

# The State of The Nation: In summary

**Evidence and impact of the  
importance of learning beyond the  
classroom in 2021**



**An analysis of learning beyond the classroom participation and  
provision using data collected between May 2019 and May 2021  
by Children's University.**

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**children's**<sup>®</sup>  
U N I V E R S I T Y

# In summary

## Children's University...

Children's University encourages, tracks, and celebrates learning beyond the classroom. With children spending just 9% of their waking life inside a classroom by the time they turn 18, we know that the remaining 91% of time holds unlimited potential for life-changing experiences, skills development, and social mobility.

## Learning beyond the classroom...

"Learning beyond the classroom" is the term we use to describe participation in any structured learning activities outside of formal curriculum time. This is inclusive of school-based enrichment and extra-curricular activities, as well as those that take place outside of schools and run by organisations and individuals with no links to formal education.

## Gathering data...

In May 2019, after years of successfully delivering our programme using time-honoured paper-based systems, we launched *Children's University Online* (CUO). We have since spent two years gathering information directly from users of CUO in order to get a real-time picture of participation and provision in the space beyond the classroom. No other organisation is doing this.

## A microcosm of the national picture...

This report uses CUO's digital microcosm of students and activities to paint a representative picture of learning participation and provision beyond the classroom today. What we know is based on data from:



**22,000+ children**



**900 schools**



**80+ local education authority areas**



**51,000+ hours of learning beyond the classroom**



**8,000+ activities, validated, categorised and profiled according to skills**

# Key messages

## **Learning beyond the classroom needs a joined-up approach**

Learning outside the formal curriculum can have a life-changing impact for those that participate. If society is to maximise this impact, collective responsibility is needed. Traditional extra-curricular activities fall under the remit of schools and the Department for Education, whereas public learning falls to any number of organisations. This needs pulling together.

## **Tackling this needs to be cross-party and cross-departmental**

The Department for Education need to work alongside the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Both need to work with business and community leaders and Local Government. The impact that structured learning beyond the classroom can have on individuals and society is huge. It needs to go beyond the whims of changing governments and rotating Secretaries of State.

## **Children's University offers a unique way to capture data**

Children's University Online (CUO) is the platform that has captured the picture of learning that this report shows. It records and validates a variety of activities for all kinds of providers, both inside and outside of schools, and categorises them and tags them with associated skills and careers links. It also enables children to record their participation. We want this information to inform an improvement of provision and access for all children.

## **No one else is doing this**

There are many great organisations working in this space, but none are as broad reaching as Children's University. With our activity data and our tracking of participation, we are in a unique position to capture real-time pictures of both participation and provision across all kinds of learning and locations.

## **We always want to work with new partners**

Children's University offers very few activities itself. What we do is validate existing provision and offer a framework that ties it together for participants and enables consistent reporting for schools and local partners. We cannot, and do not want to, work in isolation – we want to work with as many partners as possible who are committed to improving chances for children and young people. From small local providers, to new national partnerships with far-reaching organisations. [Get in touch.](#)

## **We want this report to inform an improvement for children**

What opportunities do our results highlight? What new ways of working could be introduced to address cold spots? What new partnerships could improve access and provision? How can you support and improve provision of opportunities for children and young people and help us remove barriers of access?

## **Celebration is key!**

Recognising children's efforts is always important, and we are proud to be sharing a detailed picture of participation that is categorised and broken down by skills and careers engagement. However it is important that we don't get lost in this data. Children's engagement with any learning beyond the classroom is to be celebrated. While current discourse is focused on 'lost learning' and 'education catch up', this is important to remember now more than ever.

# Recommendations

**As a charity that exists to support education beyond the classroom, it should be a given that we fully back and support recent calls for more funding for extra-curricular activities and enrichment provision. However, we feel it is important to add to these calls by making practical recommendations based on the content of this report. Primarily, we want to focus on how provision and participation data can clearly demonstrate the value that learning beyond the classroom should have as a policy focus in its own right.**



All children must be given the same opportunity and freedom of choice to actively shape their own learning beyond the classroom



Families and carers of the most socially excluded children must be able to access as much quality learning beyond the classroom as those families for whom there are fewer barriers



Schools must be given the tools to monitor pupils' activities beyond the classroom in order to encourage wider participation by **all** children and measure its impact



Schools must be supported to evaluate in-school provision according to categories of learning, skills development and accessibility by **all** pupils



Secondary schools must be supported to use the Skills Builder Framework to enable pupils to record and reflect on their own skills development beyond the classroom



Activity providers must be encouraged to register their provision in a standardised way so gaps are identified, opportunities expanded, and impact measured



Further and higher education institutions must be encouraged to broaden their outreach provision and offer more free activities for local children and young people



Businesses must be encouraged to engage with **all** local learners and offer free, career-based activities connected to the local labour market



Local Government must be better funded to harness the power of community to co-develop and co-deliver hyper-local provision of learning beyond the classroom



Greater investment must be directed to organisations that work alongside the formal education system to improve educational and social outcomes

# Recommendations

## **All children must be given the same opportunity and freedom of choice to actively shape their own learning beyond the classroom**

By increasing the activities available to all children and removing any barriers they face, children will be encouraged to access and proactively engage in, their own learning journey beyond the classroom. Additionally, we believe all children should be able to play an active part in recording, reflecting on and measuring the impact of their own participation.

## **Families and carers of the most socially excluded children must be able to access as much quality learning beyond the classroom as those families for whom there are fewer barriers**

Almost 40% of activities are inaccessible to children from low-income families due to associated costs and only 5% of participation in Children's University activities are those linked to family learning. More should be done to reduce inequalities in participation, including encouraging activity providers to make activities more accessible to children from socially excluded communities, and subsidising family learning opportunities.

## **Schools must be given the tools to monitor pupils' activities beyond the classroom in order to encourage wider participation by all children and measure its impact**

With children only spending 9% of their waking life inside a classroom by the time they turn 18, schools should be supported to monitor what children do in the remaining 91%. Monitoring not only enables measurement of impact, celebration of achievement and encourages greater participation, but also highlights inequalities and gaps in access. This will enable existing provision to be harnessed and expanded and new provision developed.

## **Schools must be supported to evaluate in-school provision according to categories of learning, skills development and accessibility by all pupils**

For the most socially excluded children, schools offer the only chance to engage in learning beyond the classroom. In order to ensure these children can access as great a range of activities as their peers, schools should be encouraged to audit and evaluate their in-school extra-curricular provision. While many schools offer a great quantity of activities, choice can be inadvertently limited by an over reliance on categories that traditionally easily lend themselves to 'beyond the classroom', such as sports.

# Recommendations

## **Secondary schools must be supported to use the Skills Builder Framework to enable pupils to record and reflect on their own skills development beyond the classroom**

Recent research, funded by Nesta and supported by the University of Sussex, shows a direct link between participation in Children's University and the use and improvement of essential skills in line with the Skills Builder Framework for those aged 11+. Running Children's University in secondary schools not only supports transition from primary to secondary, but also enables pupils to record and reflect on their development, encouraging agency in determining their future skills and work readiness.

## **Activity providers must be encouraged to register their provision in a standardised way so gaps are identified, opportunities expanded, and impact measured**

For example, the Children's University validation process associates varied activities with a standardised set of category and skill tags, offering a uniform way of comparing and measuring impact. Alongside the National Youth Agency's National Youth Sector Census, this is one of the few ways that thematically diverse provision can be recorded, harnessed, and expanded, as per the NAHT's seven pillars of educational recovery.

## **Further and higher education institutions must be encouraged to broaden their outreach provision and offer more free activities for local children and young people**

Only 5% of activities currently validated by Children's University involve interactions with FE/HE environments, students, or staff, despite these institutions being best resourced and staffed for developing a love of learning. Broadening provision and offering opportunities for those at a younger age will enable increased visibility of FE/HE to those most socially excluded, support the Government's National Careers Strategy, and improve access to and success in tertiary education.

## **Businesses must be encouraged to engage with all local learners and offer free, career-based activities connected to the local labour market**

Every community should take responsibility for supporting the education of the children within it; formal schooling does not work in isolation. In order to ensure all children have the full breadth of opportunity and choice that they need in order to develop locally-relevant skills and build experiences, businesses should be supported to develop activities for local children and engage with schools in their community.

# Recommendations

## **Local Government must be better funded to harness the power of community to co-develop and co-deliver hyper-local provision of learning beyond the classroom**

Programmes like ours offer a framework for ‘joining the dots’ between school, home, and local community and encourage social action, citizenship, engagement with community institutions and the development of learning around local assets. Funding should be increased to ensure that more provision is locally-created, locally-led, and local asset-based. The impact of this on local people should be measured and future provision developed from demonstrable evidence of what works.

## **Greater investment must be directed to organisations that work alongside the formal education system to improve educational and social outcomes**

Our education system is disproportionately focussed on what goes on within the classroom and outcomes that can be easily measured. In reality, what a child does beyond the classroom actually holds the most potential for making a positive impact on their life, yet policy, system reform and funding never reflects this. Organisations like Children’s University measure outcomes outside the classroom and are proven to improve engagement with learning back in it, using a framework for recording participation and provision. Organisations like ours are small charities with little resource and are reliant on charitable funding, yet the data we record and the impact we have – as this report shows – is very real and far reaching. By investing in these organisations, sound data could be constantly fed back into government and used as a basis for long-term planning and levelling up.

## **What do you think?**

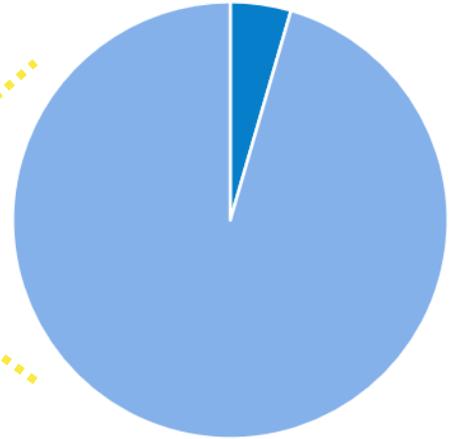


@CU\_Trust  
#CUStateoftheNation

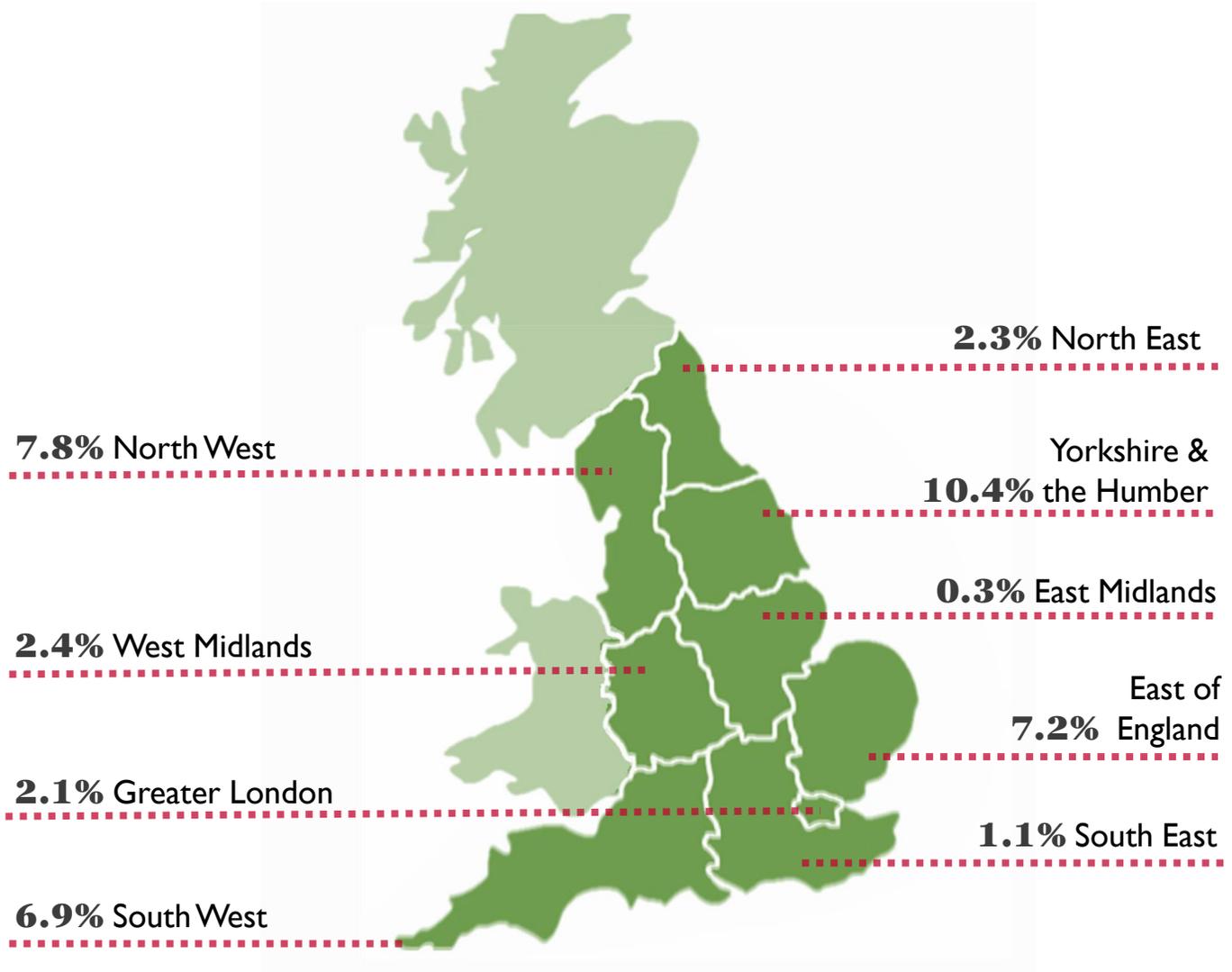
# Children's University and our reach

**We have 49 partners running Children's University in 81 Local Education Authority Areas**

**We work in over 900 schools. This is only 4.5% of the state primary and secondary schools in England**



**Our reach into the 9 different regions is as follows:**

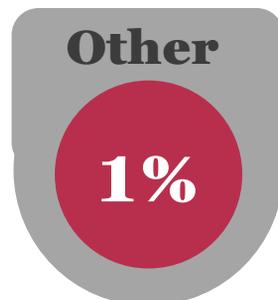
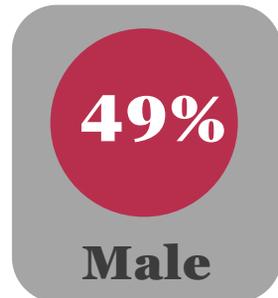
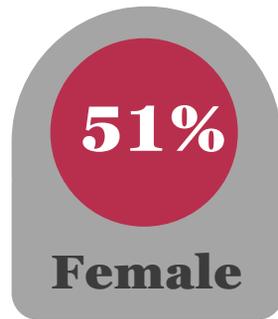
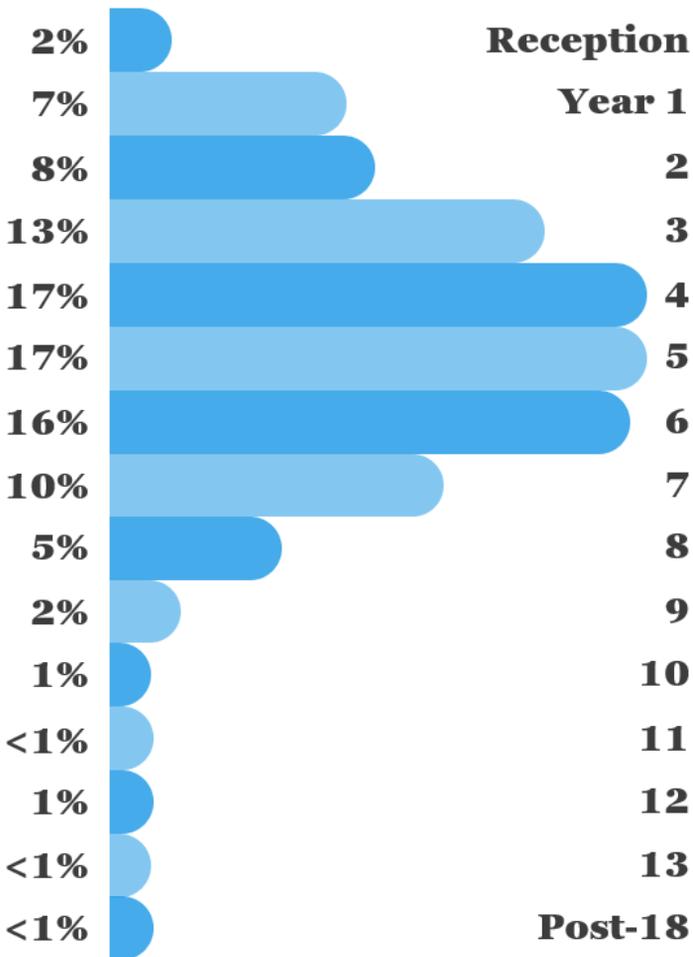


This is Children's University's presence in each region as a percentage of the total of state primary and secondary schools



# Participants

22,959 children from 900 schools have user accounts on CUO. It is their data that informs this report.\*



\* Online account numbers accurate as of May 2021. Children's University typically distributes passports and certificates for over 110,000 participants each year. Our aim is for all of these to become users of CUO.

# Provision of activities

**Children's University validates activities from all manner of providers; from major national partners to local one-person trainers. This is what our provision currently looks like.**



**6,355 activities**

**As of May 2021, 6,355 activities were validated and available to children. There have been an additional 1,922 activities that have since passed or closed (e.g. seasonal activities or short term provision). In full there have been 8,277 activities that children have been able to choose from.**

**61% of our validated activities are free. 39% have associated costs.**

**61%**

**39%**

**65% of our activities are publicly accessible by children locally and nationally. 35% are restricted to pupils of our partner schools.**

**65%**

**35%**

## Gatsby Benchmarks

Our activities are tagged with engagement information in line with the Gatsby Benchmarks 4, 5, 6 and 7 to support best practice careers guidance.

**22%**

demonstrate a link between learning and a career pathway

**9%**

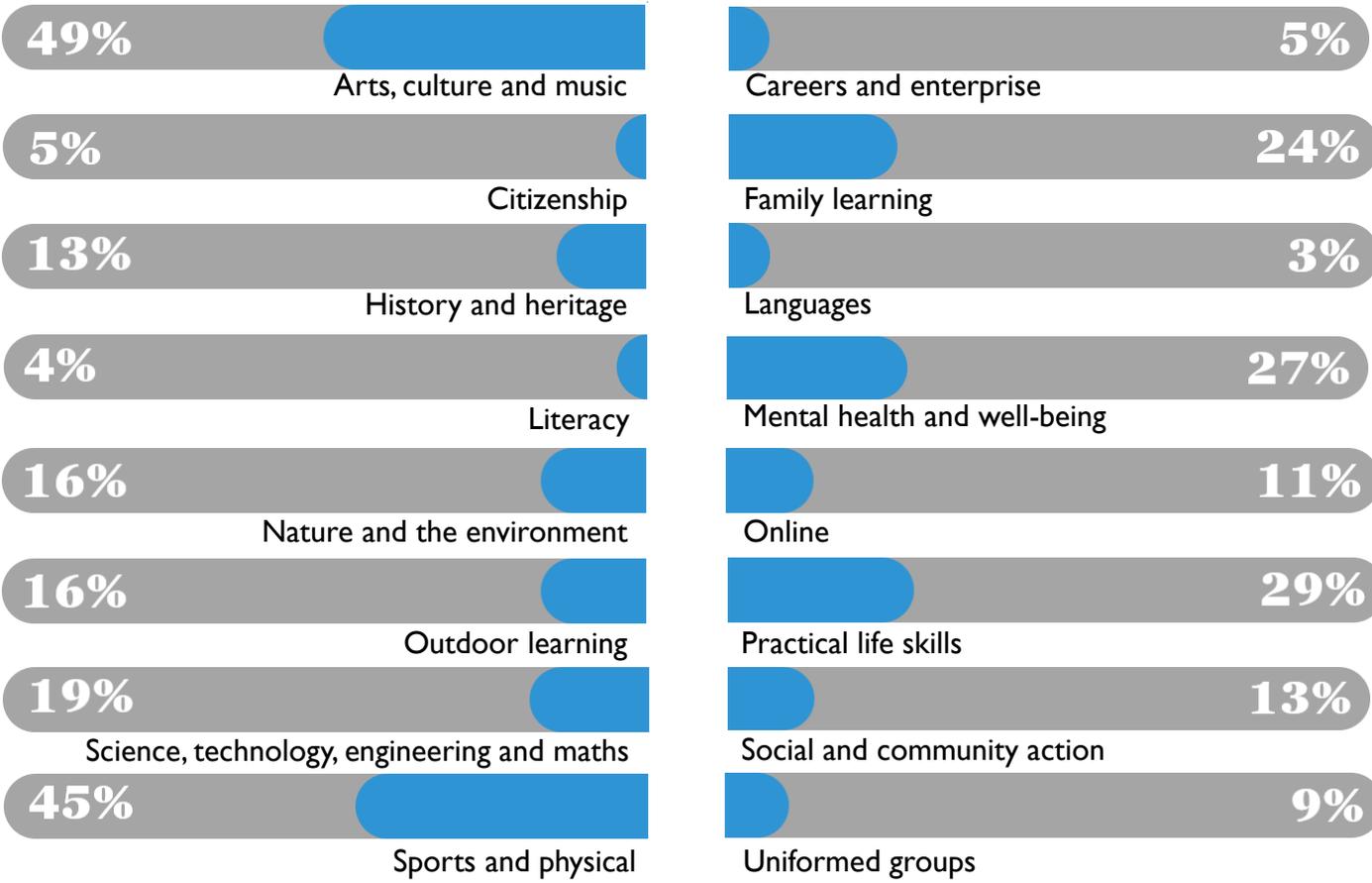
interaction with employers or a professional environment

**5%**

interaction with FE/HE environments, students or staff

# Provision of activities

All activities are tagged with up to four thematic categories of learning. Here is a breakdown of activities tagged by category.



All activities are tagged with up to three of the Skills Builder skills. Here is a breakdown of activities tagged by skills.



# Participation



**51,300 hours**

**Since launching CUO in May 2019, users have recorded participation in 51,300 hours of validated learning beyond the classroom.**

**We can see how this breaks down by thematic category and Skills Builder skill.**

**35%**

Arts, culture and music

**7%**

Citizenship

**8%**

History and heritage

**2%**

Literacy

**18%**

Nature and the environment

**19%**

Outdoor learning

**18%**

Science, technology, engineering and maths

**42%**

Sports and physical

**52%**

Listening

**31%**

Problem solving

**28%**

Staying positive

**17%**

Leadership

**8%**

Careers and enterprise

**17%**

Family learning

**5%**

Languages

**28%**

Mental health and well-being

**11%**

Online

**34%**

Practical life skills

**16%**

Social and community action

**9%**

Uniformed groups

**24%**

Speaking

**40%**

Creativity

**39%**

Aiming high

**51%**

Teamwork