



Social Mobility
Commission

An Unequal Playing Field:

Extra-Curricular Activities,
Soft Skills and Social Mobility

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Social Mobility Commission

About the Social Mobility Commission

The Social Mobility Commission is an advisory non-departmental public body established under the Life Chances Act 2010 as modified by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. It has a duty to assess progress in improving social mobility in the UK and to promote social mobility in England.

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FOREWORD

Dame Martina Milburn

Chair, Social Mobility Commission



One of the best bits about childhood is doing the things you enjoy outside the classroom – joining a football team, learning to dance or playing the drums.

Yet our research shows too many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds never get the chance. As a result, they lose out on the benefits – increased confidence which helps social interaction, a real aspiration to go onto higher or further education, more soft skills and a sense of wellbeing and belonging. Playing team sports, doing voluntary work, joining a youth club or singing in a band are also vital in developing networks – which those from affluent backgrounds often have ready-made.

An Unequal Playing Field found that the school you go to, the area where you grow up, and your socioeconomic background largely determine what types of activities are available outside the classroom. There was a direct link between household income and participation for almost all extra-curricular activities which were included in the survey. Children from the poorest households were much less likely to take part in any extra-curricular activity, but particularly music and sport.

As a Commission we want to promote choice, but here we have uncovered barriers which prevent choice. In some places it is a straightforward lack of opportunities. Some activities, common in some areas, are simply not available in others. There are financial barriers too - children from the poorest backgrounds are also often priced out of participation. Sometimes young people do not participate because they just do not know that they can. And perhaps most revealing of all, some young people do not take part in activities because of their perceived exclusivity. They do not think they would fit in. We have a responsibility to change this.

As a start we propose a national extra-curricular bursary scheme for disadvantaged households to help them access a far greater range of activities. We also call for more support to extend voluntary sector initiatives for children from less affluent backgrounds.

Ultimately our report shows that a young person may miss out on some of the most valuable experiences in life – a chance to bond with others, aspire to learn more, and gain the soft skills so important to employers – simply because of their social background and where they grew up. It is time to level the playing field.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The breadth of extra-curricular activities, spanning the musical, artistic, social and sporting domains, are widely considered valuable life experiences that should be open to all young people, regardless of background or where they happen to live. Activities such as being a member of a sports team, learning a musical instrument, or attending a local youth group are thought to be enriching life experiences. Apart from their inherent value, it is often claimed that young people can also develop positive tangible outcomes from these experiences of interacting and working with others through organised extra-curricular activities, which could benefit them in later life.

This report considers the significance of extra-curricular activities within contemporary debates around social mobility. It focusses on secondary aged school children and assesses available evidence on the possible impact of extra-curricular activities across a range of outcomes as well as current gaps in opportunities to participate in different activities. These questions are considered in the context of broader debates around the importance of soft skills within the UK labour market.

We bring together and analyse a range of data from both secondary and primary sources. This includes bringing together previous research, analysis of three

nationally representative secondary data-sets, as well as primary data collected from over 100 young people and parents across four different English localities. These data-sets provide a unique opportunity to understand both national level patterns (quantifying gaps in participation) as well as detailed explanations for what might be driving them (qualifying and explaining barriers to participation). They provide the basis for a comprehensive set of recommendations that are put forward here aimed at expanding opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities. The four key findings from our analysis, and four crucial recommendations for policy and practice, are summarised here.

Extra-curricular activities are important to young people and result in a range of positive outcomes



Opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities are unequally distributed.



Findings from previous research suggest extra-curricular activities are important in developing soft (especially social) skills as well as being associated with a range of other positive outcomes (e.g. achievement, attendance at school). We found from our analysis that extra-curricular activities - specifically music classes and playing a wide range of sports – are important in predicting intentions to remain in education after compulsory schooling. Regardless of these instrumental outcomes, extra-curricular activities were hugely valuable to young people themselves in ways that are not quantifiable. Extra-curricular activities boost young people's confidence to interact socially with others; extend their social networks; and provide them with new skills and abilities. Above all, they offer an important space to have fun and relax away from the pressures of school work. These more qualitative benefits must not be discounted, especially in the context of contemporary challenges around young people's mental health and wellbeing.

Wide parts of life experience gained from extra-curricular activities are unavailable for the most marginalised groups in society. Opportunities to participate are driven by household income, school attended, gender, ethnicity and geographic location. Household income is by far the most important factor driving gaps in participation, with children from the poorest households much less likely to take part in all types of extra-curricular activities, but especially music classes and sport. Opportunities to take part in activities also depend on school attended, with independent schools in particular likely to offer an unparalleled breadth and range of activities compared to state schools. Particular types of activities are also strongly gendered in their participation, with music, dance, art and voluntary work having a higher proportion of females and sports being more male dominated. Participation in different types of activities also differs for ethnic groups, for example, around 4% of British Pakistani youth take music classes, compared to 28% of British Indian, and 20% of White British youth. Sport is the only activity that has a nearly equal rate of participation across different ethnic groups.

Employers in the UK labour market increasingly demand soft skills – and these types of skills (which may be developed via extra-curricular activities) could be an important factor in driving intergenerational social mobility.



There is strong evidence that demand exists for soft skills from employers in the UK labour market. The most common soft skill lacking in the UK labour market is the ability to manage ones' own time and task prioritisation (51% of all 'skill-shortage vacancies' were attributed to this in 2017). In terms of the 'skills gaps' raised by employers, soft skills, such as team working, oral communication and customer handling, are reported just as frequently as gaps in 'job specific and technical skills'. There is evidence of an association between soft skills (which may be developed from extra-curricular activities) and intergenerational social mobility as shown by previous research and new analysis presented here. Our research found a correlation between higher levels of some soft skills (readiness to learn, problem-solving, and planning skills) and upward social mobility defined as an individual having higher educational attainment than their parents. In this context, further work is needed to understand more fully the degree of alignment between the nature of 'soft skills' gained through extra-curricular activities and demanded by employers – for example, whether the 'team work' skills gained through sports reflect the proficiencies in 'team work' required in the UK labour market (as well as different segments within it).

New programmes and initiatives are required to widen opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities



Recommendations are put forward here aimed at levelling the playing field and improving access to a breadth of life experience provided by extra-curricular activities. The four crucial recommendations cover both national-level policy as well as the delivery of activities in practice, and must be taken in the context of severe cuts to public services in recent times (especially to youth clubs), which have created a situation where the possibilities for extra-curricular opportunities are significantly constrained. In developing these recommendations, it is clear that significant investment is required.

1. Introduce a national extra-curricular bursary scheme.
2. Provide funding to develop and extend third-sector initiatives that successfully facilitate access to extra-curricular activities.
3. Increase the organisational capacity of schools to support their extra-curricular provision and improve information on the availability of activities in local areas.
4. Improve data collection and carry out further research into the nature of soft skills developed and deployed across different settings.

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

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- Research aims and context**
 - Research questions**
 - Policy context**
 - Methodology**
 - Secondary data**
 - Qualitative research**
 - Report outline**

Research aims and context

The University of Bath was asked by the Social Mobility Commission to carry out a piece of research addressing extra-curricular participation, soft skills and social mobility in the UK. The Social Mobility Commission originally sought to address the question of whether extra-curricular activities, through the development of soft skills, could drive intergenerational social mobility. It is difficult to directly address this question with any single data-set that contains sufficiently detailed high-quality data. Instead, we bring together a number of primary and secondary data-sets, as well as draw on previous literature, in order to address this research aim.

Our research sought to understand the significance of extra-curricular activities in terms of what impact they may have on young people. In considering the significance of these activities, we also aimed to identify current levels of participation, and any gaps in opportunities to participate according to social class, school attended, gender, ethnicity, and geographic location. The research aimed to place these findings within the broader context of the importance of soft skills in the labour market, and their possible importance for promoting social mobility.

Extra-curricular activities, together with the associated terms 'out-of-school' activities, 'super-curricular'¹ and 'co-curricular' activities, are broad 'catch-all' terms, often

used to represent a multitude of activities across musical, artistic, sporting, social and academic domains. The term 'extra-curricular' activities is used here, defined as the breadth of activities which young people undertake outside of the formal and compulsory lesson time, and spanning each of these domains. The breadth of activities considered here could include private tuition undertaken in young peoples' own time. It might also include clubs related to school subjects, such as science club, or debating society. Our definition is intentionally broad to encompass wide aspects of like experience, and includes sporting (e.g. football, boxing, cricket), musical (e.g. learning an instrument, membership of an orchestra), artistic (e.g. drama, dance, drawing), and social (e.g. youth groups, scouts/girl guides) activities. Both individual activities and team-based activities are taken into account, as well as important distinctions between types of activities within the broad categories of 'sport' and 'music'. For example, attention is given to differences between the variety of sports available and played, as well as the types of musical or artistic activities young people engage in. In distinguishing between different types of activities, we are not advocating some activities are more worthy, rather, we hope to describe the extent to which different groups have the opportunity to take part in a breadth of life experiences.

Research questions

1. How do levels of extra-curricular participation vary across different groups of young people?
2. What might account for any differences in participation between different groups of young people?
3. In what ways might extra-curricular participation, and engagement in particular types of activities, impact on young people?
4. What sorts of soft skills do employers demand in contemporary labour markets?

¹. 'Super-curricular' refers to activities that are directly linked to the scheme of work or syllabus followed by pupils (for example, a theatre trip to watch a play that pupils are currently studying).

Policy context

The question of gaps in extra-curricular participation and levels of provision is important on a number of levels. In terms of the broader concern and policy aim of promoting intergenerational social mobility, gaps in participation between groups could be one factor to consider, especially if non-academic attributes become more important in determining labour market success. It has been argued that, over time, non-academic factors become more important in determining the labour market success of individuals, as the value of credentials decline in the context of crowded graduate labour markets (Brown, 2013). Moreover, engaging in a diverse range of activities might enable young people to craft a particular narrative of the self that enables them to gain an edge over others in the competition for jobs and university places. Lareau (2002) coined the phrase ‘concerted cultivation’ to describe the intensive efforts made by middle class families in fostering the individual talents of their children through organised leisure activities. In this sense, extra-curricular activities form part of the mechanisms by which advantaged groups are able to maintain their advantaged positions, which is likely to become even more important in the future as the graduate population increases, and competition in the labour market intensifies. If extra-curricular activities are important sites for developing important attributes and skill-sets, then it might be that they are seen as one of the possible policy solutions to address social mobility.

Opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities, and the school-based provision of activities, must be considered in the context of the central government programme of austerity, representing severe cuts to public services in recent times. The cuts made as a result of austerity have resulted in closure and reductions of key local services such as youth centres, leisure centres, parks, libraries etc. (Hastings et al., 2015; Fitzgerald and Lupton, 2015; Unison, 2016; Davies, 2019). These are some of the very places where extra-curricular activities are provided, and represent the necessary structures to give young people

the opportunity to take part in activities. It is those young people who are reliant on the public provision of facilities and services who are likely to be hit hardest.

Any consideration of extra-curricular activities must also be seen in light of contemporary financial pressures facing the state education sector. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has begun to publish a series of comprehensive analyses of education spending in the UK (funded by the Nuffield Foundation). Their most recent report showed that total school spending per pupil has fallen by 8% in real terms between 2009-10 and 2017-18, which was largely owing to a 55% fall in local authority spending on services, as well as cuts of over 20% to school-based sixth forms (Belfield et al., 2018). These financial pressures within the state sector must be taken into account when considering the sorts of opportunities open to young people, as well as what teachers and schools can realistically achieve in addressing any gaps in provision and participation.

Social change in the use of public space and society more generally is also important when considering questions about opportunities for young people to engage in extra-curricular activities. In what is often referred to as the ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992), there is a heightened sense of uncertainty and insecurity attached to public spaces in contemporary Britain. Parents may be less inclined to allow their children to play as freely in the streets as they once did, owing to parental anxieties about children’s safety in outdoor public spaces (Valentine and McKendrick, 1997). Given this societal shift in parental perceptions of public spaces, it is likely that the need and demand for organised (and institutionalised) clubs and societies, perceived to offer a ‘safe space’ for children, will have also risen. Given that these organised forms of provision will often carry financial cost, this raises important questions of equity and social justice as well as participation in public life, if only those children whose parents can afford it are afforded the opportunity to access them.

Methodology

A mixed method approach is used to address the questions posed here, augmenting quantitative data from large-scale surveys and combining this with new qualitative data collected across four geographic locations in England. The first stage involved desk-based research to gather existing available evidence on the significance of extra-curricular activities as well as the importance of ‘soft skills’ in the labour market and for social mobility. Building on this review of literature, in the second stage, three secondary data-sets were used: Understanding Society (a cohort study tracking 40,000 UK households); the Program for International Student Assessment - PISA (an international assessment measuring student achievement and other outcomes); and the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies – PIAAC (an international assessment measuring adult skills and occupations). These data-sets provided an important national-level picture about extra-curricular participation and ‘soft skills’. A third stage of our research involved primary data collection carried out across four different localities in England (including focus groups with parents and young people). These different quantitative and qualitative data-sets are described further below, with the process of analysis described alongside the presentation of findings (chapters 2 and 3).

Secondary data

This section provides a detailed account of the secondary data sources drawn on here (Understanding Society, PISA, and PIAAC), including issues around design of the surveys, sampling and data collection, as well as specific detail on our variables of interest. In carrying out the statistical analyses of these data-sets, we took into consideration their complex sample (Understanding Society, PISA and PIAAC) and their complex assessment design (PIAAC and PISA)². Details about the sample and assessment design of the studies can be found in their respective technical manuals (McFall, 2012; Mohadjer,

Krenzke, & Van de Kerhove, 2013; OECD, 2017b). A detailed overview of each data-set is provided below. Further detail on the steps taken in the process of statistical analysis of these data-sets are provided alongside the findings (sections 2 and 3).

Understanding Society

Understanding Society is a longitudinal study which tracks various social, economic & behavioural aspects, along with general well-being of members of households in the UK. It is an ensemble of data pertaining to various social and economic changes over a period of time. The survey targets around 40,000 households following the same sample each year from 2009 onwards.

This sample is arrived by stratified & systematic random sampling. The general population is divided into 12 strata (geographically) including Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and then a sample is selected using systematic random sampling technique after accounting for probability proportional to size (residential addresses in each sector). Additionally, an ethnic minority boost sample (1000 adults from minority groups) is added to the sample. Also, subsequently, for the sake of more comprehensive analysis, former consenting members from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and Immigrant & Ethnic minority boost sample were added during wave 2 wave 6 respectively.

The survey involved face to face interviews and self-completion questionnaires. There was an adult questionnaire for those aged over 16 and a youth questionnaire for those in the household between 10-15 years old. The survey of particular interest to this study is the self-completion questionnaire given to young people (aged between 10-15 years) every year in the sampled households. This survey intends to capture the activities of youth outside school - his/her online & physical activity, leisure habits, type of sports, frequency of various activities and participation levels.

² For example, we used the sampling weights included in the datasets in all of our estimations to correct unequal sample selection probabilities and to frame coverage errors and nonresponses. Where appropriate, we simultaneously used all the available plausible values to account for imputation uncertainty.

The data on extra-curricular activities (such as sports, music and dance, museum and library visits etc.) and out of school activities (such as tuition, household work, and leisure activities etc.) is available from the wave 2 (2010-12), wave 4 (2012-2014), wave 6 (2014-16) and wave 8 (2016-18) surveys. There is a variance in the sample size across the waves due to the changing number of children falling between the age groups of 10 and 15 who qualify for the youth survey. The sample sizes for the four waves of interest to this study are estimated to be around 5020 (wave 2), 4050 (wave 4) and 3470 (wave 6) and 3270 (wave 8).

PISA and PIAAC

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international assessment that measures 15-year-old students' reading, mathematics, and science literacy every three years. First conducted in 2000, the major domain of study rotates between reading, mathematics, and science in each cycle. In 2015, PISA also included a measure of general or cross-curricular competencies: collaborative problem solving. According to the OECD, by design, PISA emphasises functional skills that students have acquired as they near the end of compulsory schooling. Pupils and their schools also complete a background questionnaire that enables more detailed analysis of how performance is shaped by pupils' characteristics, perceptions and experiences of school and teaching within and across countries.

Over 70 countries participated in PISA 2015, including all members of the OECD and all four countries within the United Kingdom. The vast majority of UK's participating pupils were born between September 1999 and August 2000, meaning they finished primary school during 2010, and were the last cohort to take the GCSE examinations before they were reformed. PISA uses a two-stage stratified sampling design – first schools are sampled within countries and then students are sampled within schools. In 2015, the UK participated in PISA with 14,157 students in 550 schools.

The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) was developed by the OECD. Twenty-four countries participated in PIAAC in 2012 (Round 1) followed by nine additional countries in 2014 (Round 2), and 6 more countries in 2016 (Round 3). The UK participated in Round 1, with a sample size was 8,892. PIAAC was designed to measure key cognitive and workplace skills needed for individuals to advance in their jobs and participate in society. In each participating country, a representative sample of adults between 16 and 65 years of age was interviewed at home in the language of their country of residence. The standard survey mode was to answer questions on a computer, but for respondents without computer experience there was also the option of a pencil-and-paper interview. The countries used different schemes in drawing their samples, but these were all aligned to known population counts with post-sampling weightings. PIAAC builds on knowledge and experiences gained from previous international adult assessments - the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and the Adult Literacy and Life skills Survey (ALL). PIAAC enhances and expands on these previous assessments' frameworks and, at the same time, improves upon their design and methodologies.

Qualitative research

New qualitative data was collected to address how extra-curricular activities are understood by young people themselves. The work involved gathering young people's perspectives on their experiences of extra-curricular activities, how they got involved, any activities they would like to do, barriers to involvement as well as any possible perceived benefits. The analyses of this qualitative data were intended to complement the quantitative analysis of secondary data-sets, in order to examine both the experiences of participation in different activities as well as to identify any possible explanations for the quantitative findings.

The qualitative data collection consisted of focus groups with secondary aged young people (aged 11-16), as well as parents, across four schools based within different areas of England. Focus groups were considered an effective means of accessing the shared understandings and experiences concerning extra-curricular activities. Unlike individual interviews, carrying out focus groups on topics which participants have

shared experiences of, provides access to important group-based feelings, perceptions and opinions. In addition to the pupil focus groups, it was considered important to capture parental perspectives because parents could be a key influencing group on young peoples' extra-curricular activities, especially given the high cost these often carry, which necessitates parental support.

Figure 1: Information on case study schools

School (pseudonym)	School type and age range	Geographic locality	Proportion eligible for free school meals (FSM)
Coalfields School	Academy school, ages 11 to 16	Post-industrial semi-rural locality, Yorkshire	19%
Metropolis School	Academy school, ages 11 to 18	Urban city locality, southern England	31%
Greenfields School	Academy school, ages 11 to 18	Rural location, southern England	9%
Earl's Court School	Independent school, ages 2 to 19	Urban city locality, southern England	Not recorded

Note: information on case study schools contained here was obtained from the register of schools and colleges in England provided by the UK Government (<https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/>)

In selecting the case study schools, a number of factors were considered, including school type (state/private), geographic locality (urban, rural, post-industrial), and school socio-economic and ethnic composition (figure 1 provides

a summary for each school). It is likely that these factors may well play an important role in mediating the degree of access young people may have to extra-curricular activities, and importantly, different types of activities.

Case study schools

Earl's Court School is an independent day and boarding school situated in an affluent suburb of a city in southern England. The area is among the UK's 30% least deprived, and the majority of the population within the area where the school is situated are white British. The school itself does not publish data about the proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals.

Metropolis School (academy-sponsored) is situated in an inner-city area within southern England. Just over a third (31%) of pupils here receive free school meals, and the local area in which the school is situated is among the 10% most deprived in the UK. This locality is significantly more ethnically diverse than others in the study (66% of the local population are from minority ethnic groups).

Coalfields School (academy-sponsored) is situated between a small industrial town and a post-industrial village in Yorkshire. Until the late 20th Century, coal mining was a major industry in the town and its surrounding villages. Almost a fifth (19%) of pupils here receive free school meals and the town where the school is located is among the 20% most deprived in England. The vast majority (96%) of the local population are white British.

Greenfields School (academy-sponsored) is situated on the edge of a small rural town in southern England. The school is close to a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the nearest city is around twenty miles away. 10% of pupils at the school are on free school meals and the area where the school is located is within the 10% least deprived nationally (although one neighbourhood within the town is among the top 20% most deprived). The local area is not ethnically diverse (97% white British).

Pseudonyms have been chosen for each of the case study schools in order to protect their anonymity, and these are used throughout the report. After gaining access to these schools, teachers assisted with the organisation of pupil and parent focus groups. Across all the schools, a total of 92 pupils took part. We carried out a total of 14 focus groups with pupils, with an average of around 7 pupils per group. One focus group for parents also took place in each of the schools, with a total of 16 parents participating across all schools (except Earl's Court³). We asked for pupil focus groups to be representative of those from different socio-economic backgrounds, ethnic groups and also those who engage in many extra-curricular activities as well as those who engage in fewer.

It was more challenging to recruit parents, and so not possible to target the recruitment of participants to parental focus groups in the same way. In both cases, the focus groups were semi-structured and discussions were orientated around a number of key themes. Pupil focus groups explored the activities participants took part in, the perceived benefits of participation, activities they would like to take part in, and any barriers to participation. Parent focus groups discussed a range of related topics, including parental desires for the types of activities they would like their children to take part in, barriers to participation, and what they perceive to be the benefits of participation.

This qualitative data was analysed by taking a thematic approach, guided by the overarching research questions outlined above. In analysing the qualitative data, attention was also paid to the quantitative findings on the significance and nature of participation in extra-curricular activities – although this data did not direct the qualitative analysis. The data was analysed by drawing comparisons both between schools, as well as between participants within the same schools. A coding framework was developed to sort and organise the data into themes which emerged from this analysis.

Report outline

This report is structured around two main sections. Following this introduction (Section One), Section two directly addresses questions around the significance of extra-curricular activities and differences in the extent and nature of participation. Significant gaps in opportunity to take part in extra-curricular activities are revealed, with the rich qualitative data used to provide in-depth analysis of what lies beneath the quantitative patterns. These gaps are important given the potential benefits explored here along a number of lines, including the development of soft skills. Section Three then moves on to examine soft skills more closely, including the demand for soft skills in the UK labour market, and the importance of soft skills for intergenerational social mobility.

³. Despite significant efforts, it was not possible to recruit enough parents for the focus group at Earl's Court School, and instead an individual interview with a parent was carried out at this school.

SECTION TWO: EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES: SIGNIFICANCE AND GAPS IN PARTICIPATION



Introduction

The importance of extra-curricular activities

Education, ‘soft skills’ and wellbeing

Educational aspirations and achievement: New analysis of Understanding Society and PISA

How do young people interpret the value of extra-curricular activities

Gaps in opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities

Evidence on participation gaps

Key points

- Our qualitative data showed that extra-curricular activities give young people the confidence to interact socially with others, extend their social networks beyond existing friendship groups, and provide them with new skills and abilities. Some also perceive them as important for their long-term career aspirations as well as useful in building stronger university and job applications.
- Above all, young people see extra-curricular activities as a chance to have fun, unwind and relieve the stresses of their increasingly pressured school lives.
- Our analysis of data from Understanding Society also suggests further positive outcomes in relation to educational aspirations. The analysis found that extra-curricular activities - specifically music classes and playing a wide range of sports – are important in predicting intentions to remain in education after compulsory schooling – even after holding constant important background factors (gender, age, parental education, household income, and ethnicity).
- Research in other national contexts has found strong evidence of a link between extra-curricular activities and educational outcomes as well as other positive outcomes, such as soft (especially social) skills.
- Socioeconomic status is a significant factor determining participation in extra-curricular activities. Children from more wealthy households are much more likely to take part in every type of activity, but especially music classes and sport.
- Opportunities to take part in activities also depend significantly on the school young people attend, with independent schools offering an unparalleled breadth and range of activities compared to that evident within the state sector.
- Barriers to taking part in extra-curricular activities for those from low income households include their high cost, a lack of confidence, and difficulties in access.
- The availability of youth facilities differs across geographic localities. Some of the parents, teachers and pupils we spoke to expressed alarm and disappointment about closures to youth clubs in recent times.
- Certain activities are gendered in their participation, with music, dance, art and voluntary work having a higher proportion of female participation and sports being more male dominated. In terms of sports, these gender-related patterns of participation could be partly driven by gender-based forms of provision.
- Not all extra-curricular activities have equal participation across different ethnic groups. Around 4% of British Pakistani youth take music classes, compared to 28% of British Indian, and 20% of White British youth. Sport is the only activity that has a nearly equal rate of participation across different ethnic groups.
- Geographic location also influences participation in extra-curricular activities with those in Northern Ireland much more likely to participate than other parts of the UK. Opportunities to participate also differ geographically according to the type of activity (music, sport, youth clubs etc.), for example, fewer young people in the North East of England take music classes than is the case elsewhere.

Introduction

This chapter brings together existing literature with new analysis of secondary data-sets and primary data collected⁴, in order to understand both the significance of extra-curricular activities as well as the gaps in participation and provision. Extra-curricular activities are widely considered to be of considerable value for young people growing up in contemporary British society. Whilst an attempt is made to understand their significance in terms of measurable outcomes, it must also be acknowledged that extra-curricular activities are commonly regarded as valuable in themselves, irrespective of whether or not any empirical evidence can be identified.

A wide view of extra-curricular activities is adopted here, to include not only individual activities but also team-based, and important distinctions between types of activities (i.e. differences between the kinds of sports, and their likely importance in building different kinds of networks). At the same time, we do not intend to privilege certain activities over others. We pay particular attention to the number and type of activities which youth engage in, and examine how this varies across individuals and social/ethnic groups. This raises important questions about participation gaps for specific extra-curricular activities for certain groups and individuals.

The first part of this section deals with the significance of extra-curricular activities, in terms of their impact on a wide range of outcomes as well as their value as understood by young people and parents themselves. After examining the importance of extra-curricular activities, the second part moves on to assess what gaps exist between different groups in their opportunities to participate. We provide a comprehensive picture of participation gaps as well as explanations for what may be driving these.

The importance of extra-curricular activities

The significance and potential impact of extra-curricular activities is examined here by pulling together existing evidence from previous research, together with new analysis of data from Understanding Society as well as qualitative data collected. Existing research is reviewed to consider the impact of extra-curricular activities on achievement, aspirations, soft skills, emotional well-being, and school attendance. New analysis of data from Understanding Society considers the impact of extra-curricular activities on intentions to remain in education after the compulsory schooling phase. The qualitative data allows for a richer understanding about how young people themselves interpret the benefits of extra-curricular activities from their perspective. We begin by assessing the existing evidence base around the significance of extra-curricular activities across a range of social and educational outcomes.

Education, ‘soft skills’ and well-being

A large body of research exists that addresses the role of extra-curricular activities on a range of cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes. However, this work has largely been carried out in America and European countries other than the UK, with a dearth of research relating to the UK context specifically. Some of the cross-sectional findings in the UK (Arthur et al. 2015; Pitts 2007, 2008) has suggested a positive role played by extra-curricular activities. Further research is needed in the UK context using larger data-sets to understand more fully the cognitive and non-cognitive impacts of extra-curricular activities.

A recent study carried out in Switzerland has examined the effect of extra-curricular activities, intensity of participation (measured by attendance) and quality of extra-curricular activities offered (measured by the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale) on achievement in mathematics (Schuepbach 2015). The study followed a

⁴. Information on the primary and secondary data used in this section, including issues to do with sampling, methods of data collection, and questionnaire design are provided in section 1.

quasi-experimental design with a control and comparison group which controlled for student and family effects. The findings suggest a positive effect on mathematics achievement. The intensity of participation, quality of extra-curricular activities and their interaction were all found to have a significant positive effect on achievement in mathematics. Longitudinal research in the USA has also suggested that participating in a greater number of activities can have positive impacts educationally (in terms of achievement and educational expectations) psychologically (in terms of better outcomes on measures relating to self-esteem, achievement, motivation as well as depression and internalising behaviour) as well as in terms of civic engagement and risk behaviours (Fredricks & Eccles 2006).

Mahoney, Cairns & Farmer (2003)'s 8-year longitudinal study in the USA context found that extra-curricular activities had a significant positive effect on educational outcomes (including achievement and attendance) and a reciprocal positive association with educational aspirations across adolescence. Their earlier work (Mahoney & Cairns 1997) also reported that participation in extra-curricular activities was linked to lower rates of early school dropout for boys and girls. Our analysis of data from Understanding Society builds on this research, showing a similar impact of certain extra-curricular activities on educational aspirations in the UK context (see below). Also in the USA context, Akos (2006) found a positive link between participating in multiple extra-curricular activities and student achievement, as well as feelings of 'connectedness' to school.

In addition to academic achievement, Gerber (1996) & Marsh (1992) found that extra-curricular activities have a positive impact in relation to one's self-concept, educational aspirations, absenteeism and attendance (again, in the USA context). Marsh & Kleitman (2002) suggested that extra-curricular activities in the USA are as much, or more, beneficial for socio-economically disadvantaged youth than their more advantaged peers. The benefit in outcomes is measured in terms of grades, homework, educational and occupational

aspirations, self-esteem, number of university applications, subsequent college enrolment, and highest educational level. Furthermore, Dumais (2006) examined longitudinal data collected from schools in the USA and found that participation in extra-curricular activities contributed to increased reading test scores, and that this gain was higher for disadvantaged children compared to their privileged counterparts. Thus, there is evidence that extra-curricular activities play a prominent role in narrowing the inequality gap between advantaged and disadvantaged young people.

Farb & Matjasko (2012) reviewed 52 empirical studies published between 2004 and 2009, focusing on the role of school-based extra-curricular activities among adolescents in the American and Canadian contexts. Their analysis concludes that a general positive relationship can be found between extra-curricular activities and academic outcomes (in terms of educational achievement and aspirations). This conclusion reiterates the findings from their earlier review analysis of 36 empirical studies in the USA context which involved publications over a 20-year period (1980s to 2004) (Farb & Matjasko 2005). Structured school-based extra-curricular activities were associated with lower dropout rates, higher attainment levels and improved academic performance.

Participation in extra-curricular activities has also been found to have a positive association with educational aspirations. For example, Mahoney and colleagues found that over time, consistent participation in structured extra-curricular activities has the potential to enhance students' motivation educationally, as well as set ambitious goals for their future, including those pertaining to education and career objectives (Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003). In turn, future intrinsic goal-framing has been shown to predict long-term persistence and better performance (Vansteenkiste, Matos, Lens, & Soenens, 2007).

Whilst a significant body of work suggests a link between extra-curricular activities and educational achievement, it must also be noted that not every study has been able to find evidence for such a link. The Steinmann

et al. (2018) analysis of panel data of a representative sample of school children in Germany participating in extra-curricular activities was not able to identify any significant effect on their mathematics or reading achievement. However, this study has its own limitations as the type of extra-curricular activities analysed were only academic-related - homework support, remedial education and subject specific-specific programmes. Another drawback, despite controlling for fixed effects, is the non-random assignment of students to the treatment group (those who participated in the extra-curricular activities) and the control group.

Farb & Matjasko (2005; 2012) make a strong case for a more refined study into the effects of extra-curricular activities, accounting for selection bias and more robust measurement (such as the intensity, breadth and duration of activities). They also call for research employing longitudinal data and incorporating other contextual and explanatory, mediating factors that can plausibly better explain the relationship between extra-curricular activities and desired outcomes (attainment, achievement, aspirations etc).

Based on a review of 35 empirical studies (largely based in the American context), Roth et al. (2010) have further questioned the evidence base on the positive outcomes associated with extra-curricular activities. Highlighting the dearth of evidence, they suggest that participation is multi-dimensional. As a result, it is problematic to attempt to measure the effects of participation in extra-curricular activities on various outcomes. Further research should therefore investigate which aspect of participation (duration, intensity, breadth, total exposure & engagement) leads to improvement in achievement or any developmental outcomes. The analysis presented here goes somewhat to addressing this in terms of number and duration of activities.

Apart from cognitive outcomes, extra-curricular activities have been associated with improvements in a range of non-cognitive outcomes such as students' soft

skills, e.g. persistence, independence, following instructions, working well within groups, dealing with authority figures and fitting in with peers (Carneiro & Heckman, 2005; Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Farb & Matjasko, 2012; Farkas, 2003; Howie, Lukacs, Pastor, Reuben, & Mendola, 2010). Furthermore, there is large body of research that has consistently found a significant association between extra-curricular activities and positive developmental outcomes and social behaviours (Barnes, Hoffman, Welte, Farrell, & Dintcheff, 2007; Bohnert, Richards, Kohl, & Randall, 2009; Bundick, 2011). Our own qualitative research, presented below, contributes further evidence on the non-cognitive benefits of extra-curricular activities.

Numerous studies have found that children who participate in extra-curricular activities tend to grow into adults with higher levels of civic participation and engagement. McFarland and Thomas (2006), for example, analyse the National Educational Longitudinal Study and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health and conclude that membership experiences in particular types of youth organisations (e.g., service organisations, student council, drama clubs, musical groups, and religious organizations) have positive effects on adult political participation. Several other pieces of research have also shown that extra-curricular activity in adolescence predicts various forms of civic and political participation in adulthood (Beck & Jennings, 1982; Glanville, 1999; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Plutzer, 2002).

At the same time, some studies have suggested that, because extra-curricular activities are more frequently offered in advantaged schools (Snellman, Silva, & Putnam, 2015), they can play a role in perpetuating socio-economic inequalities in education and limiting chances for social mobility (Covay & Carbonaro, 2010). On the other hand, other research has demonstrated that disadvantaged children benefit more from participation in extra-curricular activities than their privileged counterparts (Dumais, 2006).

Private tuition for school subjects is a further activity outside formal lesson time that could possibly be impacting on young

people. Whilst a large body of research has addressed the question around the uptake and availability of private tuition, there is a lack of consistent evidence on the effectiveness of private tuition on levels of achievement (Ireson, 2004). Smyth (2009) argues that in examining evidence for this link, sufficient account needs to be taken of prior achievement levels and social background. Using data from the Republic of Ireland, Smyth shows that when these background factors are taken into account, there is no evidence that private tuition impacts on achievement.

Educational aspirations and achievement: new analysis of Understanding Society and PISA

The Understanding Society survey asks young people living in the UK (aged 10-15 years old) not only about their participation in extra-curricular activities, but also various questions to do with their aspirations for the future. One of the questions asked is whether they aspire to pursue further education at a college or university after they finish school⁵. We use this data to examine the question of whether participation in various extra-curricular activities is an important predictor of young people's aspirations to pursue further study in the future.

It is likely that aspirations to pursue further study in the future could be closely associated with a range of other individual and social background factors (such as gender, socio-economic status and ethnicity). Therefore, we use Multiple Logistic Regression Models⁶ to evaluate the importance of extra-curricular activities whilst controlling for other explanatory factors. Three different models predicting the likelihood for a young person to aspire to pursue further education are presented here (see figure 2), inputting individual, household and extra-curricular independent covariates in a step-by-step way. Model 1 involves only three individual level covariates, including gender, age and ethnicity. Model 2 controls

for various household level characteristics captured by the Understanding Society survey. The household level characteristics included are: household net income, household size, parental highest educational qualification, geographic location and urban/rural locality indicator.

Model 3 (figure 2) presents findings on the role played by various individual and social factors, as well as participation in extra-curricular activities, on shaping young people's aspirations to pursue further education. All of the extra-curricular activities are positive in their impact on aspiration levels, but only a few produce statistically significant findings, and we come up against the limitations of survey data here, especially for fields with low response rates. Our interpretation of findings is based on the statistically significant results.

In terms of individual-level factors, gender and age are found to be important in assessing the aspiration of youth in regard to pursuit of full time education in future. Females are found to be 72% more likely to hold higher educational aspirations than males, and a year's increase in age can increase the likelihood for higher educational aspirations by 27%. At the household level, the net income of the household is found to have no significant effect when controlling for the full set of other variables included in the model. However, parents having a university degree is observed to be an important factor in shaping the educational aspirations of youth. Young people with parents who have not attended university are found to be at a disadvantage with their likelihood for holding aspirations to pursue further study lowered by 31%. Whilst gender and parental education levels are important predictors, it is clear that even when these are held constant, taking part in extra-curricular activities is also important in predicting the likelihood for levels of educational aspiration. It is especially interesting to observe that their importance varies according to the number and type of activities young people take part in.

⁵ The precise wording of the question contained within Understanding Society is: 'Would you like to go on to do further full-time education at a college or university after you finish school?'

⁶ We tested for clustering effects among youth with respect to geographical level, however the negligible intra-class correlation coefficient (0.0044) made a case for choosing OLS regression models over multilevel modelling.

The number of sports which young people engage in appears to have a positive, and statistically significant, impact on their likelihood to aspire to pursue further education, even after holding constant the various individual and background factors controlled for here. Young people who engage in an additional sport more than others from similar background are found to be 10% more likely to aspire to pursue further education. This is an important finding; it suggests that it is the range of sporting groups and activities which is making the difference. It could be that young people who play more sports meet a wider range of people, or develop a more rounded set of interests, which might have an impact on their educational and career aspirations.

An important finding here is the impact different types of extra-curricular activities appear to be having on the aspirations to pursue further study. Youth who attend music classes regularly are almost 40% more likely to aspire to pursue further education. Attending religious classes and private tuitions are also found to increase the likelihood of aspiring to pursue further education by 60% and 52% respectively. Religious classes and private tuitions are observed to be significant at 90% confidence interval. The very fact that something which is undertaken for a short duration of time each week, can potentially alter the outcome by magnitudes depicted above needs to be noted. It could be that the nature of these activities plays an important role here. Religious classes, learning a

**Figure 2. Logistic Regression models for educational aspirations
(dependent variable: desire to pursue further education)**

Aspiration to pursue further education	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Est	SE	Odds ratio	Est	SE	Odds ratio	Est	SE	Odds ratio
Female	0.53 ***	0.10	1.70	0.50 ***	0.11	1.65	0.54 ***	0.13	1.72
Age (10-15)	0.19 ***	0.03	1.21	0.20 ***	0.03	1.22	0.24 ***	0.04	1.27
Ethnicity	0.05	0.03	1.05	0.05	0.03	1.05	0.03	0.03	1.03
Household size	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.07	0.05	0.93	-0.07	0.05	0.93
Net income of total household				0.07	0.05	1.07	0.04	0.05	1.04
Highest educational qualification of parent				0.41 ***	0.13	1.51	0.27 *	0.13	1.31
Rural locality				0.06	0.13	1.06	0.06	0.14	1.06
Geographical location				0.02	0.02	1.02	0.02	0.02	1.02
No. of ECA's participated by the youth							-0.08	0.13	0.92
No. of sports participated by the youth							0.09 *	0.04	1.09
Youth clubs, scouts, girl guides or other organised activities							0.03	0.19	1.03
Voluntary or community work							0.13	0.20	1.14
Music							0.33 *	0.16	1.39
Art							0.13	0.26	1.14
Dance							0.19	0.22	1.21
Tutorials for school subjects							0.42	0.27	1.52
Religious classes							0.47	0.27	1.60
_cons	-2.22		0.11	-2.24		0.11	-3.02	0.57	0.05
R-squared	0.04			0.05			0.08		

*<0.05; **<0.01; *** <0.001

Source: Own calculations with data from Understanding Society (Wave 8, 2016-2018)

musical instrument and having private tuition are all activities that require dedicated and intensive commitment, over a sustained period of time. It could be that these activities inculcate a particular attitude or disposition that is more predisposed to academic study, or cultivate persistence and long-term goal setting, which might play out in young people's aspiration levels – independent of their social background. Another possible explanation could be that it is about the networks young people build through these activities, with friendships made here impacting on their educational aspirations.

Using data from PISA, we also attempted to test the possible association between extra-curricular activities, educational achievement and soft skills. In our analysis of data from PISA, we use the PISA index of 'collaborative problem-solving' as a proxy measure of soft skills. PISA 2015 assessed students' ability to collaborate in order to solve problems through a 30-minute collaborative problem-solving cluster comprising several units, which are interactive scenarios that students must work through while interacting with programmed computer agents. Units in the collaborative problem-solving assessment typically required between 5 and 20 minutes to complete and were time-limited. In their report, collaborative problem-solving is defined as: the capacity of an individual to effectively engage in a process whereby two or more agents attempt to solve a problem by sharing the understanding and effort required to come to a solution and pooling their knowledge, skills and efforts to reach that solution. The PISA 2015 framework publication (OECD, 2017a) discusses the definition in full and the procedures followed to construct the index are described in the PISA Technical Report (OECD, 2017b). It is important to note that this proxy measure may not fully capture a complete understanding of 'soft skills' but that we are necessarily limited by how this is understood and measured within the design of the PISA instrument.

Separate multilevel regression models (with students nested into schools) were estimated to test the association between the provision of different extra-curricular activities at school and the students' collaborative problem-solving score⁷. All the models controlled for a set of individual (sex, immigrant background, socio-economic status (SES), and mathematics achievement) and school-level (school location, type of school, school average SES) characteristics. The results are reported in figure 3.

Our analyses show that, after controlling for relevant student and school characteristics, there is no statistically significant association between provision of extra-curricular activities in schools and students' collaborative problem-solving. In other words, our results suggest that the provision of extra-curricular activities in a school would make no difference in their students' soft skills scores (measured here as collaborative problem solving). While this conclusion seems to contradict the results of previous studies (see, for example, Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Farb & Matjasko, 2012; Howie et al., 2010), it has to be considered that what we are testing is whether the activities are offered in the school and not the participation of the students in the activities. Furthermore, as mentioned before, there is solid evidence to indicate that extra-curricular activities are more frequently offered in socially advantaged schools (see, for example, Snellman et al., 2015). In that sense, the availability of extra-curricular activities could also be seen as a proxy measure of the schools' social advantage. In our model this is also measured by the school socioeconomic composition (School SES), which happens to be one of the variables most strongly associated with collaborative problem solving (see figure 3). This, together with the fact that the school level variance accounts only for about 10% of the total variance in the outcome variable, leaves a very small margin for the provision of extra-curricular activities to explain any differences in the students' collaborative problem solving.

⁷ It is important to mention that even though PISA 2015 included information about students' individual participation in different extra-curricular activities, we decided not to use it since preliminary analyses resulted in inconsistent, unreliable patterns. Instead, we decided to use the variables that capture the reports of Head Teachers about the availability of different extra-curricular activities at the school.

Figure 3. Multilevel regression models for collaborative problem solving on the provision of different extra-curricular activities at school

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	<i>est</i>	<i>p-value</i>										
Intercept	109.625	0.000	111.598	0.000	112.593	0.000	110.173	0.000	106.889	0.000	105.390	0.000
Female	40.984	0.000	40.639	0.000	40.597	0.000	41.194	0.000	40.735	0.000	41.307	0.000
Immigrant	-4.358	0.531	-4.879	0.481	-4.687	0.497	-4.517	0.497	-5.022	0.464	-4.489	0.509
Student SES	1.768	0.474	1.811	0.473	1.917	0.444	0.861	0.734	1.749	0.484	0.663	0.791
Maths	0.740	0.000	0.742	0.000	0.741	0.000	0.748	0.000	0.714	0.000	0.748	0.000
Rural	-9.043	0.311	-6.838	0.442	-8.662	0.328	-14.425	0.202	-8.090	0.370	-14.041	0.203
Public	24.004	0.026	21.037	0.056	23.419	0.031	23.546	0.015	22.546	0.038	23.641	0.017
School SES	15.476	0.026	14.486	0.035	16.856	0.015	16.436	0.017	16.164	0.019	16.406	0.016
Chess club	2.133	0.670										
ICT club			-0.085	0.986								
Science competitions					-3.360	0.507						
School yearbook							-3.887	0.532				
Science club									5.004	0.370		
School play											1.089	0.878
Student-level Variance	4685.618	0.000	4687.505	0.000	4692.688	0.000	4718.736	0.000	4682.498	0.000	4713.892	0.000
School-level Variance	509.478	0.000	518.208	0.000	517.407	0.000	499.644	0.000	545.411	0.000	522.477	0.000

Source: Own calculations with data from OECD PISA 2015

We also run a separate set of multilevel regression models to test the association between the provision of different extra-curricular activities at school and the students' mathematics achievement. All the models controlled for a set of individual (sex, immigrant background, SES, collaborative problem solving) and school-level (school location, type of school, school average SES) characteristics. The results are reported in figure 4.

Similar to the previous set of models, our analyses show that, after controlling for relevant student and school characteristics, the provision of none of the extra-curricular activities at school tested establish a statistically significant association with the students' mathematics performance in PISA. Once again, our results do not seem to be consistent with previous research (see, for example, Schuepbach, 2015; Steinmann et al., 2018). However, it is important to say that, for the reasons explained above, our results do not assume that individual participation in some of these extra-curricular activities does not contribute to better academic achievement. Nevertheless, due to data limitations, we cannot test that association

The collection of more reliable data which measures individual participation in these activities would contribute to better and more precise evidence about links between participation in extra-curricular activities and pupil outcomes. This data could be collected either in future PISA studies in the UK and/or in other pupil-level data (e.g. National Pupil Database). Moreover, previous research reviewed here on the significance of extra-curricular activities for developing soft skills and improving levels of achievement should not be discounted. There is also the argument that quantitative research on the significance of extra-curricular activities, using measurable outcomes such as achievement, may not adequately capture other impacts that cannot be measured in this way. We next turn to qualitative data collected from our case study localities to understand their impact, from the point of view of young people and parents.

How do young people interpret the value of extra-curricular activities?

It is also important to recognise the wider benefits of extra-curricular activities beyond educational aspirations and achievement, and our qualitative data provides important

Figure 4. Multilevel regression models for mathematics achievement on the provision of different extra-curricular activities at school

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	<i>est</i>	<i>p-value</i>										
Intercept	218.454	0.000	217.874	0.000	216.404	0.000	219.683	0.000	218.273	0.000	220.555	0.000
Female	-32.739	0.000	-32.231	0.000	-32.303	0.000	-30.924	0.000	-32.078	0.000	-30.659	0.000
Immigrant	-7.494	0.211	-7.026	0.244	-6.675	0.259	-6.632	0.245	-6.756	0.257	-7.198	0.221
Student SES	10.426	0.000	10.328	0.000	10.248	0.000	9.806	0.000	10.481	0.000	9.945	0.000
Collaborative PS	0.571	0.000	0.574	0.000	0.573	0.000	0.572	0.000	0.573	0.000	0.571	0.000
Rural	4.513	0.579	3.903	0.635	5.278	0.521	3.473	0.707	4.771	0.565	4.761	0.587
Public	-13.155	0.201	-12.825	0.211	-15.842	0.141	-13.419	0.150	-13.401	0.192	-8.359	0.330
School SES	28.802	0.000	29.060	0.000	26.270	0.000	29.051	0.000	27.949	0.000	31.539	0.000
Chess club	1.007	0.821										
ICT Club			-1.068	0.819								
Science competitions					5.992	0.159						
School yearbook							-3.185	0.537				
Science club									-0.548	0.907		
School play										-9.702	0.082	
Within Variance	3609.624	0.000	3622.851	0.000	3626.878	0.000	3606.683	0.000	3619.654	0.000	3602.757	0.000
Between Variance	417.774	0.000	414.620	0.000	410.623	0.000	402.023	0.000	424.085	0.000	394.820	0.000

Source: Own calculations with data from OECD PISA 2015

insight here. From the perspective of those young people taking part in the focus groups, extra-curricular activities were perceived to improve their social skills and extend their friendship networks. Most pupils and parents referred to the social skills children can acquire and develop by taking part in extra-curricular activities. Their social skills were often enhanced, they found, by working as part of a team. For example, at Metropolis School, a year 7 male pupil from a working-class background commented that '[being involved in extra-curricular activities] improves your social skills... you become more confident working with other people.' Another year 7 male pupil in the same focus groups added: 'it improves your social skills because you get used to working with other people in the club.' At Greenfields, a year 9 male pupil from a middle-class background commented: 'I find that it gives you good social skills because when you go to these sports, you get friends and then you talk to them.' A parent at Greenfields acknowledged the 'team aspect of it' and the chance to 'build confidence... and social skills.' For some, taking part in extra-curricular activities outside of school was important for developing a network of friends outside of their school-based friendship

groups. A parent at Coalfields suggested his son had the opportunity at music club to 'interact with people he wouldn't otherwise interact with.' The daughter of another parent at Coalfields had 'school friends' and 'horse-riding friends'; 'there are different people she can turn to and a wider social group.' Two other parents at Coalfields found that their children's involvement in music groups outside of school had improved greatly their ability to interact with adults. One mentioned, 'because he [my son] plays in a band with adults, he's getting used to being in that environment and learning to use his social skills to interact with adults.' The other added: 'it's important that they know how to interact with adults properly when they get to sixth-form or college.'

Pupils and parents across the four schools also referred frequently to the health and fitness benefits of taking part in sporting activities. A female year 7 pupil at Metropolis believed 'you get fitter and healthier' by taking part in sport. When asked about whether a voucher system should be implemented to subsidise costs for some parents at Metropolis or whether some activities should be free, one parent argued, 'I think some kind of sport is a necessity for health.' At

Greenfields, playing basketball provided the opportunity for one year 9 male pupil to undertake some form of ‘exercise.’ A parent at Greenfields saw sporting activities as playing an important role in making up for the lack of physical education in school. She reported that she was trying to persuade her daughter to persevere with her sporting activities, which she was considering giving up, because ‘they only do one hour of PE a week and that’s not enough exercise... it’s important for physical and mental health to stay active.’ At Coalfields, a parent mentioned that her son used to attend athletics ‘because I wanted him to be fit... but this clashed with music... but he does go to the gym after school.’ Finally, a pupil at Earl’s Court described the somewhat obligatory nature of taking part in sporting activities at her school for those who were in receipt of a scholarship:

‘There are lots of sports classes that come along that, as sports scholars, you kind of have to do... there are classes like ‘Kettle-size’, fitness we do three times a week. You kind of want to do it if you’re gonna stay fit and on the [sports] teams.’

Taking part in sporting activities was, for many pupils, a crucial way through which to stay fit and healthy and, for some, represented the only regular physical exercise they were able to undertake.

Some pupils also talked about the technical skills they were able to acquire and develop through the extra-curricular activities they took part in. For example, a year 9 male pupil at Greenfields shared:

‘I go to Young Farmers club... my dad [who is a farmer by occupation] knew some people who go so I said I’d go... it’s like a social club, but it’s lots of other things as well to do with farms, we learn how to do animal judging, and health and safety on the farm.’

A male from a middle-class background and a female from a working-class background, both in year 11 at Coalfields School, attend a first aid and medicine club after school. They will gain a level three qualification from this. The female pupil got involved because she ‘wants to become a nurse’, whereas the male pupil, who is not interested in a career in

health or medicine, thought the qualification would be ‘useful to have on my CV.’ A pupil at Metropolis understood that taking part in extra-curricular activities like ‘maths, art and design’ could be useful for helping realise his aspiration to become an architect in the future. However, he was not currently involved in any of these types of activities. Several pupils at Earl’s Court are members of the debating society, in which competitions are often held in other languages. A year 9 female pupil added: ‘there’s some pressure, but it’s fun... it also introduces you to real-world problems too and to discuss them in other languages.’

Finally, it should not be understated that taking part in extra-curricular activities is, for some young people, a way to occupy themselves in their free time, to have fun and to feel fulfilled. When asked about performing on stage, a year 7 female pupil at Metropolis School commented that ‘some people just do it and just don’t care what people say about them, just doing it for fun.’ Another year 7 female pupil at Metropolis explained why she feels proud when she finishes running a race:

‘Proud of yourself, if you’ve won, like when you’ve finished a race, you are just really tired, but happy that you’ve finished it and relieved... proud means that when you do something really good, you feel really good about yourself.’

Another pupil at Metropolis, male, wanted to play Dodgeball at school, because ‘it’s fun throwing a ball... and it takes out a lot of stress.’ He explained that the after-school club had been cancelled. At Coalfields, a year 9 male pupil used to attend an army cadet group but stopped attending because ‘everyone who went there wanted to be in the army... I just wanted to go and have fun and be part of a club... it was something to do and you could meet people of different ages.’ Pupils at Greenfields provided many examples of activities they took part in for fun, to relax or even to ‘help people.’ One year 9 male pupil played chess because it was ‘relaxing... and fun.’ And two pupils – both year 9 females – attended ‘world in action’ club ‘for fun’, to ‘help people’ and ‘to help the planet.’ Extra-curricular activities had an inherent value to them, regardless of any tangible or measurable outcomes.

In analysing the qualitative data, it was also apparent that young people's aspirations for the future were often brought into the discussions about their extra-curricular activities. They often talked about how their extra-curricular activities fitted with what they aspired to do in the future. For some pupils and parents, taking part in extra-curricular activities was seen as a way of standing out in the competition for university places, as well as ensuring children were at the 'top of their game'. This was especially the case among pupils at Earl's Court School. A year 13 female pupil saw taking part in music- and sport-related activities as a way of making her 'broader and more interesting as a person... you kind of have the extra level compared to someone who's just done academic, so it is useful, like in personal statements for university.' In this case, taking part in these activities was instrumental for differentiating herself from others in the future. A year 9 female pupil in the same focus group added: 'quite a few people do start things [extra-curricular activities] in sixth-form when they're starting to think about uni and personal statements.' The year 13 female pupil mentioned that school even run a club targeted at those who want to progress to 'higher tier universities'; 'it's like extra learning, research and projects... you do extra reading on subjects, debates in groups, so that club gives you an edge when you go to uni cos you've done that extra bit.' The parent interviewed at Earl's Court expressed her perception that:

The [sporting] competitions are very good in school here, but if you're gonna get better, you need to play more [outside of school]... our daughter's quite decent... she's quite keen to be selected for something high up in hockey, she wants to go high, so erm, she needs to play for [a regional or national team]

There was a strong sense from many of the pupils and from the parent at Earl's Court that playing to a 'high level' and being involved in lots of activities were instrumental in bolstering their chances of gaining places at 'good' universities and, for this parent, progressing to a high or professional level of sport.

Although less commonplace than at Earl's Court, examples similar to those above were present in other schools. A year 10 male pupil at Coalfields won a sporting scholarship from a training academy in a city 15 miles away, through which he played 'semi-professional football' for a junior team. He saw this as a route through which he could ultimately pursue a career as a professional footballer. A year 8 female pupil at Coalfields mentioned that her parents had encouraged her to do more 'because they didn't know when they were young [about the benefits of taking part in extra-curricular activities] and they can see the benefits for when I'm applying for jobs and stuff.' Also at Coalfields, a year 10 male pupil from a working-class background stated his desire to become a professional actor and that his part-time job as a 'junior plasterer' for his uncle on Saturdays was his 'back-up' plan in case this did not come to fruition. A year 10 male pupil at Greenfields, who plays the trumpet in the town orchestra, could not imagine this leading to a career in music:

'I'll definitely keep up playing my instrument, but I doubt I'll ever do anything professional with it... something like being a composer or something would be, like, amazing, but I can't really see it happening.'

For a year 8 male pupil at Metropolis, pursuing his passion for Anime⁸ drawing is not an option where he lives as there are no clubs available for him to join. For this pupil, it could be the case that he has long-term career aspirations to become an artist. However, because of where he lives and the school he attends, it seems that he lacks the support and resources with which to turn any aspirations in this area into a reality.

Gaps in opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities

Previous research

Given the significance of extra-curricular activities, we examine here the question of whether opportunities to participate are equally distributed, and we address this through new analysis of secondary data-sets and primary data collection. Before presenting this

⁸ Anime is hand-drawn and computer animation originating from Japan.

analysis, we begin by synthesising existing research on patterns in participation and provision, paying particular attention to gender, socio-economic status, school attended, ethnicity, and geography.

Extra-curricular activities are widely considered an important aspect of school life for many students and parents. Indeed, schools are assessed by the national school inspectorate on their enrichment activities, and parents often take these into account when choosing the school they'd like their child to attend. Yet, we know very little about patterns of school-based provision of extra-curricular activities at a national level in the UK, including how this varies across school types and the nature of school catchments. There is at least some evidence to suggest that funding challenges, teacher workloads and other pressures, may force schools to cut the number of activities they offer (Briggs & Somons, 2014).

Schools with a higher proportion of low-income pupils tend to face challenges and pressures which other more affluent schools do not have, which are likely to constrain their ability to offer the sorts of enrichment activities considered in this report. Schools in more disadvantaged areas tend to have larger class sizes and fewer well-qualified and experienced teachers than schools with more affluent students (Jensen, Sandoval-Hernandez, Knoll, & Gonzalez, 2012; Kozol, 2005; Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey, & Crowley, 2006), which often translates into having a more limited offer of extra-curricular activities. This is because the provision of extra-curricular activities in state schools is more often than not dependent on the motivation and ability of an individual teacher to provide them. In contrast, our qualitative findings show that one of the reasons why independent schools might offer more activities is because school staff are often required to provide them as part of their job role.

There is research to suggest that participation in extra-curricular activities is much higher in America, with at least 60%-70% of high school students taking part in at least one activity (Cooper, et al. 1999), compared to much lower rates of participation in other parts of the world (Shulruf 2011). The participation rates of males in sports has been found to be consistently higher than that of

women (McNeal 1998), whilst research has indicated that females are found to participate in a wider range of activities (Eccles & Barber 1999). The nature of participation in extra-curricular activities has been found to have an important gender component, and is also strongly associated with social class (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson 2014).

An important study which comprehensively examined participation in various extra-curricular activities was conducted by Feldman and Matjasko (2007) focussing on the context of the USA. It studied how various individual and school characteristics, for a sample of 13,820 youth, shaped their engagement with various extra-curricular activities. The study suggested that a significant proportion (43.2%) of youth participated in at least two types of activities and only about a quarter of youth did not take part in any activity at all.

The participation rates were found to take a small dip with regard to non-academic activities as the adolescents reached 12th grade. There were higher proportion of males participating in sports and a higher proportion of females in performance-based activities such as music, drama, orchestra etc (Feldman and Matjasko 2007). The research also indicated no between group differences in the case of ethnicity; however social class was found to be crucial as significantly higher percentages of youth coming from lower classes did not participate in any activity compared to upper classes. Geographic location was also found to be important; youth from rural contexts were found to be more active in extra-curricular activities than those from urban localities (Feldman and Matjasko 2007).

These results corroborate earlier research in the USA by Eccles & Barber (1999) who used data from the Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions (MSALT) to examine the involvement in various extra-curricular activities. They showed that males had higher rates than females in sports participation by nearly 20%; and female participation was 15% higher than males in dance, and 7% higher in drama. Among the sports, football is found to be the most popular. An equal proportion of males and females (2%) undertook private tutoring. 31% did not participate in any of the

extra-curricular activities. In another highly cited study by McNeal (1995), again in the USA context, it was found that a majority of extra-curricular participation (more than 50%) is in the domain of sports. The participation rates in fine-arts activities and vocational club activities were found to be 37.2% and 30.7% respectively.

In the context of the UK, there is a dearth of data and research on participation in extra-curricular activities or how this is related to social background and other demographic characteristics (such as age, gender, socio-economic status and ethnic group). The work by Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson (2014) is one of the few studies to examine the nature of participation in extra-curricular activities. Their research highlights the contrast in participation levels between working class and middle-class youth. It found that nearly half of middle-class children (42%) took part in five or more extra-curricular activities, compared to less than a tenth of working-class children (6.5%). There was a high proportion of non-participation among their working-class participants, about 22% compared to 2% from children belonging to middle classes. Whilst significant social class gaps in participation were identified here, both middle-class and working-class parents saw extra-curricular activities as fun, healthy and offering social opportunities. However, due to the sampling methods involved in this study (the research was carried out in a single geographic locality), it limits our ability to say whether these findings apply to the wider UK population, which is a major research gap. Our analysis of data from Understanding Society and PISA goes some way to addressing this gap in research on participation at a national level.

A related body of research has focused on the role of geography and public space in children's participation in different activities. The impact that fears about traffic accidents or 'stranger danger', and concerns about the control of public space, have on children's ability to play, and move through public space continues to be of interest (see, for example, Brown, Mackett, Gong, Kitazawa, & Paskins, 2008; Kato, 2009; Larsen, Gilliland, & Hess, 2012). The overall conclusions of this body of research are that

many children, most commonly from middle-class families, female, younger, and belonging to ethnic minorities have more restricted outdoor play opportunities and are less likely to make independent use of public spaces than in previous generations. Instead of playing out, these children are now increasingly likely to play at home or to participate in institutionalised extra-curricular activities. (Leander, Phillips, and Taylor 2010).

Whilst private tuition might not be commonly regarded as an extra-curricular activity, it is an out-of-school activity which may take up a significant amount of young people's time, and there is a large amount of research in the UK which has examined the extent and nature of participation. A number of estimates exist about take-up, with studies variously finding that between 10-27% of young people have received extra tuition at some point in their schooling career (Kirby, 2016). Ireson and Rushforth (2011) identified around 27% of young people had received extra tuition at some point in their schooling. Tuition was more common in mathematics, followed by English and then science. The Sutton Trust (2018) carry out and publish an annual poll they conduct in conjunction with Ipsos MORI ('Ipsos MORI Young People Omnibus Survey'). Students are asked each year if they have ever received private tuition, and their results show a small but steady increase over time, from 18% in 2005 to 27% in 2018. Evidence also suggests that private tuition is more common within higher income families as well as for ethnic minority groups and the privately educated (Kirby, 2016). Kirby (2016) reports on research carried out by the company 'Tutor Hunt' that suggests privately educated school pupils are twice as likely to receive private tuition. Ireson and Rushforth (2011) found that receiving free school meals and levels of parental education both had significant effects on whether a child received extra tuition at some point in their school careers. The effect was more pronounced in year 11, when young people are undertaking exams that have a significant impact on their post-school transitions. Whilst a limited sample size made it impossible to draw definitive conclusions, the researchers also found that private tuition was more prevalent for ethnic minority groups⁹.

⁹. White European 25%; Indian 45%; Chinese 35%; African 31%; Other Asian 29%; Pakistani 28%; Caribbean 27%; Other White 27% and Bangladeshi 20%

Past research has also suggested that the availability and cost of private tuition is also likely to vary depending on where young people live. In 2009, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DSCF) commissioned a piece of research to explore the nature of the private tuition ‘market’ in England. The review identified 504 private tuition agencies, of which the majority (86%) operated regionally, and were concentrated in London (32%), the South East (25%), as well as major cities such as Manchester and Birmingham (Tanner et al., 2009). On average, their study found that hourly tuition rates ranged between £22.90 and £24.50, with the highest amounts charged in London and the South East. Importantly, the regional costs of private tuition depended largely upon local demand and market tuition rates, as well as the phase of education taught and associated travel costs for the tutor. Therefore, it is likely that families who face the highest costs are those either living in localities with high demand, or where there is greatest travel distance for them to receive private tuition.

Evidence on participation gaps

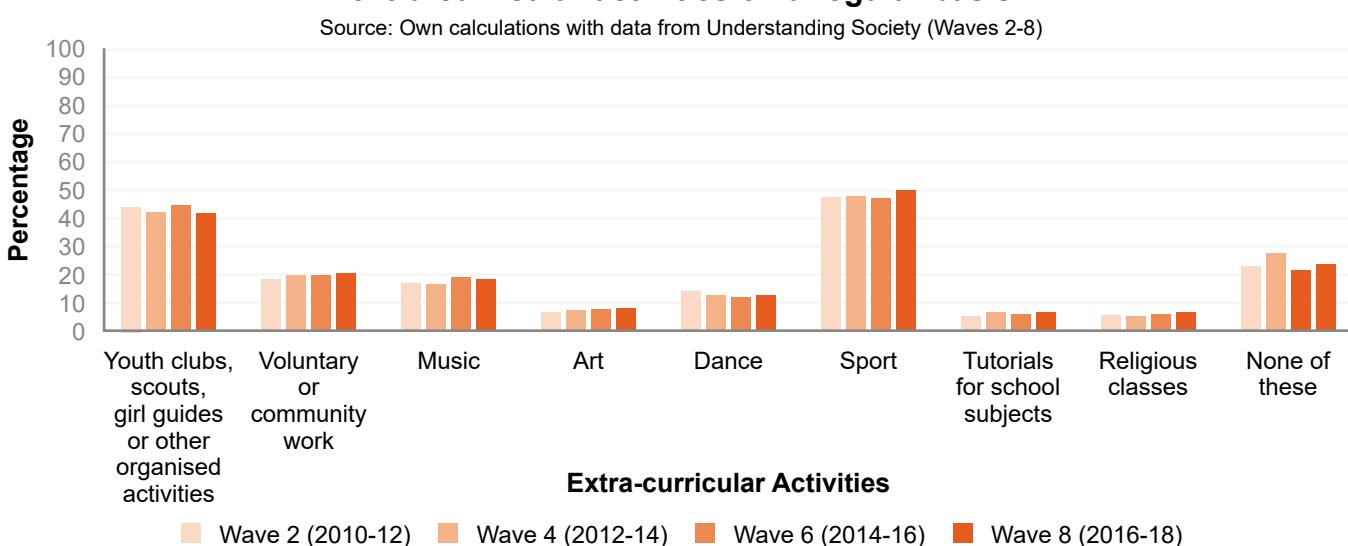
New analysis of data is presented here to understand the extent and nature of extra-curricular participation gaps. Gaps in participation are examined according to age, gender, household income, ethnicity

and geography. Importantly, we also reveal patterns in school-based provision of different activities (using data from PISA), again broken down by important social and demographic factors¹⁰. These secondary data-sets are supplemented with the qualitative data collected, in order to further knowledge about the generative mechanisms driving patterns identified.

We first present an overall picture of the types and number of extra-curricular activities young people take part in, based on the Understanding Society data, as well as the nature of provision nationally across all schools (using PISA data). In order to examine overall participation levels in different types of activities contained within the Understanding Society youth survey, eight distinct activities were derived from the range of questions participants were asked that can be reliably assessed (see figure 1 for the full list of extra-curricular activities). We selected activities based upon:

- Activities that might be commonly regarded as extra-curricular activities which excluded activities like walking, visiting pubs, attending political rallies etc.
- The regularity of participation in activities in terms of those which youth engage in on a regular basis.
- The activities which are undertaken by a

Figure 5. Percentage of youth in the UK participating in various extra-curricular activities on a regular basis



¹⁰. These findings are representative and can be generalised to the UK population at large (see chapter 1 for information on weightings).

*Youth can enrol in more than one ECA

sufficient proportion of the population to allow for relevant statistical analysis.

Figure 5 shows the percentage of youth (aged 10-15) in the UK participating in various extra-curricular activities on a regular basis (across all four waves of the Understanding Society study). We can see that the proportion of young people engaging in the different types of activities listed here is consistent across the different waves, inspiring confidence about the validity of the survey data. Nearly half of the youth population are observed to be taking part in sports – the most common type of activity compared to other extra-curricular activities. This is not surprising as, unlike other activities, sports cannot be seen as a category in itself but something which constitutes various other independent activities such as playing football or cricket (many of which young people are co-opted into playing through compulsory Physical Education lessons in school). This can perhaps explain the inflated participation rates.

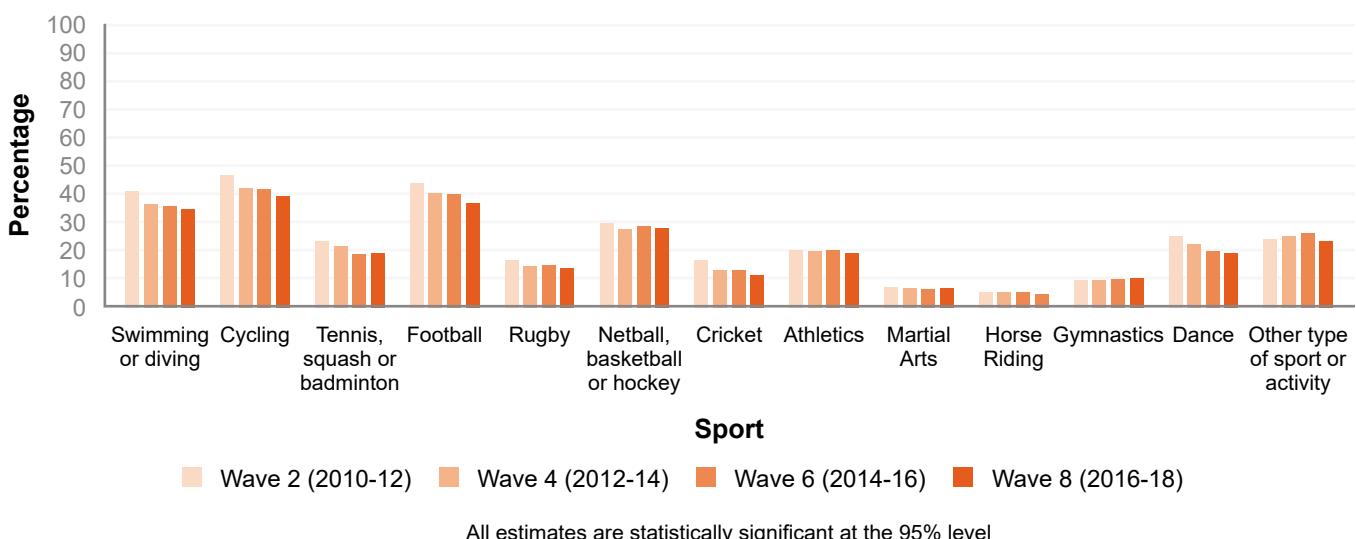
The second most popular extra-curricular activity identified here are the youth clubs and organised activities such as girl guides, scouts etc. which young people attend – around 40% of young people in the UK attend one of these groups. A further significant proportion of young people in the UK (around a fifth) take part in music

classes (e.g. learning a musical instrument). The least popular type of extra-curricular activities youth in the UK engage in are art (8%, wave 8), dance (13%, wave 8), and religious classes (7%, wave 8). A similarly low proportion of youth have extra tuition for school subjects (7%, wave 8), and this figure corresponds to what has been identified from past research discussed earlier.

Around a quarter of the youth population do not engage in any of the above eight extra-curricular activities identified within the survey. We come up against the limitations of survey-based research here, as it could be that some of these young people are engaging in activities that are not listed here, or which might not be commonly regarded as an ‘extra-curricular activity’. For example, there are many other things young people will be spending their time doing that might not be recognised as an extra-curricular activity, such as playing video games, surfing the internet or using their smart phones to play games or interact with others. We often talk about activities that are valued as a meaningful use of young people’s time, and these activities are often not perceived as such – this is despite several of them having a team/social aspect to them (such as online group-based ‘video games).

Figure 6. Percentage of youth in the UK participating in various kinds of sport

Source: Own calculations with data from Understanding Society (Waves 2-8)



*Youth can enrol in more than one ECA

As the category of ‘sport’ is a broad one, it is important to examine more closely participation rates across different types of sports. Figure 6 displays the participation rates of the youth population in different sports captured by the Understanding Society youth survey.

The trends in sports again demonstrate a level of consistency across the four different time points. Horse riding, is found to have the lowest participation (5%, wave 8) and cycling has the highest number of individuals participating (39%, wave 8). Not far from cycling, most of the population prefer to play football over other sports. Interestingly,

a quarter of youth are found to be not involved in any of the above-mentioned sports.

In the context of extra-curricular activities and sports, the above figures denote that youth participate in more than one activity (participants in the survey can tick more than one box). Looking at the number of activities each individual from the survey engages in, we can see that youth on average are found to take part in between 1 to 2 different activities (figure 7). However, this represents an average figure, and some youth engage in considerably more activities than this (the number of activities an individual takes part in ranges from 1 to 8)

Figure 7. Average number of extra-curricular activities UK youth (aged 10–15) take part in

	Wave 2 (2010-12)	Wave 4 (2012-14)	Wave 6 (2014-16)	Wave 8 (2016-18)
Mean	1.65	1.67	1.72	1.7
SE	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.03

Source: Own calculations with data from Understanding Society (Waves 2-8)

Young people engage in a higher average number of sporting activities, the mean number of sports undertaken by youth are found to be close to 3 (figure 8).

Figure 8. Average number of sports played by UK youth (aged 10–15)

	Wave 2 (2010-12)	Wave 4 (2012-14)	Wave 6 (2014-16)	Wave 8 (2016-18)
Mean	3.1	2.86	2.82	2.67
SE	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.04

Source: Own calculations with data from Understanding Society (Waves 2-8)

Figure 9 presents more detail on the number of activities young people in the UK engage in, showing that the vast majority engage in 1-2 activities, but a sizeable proportion (over 20%) of youth take part in 3-8 different activities.

Figure 9. Percentage of UK population (aged 10–15) engaged in different numbers of extra-curricular activities

Number of ECAs	Wave 2 (2010-12)		Wave 4 (2012-14)		Wave 6 (2014-16)		Wave 8 (2016-18)	
	Percentage	SE	Percentage	SE	Percentage	SE	Percentage	SE
0	20.24	0.65	19.84	0.77	20.62	0.89	20.63	0.97
1	29.06	0.74	30.31	0.89	26.16	0.93	27.59	1.05
2	27.87	0.72	25.78	0.85	28.63	0.95	27.53	1.02
3	14.53	0.57	14.85	0.67	14.8	0.72	14.79	0.81
4	5.95	0.38	6.28	0.46	6.31	0.49	6.25	0.55
5	1.8	0.21	2.11	0.27	2.56	0.35	2.15	0.32
6	0.36	0.09	0.66	0.16	0.65	0.15	0.64	0.17
7	0.19	0.06	0.16	0.08	0.21	0.09	0.23	0.01
8	0.01	0.01	0	0	0.06	0.06	0.18	0.01

Source: Own calculations with data from Understanding Society (Waves 2-8)

Figure 10. Percentage of UK population (aged 10–15) engaged in different numbers of sports

Number of Sports	Wave 2 (2010-12)		Wave 4 (2012-14)		Wave 6 (2014-16)		Wave 8 (2016-18)	
	Percentage	SE	Percentage	SE	Percentage	SE	Percentage	SE
0	5.52	0.36	7.49	0.48	8.76	0.59	8.47	0.63
1	19.34	0.63	21.50	0.77	21.30	0.85	23.75	0.98
2	20.71	0.64	20.86	0.76	22.10	0.87	22.07	0.93
3	18.15	0.60	19.08	0.73	17.33	0.77	18.10	0.89
4	13.51	0.55	12.16	0.61	11.32	0.65	11.15	0.72
5	9.79	0.47	8.11	0.51	8.04	0.58	7.58	0.59
6	5.71	0.37	4.91	0.41	4.93	0.46	4.11	0.46
7	3.40	0.29	2.64	0.31	2.95	0.36	2.55	0.34
8	2.01	0.22	1.84	0.26	1.70	0.25	1.06	0.22
9	1.14	0.16	0.55	0.12	0.92	0.19	0.44	0.14
10	0.37	0.10	0.69	0.17	0.34	0.11	0.47	0.17
11	0.31	0.08	0.13	0.08	0.25	0.12	0.12	0.09
12	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.11	0.08
13	0.03	0.02	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.04	0.01	0.01

Source: Own calculations with data from Understanding Society (Waves 2-8)

In terms of different sports played by young people in the UK (Figure 10), a similar trend can be observed to that of extra-curricular activities as a whole. The majority of young people play 1-3 sports (around 60%, wave 8), with around 11% playing 4 (wave 8), and a declining number playing more than 4.

Analysis of the qualitative data suggests that the Understanding Society survey may give only a limited picture of how young people spend their time. Talking to young people, it became apparent that there are many clubs and activities that they take part in which do not feature in the Understanding Society survey. For example, at Greenfields School, pupils reportedly took part in activities that included a debating society, photography club and media club.

It is also important to note that how we define extra-curricular activities matters for understanding participation. Many children across the schools reported their involvement in a range of other less formal activities that were meaningful to them, rather than scheduled or organised extra-curricular activities represented in the surveys. For example, at Greenfields, several children said they 'didn't do anything', but when pressed further, talked about socialising with friends and playing video games. One pupil at Coalfields spends a lot of his time riding his bike and stunt scooter with his friends. Also, at Coalfields, a year 8 white working-class girl mentioned that she often 'helps her mum with plumbing jobs' after school, and a year 9 black British girl commented that she 'holds the torch light when [her] dad's fixing a car.'

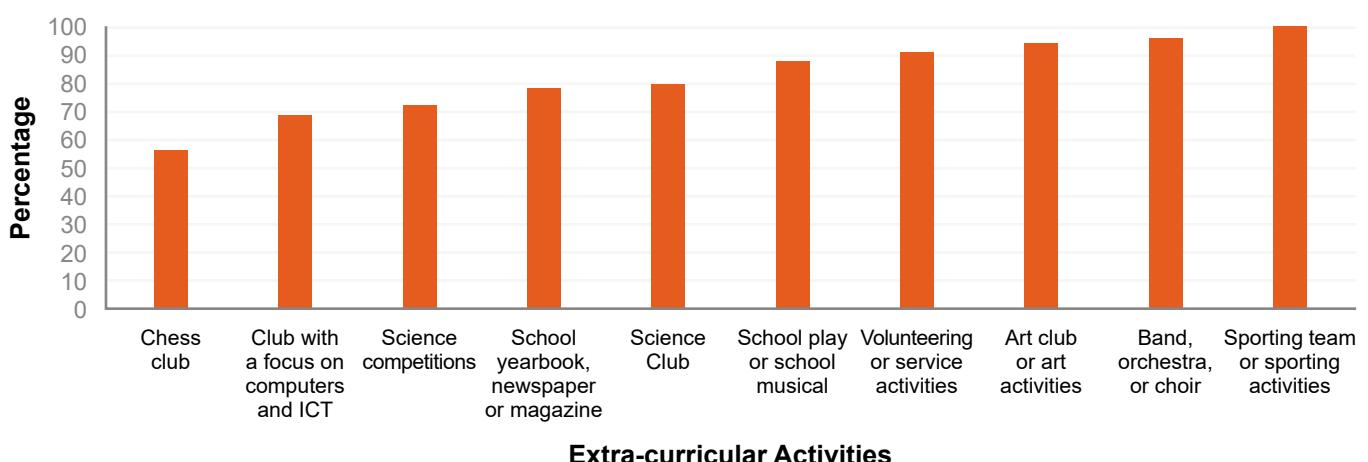
It is important to acknowledge the value we place on activities children engage in and how they make use of their time. Survey-based research can miss important information, and it is clear that many of the young people who reported that they do not engage in any of the

specified extra-curricular activities are likely to be spending their time doing other things they attribute value to. Children themselves may place huge value on playing computer games or socialising, regardless of the meaning adults attribute to these activities.

In considering the participation of young people in extra-curricular activities, it is also relevant to examine the school-based provision of different activities. Understanding Society was a survey carried out at the household level, and so does not contain relevant school-based information, but PISA provides valuable information here as part of the data collected on the context of schools. In PISA 2015, school Head Teachers were asked whether their school offers various extra-curricular activities. Analysis of this data suggests that the majority of schools in the UK offer each of the activities contained within the PISA study. Indeed, looking at the information here it would seem that UK schools do very well in providing activities for their pupils. As can be observed in figure 11, the most popular extra-curricular activity provided across all UK schools are sporting team or sporting activities, with almost 100 percent of students attending schools where the Head Teacher reports offering this activity. This makes sense given that schools are required to provide physical education classes, and so will have the infrastructure for this. The least popular extra-curricular activity is chess club with just above half of the students attending schools where this activity is offered.

The rates of participation in different extra-

Figure 11. Extra-curricular activities offered in schools (percentage of students attending schools where the activities are offered) Source: Own calculations with data from OECD PISA 2015



curricular activities, and their provision across different schools, have so far been examined overall. However, it is likely that individuals and groups will vary in their take-up of activities; the following sections examine any gaps or differences in participation according to gender, age, socio-economic status, school type, ethnicity, and geography.

Socio-economic status

Some of the largest gaps in participation in different extra-curricular activities can be observed in terms of socio-economic status. Understanding Society provides information on the household income of young people taking part in the survey, and we use this information to order participants into 6 groups according to their household income (figure 12). Figure 12 displays participation levels across each of these income groupings, with group 1 being the lowest income households and group 6 the highest income. It is clear from this analysis that as household income rises, participation in the different activities also increases, but this is especially the case for certain activities. Music, for example, is clearly the preserve of more affluent family households, with 11% of the lowest income households taking part compared to 32% taking part from the highest income households. Whilst being careful not to attribute greater importance to particular activities like music, this gap in participation is more than likely to be explained by the high cost of learning a musical instrument (one-to-one lessons with the added cost of instruments themselves). However, it is perhaps more

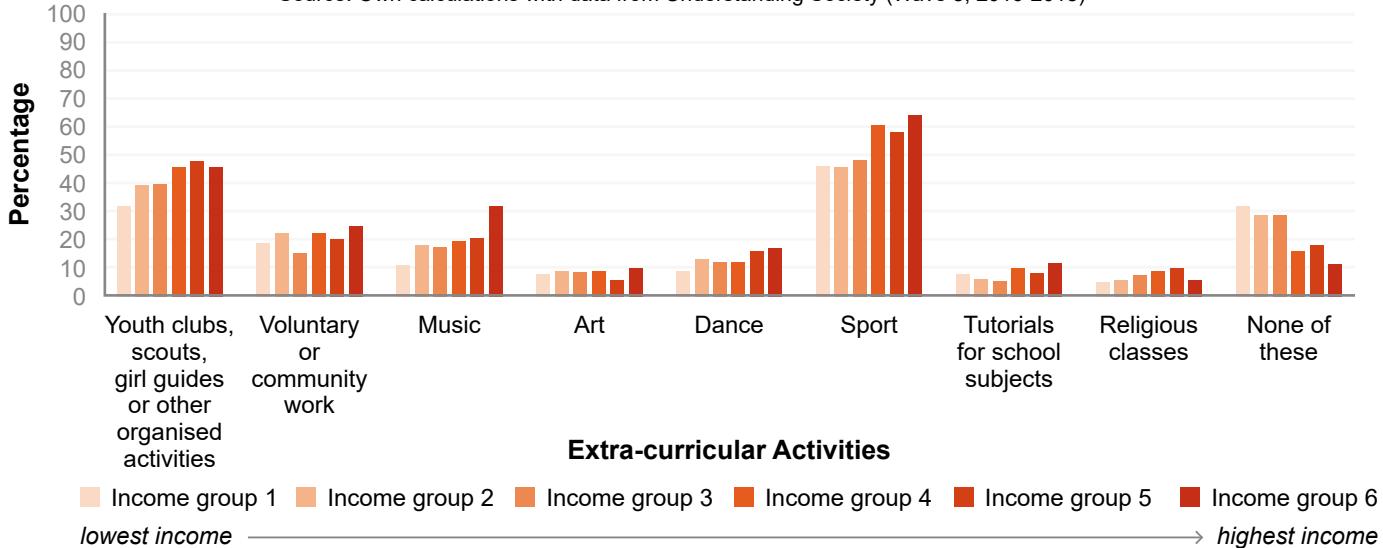
surprising that the gap in sports participation is just as significant, with 46% of young people from the lowest income households taking part, compared to 64% of youth from the highest income households. This is surprising because it might be expected that playing sports does not carry the same financial burden as learning a musical instrument, but this finding might be suggestive of increasing financial pressures and the rising cost of activities in general. Further research is needed here, and it would be valuable to carry out a comprehensive survey of the different costs of activities.

Other activities are also more likely to be prevalent for youth in higher income households, albeit the gaps are not as pronounced as with music and sport. For example, voluntary work and youth groups appear less socio-economically exclusive, with only slight variation in participation rates according to household income. Art is an interesting example of an extra-curricular activity undertaken fairly evenly across the spectrum of household income levels. There is around a 2% difference between the lowest and highest income households in their art participation (8% and 10%, respectively), and one of the higher income groups actually has the lowest participation (group 5, 6%). There are a number of possible explanations for these patterns; it could be due to cost, or might be reflective of what is valued by different socio-economic groups.

Using PISA data, it is also possible to

Figure 12. Household income and participation in extra-curricular activities

Source: Own calculations with data from Understanding Society (Wave 8, 2016-2018)

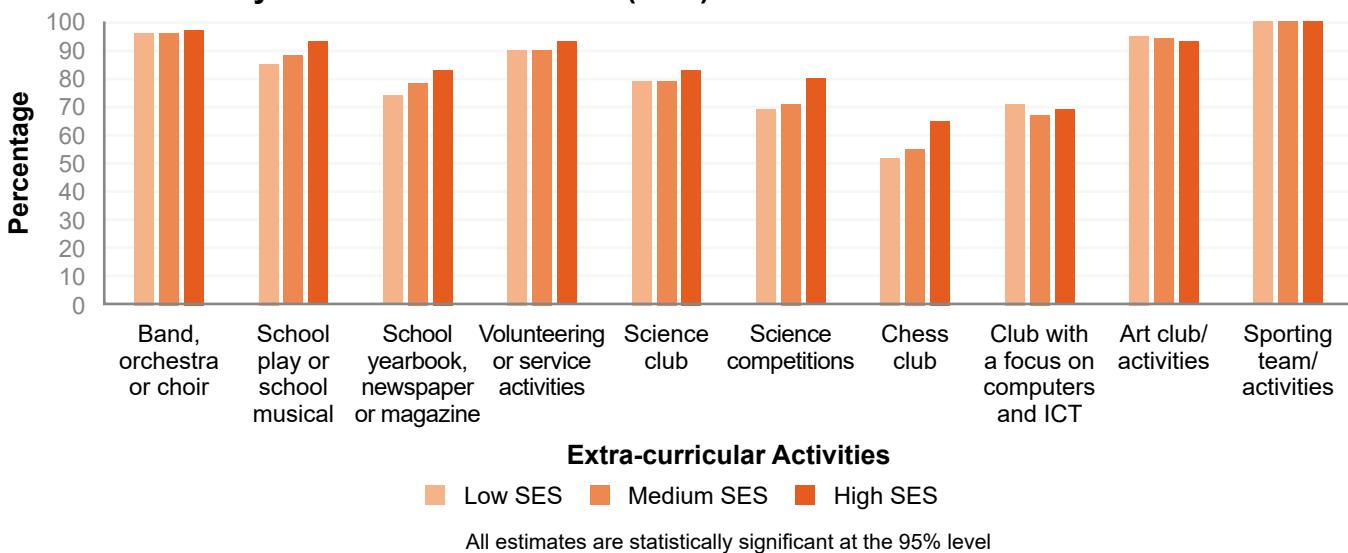


examine how young people from different socio-economic groups have varying access to different extra-curricular activities according to the provision in the schools they attend. Figure 13 displays this information according to the activities surveyed in the PISA study. This data would suggest schools with differing socio-economic compositions do not vary in any significant way in terms of their provision of extra-curricular activities. Indeed, as observed earlier, there appears a very good level of provision across schools, with those serving low and high socio-economic status pupils just as likely to offer activities that include a band/orchestra/choir,

taking part in some extra-curricular activities. Although there were certainly aspirations among those from less economically advantaged backgrounds to engage in more extra-curricular activities, they did not always have the means to do so.

A year 9 working-class male at Greenfields School had a strong desire to attend a food technology after-school club but explained that he could not, ‘because my mum didn’t have the money to buy food [ingredients for the class] every week.’ This particular pupil had also given up several other activities he enjoyed in the past and is

Figure 13. Percentage of students attending schools offering different extra-curricular activities by socioeconomic status (SES) Source: Own calculations with data from OECD PISA 2015



sports teams, volunteering and art clubs. In terms of gaps in provision, the data does suggest differences can be observed in the ‘chess clubs’ and ‘science competitions’. A greater proportion of students from high socio-economic backgrounds attend schools where these activities are offered (80 and 65%, respectively) in comparison to the schools attended by low socio-economic students (69 and 52%, respectively).

Analysis of the qualitative data helps to explain some of these quantitative patterns, especially in terms of how participation in activities are closely associated with family income. Pupils from working-class backgrounds at Coalfields, Greenfields and Metropolis schools were significantly more disadvantaged than their middle-class peers by the financial costs associated with

often unspecific about the reasons for this. He did however mention that his mum had been encouraging him to take up a musical instrument ‘because she thinks it would be good for me’, but added ‘I don’t want to do it, cos, I just don’t, I don’t know, I don’t know what puts me off, I just don’t want to do it.’ The impression felt here and elsewhere was that he was aware his mum could not really afford it. At Metropolis School, the prohibitive financial cost of their children taking part in activities was a dominant theme among parents. One lower middle-class female parent commented:

‘I would love my children to have music lessons, but you have to pay for them, they [my three children] would like to learn an instrument, but that would cost me three times, that would be £15 per week a

Pupils from working-class backgrounds at Metropolis also mentioned that activities like badminton are provided at a local leisure centre, but that they could not get involved in these because they would have to pay membership fees, and this was too expensive.

When asked about the financial implications of taking part in activities, pupils from middle-class backgrounds, on the other hand, typically did not find this to be an issue. A year 11 white middle-class pupil at Coalfields School admitted 'I know

activities, with a range of sports played (see Box A). Crucially, this initiative takes account of possible financial barriers to participation, with measures in place to try to ensure young people can take part regardless of their socio-economic background. A key feature of this particular initiative is that it engages with young people via their schools, and does not depend upon parental encouragement, arguably ensuring a broader cross-section of young people take part.

The financial cost of taking part in activities was 'riskier' for those from lower social

Box A: Western Fitness Project

Western Fitness Project (WFP) is a third-sector organisation, local to Metropolis school, focused on promoting and delivering sport-based programmes in primary schools throughout the local area. Part-funded by donations, grant funding, fundraising activities and revenue generated through services provided, the WFP designs and delivers after-school programmes. The sporting activities offered are wide-ranging and include sports such as hockey, football, running, badminton and gymnastics.

Activities are either paid for by parents or are partially or fully subsidised by schools; the charity encourages schools to subsidise places for children eligible for pupil premium funding to ensure those from less advantaged backgrounds have access. The cost and range of activities offered in individual schools vary. For example, in one school, a five-week 'all-years badminton and multi-sport club' runs after school, free of charge. In another school, key stage one dodgeball or key stage two handball clubs cost £17.50 per child per five-week programme.

'money's a problem for a lot of people; I don't have a particular problem with it, but then most of the stuff I do is free.' Financial cost was not something that stopped any of the students at Earl's Court school from taking part in activities. However, the school provided activities and necessary equipment and kit where required free of charge; all activities, from sailing to fencing, were included in school fees.

A number of third sector initiatives exist to address gaps in extra-curricular participation, and an example of one such initiative, the 'Western Fitness Project', is located in close proximity to Metropolis School. This organisation works with schools to encourage participation in sporting

class backgrounds. Some of these pupils felt learning to play a musical instrument required a financial investment that was potentially 'not worth it' if they later decided to discontinue their lessons or were not 'good enough'. A year 9 boy from a Metropolis also mentioned that activities like badminton are provided at a local leisure centre, but that they could not get involved in these because they would have to pay membership fees, and this was too expensive.

A year 9 boy from a working-class background at Greenfields School had been interested in learning to play the drums and guitar but has not yet pursued these because ‘it costs money to do like instruments... you’ve gotta get the instruments and then pay for classes.’ Others in the same group lacked confidence in their abilities to learn. A year 9 girl had not taken up learning a musical instrument because it was perceived as being difficult to learn and too expensive to buy the instrument:

‘There’s so much you have to do... you would just do it wrong and have to do the whole thing again [referring to mastering technical skills, such as reading music] ... they should at least have the equipment for people.’

When the rest of the group were asked if they agreed, a working-class year 9 male stated ‘no, I just find money is the hardest,’ suggesting he was indeed confident in his ability to learn but could not afford to do so. A year 9 working-class female pupil in another focus group at Greenfields explained:

‘My parents said like they’d pay for it but then I don’t think I would enjoy it so I would just be wasting money that could go to like things that we actually need ... if I wanted to [learn an instrument] they said I could, but then I just like- if you don’t enjoy it or you don’t wanna carry it on, it is just like hard to tell them that you don’t want to carry it on after they have been paying for it I would feel bad about that.’

Her parents were clearly willing to pay for music tuition, but it was the young person who felt guilty asking her parents to pay for this given the risk that it might not ‘pay off’. Whilst her parents were clearly very supportive, this shows how aware young people are of their families’ financial situation, and their realisation that the cost of their involvement in such activities would constitute a significant portion of their families’ disposable income. A year 9 working-class girl at Coalfields was also aware of the financial burden placed on her parents because of her and her siblings’ involvement in extra-curricular activities:

‘When I did dancing, that were quite expensive, cos you had to pay for your shoes and costumes and then monthly for being at the studio, so all of it adds up and say if your mum and dad have got more than one child and they all do different activities, it all adds up.’

Regardless of whether their parents are encouraging and supportive, the financial cost of some extra-curricular activities represents too great a risk when they know their parents are not in a fortunate position financially. At the same time, even those from more advantaged backgrounds commented on the high cost, with one such pupil from Greenfields School describing music lessons as ‘a luxury’. This underlines the high cost of some activities, such as music tuition, in the UK.

One possible solution for reducing perceptions of financial risk among those from lower social class backgrounds is for students to trial extra-curricular activities, such as learning musical instruments. A year 9 working-class male pupil at Greenfields suggested:

‘I’d like to play something like a saxophone or something like a trumpet or something like that... like I would try it, but then again you have to buy the instrument so like if I could do like a trial lesson where the school leant me the instrument and I could see if I enjoyed it then maybe I would...’ ‘so like [my friend] asked if he could use the drums at lunch time and now like he has got electronic drums at home and he does it... he got it for Christmas’

Another working-class pupil at Greenfields, female and in year 9, agreed with this:

‘If they did like a test like you said, where you got to try out [an instrument] then I think I might, because I don’t know if I would enjoy it or not.’

Pupils and parents at Coalfields School suggested these ideas have been successfully introduced in their local area. They were aware of two local music services which provide tuition and performance opportunities in schools and local communities. The first, Coalhill Music Service (Box B), provides the opportunity for 80% of primary school children to learn to

play a musical instrument in school. Through both services, children can loan a music instrument and undertake music tuition at a subsidised rate. They can also join bands and orchestras run by the services. The children of three parents in the Coalfields School focus group were involved in music groups and received tuition through at least one of these services and, according to one parent, 'it's a lot cheaper than paying for private lessons.' For some pupils from lower social class backgrounds, however, the cost is still prohibitive. A year 9 girl at Coalfields learnt to play both the guitar and ukulele at primary school through the Coalhill Music Service but did not anymore because it is 'too expensive.' The fact that only 23% of pupils continue to have lessons with the CMS following the year of free tuition they receive suggests that despite the cheaper rate offered by a service like this, for some pupils this is still too much.

In addition to financial barriers, the issue of confidence also came up as a barrier affecting lower socio-economic groups' participation in extra-curricular activities. A dominant theme among many pupils from working-class backgrounds across the three

state school case studies was the lack of confidence exhibited – confidence in their own abilities and confidence to approach clubs external to school in their local communities.

When asked about activities available in her local area, a year 8 Black British female pupil from a working-class background at Metropolis School explained: 'I don't go and explore the things that are out there, cos I don't feel comfortable... I just feel shy.' A year 8 Asian British male pupil from a working-class background in the same focus group added that he had felt uncomfortable to pursue extra-curricular activities in school since his first term in year 7: 'if there's a club and you wanna join it, like, when you move to a different school, yeah, and you know everyone just looks at you cos you're new, like down [on you].'

Several pupils at Greenfields School lacked confidence in their abilities to learn a musical instrument; as one year 9 female pupil from a working-class background explained, she 'would just do it wrong.'

Box B: Coalhill Music Service

Coalhill Music Service (CMS) is a local music service provider, part-funded by the local council, Arts Council England and income generated from services provided. Following budgetary reductions in 2007, the CMS now operates as a central music hub for the local borough and has partnered with other private organisations in the local area to deliver music tuition and performance opportunities for children aged 5-18. The CMS offers four key services:

1. Whole class instrumental projects: this involves a tutor teaching a whole class (typically year 4 or 5 groups) to play a musical instrument over the course of a year. This service is heavily subsidised by the Service and schools typically pay approx. £700 per year, meaning no cost is passed onto parents. CMS currently runs these services in 80% of all primary schools in the local area.
2. Musical progression route: of the children who take part in 'whole class instrumental projects', 23% continue to learn a musical instrument in small groups of two or three pupils, usually in school. At this point, parents must pay the termly cost (10 lessons) of £48 (or £15 for FSM pupils). Pupils can also hire an instrument if they need at a cost of £15 per term (or free of charge for FSM pupils).
3. Ensemble opportunities: pupils have the opportunity to join an affiliated band or orchestra. Subs are typically between £15 and £20 per term.
4. Vocal strategy: the CMS also runs singing lessons and choirs in schools.

For some pupils, this lack of confidence was potentially masked by citing other reasons for not taking part in extra-curricular activities. A year 9 female pupil from a working-class background at Coalfields School was interested in joining a local theatre group but has not done so, ‘mainly cos I’m too lazy to get out of the house and do it.’

A parent at Coalfields School acknowledged that ‘it can be hard for them to join [clubs outside of school] when they’re not known [when they don’t know other members of those clubs].’ However, pupils from middle-class backgrounds were on the whole more confident in their abilities. A year 11 pupil from a middle-class background at Coalfields had been teaching himself the guitar in his spare time. A middle-class parent at Coalfields understood that, through her son’s performances in local music bands, he had developed confidence and independence: ‘he’s gone from a quiet child to a much more confident child... even the confidence to get himself home from school, get himself on the bus to his music lesson and get home again when I can’t physically take him.’

The issue of time and availability of parents also came up, affecting children from a range of household incomes, but especially the lowest income groups. This was particularly the case at our school based in the rural locality, Greenfields School, where transport was often essential for taking part in activities. A year 9 working-class male pupil at Greenfields School was unable to go to his local swimming pool because this required a car journey and his mum was not able to drive him there. This was the case for other pupils at Greenfields, for whom activities were often a car journey away and required parents to take them places.

Another pupil (lower middle class, year 9, female) mentioned, ‘you’d have to drive everywhere, sometimes it’s a bit difficult, cos my mum’s at work and my dad’s at work, so it’s not easy.’ Another pupil (lower middle-class, year 8, male) would like to have been involved in more activities but explained, ‘my mum has to take me and she’s a teacher and she has limited time sometimes.’ A parent at Greenfields echoed discussions

that took place in the student focus groups and stated that ‘parents need to take them [their children] as some activities are a 40-minute journey to get there. It’s your time and often your money.’ Another parent explained that because she works shifts, ‘I don’t always know what my shift pattern will be’, and this made it hard for her children to take part in activities that are further afield. One pupil at the school (working class, year 10, female) took part in no activities because of her caring responsibilities. She regularly looked after her 11-year-old brother after school. She shared, ‘he’s autistic and can’t be left alone’, and her single mother works until 5pm every weekday.

Having time to spare was less of a problem for others. A lower middle-class parent at Coalfields admitted ‘I’m lucky that I work part-time and I’m at home a lot of the time, so if there’s something he [my son] wants to do and I can physically take him in the car, I do.’ Another parent at Coalfields (lower middle-class male) acknowledged ‘if I didn’t work from home, there wouldn’t be anyone to take him [my son] to his guitar lessons.’ One middle-class parent at Coalfields explained, ‘as long as you’ve got a car and you can drive around then anything any of my kids have wanted to do, they can do’. Finally, an unemployed middle-class mother at Earl’s Court School demonstrated that, as she had lots of free time to spare, she was able to take responsibility for transporting her children to and from their activities:

Well, I take them everywhere, erm, on weekends, standing on touchlines, and, well, we’ve got four kids... but yeah, we’re very involved cos we have to take them everywhere.

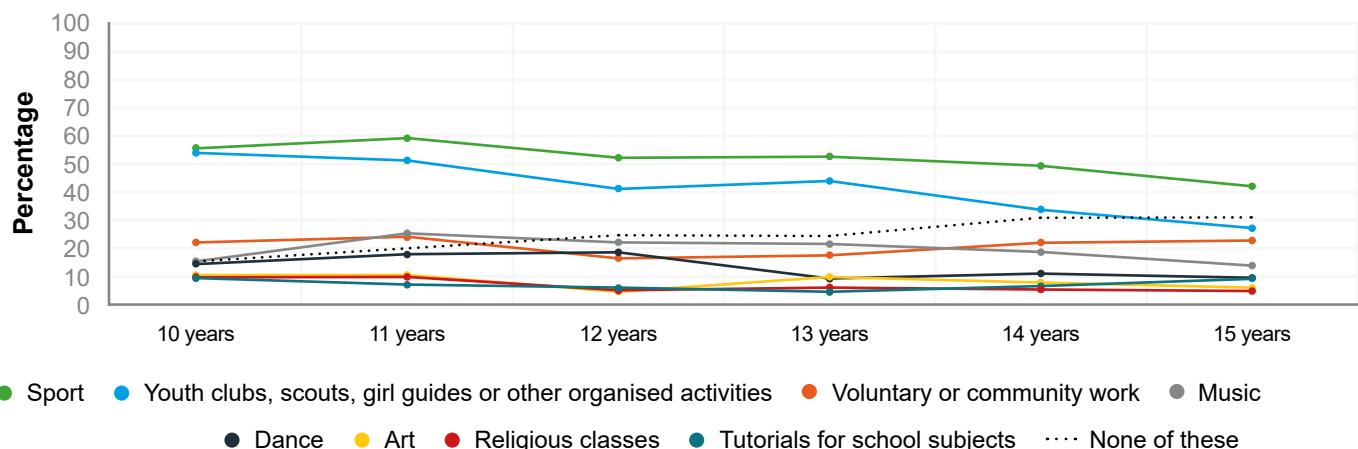
Age and gender

Important patterns exist in the participation rates across different types of activities as young people grow up. Figure 14 shows a consistent decrease in the frequency of participation rates in almost every extra-curricular activity, except tutorials for school subjects and voluntary work, as young people get older. There is an increase in the participation levels with regard to tutorials (private tuitions) from age group of 10 to 15. This increase in private tuition and decrease in other extra-curricular activities could be attributed to the fact that young people aged 14/15 are approaching their GCSE exams.

It is likely to be a time when their homework demands will be increasing, and there is a growing pressure to perform academically if they are to progress on to further study and university. This trend is substantiated by the rise in the frequency percentage of children who are not taking part in any of the eight activities surveyed within the Understanding Society study. Interestingly, voluntary or community work remains steady over time. Further research is needed to understand what could be driving this, but one possible theory is that voluntary and community work might engender a greater degree of commitment and is less easy for young people to give up.

Figure 14: Trends in participation rates in various extra-curricular activities according to age

Source: Own calculations with data from Understanding Society (Wave 8, 2016-2018)



The qualitative analysis corresponds, and to some extent helps to make sense of, these quantitative patterns in relation to age. It was apparent in the state schools that the children took part in more activities when they were younger, in primary school, and that as they got older, they engaged in fewer activities. It was especially the case that children expected to be engaging in far fewer activities once they reached school years 10 and 11, owing to the pressure of their GCSE exams. In some focus groups, pupils felt activities were targeted more at younger students. A year 8 female pupil at Metropolis School stated that there is a girls'

football team for year 7 pupils, but not year 8. And a year 11 male at Coalfields school felt that 'year 11s don't really get told about clubs... From year 8, you just don't really get told about anything like that... you're just more focused on getting your exams done.'

For some, their diminished involvement with age was also related to cost; a year 9 female at Coalfields learnt to play the guitar and ukulele at primary school, which were free at the time, but no longer had lessons as she would have to pay for them. Students at both Coalfields and Greenfields mentioned there were youth clubs in their local areas,

however, these are targeted at younger children and they do not attend because of this. At Earl's Court school, on the other hand, pupils in the sixth-form were as likely to be involved in multiple activities as those in younger year groups.

It is also clear that there is a gender dimension to participation in certain types of extra-curricular activities. Figure 15 displays the gender composition of extra-curricular activities contained within the survey, showing that gender imbalances exist across a number of activities. In the domains of music, dance, art, and voluntary work the percentage of women is found to be disproportionately higher than men. There is a vast disparity in the context of

dance, where a far lower proportion of boys (3%) indicated they took part in the activity compared to girls (23%). Similar to dance, sports can also be considered as a particularly gendered activity, with more boys (63%) indicating they take part in sports than girls (41%). It is not the case that all activities appear gendered; youth clubs, religious classes and private tuition have roughly the same proportion of girls and boys taking part in each activity. A drawback to survey data of this kind is that it could disguise nuances within what are broad categories. For example, whilst there appears to be a gender balance to taking part in voluntary work, this could mask differences in the kinds of voluntary activities undertaken by boys and girls.

Figure 15: Gender and participation in extra-curricular activities

	Wave 8 (2016-18)			
	Male		Female	
	%	SE	%	SE
Youth clubs, Scouts, Girl Guides or other organised activities	41.29	1.61	41.72	1.57
Voluntary or community work	18.27	1.27	23.06	1.34
Music	17.51	1.23	21.41	1.29
Art	6.94	0.81	9.92	0.97
Dance	3.40	0.60	22.70	1.35
Sport	62.66	1.62	40.78	1.57
Tutorials for school subjects	6.81	0.76	7.79	0.79
Religious classes	6.43	0.75	7.35	0.79
None of these	21.75	1.42	26.50	1.45

Source: Own calculations with data from Understanding Society (Wave 8, 2016-2018)

The analysis of qualitative data helps to explain some of these quantitative findings. Whilst our qualitative analysis did not reveal any noticeable gender divide in the uptake of activities like learning a musical instrument or attending drama club, for some activities, particularly sport-based activities, gender often played a role in terms of opportunities to participate. The gender divide was most prominent in the state schools, where, in most cases, males were most likely to play football and/or rugby, and only girls reported taking part in activities like netball or hockey.

In some focus groups, it became apparent that some activities were not equally

available to both male and female pupils. For example, at Metropolis, a white year 8 female, from a working-class background, said that although she enjoyed playing football and used to play in primary school, there is currently no girls' team for her age group in school. This was echoed by a year 9 girl from a working-class background at CoalfIELDS School. At Greenfields School, a year 9 boy from a working-class background had attended a gymnastics club outside of school when he was younger. However, he stopped attending after a couple of months because 'it was kind of embarrassing because I was the only boy there.' It seems that some pupils feel too uncomfortable to

take part in certain activities because of their gender, while for others, there is simply no opportunity for them to take part because of their gender.

School attended

In examining patterns in participation across different types of extra-curricular activities, it is important to take into account the differentiated nature of the UK school system, and especially differences between state and private schooling sectors. Understanding Society does not provide information on the type of school attended by young people taking part in the study. PISA, however, does provide this level of detail, and is used here to examine levels of provision in the types of extra-curricular activities offered across the state/private divide.

Figure 16 displays information on the provision of different activities across state and private schools. It is interesting to note that 'volunteering or services activities' are much more common in state schools than in private schools (the difference is of almost 30%, see figure 16), according to this PISA data. At the same time, science competitions are more prevalent in private schools than in the state sector (nearly 30% more private school provide these activities). It is also interesting to note that art-based activities had a higher rate of provision (nearly 10%) in the state sector than across private schools. These patterns could be explained by the nature of these activities, and possible associations with social background.

Figure 16. Percentage of schools offering different extra-curricular activities by school type

	Private		State-funded	
	%	SE	%	SE
Band, Orchestra or Choir	100.00	0.00	95.65	1.69
School play or school musical	81.22	16.41	87.88	2.59
School yearbook, newspaper or magazine	99.29	0.78	76.40	3.12
Volunteering or service activities	63.30	18.93	91.98	2.10
Science club	82.19	14.13	78.93	3.11
Science competitions	81.50	14.80	54.12	3.93
Chess club	73.88	18.47	71.43	3.58
Club with a focus on computers and ICT	57.60	19.28	68.75	3.70
Art club/activities	85.69	12.55	94.34	1.50
Sporting team/activities	100.00	0.00	100.00	0.00

Source: Own calculations with data from OECD PISA 2015

Whilst the analysis of PISA data suggests broadly similar patterns in the provision of extra-curricular activities (particularly activities related to sport and music) between independent and state schools (figure 16), a more nuanced story emerges from the qualitative analysis. The qualitative analysis also sheds further light on differences within the state sector itself, in terms of differences between state schools. Opportunities to take part in activities depended significantly on the school young people attended, and there were significant

disparities between the case study schools in terms of the amounts and types of activities provided.

The division between state and independent schools in terms of the amount and range of extra-curricular provision was particularly stark. Earl's Court stood out as a school that offered an exhaustive variety of activities that were not offered in the other schools. For example, pupils at this school were involved in chapel and chamber choirs, chess and darts clubs, and a wide range of

sporting activities, including widely available as well as more esoteric sports such as archery, caving, fencing, and ‘Real Tennis’, all of which were provided by the school free of charge (costs were included in school fees). One year 9 female pupil from a middle-class background is a member of the chapel choir, orchestra, flute group and chamber choir, all of which are school-led activities. More obscure sporting activities offered in school included water polo, fencing and rackets (a form of squash). Some pupils at Earl’s Court reported the somewhat compulsory nature of taking part in extra-curricular activities at their school. For example, it is compulsory to take part in one competitive sporting activity for your first term at the school. For others, those who attend the school on partial music or sport scholarships, they feel an obligation and that it is unofficially compulsory for them to remain part of the teams or clubs they sign up for. However, students recognised the value of taking part in activities for university applications and for just being ‘well-rounded’ individuals outside of their academic studies.

Many of the activities provided by Earl’s Court carried a high economic cost because they often involved travelling further afield to take part (for example, caving) as well as requiring expensive equipment (such as the kit needed for fencing). A year 9 male pupil at this school was a member of the school sailing club and has sailing lessons every Saturday at a local lake. He talked about the time it had taken him to learn how to sail, facilitated by the sailing experts who had coached him. Even when state schools are able to provide extra-curricular activities, they are not going to be able to match private schools in the sorts of activities they can offer, owing to their more constrained financial position. It was apparent at Earl’s Court that these esoteric and costly activities were part of the ‘package’ that was expected from the fees they paid to attend the school.

There was also a difference in terms of the sense of expectation or entitlement from students in the independent school. Pupils at Earl’s Court were confident they could initiate the introduction of new clubs where desired. A year 13 female pupil from a middle-class background described the ‘ease’ by which pupils could set up new

clubs themselves or approach the student council with an idea for a new club. Whilst it is always difficult to extrapolate from a single case, it could be that a greater sense of entitlement and ‘ease’ in establishing new activities stemmed from this being a fee-paying school, where greater expectations exist of their financial investment in their school experience.

In almost every state school focus group, however, pupils were generally unaware about how they would go about setting up a new club or activity. A year 10 male pupil at Greenfields expressed an interest in attending an after-school board game club. However, this is not currently an activity on offer, and he did not know how to go about suggesting this to school staff. The lack of entitlement and expectation of some of the state school students was felt most acutely among those from working-class backgrounds and in one focus group in particular at Metropolis school. This group talked about the differences in opportunities and status given to pupils from their school and those at schools like Earl’s Court. A year 11 female pupil argued ‘our school does get funding, but not like the other schools.’ A year 11 male in the group added, ‘I think they put it [funding] where they see potential... [funding at this school] won’t be as much as where there’s a better reputation.’ This group were frustrated with the lack of opportunities which came their way and communicated their perceptions that they were seen by others as undeserving of better opportunities because of where they go to school.

Although our limited sample of schools makes it difficult to generalise our findings, it was clear that there were significant differences between our state schools and the independent school in terms of staff members’ capacity to deliver extra-curricular activities. At Earl’s Court, running a wide range of activities was very much integral to the school’s ethos. Activities are offered long-term and a high level of engagement inside and outside of school is actively encouraged by staff. One year 11 female pupil had been given the opportunity, facilitated by a staff member, to play ‘Real Tennis’ along with the school team at a major London tennis club. A year 9 pupil spoke

about her music teachers' encouragement to pursue greater involvement in music groups: 'music teachers sign you up to the music groups they think you'd be interested in and perform well in.'

Furthermore, a year 12 male pupil was encouraged by a member of staff to pursue hockey outside of school and he now plays for a regional team. Engagement in extra-curricular activities at Earl's Court was encouraged and sometimes facilitated by staff who clearly had the means with which to provide access to these opportunities. Whilst difficult to extrapolate these findings beyond our sample, it is not unreasonable to assume that these findings are reflective of broader differences between state and private schools generally, especially given the rich literature that exists on the privileged and elite experiences of private schooling (Courtois, 2017; Walford, 1986; Kenway et al., 2017; Khan, 2010).

Whilst the biggest differences can be observed between the private and state schools within our sample, it was also apparent that the state schools also differed relative to each other in the range and type of activities they provided. Greenfields School stood out from the other state schools for the range of activities offered, driven by the headteacher's objective to increase provision and participation. At Greenfields School, there were between 12-20 different activities offered per day, over a three day period. All new teachers were asked to take responsibility for running an extra-curricular club (either at lunchtime or for one hour after school). Furthermore, at Greenfields, some clubs still ran even when popularity was low. For example, one parent mentioned that her daughter had joined the Harry Potter club 'and, bless her, she was the only one that turned up, but the teacher still ran the club.'

In taking account of the other state schools in our sample, it is likely that such a high level of extra-curricular provision within schools is not as widespread within the state sector. At CoalfIELDS and Metropolis Schools, some pupils and parents reported a lack of provision in school. One parent at CoalfIELDS argued that the school used to provide most of its activities for one hour at the end of the

school day. However, many of these are now run for 'just twenty minutes in lunchtime... which makes a huge difference in terms of how much they can get done.' At Metropolis, a year 11 male pupil stated he 'would like to see more activities' in school. This was echoed by a year 11 female pupil in the same focus group who commented 'we just want something good to do that's not sports.'

Parents and pupils at CoalfIELDS and Metropolis schools acknowledged a lack of teachers available to provide activities in school. Parents and teachers at CoalfIELDS explained that some teachers at the school were delivering after-school activities 'technically in their own time' and 'outside of contracted hours.' One father added: 'it's asking teachers to do something for nothing.' At Metropolis School, a year 9 female pupil suggested some clubs had been cancelled because staff members were not available to run them: 'they used to offer art, but not anymore because they couldn't find a teacher to run it. They haven't done it for like a year and a half now.' A teacher at Metropolis School mentioned in the parent focus group:

I think there are issues around staff... because they did [extra-curricular activities] voluntarily... and I think a lot of staff are kind of exhausted by the end of the day and so it is difficult... and I don't know how they do it in other schools.

This demonstrates the variation between schools in terms of the resources at their disposal to provide extra-curricular activities. Whilst state schools can try to mirror some of the practices found in the independent school, they will always have greater economic constraints and pressures which might be less problematic for private schools like Earl's Court. It seemed from the focus groups in the state schools that the provision of activities was often contingent on adequate pupil demand and the availability and interests of staff members.

It is also clear from the qualitative analysis that whilst the PISA dataset includes information on differences in the availability of ‘sports’ between state and private schools, this can mask the scale of differences between them in terms of the nature of sports offered. As discussed above, the private school offered distinctive and esoteric sporting activities that were not at all mentioned as a possible activity in the state schools. So, whilst there appears to be no differences quantitatively in levels of provision, the qualitative differences in the nature of activities are much more significant.

Similarly, whilst Understanding Society collects information on participation in music classes, it does not fully tease out differences in the nature of musical instruments being learnt by young people. For example, pupils at the state schools typically played or wanted to take up musical instruments like the piano or guitar. At the private school (Earl’s Court), provision and participation in music classes included an overwhelming range of instruments, bands and organised groups. Again, like sporting activities, the vast range of music related activities included the more unusual and less commonly known musical instruments and bands/groups. A year 10 male pupil at Earl’s Court School recounted his involvement in at least eleven different musical groups, including ‘string group’, ‘flute group’, ‘saxophone group’ and two ‘soul bands.’

Ethnicity

In examining how participation in different extra-curricular activities varies across different social groups, we also examine patterns according to ethnicity. Drawing on data from Understanding Society, figure 17 displays the frequency percentage of each ethnic group participating in the different extra-curricular activities. There are a number of interesting patterns present here, which signal that different ethnic groups take part in particular activities to differing degrees. Whilst 60% of Black African youth attend youth groups/scouts/girl guides or other organized activities, only 12% of Indian youth do so, and around a fifth of Black African, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Asian youth. Around 44% of white young people take part in these activities. As evidenced by previous research discussed earlier, we see here how almost all ethnic minority groups are more likely than white young people to receive private tuition. There are also other important findings to note here, including the fact that white youth appear more likely to take part in music and dance than most youth from ethnic minority backgrounds. Further research is needed to understand these ethnic disparities more fully - one theory could be that ethnic stereotypes associated with certain activities could be hindering participation.

Figure 17: Ethnicity and participation in extra-curricular activities

		White British	Other White	Mixed	Indian	PK*	BD†	Asian	Black Carib.	Black African	Other Black
	%	43.52	38.50	39.83	12.65	24.67	20.44	23.56	60.51	23.92	59.99
	SE	1.29	7.28	4.85	3.86	5.58	5.96	11.26	11.11	5.54	19.16
Voluntary or community work	%	20.60	23.46	10.99	27.11	30.82	21.18	20.65	14.45	19.68	0.00
	SE	1.06	7.04	2.71	5.54	4.90	0.61	10.29	8.40	5.15	
Music	%	19.81	26.53	25.21	28.15	3.78	13.58	44.30	10.97	12.54	13.55
	SE	1.03	6.17	3.97	6.11	2.14	5.30	12.89	5.28	4.26	12.73
Art	%	8.27	13.68	7.36	3.59	11.05	11.26	10.46	3.62	15.75	13.38
	SE	0.73	5.35	2.60	1.77	3.35	3.16	8.04	3.14	5.67	12.59
Dance	%	13.25	19.55	15.13	17.40	3.69	3.34	15.99	12.87	7.22	0.00
	SE	0.89	5.94	3.27	5.52	1.89	1.84	11.14	6.41	2.82	
Sport	%	51.18	51.62	59.28	54.51	44.51	38.63	47.41	58.87	47.52	43.06
	SE	1.33	7.75	4.78	6.60	5.33	6.45	13.14	11.09	6.36	19.22
Tutorials for school subjects	%	5.39	21.35	6.77	26.97	18.40	13.59	18.91	8.71	17.15	0.00
	SE	0.56	6.15	1.75	6.07	3.98	3.85	9.55	5.89	4.29	
Religious classes	%	4.52	8.01	12.30	20.62	45.04	32.52	17.74	6.89	15.41	20.22
	SE	0.53	4.43	3.23	5.62	5.69	5.69	9.03	4.50	4.28	14.08
None of these	%	25.38	12.33	12.82	14.02	22.23	29.27	19.61	33.51	24.86	50.27
	SE	1.20	3.95	3.21	4.24	3.77	6.45	10.36	10.76	5.57	19.52

*PK = Pakistani †BD = Bangladeshi

Source: Own calculations with data from Understanding Society (Wave 8, 2016-2018)

Figure 18: Geographic location and participation in extra-curricular activities (aged 10–15)

Explore the complete dataset in appendix page 73

Source: Own calculations with data from Understanding Society (Wave 8, 2016-2018)

Youth clubs, scouts, girl guides or other organised activities



Voluntary or community work



Music



Art



Dance



Sport



Tutorials for school subjects



Religious classes



None of these



Increasing participation →

All estimates are statistically significant at the 95% level

Geography

The places where young people grow up are also likely to matter in determining their access to, and participation in, extra-curricular activities. Figure 18 shows participation levels in the different extra-curricular activities broken down by the 12 Government Office Regions of the UK. For the most part, participation levels do not appear to vary significantly across different countries and regions of the UK, but certain areas differ slightly from the rest. Young people in Northern Ireland are found to be participating more than the national average in certain types of activities, especially youth clubs or other organised activities (61% of youth participate, compared to 42% nationally). The non-participation rate is also the second lowest nationally.

Particular regions also stand out from the rest in terms of much lower rates of participation in certain activities. For example, in the North East of England, only 9% of young people take part in music classes, compared to 19% of youth nationally – and 22% of youth in the South East. A slightly higher proportion of youth take part in religious classes in the West Midlands and London compared to the national average. There are a range of possible explanations for these geographic

differences. For example, the lack of music take-up in the North East could be due to regional differences in earnings (Office for National Statistics, 2018), especially in the context of costly music lessons and instruments. It could also reflect differences in rates of provision across different localities. A more detailed and comprehensive analysis of the geography of extra-curricular participation and provision is needed to understand these patterns.

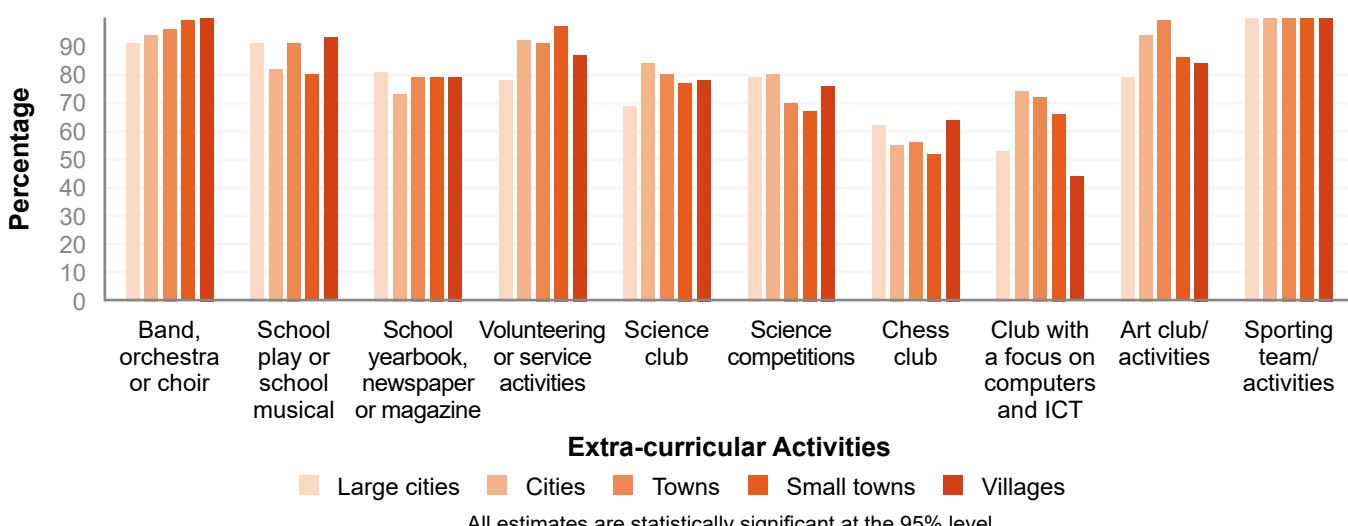
A limitation of observing patterns of participation broken down by broad geographic regions is that it can obscure differences within regions and countries. It is likely that even within towns and cities, particular areas will have differing levels of take-up or provision of activities. An alternative to examining participation by broad country/region is to look at more geographically meaningful units of analysis, such as urban/rural or whether youth live in towns, cities or villages. Figure 19 displays what percentage of youth from urban/rural localities engage with a given extra-curricular activity. It shows that youth living in rural localities participate more in sport and slightly more in organized activities (such as scouts, clubs and guides etc.). Whereas, in the context of tutorials, dance and attending religious classes, rates of participation are higher for youth in urban areas.

Figure 19: Urban/rural participation in extra-curricular activities

	Wave 8 (2016-18)			
	Urban		Rural	
	%	SE	%	SE
Youth clubs, Scouts, Girl Guides or other organised activities	40.88	1.31	43.45	2.19
Voluntary or community work	20.27	1.07	22.23	1.86
Music	19.38	1.03	19.94	1.76
Art	8.24	0.74	9.16	1.29
Dance	14.23	0.93	10.66	1.39
Sport	50.04	1.34	55.47	2.25
Tutorials for school subjects	7.54	0.64	6.64	1.07
Religious classes	7.91	0.67	3.84	0.8
None of these	25.15	1.2	21.32	1.9

Source: Own calculations with data from Understanding Society (Wave 8, 2016-2018)

It could be that any geographic differences in participation might in turn be explained by geographic variances in school-based provision of activities – and we again draw on the PISA data to examine provision broken down by geographic location. PISA does not contain information on the country/region of schools, but does provide details on whether schools are located in cities, towns or villages (figure 20). Broadly speaking, the differences in provision across these localities is not too dissimilar, with only a few notable differences. The most important difference regarding the location of schools corresponds to ‘clubs with a focus on ICT’. With a difference of about 30%, these kinds of clubs are on average more frequently offered in schools located in cities than in schools located in villages.

Figure 20. Percentage of schools offering different extra-curricular activities by school location Source: Own calculations with data from OECD PISA 2015

The analysis of qualitative data provides further insight into the role played by geography, especially the nature of different neighbourhoods, including differences within urban areas and between different rural areas. The geographic diversity in our case study school locations (see section 1) provides one means of making these comparisons. It is apparent from the focus groups conducted that where young people live impacts significantly on the opportunities

Note: large city = over 1 000 000 people, city = 100 000 to about 1 000 000 people, town = 15 000 to about 100 000 people, small town = 3 000 to about 15 000 people, village = fewer than 3 000 people

available to them for taking part in extra-curricular activities. In some localities, far fewer extra-curricular activities were provided; this was felt most acutely in focus groups at Coalfields and Greenfields schools. Pupils at Coalfields School lived either in the small post-industrial town in which the school is situated or in neighbouring villages which varied dramatically in terms of the extra-curricular opportunities to which pupils had access. It became clear that in one village, where at least one pupil or parent in each focus group lived, there was virtually no provision of activities or even public spaces for children to spend their time. One parent recounted that 'we've got absolutely no stuff at all, absolutely nothing... there used to be a youth club but that's gone now... there's not even a football club anymore.' A year 9 pupil agreed: 'I'm not aware of anything [any opportunity to take part in activities in my village] actually, to be honest.' Although comparatively, there was more to do in the small town of Forkhill in which the school was situated, there was still only minimal provision. A year 10 pupil from a middle-class background reported: 'the only thing there is to do in [this town] is [go to the] park and just sit there.' A year 9 female pupil from a working-class background recalled that she used to go swimming, 'but they closed the swimming pool [in town] for good.'

There seemed to be a common trend across all the localities in which pupils at Coalfields lived whereby the provision of extra-curricular activities had diminished significantly in recent years. A year 11 male pupil, who lived in a village adjoining Forkhill, now had to catch a bus to a neighbouring village to play football on weekends as his local team had ceased to exist. A year 10 working-class male pupil used to go every Friday to the church at the end of his street in Forkhill to attend the youth club. He said, 'that's where I learnt piano and then it shut down at the end that year.' A year 9 male pupil added:

I think there should be more stuff going off... some clubs can help you out and stop you getting in trouble... there's not a lot of places [in this town] for people to go and like people with disabilities... if there were like a computer club or something like that, it'd stop people getting in each other's way.

This pupil could be referring to a family member or friend who has a disability and is not able to take part in activities. He also touches on the issue of antisocial behaviour and how clubs could prevent it. Many pupils at Coalfields discussed the high levels of antisocial behaviour present in their villages and their unwillingness to use public parks because of this. Pupils described one local park as having 'lots of smashed glass', that it's 'dirty' and that 'young adults [are always] smoking and drinking [there].' One year 11 male pupil added: 'it's sort of like forgotten... they get loads of police coming down and stuff.' The situation was the same in another small village near to the school. One parent who lived here commented, 'there's nothing in [my village] at all... it's small and there used to be a shop and a pub and things like that but that's gone now. There is a park, but we don't really go down there,' Through these examples, pupils and parents at Coalfields characterised Forkhill and its surrounding villages as an area where extra-curricular activities in the local community are hard to come by.

Although Greenfields School pupils did not report any antisocial behaviour in their local area, they too argued that there was not much provision in their local villages and towns. Greenfields is situated in a small rural town in southern England approximately a 30-minute drive (according to one teacher) to the nearest large town. A year 9 male pupil, when asked if there was much going on in his local area, answered:

No, not really. There's scouts, but there's not many scouts and if there is a scout group, it [tends to be] a very small one. Like, Beavers, I used to go there, a lot of people would go there. Now, my cousin goes there but he says there's not a lot of people.

A parent in the focus group also agreed, acknowledging:

There's cubs and scouts but we're in a town where the waiting list is huge... there's massive waiting lists... I think it's generally in most places, there's waiting lists for things that are cheaper.

The parent brings to light the fact that there is indeed a desire among parents and their children to take part in these types of activities, evidenced by the long waiting lists to join local scout groups. However, provision is lacking. This points to a need for more facilities to run these activities in smaller rural towns and villages, as well as a lack of opportunities to engage in more affordable extra-curricular activities.

Pupils at Greenfields felt that the geographical remoteness of the villages where they lived disadvantaged them in terms of their access to extra-curricular activities. One year 9 female pupil is able to go ice-skating in the nearby larger town because her dad is able to drive her there. However, another year 9 pupil struggled to access activities that were farther afield: ‘I’d have to drive everywhere [to access a lot of activities], sometimes it’s a bit difficult, ‘cos my mum’s at work and my dad’s at work, so it’s not always easy.’ Another pupil, female and in year 10, added:

It’s a really small village, so there’s, you know, village football and a youth club once a week and that’s pretty much it I used to go to a [community-run] youth club in [the town where the school is situated], but that closed down.

A year 9 female pupil agreed:

Sometimes you can’t actually get to clubs that you want to do, cos my dad works quite late and my mum doesn’t drive... some of the things, you need a car to get there.

Finally, a parent at Greenfields commented that:

For a better range of clubs, we have no choice but to travel and some parents just can’t do it we don’t really have any youth clubs, where other more academic activities like chess would usually be offered.

The area where Greenfields is situated stood out particularly for its remoteness and the distances pupils and parents had to travel to access different extra-curricular activities. Pupils’ involvement in many activities was highly dependent on their parents’ capacity to drive them between towns and villages.

Whilst Earl’s Court and Metropolis are both situated within a city, Earl’s Court is situated within an affluent area of its city, and the area surrounding where Metropolis School is located is considerably more deprived socioeconomically. Despite pupils and parents at Metropolis being geographically closer to a greater range of activities than those at Coalfields and Greenfields (they could access activities more easily by public transport and on foot), their involvement was often stunted by the antisocial behaviour present where they lived. A year 8 black British female pupil from a working-class background alluded to street violence a couple of times during the focus group. She mentioned not being able to go to a particular youth club because she feared being ‘beaten up outside.’ She used to attend a different youth club, ‘until a girl got jumped and then everyone stopped going.’ She added, exasperatedly, ‘can’t do nothing.’ One year 10 male pupil, black African and from a working-class background, had ‘nearly been arrested’ for antisocial behaviour in the city centre, and said that ‘doing basketball kept me off the streets and out of crime.’ A year 11 male pupil also saw extra-curricular activities as a way of curbing the antisocial behaviour the pupils talked about and added, ‘it’d be better for the community as a whole if they opened more youth clubs.’

Additionally, although there are a good number of activities available in the wider city, pupils and parents at Metropolis in general did not think there was adequate provision in their immediate locality. One working-class female parent pointed out that, compared with her friends in London, there was little to do in this area. For example, her son wanted to play cricket but could not find an opportunity to do so where they live. A year 9 male pupil from a working-class background was learning to play guitar in school but stated that ‘if I wasn’t learning in school, I probably wouldn’t be learning at all.’ He was not aware of how he would go about finding a private tutor and whether this would be affordable.

Although pupils at Metropolis lived within easy reach of other areas of the city via a public transport network of trains and buses

that ran through their local suburb, many perceived that opportunities elsewhere were too far away. A year 8 male pupil mentioned that he would like to attend a sport club in Bristol that he had looked into but that it is 'super far away' meaning he could not get involved. A year 9 male pupil in another focus group was keen to play basketball: 'if there were a basketball team near me, I'd probably join... the nearest place to do it is [town less than two miles away], but it's too far.' One parent pointed out a club that had started in another part of the city, but that 'it is quite far and my daughter wants to go... but that relies on me being a taxi service.'

Another parent suggested that children in this area want to get involved in activities but that there is not a lot of provision locally. It should not be assumed, therefore, that because a school is located within a major city that pupils and parents will have the money or time needed to travel to different activities within the city that may be relatively close by. The financial position of many families at Metropolis meant that their child's involvement in activities was restricted to their small corner of the city, where provision was low or too expensive. As provision in school was also low, many pupils, as the exasperated year 8 female pupil exclaimed, 'can't do nothing.'

Accessing activities in their local area was not a problem for pupils at Earl's Court, largely because so many activities were offered in, or facilitated through, the school. Additionally, the parent interviewed at Earl's Court exemplified the stark differences in the capacity of parents from different social class backgrounds to facilitate children's access to opportunities that are perhaps further afield. This parent did not work and had the time and financial means with which to travel with her children to their different activities. She mentioned 'well, I take them everywhere, erm, on weekends, standing on touchlines... we're very involved because we have to take them everywhere.' She gave an example of her two daughters being given the opportunity to go with their school team on a 'tennis tour' abroad. 'Our boys thought this was unfair and we didn't have a holiday planned yet that year, so we all decided to go along too.' In the pupil focus

groups, pupils were involved in activities that required them to travel outside of the city for training or competitions, and they relied on parents or coaches provided by school to do this. Most of these pupils (at least six out of the eight taking part in one focus group) travelled from outside of the city to get to school each day, so they are used to relying on parents to take them places for extra-curricular activities.

SECTION THREE: THE LABOUR MARKET, 'SOFT SKILLS' AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Introduction

**Soft skills: Definitions
and concepts**

**Which soft skills do
employers want?**

Skill shortages

Skill gaps

**Critique of employer
perspectives**

Soft skills and social mobility

Key points

- There is strong evidence that demand exists from employers for soft skills in the UK labour market.
- The Employer Skills Survey has consistently shown that the most common soft skill lacking in the labour market is the ability to manage ones' own time and task prioritisation (51% of all 'skill-shortage vacancies' were attributed to this in 2017). This is followed by the ability to manage one's own feelings and handle the feelings of others.
- Gaps in soft skills (such as customer handling, team working and oral communication) were as widely reported by employers as the gaps in 'job specific and technical skills'.
- A recent study analysing job adverts in the UK found that academic credentials were not the key factor that employers highlight in the advertisement phase of the recruitment process (present only in 18% of job adverts UK wide). Social skills, specific technical skills, and personal characteristics – rather than academic qualifications – are more central in this part of the hiring process.
- Previous research analysing job adverts in the UK labour market has found that social skills are less likely to appear than technical and cognitive skills, and more likely to appear than formal qualification or educational requirements.
- Social skills are on the other hand very important for sales and customer service occupations, administrative and secretarial occupations, associate professional and managers.
- Analysis of data from PIAAC supports past research on the association between soft skills (some of which can be gained from extra-curricular activities) and intergenerational social mobility. Our research found a correlation between higher levels of soft skills (readiness to learn, problem-solving, and planning skills) and upward social mobility defined as having higher educational achievement than parents.

Introduction

In section 2 of the report, we examined the significance of extra-curricular activities across a variety of outcomes (including educational achievement and aspirations), as well as analysing differences in participation according to age, gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, school attended and geographic location. Our qualitative research in selected schools confirmed that young people and parents perceive extra-curricular activities as an important contributor to improving confidence to interact socially, some technical skills, as well as a crucial means for extending friendship networks. Previous research reviewed here has also suggested that extra-curricular activities contribute to the acquisition of interpersonal ‘soft skills’ like communication, persistence, independence, following instructions, working well within groups, dealing with authority figures and fitting in with peers (Carneiro & Heckman, 2005; Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Farb & Matjasko, 2012; Farkas, 2003; Howie, Lukacs, Pastor, Reuben, & Mendola, 2010). It must also be noted that the kinds of ‘soft skills’ gained through extra-curricular activities might not necessarily be the kind needed in the labour market by employers. For example, the kind of ‘team work’ developed through sports activities might not necessarily be the kind of ‘team work’ needed in the labour market. As a caveat for the discussion presented here, one should not necessarily assume that there is a single mutually conceived notion of ‘team work’ or any other soft skill.

Nevertheless, the possible influence of extra-curricular activities on the acquisition of soft skills becomes even more important in the context of growing demands from the labour market and employers for these types of skills. Various studies have found that the skills for which there has been the greatest increase in demand in the last decades of the 20th century were non-routine analytical skills (i.e. those involved in problem solving) and, to an even larger extent, non-cognitive (or ‘soft’) skills, including collaboration skills (Autor, Levy, & Murnane, 2003; Deming, 2017; Whitmore Schanzenbach, Nunn, Bauer, Mumford, & Breitwieser, 2016). It has

been suggested that new jobs tend to require both foundational (e.g. literacy, numeracy) and soft skills (Bacolod & Blum, 2010).

Other studies have argued that the flattening of organizational hierarchies has meant that workers at all levels are now required to have higher levels of soft skills (Brungardt, 2011). According to this research, technical skills would still be necessary for workers to get jobs, but they may not be sufficient for workers to move beyond entry-level jobs. In other words, subsequent success beyond entry levels usually would require proficiency in ‘soft skill’ areas such as leadership, self-management, conflict resolution, communication, emotional intelligence, etc. (Laker & Powell, 2011). Furthermore, soft skills have also been found to be positively associated with workers’ occupational status (Lucs, 2014) and higher salaries (Bacolod & Blum, 2010; Heckman, Stixrud, & Urzua, 2006). In addition, researchers have also found that these skills not only directly impact job outcomes, but significantly impact educational attainment (Blanden, Gregg, & Macmillan, 2007).

A further study commissioned by the Education Endowment Foundation and Cabinet Office found a strong relationship between soft skills and positive academic and broader life outcomes such as academic attainment, improved finance in adulthood and reduced crime (Gutman & Schoon, 2013). The same study suggests that the evidence is strongest in relation to soft skills underpinning academic-related outcomes such as children’s perception of their ability, their expectations of future success, and their motivation and persistence. Furthermore, recent research by the Sutton Trust reveals that differences in soft skills exist between children from different socio-economic backgrounds (Vries & Rentfrow, 2016). They highlight the growing body of research that demonstrates that these skills are essential for securing jobs and hence are vital for social mobility.

This chapter builds upon these findings and sets them in the context of the UK labour market, in terms of the demand for soft skills from employers. It also goes further and tries to examine claims about the possible linkages between soft skills and upward

social mobility empirically using available data sources in the UK. We first elaborate on the concept and definition of soft skills, before moving on to the evidence base for labour market demand in relation to soft skills, using Employer Skill Survey data and recent big data analysis of job adverts in the UK. Finally, we use data from PIAAC to examine the possible links between level of soft skills and upward social mobility, defined here as having higher educational achievement than parents.

Soft skills: definitions and concepts

In recent decades the use of the term **skill** by policy makers, employers and academics has broadened considerably, raising questions about the concept of skilled work and what it constitutes (Payne 2017). Various academic disciplines and traditions understand the concept of skill differently (Bryson 2017) and it is beyond the scope of this report to address the variety of understandings and uses of the concept of skills. For example, those in sport and exercise psychology tend to speak more about “life skills” rather than soft skills which are prominent in the labour market and education studies. However, what is important is that the notion of skill is expanding from technical and cognitive conceptualizations (characteristics for trades and industrial production) to include ‘soft’ interpersonal and social elements which are essential across service organisations, especially in customer-facing jobs (Payne 2017; Bryson 2017; Hurrell 2016; Nickson et al. 2012). This shift in understanding is linked with the expansion of service sectors in developed economies and the expansion in low level service sectors (Appelbaum, Bernhardt, and Murnane 2003; Hurrell 2016).

Soft skills are usually defined as: ‘non-technical and not reliant on abstract reasoning, involving interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities to facilitate mastered performance in particular social contexts’ (Hurrell, Scholarios, and Thompson 2013). Examples of soft skills include oral communication, team working, negotiation skills, customer handling and self-presentation. Soft skills involve dealing

with others and managing oneself and one’s emotions in a manner consistent with particular workplaces and organizations (Hurrell, Scholarios, and Thompson 2013). Although soft skills are seen to be especially important within customer service sectors (Nickson et al. 2012) they are seen also as important across occupational groups e.g. for highly educated professional service workers (Grugulis 2006) as well as for managers for which they are seen as crucial in increasing leadership effectiveness (Riggio et al. 2003).

Despite disagreement within the academic community on definitions (Bryson 2017) as to whether soft skills are skills (Hurrell, Scholarios, and Thompson 2013), they are increasingly present in the policy debates and demanded by employers. Within these debates, the crucial and burning issue is the perceived skill deficits in the labour force reported by employers. In the UK, the concerns raised by some reports claim the UK is facing a “skills crisis” as the workforce is facing in particular a deficit in soft skills which is threatening productivity and which could have major financial implications for the UK economy (Clarke 2016). For instance, a widely quoted report published by Development Economics on behalf of McDonald’s, UK, suggested that by 2020 over half a million UK workers will be significantly held back by lack of soft skills – an issue that is forecast to affect all industry sectors (Development Economics, 2015).

Within regular Employers Skills survey reports (see Winterbotham et al, 2018, as the most recent example) employers report problems with filling vacancies because applicants lack the required skills (skills shortages) and/or that current workers lack proficiency in their jobs (skills gaps). These problems are, however, not confined to hard/technical skills and deficiencies are frequently reported in ‘soft’ interpersonal and social skills. Within the UK, a significant minority of employers report that potential recruits or current workers do not possess these soft skills, with soft skills gaps much more widely reported than soft skills shortages (Winterbotham et al, 2018). These phenomena are not extensive in absolute terms, with both phenomena being reported

by a small minority of employers. Soft skills are more prominently featured in job adverts compared to formal credentials or technical skills (Souto-Otero 2018). We present these findings in more detail in the next section.

Which soft skills do employers want?

One way to assess the extent of ‘skills shortages’ and ‘skills gaps’ in the UK is to analyse employer responses to national Employer Skills Surveys (ESS) (latest report Winterbotham et al, 2018). The UK ESS is one of the largest business surveys in the world, with the data in this report based on survey responses from over 87,000 employers. These surveys are conducted at the establishment level and completed by a HR representative or manager responsible for HR issues. The latest UK ESS 2017 revealed a far greater proportion of establishments reporting skills gaps (13% of surveyed establishments reported staff not fully proficient and within these establishments, a total of 4% of employed staff have been reported as not being sufficiently proficient) than skills shortages (6% of establishments report ‘skill shortage vacancies’, and these vacancies make 22% of all open vacancies). Compared with previous rounds of ESS percentage of ‘skill-shortage vacancies’ increases, while the percentage of employed staff with skill gaps decreases.

Skill shortages

The Employer Skills Survey (Winterbotham et al, 2018) provides insight into the particular skills that employers have found to be lacking among applicants. Employers with ‘skill-shortage vacancies’ were read a list of skills and asked, for each occupation in which they reported ‘skill-shortage vacancies’ (2 occupations chosen at random), which skills were lacking. The Employer Skills Survey groups skills they are lacking into two broad categories:

- Technical and practical skills – these are the specific skills required to perform the specific functions of a job role

- People and personal skills – these are the ‘softer’, more tacit skills required to manage oneself and interact with others in the workplace.

As the primary concern of our research is about soft skills, we focus on the second group – people and personal skills. They are by definition less tangible than technical and practical skills, but they can have a big impact on the ability of a potential employee to adapt to the workplace and be an effective member of staff.

The Employer Skills Survey consistently shows over its different rounds that the most common soft skill lacking in the labour market was the ability to manage ones’ own time and task prioritisation (51% of all ‘skill-shortage vacancies’ were attributed to this in 2017). This is followed by the ability to manage one’s own feelings and handle the feelings of others – which was cited as a skill lacking for 37% of all ‘skill-shortage vacancies’ in 2017. These two types of soft skills belong to the group of self-managing skills. Around six in ten ‘skill-shortage vacancies’ (59%) were at least partly caused by a lack of ‘self-management skills’ in 2017. A lack of self-management skills was particularly prevalent for employers in the following sectors: Hotels and Restaurants (75% of all skill-shortage vacancies in the sector), Arts and Other Services (67%), and Financial Services (61%) (Winterbotham et al, 2018).

The second less deficient group represent ‘management and leadership’ skills. This group includes: managing or motivating other staff (35% of all skill-shortage vacancies), persuading and influencing others (33%), and setting objectives and/or planning resources (25%). A lack of management and leadership skills were most prevalent for employers in Hotels and Restaurants (62% of all skill-shortage vacancies in the sector) and Financial Services (61%).

The third group of soft skills that were reported as lacking are ‘sales and customer skills’, cited as a cause for 45% of all skill-shortage vacancies. This group includes: customer handling skills (39% of all ‘skill-shortage vacancies’) and sales skills (27%

of all skill-shortage vacancies). A lack of sales and customer skills were particularly prevalent in Financial Services (71%), Arts and Other Services (58%) and Wholesale and Retail (54%).

Other prominent soft skills reported as lacking but not grouped in the previous three categories are: team working (37% of all skill-shortage vacancies and primarily reported in Hotel and Restaurant sectors, Arts and Other services and Health and Social Work), Instructing, teaching or training people (26% of all 'skill-shortage vacancies', primarily reported in Hotel and Restaurant sector and Education) and making speeches and presentations (17%, primarily reported in Information and Communication Sector, Financial Services and Education).

Skills gaps

The extent of skill gaps in the existing labour force in the UK is not extensive according to the Employer Skills Survey 2017. The majority of establishments (87%) reported that all of their staff were fully proficient at their jobs and one in seven employers (13%) had at least one member of staff who was not fully proficient. The proportion of the workforce perceived to be lacking proficiency has continued to fall across the UK, from 5.5% in 2011 to 4.4% in 2017 (Winterbotham et al, 2018).

In all of the Employer Skills Survey rounds, the highest density of skills gaps was seen in the Hotels and Restaurants and Manufacturing sectors. At an occupational level, Sales and Customer Service staff were most likely to lack full proficiency at their job (7%), especially those working at large establishments with more than 100 employees. They are followed by elementary work staff (6.4% employees are reported to have skill gap), skilled trade occupations (5.7%) and machine operatives (5.2%). Skills gaps are very rare in the case of managers and professional workers (less than 2%). Public sector and third sector establishments who reported skills gaps were more likely to have responded to these issues (91% and 90% respectively) than establishments in the private sector (85%), with the proportion particularly high within Education and Health and Social Work (93% and 92% respectively) (Winterbotham et al, 2018).

Soft skills (such as customer handling, team working and oral communication) were a widespread constituent of skills gaps and in the 2017 survey round they were as widely reported as the gaps in 'job specific and technical skills'. Approximately half of all establishments which reported a skills gap, reported that these were in soft skills (Hurrell 2016).

Both in the 2015 and 2017 Employer Skills Surveys, the most common people or personal skill found to be lacking among staff related to:

- Time management and prioritisation of tasks (reported by 45% of staff with skill gap), reported above average in sectors of Health and Social Work, Business Services, Hotel and Restaurants and Transport and Storage.
- Managing and motivating other staff (40% of staff with skill gap), reported above average in sectors of Hotels and Restaurants, Education, Health and Social Work and Manufacturing.
- Team work (40% of staff with skill gap) reported above average in sectors of Health and Social Work, Transports and Storage, Manufacturing and Hotels and Restaurants.
- Customer handling skills (37% of staff with skill gap) reported above average in sectors of Hotels and Restaurants and Wholesale and Retail.
- Instructing teaching or training people (35% of staff with skill gap) reported above average in sectors of Manufacturing, Education, Hotels and Restaurants and Transport and Storage.
- Managing own/others feelings (34% of staff with skill gap) reported above average in sectors of Health and Social Work, Education and Transport and Storage.
- Persuading and influencing others (31% of staff with skill gap) reported above average in sectors of Health and Social Work, Manufacturing and Transport and Storage.

- Setting objectives for others (31% of staff with skill gap) reported above average in sectors of Education, Health and Social Work and Manufacturing.
- Sales skills (31% of staff with skill gap) reported above average in sectors of Hotels and Restaurants, Wholesale and Retail and Information and Communication.
- Making speeches and presentations (19% of staff with skill gap) reported above average in sectors of Transport and Storage, Education, Health and Social Work and Business Services.

Analysis of job adverts

An alternative way to establish which skills (including soft skills) are deemed important and required by employers is to look at job adverts and job descriptions. Job adverts represent a key stage in recruitment as they are a first filter which allocate people to particular jobs. Through this initial stage, the number of applicants is narrowed down from a very large pool of job seekers to a relatively small number of job applicants, which are then selected further in the recruitment processes (Brown and Souto-Otero 2018). A ground breaking ‘big data’ study by Brown and Souto Otero (2018) has analysed more than 21 million job adverts in the UK posted online between January 2012 and December 2014 using Burning Glass’s Labour Insight, which web crawls approximately 10,000 employer websites per day (Burning Glass, 2015). The analysis of these adverts was across the entire economy.

Formal qualification requirements vs. skills profiles

The results of the study are somewhat surprising and confirm the importance of soft skills for employers. Only 18% of jobs specify a formal qualification requirement. Findings show that academic credentials are not the key factor that employers highlight in the advertisement phase of the recruitment process and that social skills, specific skills and personal characteristics – rather than academic qualifications – are more central in this process. Authors warn that these findings should be interpreted cautiously as:

“specific qualification requirements may be used as an initial filter in the selection/elimination process, even if not listed in advertised job requirements. In some professions certification requirements may be well known and thus assumed rather than made explicit. There may also be greater use of academic qualifications in entry-level jobs as other jobs may focus more on relevant experience”

(Brown and Souto-Otero 2018).

Furthermore, Brown and Souto Otero (2018) looked beyond formal qualifications and uncovered that employers look for a wider range of technical and social skills in defining job profiles, with an emphasis on immediate performance rather than in terms of ‘trainability’. figure 21 is adapted from their paper and shows the proportion of different requirements present in adverts for posts in different occupational categories. The analysed requirement groups are: qualifications, cognitive skills, effort, technical, social and personal skills. For most occupational groups, cognitive, social and above all technical skills, are indeed more frequently demanded than qualifications.

- In cognitive abilities, authors classify: organisational skills, time management, and planning, multi-tasking, prioritising tasks, project planning, orientation towards detail, analytical skills, quick learner, problem-solving, foreign language skills and change management.
- Under effort authors group the following descriptors: energetic, meeting deadlines, self-motivation, self-starter and initiative
- Under technical skills authors group: computer skills, knowledge of office software packages, typing, secretarial skills, budgeting and other very specific technical skills.
- Under social skills authors group advert descriptors: team-work, leadership, supervisory skills, team management, team building, building effective relationships with customers or co-workers, customer service, communication skills, writing skills, English, presentation skills, articulate, listening, negotiation skills, conflict management.

The emphasis on technical skills is important as it points to the detailed specification of technical requirements, for instance in terms of the ability to use certain software programmes, not captured by formal qualifications. A key finding from this research is that personal characteristics sometimes covered under the soft skill label – being articulate, energetic, a quick learner, a self-starter or having certain physical abilities – play a limited role across occupations (Brown and Souto-Otero 2018). As we can see in adverts for all occupational categories, social skills are less present than technical and cognitive skills and more present in job adverts than formal qualification requirements. Social skills are on the other hand very important for sales and customer service occupations, administrative and secretarial occupations, associate professional and managers.

Not all analysed adverts contained information on skill requirements. Analysing nearly 19 million adverts which did contain such descriptions indicates that only two skills: communication skills and planning and organisation skills are mentioned in more than 10% of adverts. Other soft skills prominent in the Employer Skill Survey findings presented previously like building effective relationships, team work or problem solving, are present in less than 10% of analysed job adverts (figure 22).

Figure 21. Job advert requirements for different occupational categories in percentages (Brown and Souto Otero 2018)

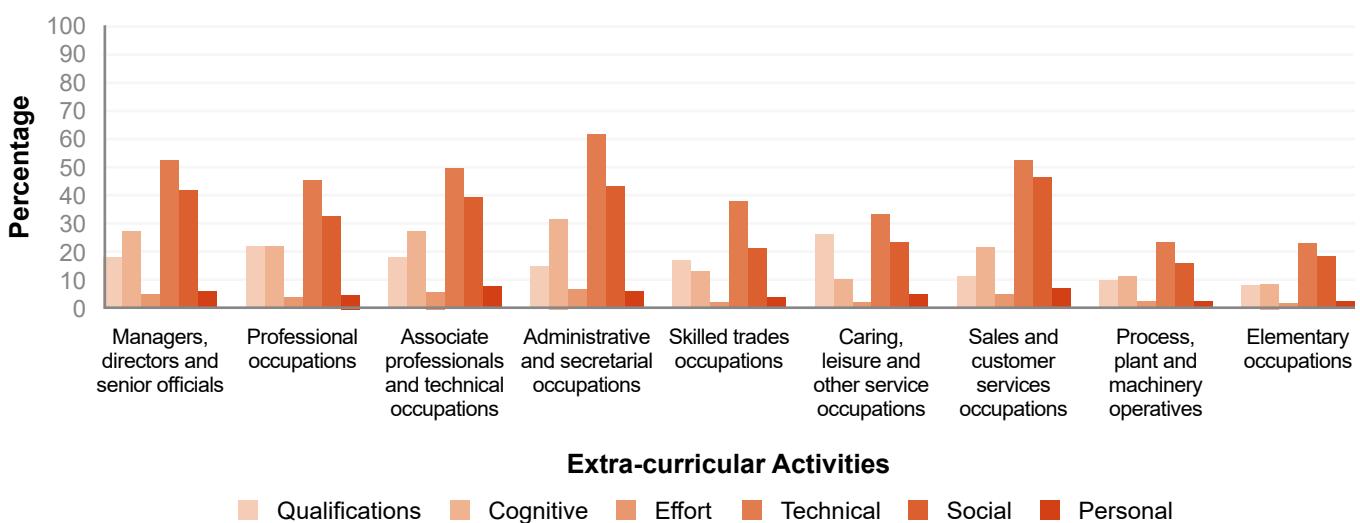


Figure 22. Specific skills in greatest demand 2012–2014 (%) (Brown and Souto Otero 2018)

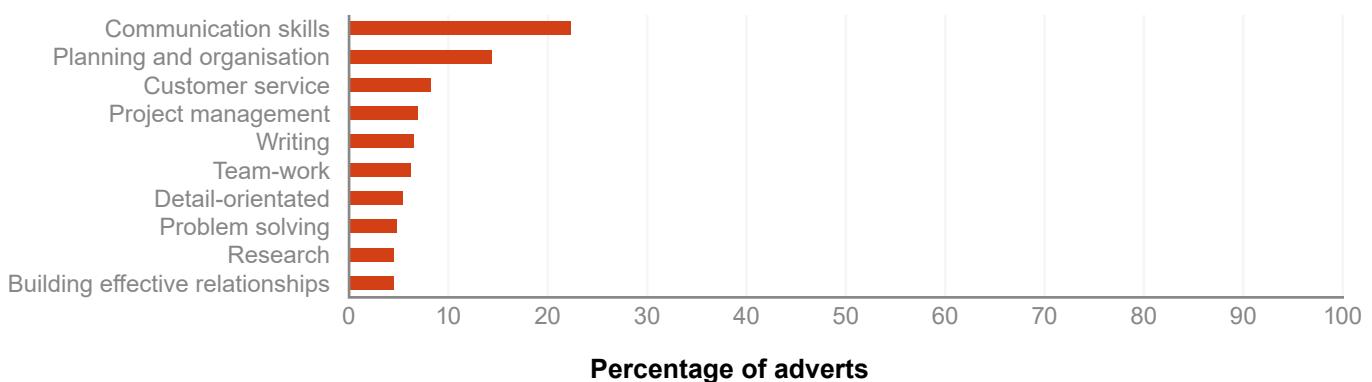


Figure 21 and 22 were re-drawn from those originally published in the research by Brown and Souto Otero (2018). Raw data was not provided in the original article, and so the graphics have been re-drawn and the y-axis adjusted to reflect the same scale used elsewhere in this report.

Brown and Souto Otero's (2018) findings question the future role of credentials in the labour market and wider UK society. They warn that this is not because credentials are no longer important, but because they can no longer be seen as the differentiating factor in employer hiring decisions (Brown and Souto Otero, 2018). The less frequent requirement of formal qualifications might be a sign that businesses and other employers increasingly acknowledge that required skills might be acquired in other ways than through formal education and training. Finally, authors support the claims of this report that more focus should be given to extra-curricular activities and soft skills acquired beyond the classroom, especially in the context of aims to promote greater intergenerational social mobility:

"If the exchange value of credentials in the labour market is more limited than assumed, the idea of a level playing field will need to be cast far beyond the school gates or university lecture theatre. The failure to consider the importance of other skills, competences and experiences beyond formal qualifications in recruitment processes is destined to disappoint in efforts to reduce educational, labour market and wage inequalities." (Brown and Souto Otero, 2018, p. 18).

Critique of employer perspectives

Employer identification of skills deficits e.g. within the Employer Skill Survey is, however, not unproblematic. Some authors point out that managers and other senior company officials are affected by biases and organizational politics when reporting skills deficits (Bryant and Jaworski 2011; Watson, Webb, and Johnson 2006; Hurrell 2016). Skill shortages are often linked to gender or class stereotyping and understandings about suitability for particular jobs, with women frequently overlooked for certain positions (Bryant and Jaworski 2011). Watson et al. (2006) examined how those usually responsible for reporting skills deficits in UK surveys (personnel specialists) were less likely to report skills gaps in current workers than other managers, but more likely to report present and anticipated future external skills shortages. Watson et al.

(2006) attribute this to personnel specialists justifying their training and recruitment budgets and warn that skills deficit statistics based solely on employers' perceptions should be treated with caution. Furthermore, Hurell (2016) points out that given employers' biases and frames of reference, they may make incorrect attributions regarding whether and why employees lack skills and who should be blamed for skill deficits.

Brown and Souto Otero (2018) rightfully criticise employers for their focus on job-readiness and their reluctance to share the cost of employee in-service training, as well as their sole focus on short-term horizons in the production of value for the company ('plug and play') (Brown and Souto Otero, 2018). They note that candidates are increasingly expected to 'hit the ground running' with minimal cost to the employer, and that qualifications lose much of their signalling value because 'job readiness' extends far beyond the examination hall, requiring job seekers to demonstrate specific and generic, hard and soft skills. Extensive and substantial cuts to investment in the training of workers in Britain since the 1990s (Green et al, 2013) are linked with increased "employability narratives" promoted by employers and policy makers that according to Brown and Souto Otero (2018, p. 17):

"capitalises on cultural background, extra-curricular activities, social networks, and other life experiences that demonstrates a good 'fit' with colleagues and the organisations' ethos".

This employability narrative and focus on soft skills shifts the attention on (soft) skill deficits from the educational system and employers to individual candidates and workers.

Soft skills and social mobility

In the previous sections we identified the significance of the soft skills in the labour market in the UK and the growing concerns of employers about their deficit. We found based on the extensive analysis of job adverts in the UK by Brown and Souto Otero (2018) that formal credential requirements are far less present in job adverts than previously assumed. In this context, the

equality in participation in other non-formal or extra-curricular learning activities which foster soft skill attainment (as examined in section 1) becomes a potential vehicle for greater intergenerational social mobility. The final analyses presented here examines more directly the possible linkages between levels of soft skill and intergenerational social mobility.

We use data from PIAAC to perform analyses to test this association between soft skills and social mobility. In this analysis, due to the data available in PIAAC, we define individuals as socially mobile when their highest level of education is higher than the highest level of education of either parent. As a preliminary step, the proportion of socially mobile individuals was estimated for the whole sample, by gender, by immigration status and by occupational status. We consider these variables because, according to the literature, these factors are known to influence the probabilities of social mobility (Nunn, Johnson, Monro, Bickerstaffe, & Kelsey, 2007). The results of these estimations are shown in figure 4.

No significant differences in the proportion of socially mobile individuals are observed between males and females or between people with and without an immigration background. Some differences, however, are observed depending on the occupational status of individuals (see figure 23). People with a lower occupational status are less socially mobile than their counterparts with higher occupational status. This is not surprising given the strong link between educational level which we use to measure social mobility and occupational status. The occupational classification used here is based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISC0-08). High skilled white-collar occupations include legislators, senior officials and managers, professionals, technicians and associate professionals. Low skilled white-collar occupations include clerks, service workers and shop and market sales workers. Blue-collar occupations include skilled agricultural and fishery workers, craft and related trades workers, plant and machine operators and assemblers. Elementary occupations include labourers.

Figure 23. Percentage of socially mobile individuals by background characteristics

Variable		%	SE
Blue-collar occupations	Male	34.68	1.23
	Female	34.33	1.07
Immigrant status	Non-immigrant	34.42	0.88
	Immigrant	34.95	2.31
Occupational status	Elementary occupations	29.54	3.22
	Blue-collar occupations	32.38	2.44
	Low skilled white-collar occupations	29.85	1.46
	High skilled white-collar occupations	46.06	1.51

Source: Own calculations with data from OECD PIAAC

Separate models were estimated to test the association between the probability of being socially mobile and the individuals' scores in four soft skills measured in PIAAC (i.e. readiness to learn, problem solving, planning skills at work and learning at work). All the models controlled for a set of individual characteristics (sex, immigrant background and occupational status).

These soft skills are measured with items related to the use of skills at work or task clusters and are based on descriptions of specific types of activities. Details of the items used to measure each of these soft skills can be consulted in the Survey of Adult Skills: Reader's Companion (OECD, 2013). The results of these analyses are reported in figure 5.

Figure 24: Logistic regression models for social mobility on different soft skills

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Odds ratio	p-value						
Intercept	0.78	0.043	3.05	0.002	0.58	0.000	0.61	0.000
Female	1.14	0.132	1.06	0.560	1.22	0.049	1.32	0.005
Immigrant	1.11	0.386	0.96	0.740	0.95	0.676	1.20	0.156
Blue-collar occupations	0.49	0.000	0.46	0.000	0.55	0.005	0.62	0.034
Low skilled white-collar occupations	0.58	0.000	0.55	0.000	0.68	0.009	0.63	0.005
High skilled white-collar occupations	0.48	0.000	0.45	0.000	0.55	0.000	0.50	0.000
Readiness to learn	1.01	0.824						
Problem solving			1.00	0.000				
Planning skills					1.13	0.009		
Learning at work							1.08	0.010
Nagelkerke R Squared	0.036		0.041		0.037		0.036	

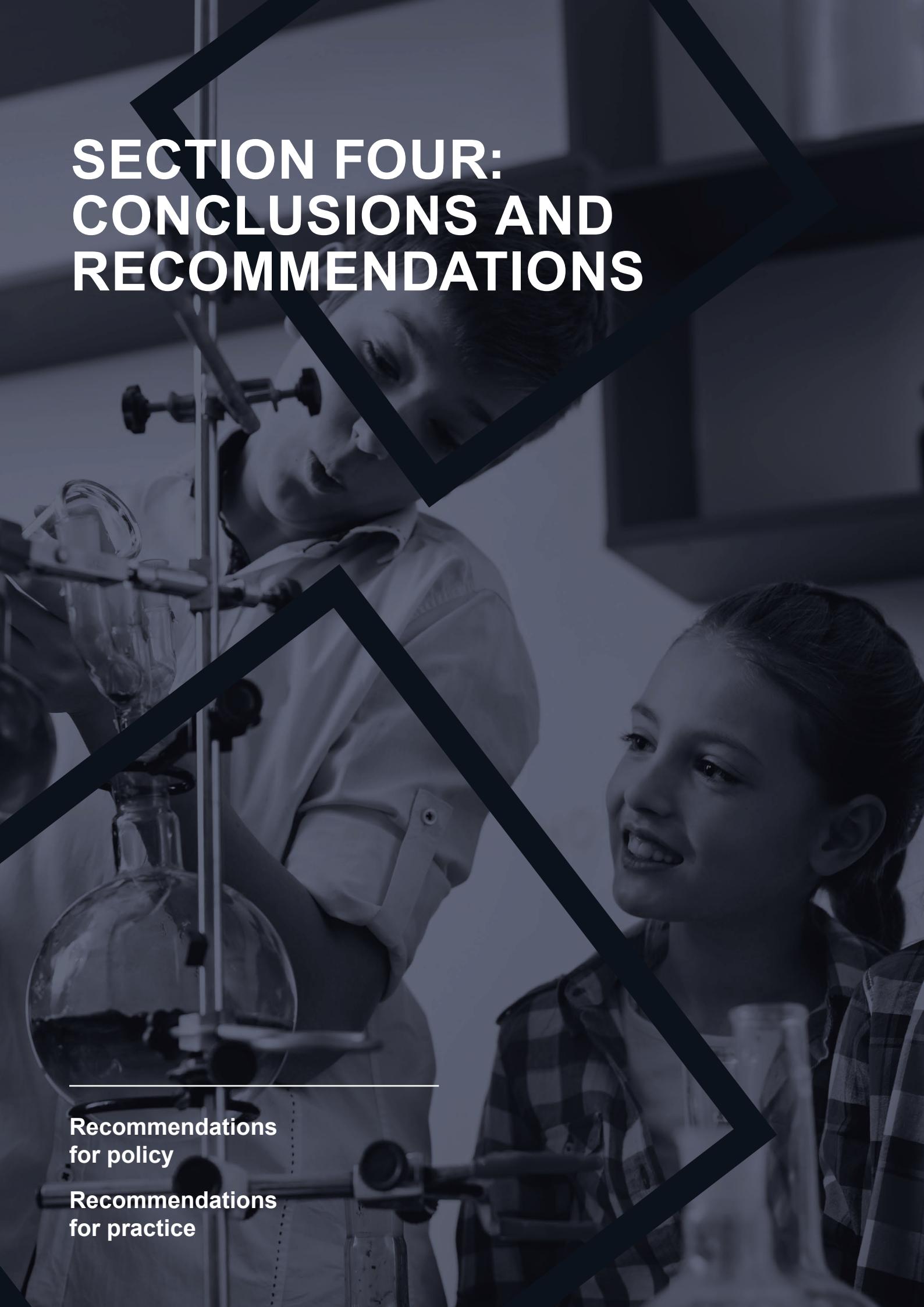
All estimates are statistically significant at the 95% level

Source: Own calculations with data from OECD PIAAC

Our analyses show that, after controlling for relevant individual characteristics, three of the tested soft skills are expected to increase the odds of being socially mobile. The association is rather weak (1% for readiness to learn, 13% for planning skills at work and 8% for learning at work) but statistically significant in the three cases.

In agreement with the literature in the field (see, for example, Heckman & Mosso, 2014), these findings indicate that there is small but significant association between soft skills and upward social mobility. In other words, our analyses suggest that developing higher levels of soft skills might have a positive influence in the probabilities of an individual to become upwardly socially mobile (here defined as having a higher level of education than parents). However, it is important to say that these results cannot be interpreted in causal terms. It might be that inherent soft skills contributed to upward social mobility, but one can also equally claim that social mobility actually contributed to a higher skill spectrum including advancement in soft skills.

SECTION FOUR: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



**Recommendations
for policy**

**Recommendations
for practice**

Section 4: Conclusions And Recommendations

This report set out to address the significance of extra-curricular activities within contemporary debates around social mobility. It paid attention to the importance of extra-curricular activities across a range of outcomes and gathered together a range of quantitative and qualitative evidence on the gaps that exist in opportunities to participate (focussing on secondary school aged children). In doing so, the report also sought to synthesise existing evidence on the skills employers demand within the UK labour market and the relationship between soft skills and social mobility more broadly.

The review of labour market data presented here confirms the growing relevance of soft skills for employers in the UK. We also identified a correlation between higher levels of soft skills (readiness to learn, problem-solving, and planning skills) and upward social mobility defined as having higher educational attainment than parents. Previous research and our own qualitative data clearly support claims about the importance of extra-curricular activities in attainment of soft (especially social) skills. Our analyses of quantitative data from the Understanding Society survey is also suggestive of a link between participation in extra-curricular activities and educational aspirations. The impact on achievement has also been evidenced from previous research (especially in the USA), and further data is needed to provide more rigorous evidence of its effect in the UK context.

Evidence from young people themselves presented here shows the wider value placed on extra-curricular activities. These were found to be an important part of childhood, a space to have fun, escape the pressures of school work, on top of their value in developing confidence, social skills and team work abilities (the kinds of 'soft skills' valued by employers).

The evidence presented here suggests that extra-curricular activities are a positive and enriching experience for young people, promoting not only positive educational outcomes but also offering the possibility for developing a wider set of skills beyond the qualifications obtained from school.

As levels of education increase, and more graduates enter the labour market, these non-educational skills and capabilities are likely to become increasingly significant in determining labour market success.

Importantly, our findings also reveal the unequal opportunities young people have to take part in extra-curricular activities. It is not so much a question of choosing not to participate, but rather a question of an unequal playing field in the opportunities and chance of participating. The overlapping effects of social class, school attended, gender, ethnicity and geography are key drivers shaping these unequal opportunities.

A key finding from this research is that opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities is profoundly structured by socio-economic status, with participation gaps between rich and poor households evident through the national-level analysis as well as the case study research in the four localities. Analysis of Understanding Society data showed that across every type of extra-curricular activity, as household income declined, so too did participation in each activity. Children from poorer households were especially excluded from music classes and sports, where the participation gap is much more pronounced. A crucial factor driving this socio-economic gap in opportunities to participate is the cost of extra-curricular activities, especially activities that incur the highest 'upfront costs'. For many families, even those with average incomes, these costs are too much to bear, especially if they are multiplied from having more than one child. Our research suggests that a range of extra-curricular activities carry a heavy cost burden for families (not only activities that are commonly regarded as expensive), notably sports, dancing, and private tuition. This point about the financial cost of activities is underlined by the fact that the activity with more equal participation between household income groups (voluntary and community work) is that which is likely to be one of the cheapest activities.

Overlapping with socio-economic status, the school attended has been shown here to make a significant difference in the scale and range of extra-curricular activities opportunities open to young people. Independent schools are likely to provide an

unparalleled level of extra-curricular activities, and survey-based research masks the uniqueness of some activities offered – for example, going beyond the more commonplace sports such as football and rugby, and offering more unusual activities like archery and sailing. School-level differences are not only evident across the independent-state divide. Between state schools, differences in provision are also apparent to some extent. The prioritisation of extra-curricular activities by a key figure within the school, such as the Head Teacher, could be important in driving a wide portfolio of extra-curricular activities within the school (though without significant further investment, few state schools are likely to have the same kind of facilities and resource of many independent schools).

We also found here a notable imbalance between extra-curricular activities in their gender and ethnic composition. Activities that appear especially gendered in who takes part include music, art, and dance (female dominated) and sport (male dominated). The same is true when it comes to ethnicity, with certain types of activities having an unbalanced ethnic composition. For example, around 4% of British Pakistani youth take music classes, compared to 28% of British Indian, and 20% of white British youth. In terms of youth clubs, scouts and girl guides, a much higher proportion of white British youth indicated they took part (44%) compared to British Indian (13%), British Bangladeshi (20%), British Pakistani (25%), Asian (24%), and British African (24%) young people. Sport is the only activity that has a nearly equal rate of participation across different ethnic groups. A further piece of research that more directly addresses these ethnic disparities would be worthwhile to understand these patterns and their significance.

Past research has indicated the value of extra-curricular activities in terms of their positive impact on achievement, attendance at school, soft skills, as well as the development of other personal attributes such as independence and persistence. Data quality issues with PISA prevented further analysis here of the association between individual participation in extra-curricular activities, achievement and the development of ‘soft skills’. However, an important finding from our analysis of Understanding Society data showed that participation in certain

extra-curricular activities had an impact on levels of educational aspirations. Playing a greater number of sports, and taking music classes and private tuition were found to have this effect even after holding constant other background factors (age, gender, ethnicity and parental education etc.). Of course, educational aspirations are just one way of interpreting the possible benefits accrued through taking part in extra-curricular activities. Young people themselves perceived the benefits in a much wider sense, in terms of improving their confidence interacting with others, bolstering future job and university applications, acquiring new skills and improving their fitness levels. Moreover, young people saw them as a chance to have fun, relax and relieve the stresses of contemporary schooling.

The breadth of life experiences gained from extra-curricular activities, covering the range of sporting, musical and artistic domains, represent valuable opportunities in themselves, irrespective of any measurable educational or labour market outcomes. This report sets out a series of recommendations aimed at levelling the playing field and improving equality in opportunities to participate.

These proposals must be considered in the broader context of cuts to local youth services and youth centres under the central Government programme of austerity. Local authorities and schools are operating within a severely constrained funding landscape, and extra-curricular activities may not be deemed as ‘essential’ in such a financial climate. Without a broader investment in youth provision, the proposal put forward here will realistically have little impact in terms of the opportunities available to young people in local areas. Account must also be taken of the fact that parents who work long unsocial hours, in jobs that offer little flexibility, may not be in a position to help their children access activities. More often than not it is likely to be lower income households where this applies, and proposals need to be developed in a way that is sensitive to the different pressures families face, especially those on the lowest incomes.

The four recommendations put forward here are aimed at secondary aged school children in particular, and cover the levels of policy and practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Introduction of a national extra-curricular bursary scheme.



A national extra-curricular bursary scheme would provide financial support to children from low income households activities to be spent on activities that are meaningful to them (covering all associated costs including fees, equipment and transportation). This would help to address the significant financial barriers to participation. Flexibility in how the money might be spent could be important to account for different needs, such as those in rural areas incurring greater transport costs. The scheme could operate through local authorities and eligibility might be determined by established indicators of disadvantage, for example Free School Meals (FSM) eligibility. It could make sense to pilot the scheme within the Opportunity Areas to begin with, before it is rolled out more widely. The scheme should be delivered in such a way to ensure that it also works to address a lack of confidence many disadvantaged young people have to get involved in activities.

2. Provide funding to develop and extend third-sector initiatives that successfully facilitate access to extra-curricular activities.

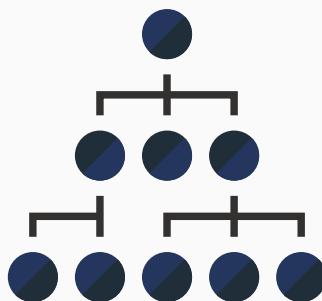


The high cost of kit and equipment can make taking part in extra-curricular activities too risky for children from lower income households. Successful initiatives that work directly with schools to allow young people to 'trial' activities, and provide heavily subsidised fees, should be identified and rolled out across the country. The Western Fitness Project (see box A, page 35) is one example of such an initiative which could be easily replicated. Those initiatives that are most successful in engaging disadvantaged youth and improving their confidence to take part should be prioritised. Funding could be provided to local authorities who might be better placed to ensure that an even spread of initiatives across the artistic, sporting and musical domains are allocated funding.

3. Increase the organisational capacity of schools to support their extra-curricular provision and improve information on the availability of activities in local areas.



4. Improve data collection and carry out further research into the nature of soft skills developed and deployed across different settings.



A designated extra-curricular co-ordinator in every state school could help drive school-based provision. This must be implemented alongside allocating space in teacher workloads for delivering activities themselves. Additional coordination among schools within local areas could also help to provide a wider range of extra-curricular activities by preventing duplication of activities. Much of this work could be taken on by either academy/free school chains or local authorities.

A central information resource for each local authority could also be introduced to pool together information and details on the wide variety of extra-curricular activities available. This kind of resource could be added on to existing local authority platforms (online and via apps)

There are no existing data sources which provide an account of the extra-curricular activities offered by schools or that exist within local areas. Data from PISA provides limited information across broad categories, but not enough detail to capture the scale of differences between schools in their levels of provision. Additional data on participation in extra-curricular activities needs to be collected (for example, via the Department for Education's school census) at the individual pupil level and aggregated nationally.

Further research is also needed to understand more fully the degree of alignment between the nature of 'soft skills' gained through extra-curricular activities and demanded by employers – for example taking the example of team work, whether the 'team work' skills gained through sports reflect the proficiencies in 'team work' required in the UK labour market. Ethnographic research would be an effective means of eliciting knowledge about the nature of soft skills across different settings.

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Appendix: Geographic location and participation in extra-curricular activities

Explore the maps on page 44

Geographic location and participation in extra-curricular activities

	Youth clubs, scouts, girl guides or other organised activities	Voluntary or community work	Music	Art	Dance	Sport	Tutorials for school subjects	Religious classes	None of these
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
North East	39.32	17.28	3.97	4.37	12.54	52.94	5.43	4.18	25.37
North West	33.55	18.02	15.65	6.81	16.23	47.30	5.59	4.78	28.26
Yorkshire & the Humber	40.91	15.82	18.20	7.69	15.15	50.13	6.24	5.28	26.43
E Midlands	38.86	22.40	20.89	8.89	11.25	43.54	5.46	6.14	30.37
W Midlands	46.18	22.60	19.32	10.39	13.00	49.19	5.32	10.36	23.63
East of England	45.02	21.40	18.69	8.61	9.50	54.13	8.53	6.43	24.79
London	34.19	22.09	19.01	6.23	14.98	46.06	11.85	12.60	23.24
South East	41.37	20.18	21.76	5.69	11.73	51.15	8.04	5.82	24.77
South West	42.34	25.21	19.52	7.49	14.12	61.15	8.13	4.16	16.77
Wales	51.58	19.79	24.47	10.57	13.33	56.39	2.93	8.01	20.14
Scotland	45.95	21.04	22.92	13.05	15.89	54.18	6.36	6.10	22.21
Northern Ireland	60.91	20.43	20.56	8.69	10.13	62.25	10.35	10.4	20.17



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