were:

- 'Helps me improve my mental ability'
- 'Knowledge'
- 'They help me think'
- 'They help me by helping me learn so I can focus'
- 'I like coding club that helps me with ICT and I play dodgeball that helps me in PE'
- 'They make me focus so I can learn and don't feel stressed'

From these answers we can again ascertain that Children's University is achieving many of its primary goals and objectives. For example, along with exhibiting that Children's University clubs and activities do indeed help the children in their day to day participation in curricular education, we can see the specific ways in which this help manifests itself. Interestingly, there seems to be a particular onus on mental resilience and health, with stress, focus, and relaxation being common themes. Second, the introduction of new activities such as coding and dodgeball are shown to be helping in traditional, classroom based learning, showing that such activities not only engage children in novel ways, but also reinforce existing learning structures. This is again a positive reaffirmation of Children's University's ability to aid in the



removal of barriers to educational attainment, by helping children to relax and experience activities and knowledge they are not normally exposed to.



YRE Group 3 – Colmore Junior School

Taking a slightly different approach to previous groups and choosing to address ways in which Children's University could improve their activities and clubs so that more students could get involved, Group 3 posed the research question, How could Children's University be improved so that more people can benefit? Again using Survey Monkey to conduct their research, Group 3 asked a total of 35 Year 6 students at Colmore Junior School three sub questions:

1. Do you think that Children's University could be improved?
2. Can you suggest three ways in which Children's University could be improved?
3. What activities do you think could get more children involved?

The group noted that they chose two questions that allowed for longer, more detailed answers and for those surveyed to respond how they wanted. They also noted that this caused more difficulty at the analysis stage as Survey Monkey was not able to analyse the



data on their behalf, resulting in the group undertaking a thematic analysis of the responses to identify common answers.

Through the analysis of responses to their first question, Group 3 found that 60% of those asked believed that Children's University could be improved. This was compared to an answer rate of 5.71% for 'No' and 34.29% for 'Not Sure', showing that the majority of respondents believed that some form of improvement was necessary for Children's University to implement. To ascertain specific ways in which the respondents believed these improvements could be made, the responses to Group 3's second question were narrowed down to the most popular. These were:

- Trampolining
- Laser Quest
- Climbing
- Getting people to explain their interesting jobs
- More clubs at lunchtimes
- Clubs for disabled people

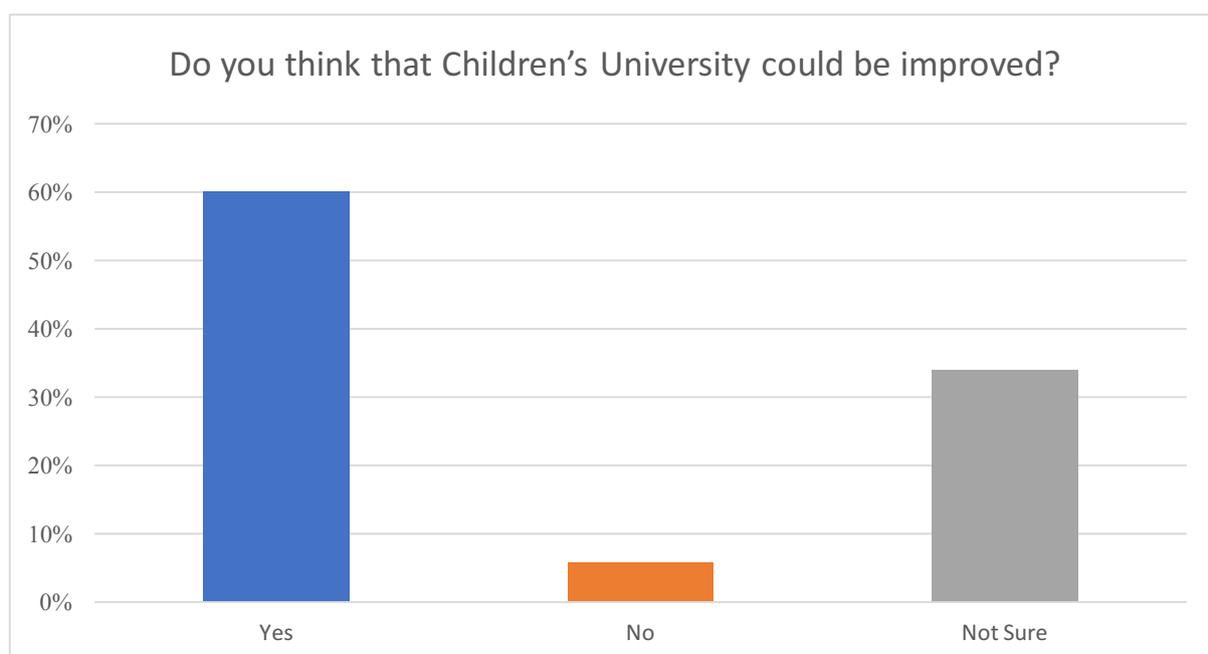
The group analysed the responses to their third question in the same way. The most common responses to this question were:

- Clubs that help with school work
- Clubs that help with stress
- Different ways to get hours
- Easier ways to check hours

The responses garnered from Group 3's second and third questions paint an interesting picture regarding how the respondents felt their experience with Children's University could be improved. Responses seem to allude to a want for more variety in activities, including more adventurous, non-traditional physical activities such as trampolining, climbing, and laser quest. Similarly, the ways in which students are able to collect and check their hours was raised as an area for improvement, suggesting that Children's University may wish to consider



changes to their model of implementing the programme itself. The suggestion of career explanations by those with 'interesting' jobs is also a thought-provoking answer, perhaps suggesting that Children's University may find success in implementing career workshops where children can experience jobs and careers they may normally not be exposed to. This is a particularly pertinent idea given the government's recent Social Mobility action plan and its recognition of the need to expose disadvantaged children to careers outside of their immediate consideration and aspiration. Perhaps most importantly, though, Group 3's research also raised the concern of stress and accessibility, with respondents highlighting a need for activities that enabled participation for those with disabilities, and that helped with the reduction of school-related stress. Disability access and youth mental health are both current and pertinent issues in contemporary society and, having been raised as areas for improvement, must be considered a priority by Children's University and could perhaps be considered alongside the request for more variety.





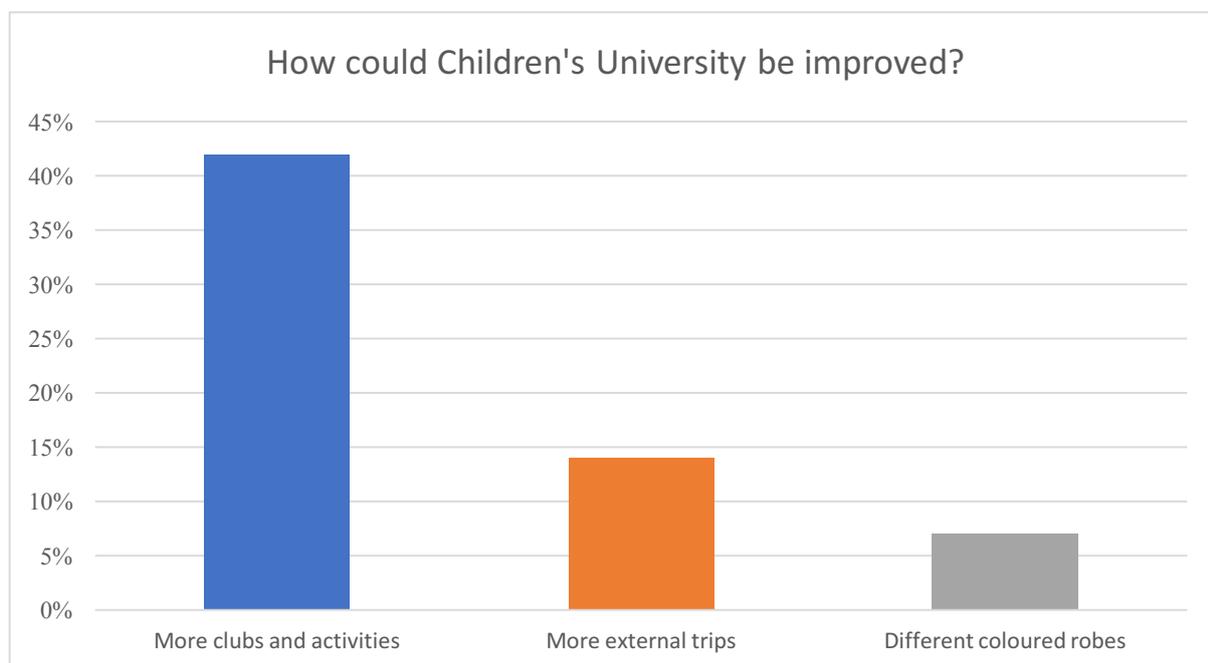
YRE Group 4 – Clifton Primary School

Group 4's research also sought to identify ways in which Children's University could improve its programme, activities, and clubs. Conducted by pupils at Clifton Primary School, Group 4 asked the research question, how could Children's University be improved so that more children can benefit? Opting to conduct their research using a questionnaire, Group 4 asked a total of 14 Year 6 students what they liked most and least about their experience of Children's University. Regarding the respondents' favourite aspect of Children's University, the most popular answer was graduation ceremonies, with 10 (71%) participants answering this way. This was followed by a total of 4 (29%) respondents answering that the clubs and activities themselves were their favourite aspect. In terms of the children's least favourite part of their participation in Children's University, 4 (29%) respondents stated that they disliked the hats worn at graduations and 1 (7%) answered that they felt nervous when receiving their certificate. The remaining respondents left this question blank or responded with 'nothing'.

When asked to provide ways in which Children's University could improve, Group 4's participants predominantly responded with 'more clubs', with a total of 6 (42%) answering this way. Remaining answers included a want for more external trips (14%), and a suggestion for different coloured graduation robes depending on which award was being received (7%). Group 4's research offers an interesting insight into how Children's University participants believe that their experience with activities and clubs could be improved. Similar to Group 3's research in Colmore Junior School, the Clifton Primary students appeared keen to have a wider variety of clubs and activities, including more external trips. Specifically, Group 4's respondents suggested a swimming club, art club, basketball club, and a running club that wasn't exclusively for girls, again raising the issue of inclusivity and variety. Regarding unpopular aspects of Children's University, Group 4's research highlighted a dislike for graduation hats. Although undoubtedly a point for consideration, it is gratifying to see that the children were not highlighting more significant aspects of Children's University as areas



for concern and improvement. Having highlighted positive attitudes towards graduation ceremonies, in offering areas for improvement, the group at Clifton Primary have again reiterated Children's University's success in offering a rewarding experience, suggesting that the goal to raise aspiration amongst those often left behind by the education system is being met.





Conclusion

The research conducted by UFA's Young Researchers and Evaluators is undoubtedly insightful, offering many interesting judgements into both the ways in which Children's University is having a positive effect on those experiencing barriers to attainment, and where the organisation could consider implementing improvements and changes.

First, regarding the positive impact that Children's University is having upon participants at Colmore Junior School, there are many elements which show that Children's University is achieving its intended aims and goals. For example, as found by the research conducted by both Groups 1 and 2, it is clear that Children's University is having an impact upon those who undertake the activities and clubs on offer, with as many as 80.95% of respondents agreeing that taking part in Children's University helps them in a positive way. Excitingly, we can see that the ways in which such help is manifesting itself aligns with the organisation's fundamental aim of providing transferable life skills that aid children both in and out of the classroom. This is particularly highlighted by responses to question 4 of both Group 1 and 2's research, which show that Children's University activities are helping children to communicate, appreciate learning, and find new confidence. Not only do these skills help with educational attainment, but are undeniably necessary to ensuring success outside of the classroom too.

Similarly, in researching the specific ways in which Children's University benefits those who participate, Groups 1 and 2 both identified that the variety of clubs and activities enables an introduction to new knowledge and skills that are otherwise unavailable in traditional, classroom based learning. In Group 2's research, one such novel activity was identified in the form of a coding club; an exciting activity for students to get involved with in an increasingly technological world where up to the minute STEM knowledge and skills are not only in demand, but often inaccessible via mainstream education.



However, as positive and reassuring as much of the feedback from UFA's programme was, the YRE project also identified a number of areas where Children's University should strive to improve. In Group 3 and 4's research, these areas were identified and addressed, with respondents asked to offer suggestions regarding both their least and most preferable aspects of CU, and how Children's University could specifically improve upon the provision of activities.

Across both groups' research, common themes regarding potential improvements for Children's University to implement included the provision of activities that address mental healthcare, such as yoga and meditation, and better accessibility for those with disabilities. Interestingly, respondents also suggested that Children's University needs to offer a wider variety of activities. Despite positive feedback from two YRE groups including praise for the variety of activities available, this recommendation for improvement suggests that there is still much to be done in terms of ensuring that Children's University offers a range of activities that suit multiple interests and abilities, and offer new forms of knowledge and skills. These suggestions of better access for disabled students and more attention for mental health also allude to pertinent and contemporary issues affecting wider society. To ensure Children's University remains up-to-date and viable, issues such as these must be addressed, and although positive responses to UFA's research show that activities do contribute to the relief of stress and anxiety amongst school children, the suggestion remains that this is an aspect that needs to be addressed more thoroughly.

Group 4 did, however, identify how Children's University graduations were a popular feature for students. Aligning with our belief that these ceremonies help to inspire students and instil a sense of achievement, reward, and aspiration, this feedback is a positive confirmation of one of our most unique and exciting features.

In summary, this report has sought to outline the evaluation of Children's University undertaken by UFA Young Researchers and Evaluators in Colmore Junior and Clifton Primary

Children's University



school. An exciting partnership, UFA's project has not only offered an in-depth insight into the efficacy of our organisation from the perspective of our beneficiaries, but has done so in a way that simultaneously offers its own participants a learning experience that aligns with our fundamental aim of offering young people valuable educational opportunities that go beyond those of the traditional classroom environment.