

**Title:** How Might Extra-Curricular Activities in State Schools Improve Educational and Social Outcomes?

**Authors:** Daniyal Vemuri, Maisie Angus, Eleanor Davies, Sali Adams

**Aim of research:**

Our aim is to determine in which ways student-led extracurricular activities could be designed and implemented to serve the needs of stakeholders in disadvantaged Oxford communities and foster integration between the University of Oxford and its local context.

**Introduction:**

Addressing the highly unequal wealth distribution present in a worldwide context is a foremost priority for sustainable development, and at a macro level often focuses on the disequilibrium between the Global North and Global South. However, inequality is also a salient issue in local contexts, especially that of Oxford, the UK's second most unequal city<sup>1</sup>. Here, the wealth and world-leading research of the University of Oxford contrasts high poverty incidence and poor educational attainment in areas of lower socio-economic status within the city. One proposed approach to build connections between these unequal areas is the provision of extracurricular activities by university students in local schools. Our contribution to this study is twofold. We will design and implement a pilot extracurricular program in Oxford schools intended to improve outcomes and bridge the 'town vs gown' divide; concurrently, we will be conducting research into community stakeholders' desires and requirements from extracurriculars, as a means of community engagement groundwork for a longer-term university-partnered intervention.

**Objectives:**

1. Uncover perceptions of different extracurricular activities held by various stakeholders in South East Oxford, namely community leaders, teachers and caregivers.
2. Determine the perceived needs of the local community regarding extracurricular activities, in terms of desired long-term outcomes and required assistance to overcome barriers to uptake.
3. Lay the foundations for effective university-community collaboration over an expanded longitudinal study through considered and ethical community engagement.

**The UN SDG Framework:**

We are modelling our research in consideration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This UN framework was established in 2015 to guide nations' economic and social development, but the goals it lays out are applicable to our local context. We are minded to

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<sup>1</sup> Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) and Oxford City Council. n.d. "Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy." Initiative Summary Report Findings, 32.

address SDG 1 to ‘end poverty in all its forms everywhere’<sup>2</sup> as Oxford has a higher incidence of child poverty than the national average, with for example the Blackbird Leys and Northfield Brook wards being among the 20% most deprived areas in England<sup>3</sup>. We believe after-school clubs are likely to develop skills which enable pupils to improve in their educational attainment and career prospects. In addition to SDG 1, the after-school teaching programme will work towards SDG 4 to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’<sup>4</sup>. As an Oxfordshire Education Commission report observed, “Oxfordshire ranks in the bottom quartile nationally for the proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading, writing and maths combined.”<sup>5</sup> Given this, community engagement will identify how the University’s resources could be used to uplift education in the area. This community engagement aligns with SDG 17<sup>6</sup> and closely with SDG 17.17 to “encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.”<sup>7</sup> The community engagement will be part of the wider ongoing effort to foster a lattice of connections between the University and stakeholders in Oxford<sup>8</sup>, allowing the resources of the former to contribute towards the sustainable development of the latter.

## Rationale

The Oxford population has a considerable incidence of deprivation, with 26% of its children living below the poverty line<sup>9</sup>. The inequality that this flat figure hides is, however, arguably more striking - 6 out of the 83 Oxford City LSOEs (lower-level super output layers) have child poverty incidence of over 30%<sup>10</sup>, whilst in 9 LSOEs the corresponding figure is under 4%<sup>11</sup>. Perhaps most shocking is the area’s differential access to youth education and training given the presence of a world-leading institute of higher education in the city. Despite containing some of the country’s most prestigious schools, over one eighth of local communities rank in the lowest 10% nationally for youth educational attainment<sup>12</sup>. However, this particular index of deprivation is one the University, with its network of students and scholars of various disciplines and extensive academic and sporting facilities, is uniquely well-placed to help to rebalance.

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<sup>2</sup> The United Nations, ‘Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform our World’, accessed 12/09/2024, [Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform our World | United Nations](#)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Oxford City Council, ‘Poverty and Deprivation Statistics’, Last modified (2021), accessed on September 11, 2024. <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/population-statistics/poverty-deprivation-statistics>

<sup>4</sup> The United Nations, ‘Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform our World’, accessed 12/09/2024, [Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform our World | United Nations](#)

<sup>5</sup> Oxfordshire Education Commission, ‘Time for Change: Improving Educational Opportunity for all Oxfordshire’s Children and Young People’ (September 2023) . p.59

<sup>6</sup> SDG 17: “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.”, The United Nations, ‘Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform our World’, accessed 12/09/2024, [Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform our World | United Nations](#)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Commitment 2, University of Oxford Strategic Plan 2018-23 (October 2018), p. 5

<sup>9</sup> Oxford City Council, ‘Poverty and Deprivation Statistics’, Last modified (2021), accessed on September 11, 2024. <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/population-statistics/poverty-deprivation-statistics>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 Oxford City Results, p. 14

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 16

The chosen approach to facilitate this is the delivery of extracurricular clubs at schools in the most economically disadvantaged areas of Oxford by members of the university. Extracurricular interventions have been shown to be effective in promoting the development of key 'soft skills' such as confidence<sup>13</sup>, self-expression<sup>14</sup> and effective listening<sup>15</sup> in young people. Some programmes also target subject- or career-specific competencies, preparing young people for further education and the workforce. Furthermore, there is an identified gap in extracurricular provision in less economically advantaged state schools<sup>16</sup>; student-run programmes could help to bridge this, whilst building positive relationships between the University and the local community.

As a group, we will design and implement a pilot extracurricular programme focusing on storytelling, poetry, and drama in two Oxford schools. This will develop skills of public speaking and creativity as well as tools for analysis in English Language lessons. We see this focus as complementary to the differently-focused pilot interventions run by other chapter authors, permitting analysis of a range of programme topics across the cohort. Furthermore, engaging in schools will allow us to gauge first-hand the opportunities and challenges of running such programmes in the specific community context.

However, to further strengthen our evidence basis for the hypothesised value of extra-curricular interventions, we will research the needs and perceptions held by different members of the community regarding extracurricular activities. Our aim in doing so is to ensure that an expanded programme serves the wants and needs of local stakeholders and is built on trust and collaboration between community members and the university.

## **Research Methods**

We plan to inform our area of enquiry with a range of primary and secondary data. We will conduct a literature review of existing research, covering the impacts of extracurricular activity, journal articles and frameworks on the importance of community engagement, and data on the demographics and existing extracurricular provisions in the area of interest. The findings from this review will be reinforced by data collected from local stakeholders through a mixed-method approach. This will include qualitative data collected from interviews and focus groups involving caregivers, teachers, university staff, council workers, and business owners, alongside a survey sent to a larger pool of caregivers. In this pilot phase of the study, the first-hand experiences of pupils participating in the extracurriculars will not be collated in the form of raw data, due to the need to establish ethical engagement practices over a longer time period in the full study. However, the perceptions of students will be obtained second-hand through interviews with caregivers and teachers.

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<sup>13</sup> Burtonshaw, S., Dorrel, E., and Yates, W., 'Building Tomorrow's Healthy, Confident and Productive Citizens' (2023), p. 57

<sup>14</sup> Dymoke, S., 'Poetry is not a special club': how has an introduction to the secondary Discourse of Spoken Word made poetry a memorable learning experience for young people?', *Oxford Review of Education*, 43:2 (April 2017), p. 237

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 236

<sup>16</sup> Burtonshaw, S., Dorrel, E., and Yates, W., 'Building Tomorrow's Healthy, Confident and Productive Citizens' (2023), p. 57