



Learning Beyond the Classroom: The State of the Nation 2024

**A summary of data which examines the impact
and importance of learning beyond the
classroom in modern Britain**



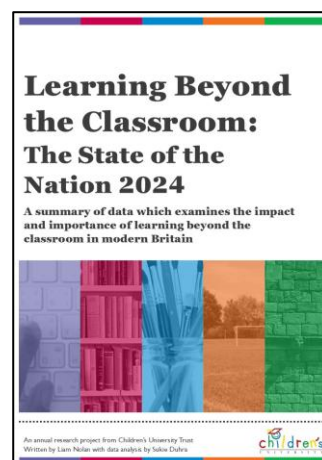
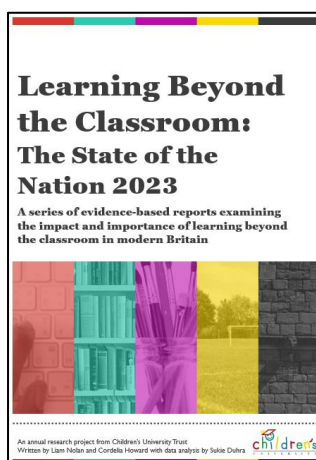
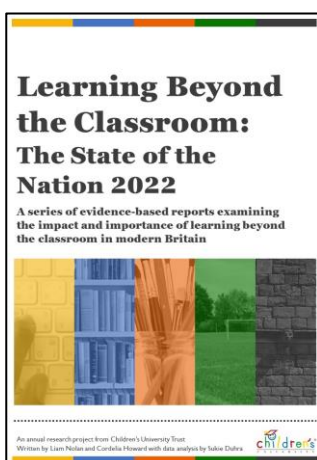
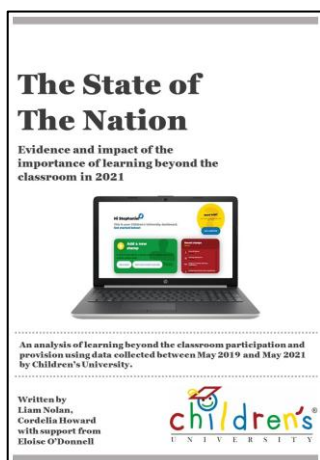
An annual research project from Children's University Trust
Written by Liam Nolan with data analysis by Sukie Duhra



About these reports

Children's University Trust's State of the Nation reports are the culmination of an annual research project looking at everything we know about learning beyond the classroom in modern Britain. They are 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 our 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.

Since 2021 our State of the Nation Reports have offered up an analysis of over 1.5 million hours of participation in learning beyond the classroom.



Thank you for reading



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childrensuniversity.co.uk/stateofthenation

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Foreword: Sonjia Peers

CEO, Children's University Trust



“If you want to know what children are doing beyond the classroom, what they have access to, and the skills and interests that are being developed along the way, then look no further.”

As someone deeply committed to enhancing the life chances and opportunities for children and young people, especially those who may not have access to such opportunities otherwise, it is truly a highlight of my year to write the foreword for a report that clearly demonstrates such meaningful impact. At Children's University, we focus on encouraging, tracking, and celebrating the involvement of children and young people in a diverse range of activities and opportunities beyond the classroom. Through our programs, we help broaden horizons, build confidence, and foster a love for learning, all of which enable children to explore their interests, uncover new talents, and develop the skills they need to succeed.

This report is informed by data from more than 106,000 children, who together recorded more than half a million hours of participation in activities. If you want to know what children are doing beyond the classroom, what they have access to, and the skills and interests that are being developed along the way, then look no further.

However, like many organisations, this past year has presented significant challenges. Through conversations with our members, it's clear that both they and the schools they support continue to feel the effects of financial pressures and ongoing changes within their sectors. Similarly, here at the Trust, we've faced familiar hurdles that many small charities encounter in today's climate. With a new government and Secretary of State for Education, we remain hopeful that stability will be on the horizon for all of us in the future.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to the team at the Trust, as well as the dedicated, knowledgeable, and hardworking local Children's University managers, whose efforts have made such a significant impact possible. Getting to know our network of members and understanding the diverse local contexts in which our programs operate has been a fascinating journey, both professionally and personally. Without their dedication, none of this would be achievable.

What you will find in the following pages is not data for the sake of data. We aim to inform, drive change, and improve opportunities for children and young people in the world beyond the classroom. Whether you work in education, are a parent or carer, or provide opportunities for children; whoever you are. I invite you to get in touch and join us in realising our vision of a world where every child has equal opportunity to unlock their full potential through learning beyond the classroom.

In summary: Key findings

There needs to be greater variety in the types of opportunities available for children and young people beyond the classroom

Sports and arts activities dominate the space beyond the classroom. While these types of activities are hugely important and this success needs celebrating, there is clearly need for funding and focus to go towards other types of activities. Particularly those focused on languages, history and heritage, and careers and enterprise.

Children are reliant on schools to offer informal learning

Our findings show that while a wide variety of organisations run activities and opportunities for children beyond the classroom (51% of our validated activities take place outside of schools), the majority of participation (68% of it) still happens within schools. Schools need to be funded and supported to recognise this demand.

Children are reliant on free activities to engage with learning beyond the classroom

Even though a significant percentage of activities available for children (79%) are free-of-charge, the cost of some activities is still a barrier. The majority of participation (81%) in learning beyond the classroom is only possible when there is no associated cost to take part.

The space beyond the classroom is undoubtedly a place to develop essential skills

Children of all ages have repeatedly told us that they are developing and improving their essential skills through taking part in Children's University. We will continue to work with Skills Builder and be a vocal champion for the impact that learning beyond the classroom has on skills development.

The Children's University programme is particularly good for engaging pupils eligible for Free School Meals

At a school level, we reach more children and young people who are FSM-eligible than the national average. We are proud of this, yet we know we need to do more to meet the needs of children from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Children tell us that taking part in Children's University is good for physical and mental health

More than half of our participants tell us that they are more physically active and their physical and mental health has improved due to their engagement with our programme.

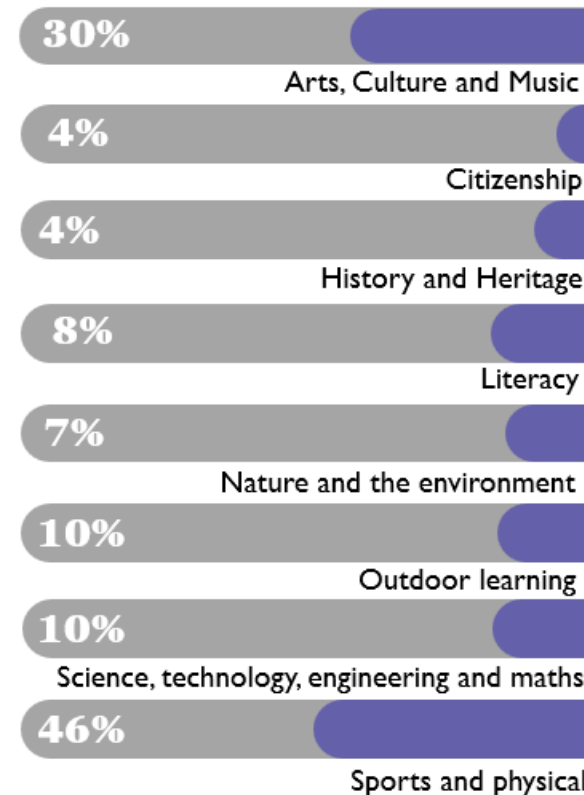
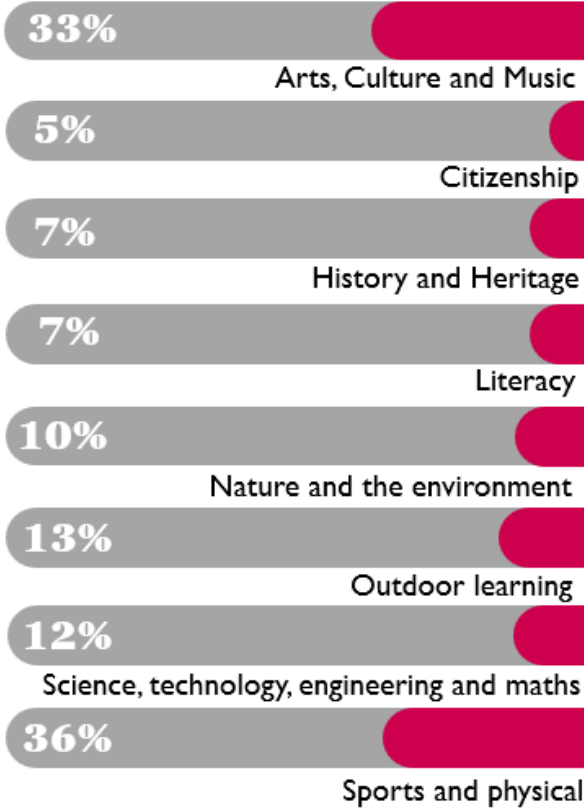
Learning beyond the classroom: Provision and Participation



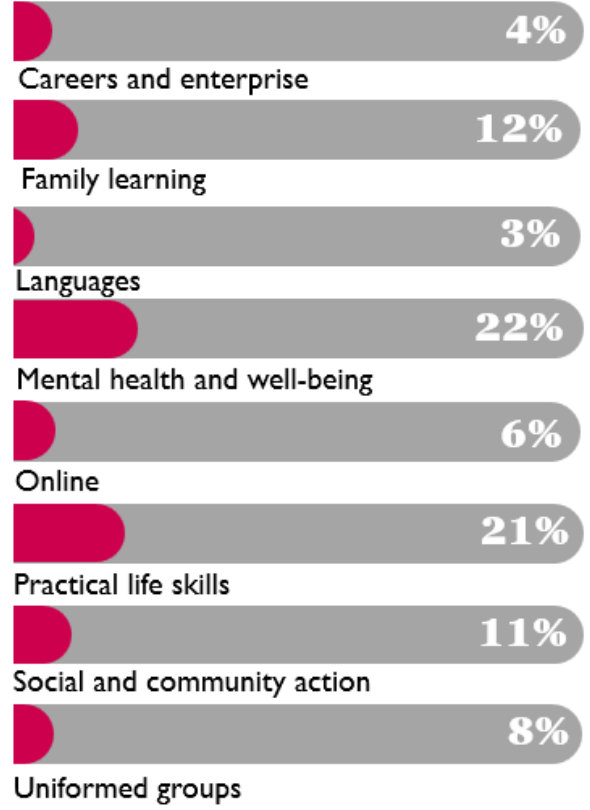
**A profile of the activities available for children and young people
and how they engage with learning beyond the classroom**

Categorisation of activities

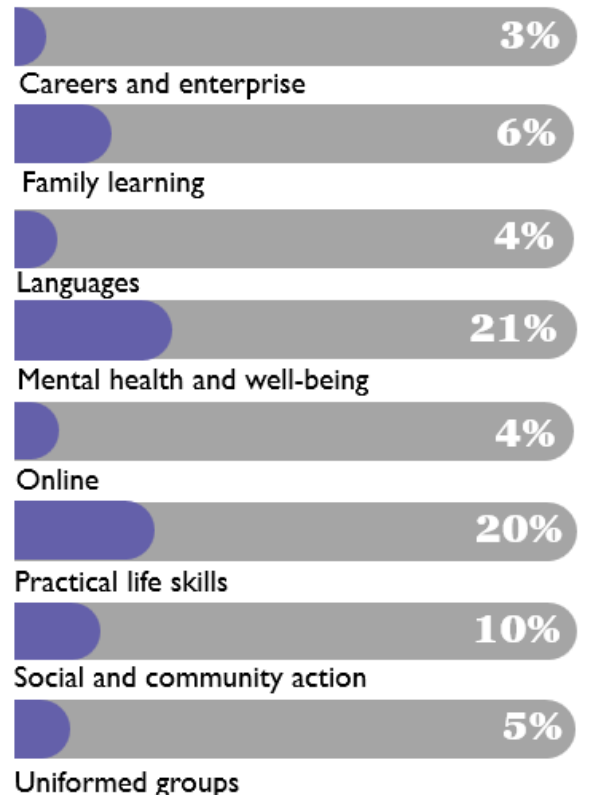
All Children's University-validated activities are tagged with up to four thematic categories of learning. Using this data we can provide a side-by-side look at what activities are available to children (Provision) and how that compares to the activities that children have actually done in the past year (Participation). This data covers the period Sept 2023 – Aug 2024. Here we can see the percentage of activities tagged in each category.



Provision

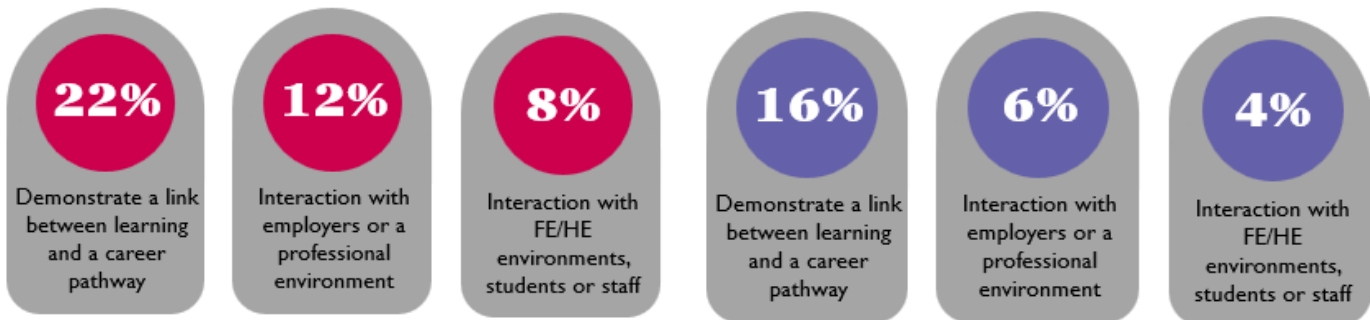
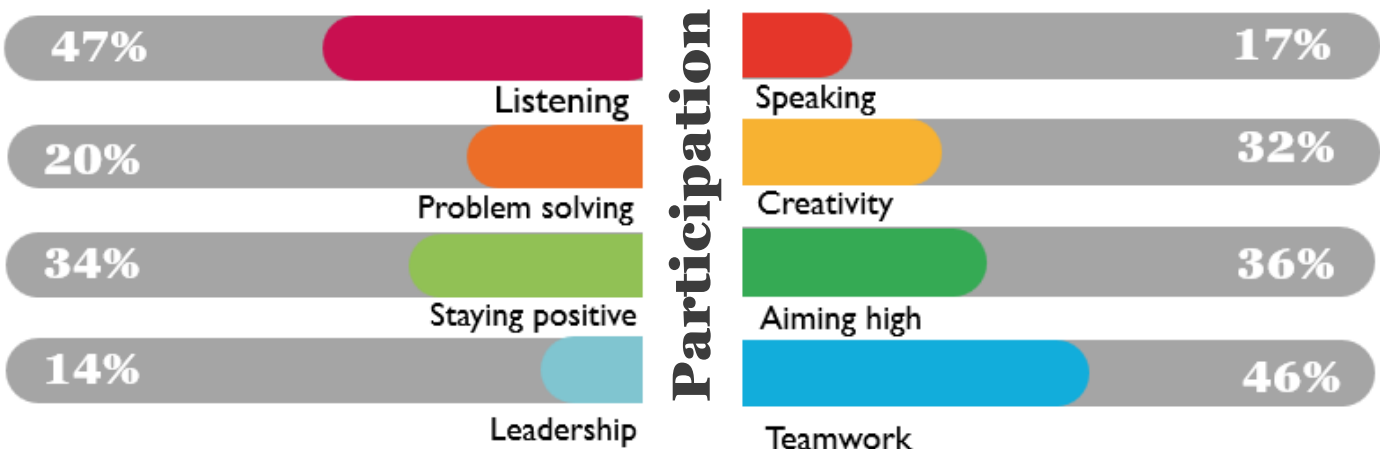
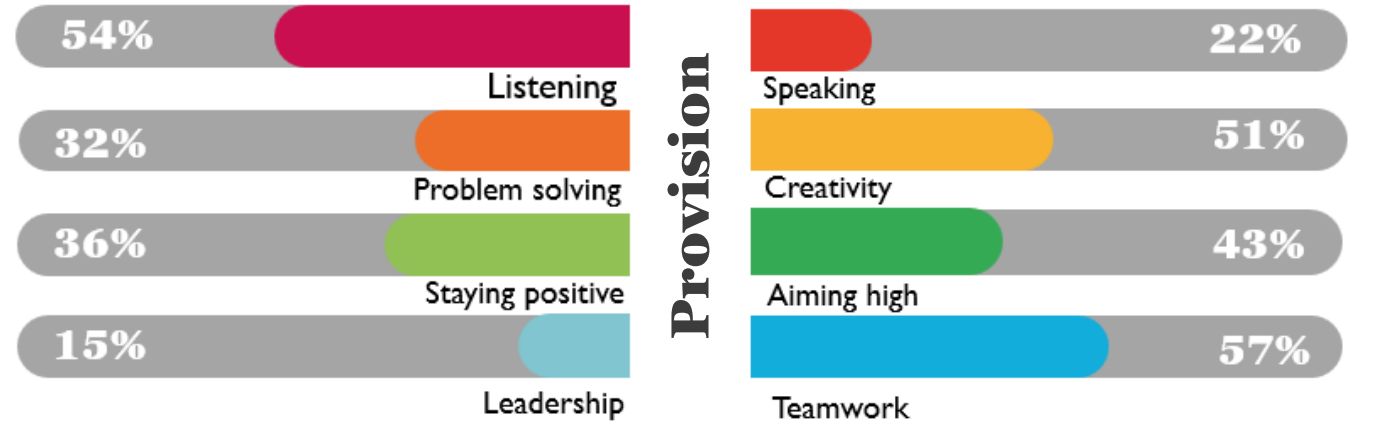


Participation



Activities tagged by skills

Just as all activities are tagged with relevant learning categories, so too are they tagged with up to three skills, in line with the 8 essential skills of the Skills Builder framework. These tags reflect the skills that the activity providers believe best link to those that children will use and develop through participation.



Provision

Participation

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

Location and cost of activities

Children's University validates activities from all manner of providers; from major national partners to local one-person trainers. As well as tagging with learning categories, skills, and Gatsby links, we also record whether activities are free-of-charge or if a charge applies, and whether they take place in schools or elsewhere.

Provision



51%

49%



32%

68%



Participation

Our data shows that children are reliant on schools in order to engage with learning beyond the classroom

A wide variety of organisations run activities and opportunities for children beyond the classroom (51% of our validated activities take place outside of schools) yet the majority of participation (68% of it) still happens within schools.

Provision



79%

21%



81%

19%



Participation

Our data shows that children are heavily reliant on free activities in order to engage with learning beyond the classroom

Even though a significant percentage of activities available for children (79%) are free-of-charge, the cost of some activities is still a barrier. The majority of participation (81%) in learning beyond the classroom is only possible when there is no associated cost to take part. Since last year's report, we have seen an increase in free activities from 61% to 79%, because Children's University Trust has been focussed on signposting to more free activities.

The role that learning beyond the classroom plays in skills development

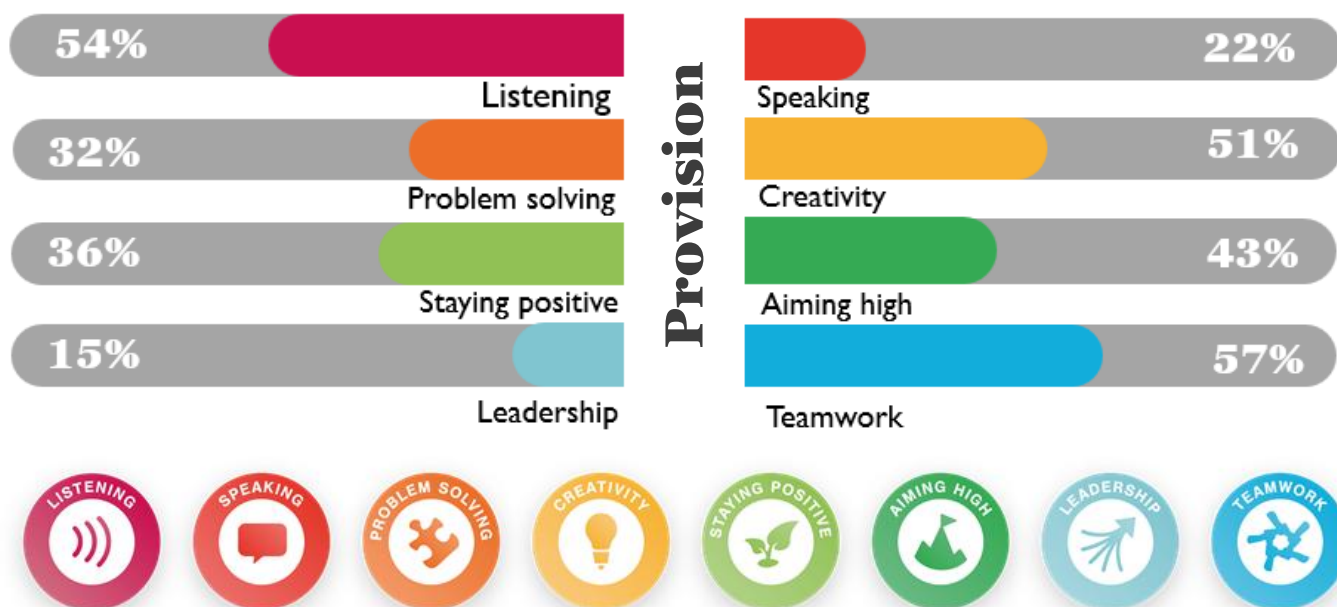


The impact of learning beyond the classroom on the use and development of essential skills

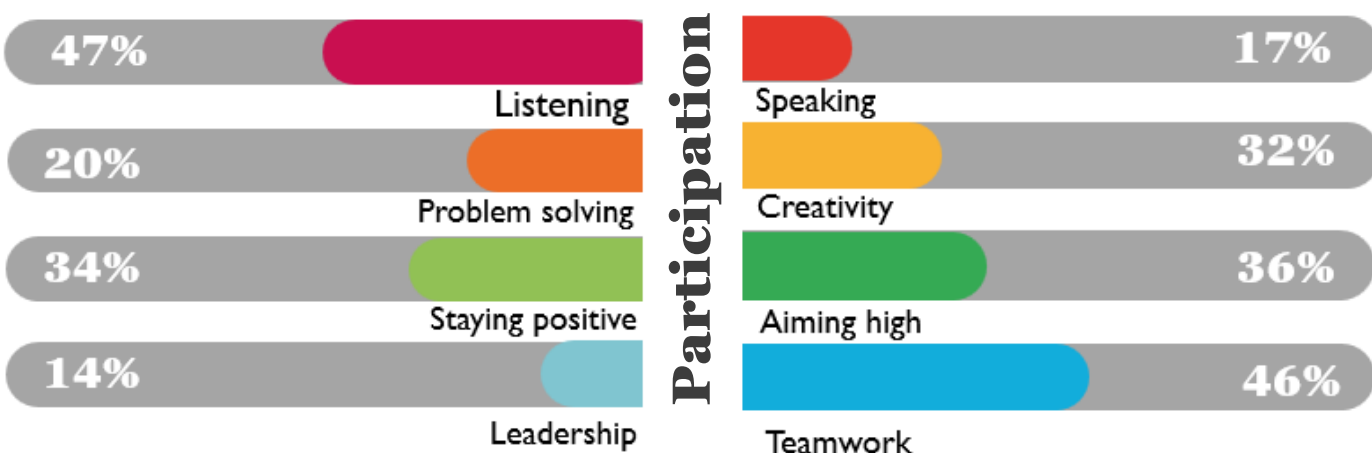


What we know about skills and learning beyond the classroom

Looking at provision, we analysed the profile of 25,309 activities that have been quality assured and registered as part of the Children's University programme. All 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 25,309 activities but reviewing instead the participation levels, we can see how skills are actually used. Analysing over 515,000 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 32% of activities that are available give children and young people an opportunity to develop problem solving skills, only 20% of participation is in these activities. Similarly, creativity is associated with 51% of activities available, yet only makes up 32% of participation.



In short, more needs to be done to break down barriers and encourage participation in these activities. Providers also need to better understand the links between their activities and the essential skills that will be developed through participation.

What children tell us – A five-year picture

Over the past 5 years, more than 35,000 activities have been registered on Children’s University Online and tagged with up to three skills. Between September 2019 and August 2024 children were surveyed directly about the impact that learning beyond the classroom had on their skills use and development. Based on more than 50,200 individual skills reflections, children told us:



Used the skills we said they would use

88 %

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

93 %

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

55 %

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%

54%



90 %

94 %

55 %



84 %

94%

52%



90 %

95 %

57 %



84 %

93 %

51 %



79 %

92 %

54 %



88 %

93 %

54 %



88 %

94 %

58 %

Skills development and age

The above data gives an insight into the relationship between skills use and development in all children over the past 5 years. We have run this survey in different age ranges in the past. 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 %

Children's University: Our reach



**A look at Children's University's digital reach and growth from
2023 to 2024**

About us

“We need to remain focused on capturing the insights and overviews of the learning environment beyond the classroom so that peers, policy makers, and educators of all stripes can call on us as the experts in our field and the holders of valuable live, and growing data sets.”

Children's University is all about encouraging, tracking and celebrating children's participation in learning beyond the classroom. “Learning beyond the classroom” is the term we use to describe participation in any structured learning activity outside of the timetabled curriculum. This is inclusive of school-based enrichment and extra-curricular activities, as well as those that take place outside of schools and are run by organisations and individuals with no links to formal education.

With a long-established paper passport scheme running since 2007, participants collect stamps for taking part in any activities that contain structured learning and take place beyond the formal classroom curriculum. This makes Children's University unique in the breadth of our remit. We work closely with schools, for example, and validate and support extra-curricular provision, but we also work beyond schools. We work with charities, museums and education providers, but also businesses, retailers and more. Similarly, we celebrate all kinds of learning and don't limit ourselves to any one subject area or theme. We use the term ‘thematically agnostic’ to describe our catch-all approach to learning.

In short, Children's University is about recognising that learning takes place anywhere and that learning can take any form. As this report illustrates elsewhere, the impact of this is huge and is why we are committed to sharing all we know.

Our State of the Nation Reports

Since 2019 we have been running a bespoke online platform that works alongside our passport scheme. Children have a safe and secure place to record their participation, see their interests and skills develop, and schools and partners get an insight into the provision and participation levels in their area. Nationally Children's University Trust publishes this report annually with the intent of informing and improving provision.

To date our three annual State of the Nation Reports have offered an analysis and breakdown of over 1,500,000 hours of learning beyond the classroom.

Headline figures

Children's University Online (CUO) gives us the opportunity to collect data that no one else is. The insights that feed into this report come from:



106,283* children

There were 106,283 children who recorded activity on CUO. **This is an increase of 48% from last year's report.**



933 schools

There are 933 schools registered on CUO.



25,309 activities

There are 25,309 activities currently validated and available for children on CUO. **This is an increase of 30% from last year's report.**



515,000 hours**

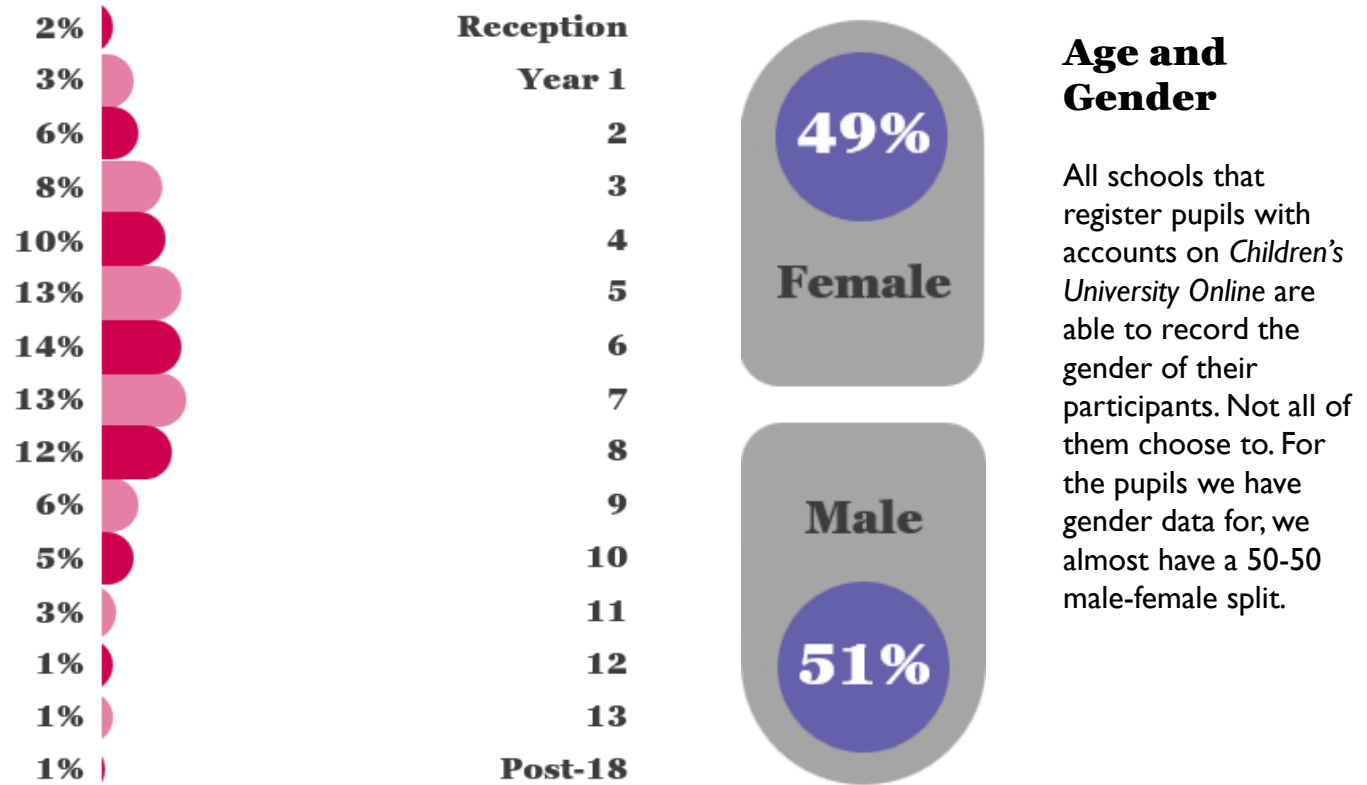
In the past year children have registered 515,000 hours of learning beyond the classroom.

* Online account numbers accurate as of September 2024. In addition to these online users, we have participants not registered online

** Total hours recorded online accurate as of September 2024. In addition to these online hours, our partners not currently using CUO have recorded hours not eligible for full analysis in this report. Our aim is for all of our network of partners to use CUO.

Our participants

106,000+ children from 933 schools have had user accounts on CUO in the past year. This is what we know about them.



Participant profiles extrapolated from school-level data

Ethnicity and Free School Meals

We do not directly collect data on Free School Meal eligibility or ethnic background of participants. However, looking at public Department for Education data, we can see at a school level the variances between Children's University participant levels compared to national averages.

Ethnic minority background



Free School Meals

How participants feel about Children’s University

Children’s University’s Outcomes for Children

“Our work is focused on ensuring that every child that participates in Children’s University feels positively towards these outcomes.”

As an organisation Children’s University has seven strategic desired outcomes for children. All of our work is focused on ensuring that every child that participates in learning beyond the classroom through Children’s University feels positively towards these seven outcomes.

During August 2024, we surveyed participants about these outcomes. Over 600 pupils rated their feelings based on a Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree alongside each of the seven statements. A breakdown of these results is below.

Survey results

“Because of Children’s University...”

I think learning is fun and is something that I want to keep doing



I now think there are lots of new and different ways that I can learn



I feel confident and believe in myself



I have gained lots of different skills



I know that I can choose what I want to do in the future



I feel more prepared to face new challenges



I know that there are people who are proud of me for what I’m achieving



Children's University and mental and physical health and wellbeing

As part of our summer survey in 2024, we asked our respondents additional questions about their mental and physical health.



61% of Children's University participants report that they are more physically active because of Children's University



54% of Children's University participants believe that their physical health has improved because of Children's University



56% of Children's University participants believe that their mental health has improved because of Children's University

Thanks

Children's University Trust introduced CUO as a tool to support our network and to gather data to inform reports such as these. Without the continued use, support and feedback from our network of partners this report would not be possible. Thank you to all existing and former Children's University Managers who contributed in some way.

Thanks to Big Change, EEF, Nesta, SHINE, Garfield Weston Foundation, The Goldsmiths Company Charity and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for funding work that has helped us evidence our impact so robustly. Your insight and faith in us as an organisation are as important to us as your generous financial support.

Thank you to the schools, children and parents who have joined us on our digital journey and whose engagement with learning beyond the classroom has supported our evidence base as well as being fun and rewarding in and of itself.

Thank you to [The Tech Dept](#) for being understanding, talented and patient digital partners in the build, maintenance and ongoing development of CUO.

Thanks to you for reading this. Should you still be here reading this final page, you are almost certainly engaged enough with the same issues as us to play a part in joining our movement. Do get in touch.

Now get in touch



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