

## **Title: How Might Extra Curricular activities in State Schools Improve educational and social outcomes?**

### Authors

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### Aim of research

The aim of this research is to investigate the role of national policy on extra-curricular activities in the UK education system and its alignment with local policy interpretation and implementation, with a specific focus on the city of Oxford.

### \*\* Introduction:

Extra-curricular activities (ECAs) are crucial for enhancing educational and social outcomes, However, their presence in UK schools often varies significantly, reflecting broader global and local disparities, particularly those linked to socio-economic status. By examining current national and local policies and recommendations on education and their positive impact, this research seeks to review and understand any differences or disparities between policies on National and local levels, and the situation on the ground.

### Objectives:

To gain a deeper understanding on the current policy and recommendations for extra-curriculars in UK state schools, in order to create a basis for further research on the longer-term benefits of delivering ECAs in schools in Oxford as per national guidance. Similarly, we will be delivering extracurriculars to schools in Oxford while building connections with the local community, breaching 'town & gown' divides.

### The UN SDG Framework:

The 2015-2030 UN Sustainable Development Goal framework aims to end poverty, protect the planet and promote peace around the world.

This project will focus on two SDGs: Good Health and Wellbeing (3) and Quality Education (4). For SDG 3, Extra-curriculars allow students to socialise with their peers in a low-pressure setting, promoting mental wellbeing, which has been shown to positively affect holistic health. Furthermore, when it comes to SDG 4, ECAs offer students the opportunity to widen their studies and develop skills, such as problem-solving and creativity, promoting "Quality Education".

## Rationale

In recent years, the benefits of ECAs for young people from underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds have become clear - from research on how sport clubs strengthen developing teamwork skills (DÜZ, S. & ASLAN, T. V., 2020), to how drama and journalism support the development of unique ideas (Kuhar, K. & Sabljic, J., 2016). Altogether, findings show how ECAs boost educational attainment and interpersonal skills, including teamwork (DÜZ, S. & ASLAN, T. V., 2020). These benefits boost children's wellbeing, further aligning with the aforementioned framework of the UN SDGs of 'Quality Education' and 'Good Health and Wellbeing', altogether highlighting the importance of ECAs.

Despite their importance, there is a significant disparity in the uptake of ECAs across the UK (Donnelly, Lažetić, Sandoval-Hernandez, Kumar and Whewall, 2019). The case of the city of Oxford illustrates this disparity threefold. In Oxford, economic inequalities across the city are reflected in school attainment, and a historic disconnect exists between the University of Oxford and local residents. The case of the city Oxford illustrates this evidence threefold, as follows.

First, as the second most unequal city in the UK, second only to Cambridge, (Gini Coefficient, World Bank, 2021) Oxfordshire faces a gap in educational attainment for its most disadvantaged children and those with special needs (Oxford County Council, 2023).

Next, although the university is globally renowned for its world-class resources and plays a central role in the city's culture, it has long been referred to as a city of two halves - where many residents outside the centre feel little connection to it. This disconnect is often attributed to the 'town-and-gown' divide, with locals feeling they benefit minimally from the university's presence.

This is finally reflected in Oxford's state schools, where despite national policies recommending ECAs, our research so far suggests the presence of ECAs is unequal and varies broadly across schools within Oxford and the wider area of Oxfordshire. Thus, we investigate the presence of any disparities between national policy and local context, and investigate any underlying reasons behind them. Examining UK policies regarding ECAs will help clarify whether this disparity is due to a lack of focus on ECAs specifically, or whether other factors—such as funding distribution and costs associated with provision—are limiting their implementation in schools. Furthermore, by collaborating with local Oxford schools to research the disparity and provide ECA support, there is an opportunity to bridge this gap and foster a stronger relationship between the university and the wider community.

## Research Methods.

To examine the policy on ECAs in UK state schools, we will research a mixture of primary and secondary sources. Our primary data collection methods will include

interviews with senior strategic and operational stakeholders in the education sector: this will include national policy-makers, education ministers and civil servants, as well as those implementing policy in schools. We have selected these groups as we believe they will give both insights into current policy across different schools as well as attitudes towards current policy.

We anticipate that respondents may be guarded in expressing their personal opinions on current policy. To mitigate this, we will offer interviewees anonymity, and will refer to them by a mutually-agreed description in our research e.g: representative from the ministry of education, and reassure them that any quotes used will not be identifiable to them. We will provide interviewees the option of an in-person meeting in Oxford, a video-call on permitted software, or sending us their answers by email. All personal details will be stored securely and deleted after the research project has been completed.

In the interviews, we speak on the following three areas:

- What is the current policy or guidance on ECAs in state schools?
- In the interviewee's opinion, has this been successful?
- In the interviewee's opinion, what changes in policy could be made to improve the provision of ECAs?

We complement qualitative data from the interviews with our chosen secondary sources: research papers and government policy and advice on the provision of ECAs. Using these sources, we will identify the national policy on ECAs, and the attitudes towards it. To research the current policy, we will use government sources such as Ofsted and the UK Parliament website. To locate recommendations for the improvement of extra-curricular policy, we will consider papers from sources including the Education Policy Institute (EPI) and the Social Mobility Commission.

For the analysis, we will explore the reasons behind current policies and the situation on the ground using our reviews of current government policy papers, guidance and uptake at national and local levels, alongside perspectives uncovered in our interviews of stakeholders within and beyond Oxford. To do so, we will also utilise software such as NVivo to identify recurring themes between our sources.

It is acknowledged that both interviews and the literature review will contain large amounts of qualitative data. Thus, we aim to use an analytical framework to aid the systematic capture of key data to keep the focus on the research enquiry and areas of most interest, while keeping additional findings in our recommendation or conclusions. Furthermore, we aim to strike a balance between examining national policy while maintaining a focus on the local Oxford area, within time restrictions and limited access to national central government stakeholders. Hence, we will be aiming to do so while leaning towards opportunistic sampling within our sample-frame. Thus, whilst we have limited breadth, we aim to provide depth by speaking to stakeholders that give us insight that adds real value beyond secondary data.

