

Laidlaw Scholars – Extracurricular School Programme

Title Group 4 - Engagement with local school stakeholders

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Aim To assess the demand, aspirations, and barriers for successful co-curricular delivery in Oxfordshire's state schools.

SDGs

Goal 4: Quality education

- **Target 4.1:** Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education.
- **Target 4.5:** Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.
- **Target 4.7:** Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including through education for sustainable lifestyles, human rights, and global citizenship.

Goal 10: Reduced Inequality

- **Target 10.2:** Empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

Goal 3: Good Health and Wellbeing

- **Target 3.4:** Reduce premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and promote mental health and well-being.

Goal 5: Gender Equality

- **Target 5.1:** End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.
- **Target 5.5:** Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership.

Research Questions

1. What types of co-curricular activities are most in demand among local schools and families in Oxfordshire?
2. What are the perceived logistical, cultural and structural barriers to implementing co-curricular programmes in schools in Oxfordshire?

Objectives

- 1) Data collection objective: (Assuming we will work with 2 schools minimum) We aim to obtain survey answers from 5 parents using Microsoft Forms, and interview 3 staff members using online or in-person meetings.
- 2) Manually analyse responses from 8 respondents using Excel (surveys)
- 3) Using NVivo to code qualitative data received from interviews.
- 4) Produce an academic article outlining the co-curricular demands and barriers, with recommendations.

Rationale

While Oxfordshire as a whole is considered to be one of the most affluent areas in the UK, there exist substantial intra-county inequalities with pockets of significant deprivation (“Vale of White Horse District Council, 2025). This is manifested within secondary schools, where some state-school students experience significant barriers to reaching their full potential in academic and social achievements. We are examining the social, economic, and cultural barriers disadvantaged secondary school students face, and exploring how co-curricular activities can help to circumvent the issues faced.

However, it is unclear to us the exact mechanisms of how co-curricular activities improve social and academic attainment. Furthermore, we are unfamiliar with the existing stocks of co-curricular programmes on offer for students, what other kinds of co-curricular programmes are in demand and how these differ from school to school. Lastly, we are unsure as to how local stakeholders can help achieve the aims of our research. We need to investigate which are likely to further aid us in the research and implementation of co-curricular programmes, which may act as limitations, and the different barriers schools may face in terms of finances, facilities, pupil and staff motivation, time availability for staff and so on. We hypothesise this is likely to shift on a case-by-case basis, so it is important to us to understand the stakeholder dynamics within each school to properly assess how we can make the most meaningful impact.

We believe that this approach ultimately informs schools and policymakers of the structural issues preventing successful delivery of co-curricular programmes. We think that offering co-curricular interventions as an attempt to help address educational inequality, which can allow us to begin tackling the overall inequality that exists within the Oxfordshire region. Ultimately, we believe that all students deserve access to opportunities they need to excel, regardless of their background. No child’s potential should be limited by a lack of resources.

We must ensure every child can reach their goals with little to no barriers. This project is pivotal in working towards that aim by reducing barriers to participation and promoting more equitable provision.

Our rationale that educational attainment is a strong predictor of future outcomes, and the influence of co-curricular activities on attainment, is well-supported by existing literature. For example, a UK commission found that co-curricular participation plays a strong role in fostering soft skills and increasing social mobility, and highlights how there exist significant participation gaps along socio-economic cleavages, school types and geographic location (Social Mobility Commission, 2019). Furthermore, various reviews have found that both academic and non-academic co-curricular activities are associated with improved academic attitudes and outcomes (Singh, 2017). However, others, such as Seow and Pan (2014) have found that there exists a threshold, where too much extracurricular involvement, beyond a certain tipping point, becomes detrimental for a student's schooling success. The threshold theory suggests that academic outcomes decline at higher levels of ECA participation, as it leaves them little time for academic studies. Intense participation on ECA could lead to stress in balancing, as well as fitting in with peers. Our hypothesis that extracurricular delivery will largely differ between state and private schools is supported by Agarwal et al. (2024)'s finding that extracurricular delivery in the UK lacks a national framework. As independent and grammar schools are likely better funded, they may be more responsive or have better facilities to host such charity organisations, and may also have more engaged parents that enable engagement, whereas state-schools are more likely to be left behind in this system. However, the lack of a national framework may be beneficial as limited intervention allows for schools to tailor their co-curricular programme to better support pupils' personal development and well-being.

We think our research will help provide suggestions for how to close the attainment gap through our specific focus on the implementation conditions which will allow for the highest programme delivery success. Our focus on the Oxfordshire region will allow us to make highly-specific and relevant recommendations for future outreach efforts.

Stakeholder Mapping:

Identify at least three key stakeholders for your research. Stakeholders are people/groups who are affected by your topic or can help with your research.

Stakeholder	Relevance to Topic	Engagement Strategy	What we need from them
Educational trusts	They often dictate educational and extra-curricular policies in schools as well as funding and facilities for schools (which are key). This will allow us to get institutional answers.	Can send emails or ask the headteacher for specific contact details, then either interview or survey	From the school's side- a barrier to extracurricular engagement as well as further educational context.
Head Teacher	Oversees the school, is responsible for allocating funding, and has a personal understanding of the school and its context.	Email and subsequent interview.	Information regarding the school context, the type of extracurriculars offered. Barriers and aspirations, staffing contexts, and school facilities offered.
Board of Governors / School Board	Governors have a say in the school's development plan and how co-curricular activities are prioritised relative to other initiatives, they also impact how the school allocates budget, both of these matters key to our research on the provision of co-curriculars. They also often include parent representatives, community members, and local authority links. Their input offers a wider view of how schools are perceived externally and how co-curriculars align with the community's needs.	Ask the headteacher for emails, and research contact details on the council or school website. Then email and ask for an interview.	We hope to gain contextual understanding of how co-curricular provision is governed or prioritised. We also hope to gain an insight into budgetary and strategic constraints influencing such provision and any existing plans or discussions around co-curricular expansion or review that that board has been involved in. We also seek to explore perspectives on

			community or parental demand for certain co-curriculars.
School Staff- teachers/ facilities managers	They can provide deeper context, classroom-level perspectives. They ultimately also lead extracurriculars, so we can get contextual information. Also, they can be an avenue into parent engagement.	Use existing contact details from last year's cohort, find emails through the school website and arrange for interviews	The day-to-day context, specific case studies of extra-curriculars, deeper context and age-specific information. Teachers' availabilities and strategies already used for extra-curricular engagement.
Parents	Can be an avenue to find what students perceive as limitations, as we are not allowed direct student contact. Also can provide logistical information, as well as both short and long-term solutions or limitations to extra-curricular engagement.	Can ask through the termly newsletter (as the academic year is about to end), through surveys that other groups are sending out, and by joining Facebook groups	How often their child participates in extra-curriculars and the reasons for engagement, what their opinion is on the level and variety of extracurriculars provided, whether timing is an issue, and an open question at the end on how extracurricular delivery can be improved.
Extracurricular providers	Some extracurriculars / academic programmes may be led by charity organisations within schools	Gather contact details through the school's headteacher and research online through the gov.uk website.	We want to find out the kind of activities they offer, the response from the schools and students, the barriers faced by the students for the activities offered and the impact they have observed over time.
Carers for disabled	They see first- hand how the student in their care is	Through an email from the	We need the student's opinion on the

students	impacted by the activities on a day to day basis and can give a subjective view on it.	school's headteacher and/or the termly newsletter.	co-curricular (if viable) which we can gauge through the carer, as well the carer's own observation on the impact of the co-curricular and the barriers the student may have faced in the process.
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Research Methods:

Describe your proposed research approach (Quant/Qual, Survey/Interview, Lit Review):

- Semi-structured interviews with school leaders across Oxfordshire's most deprived areas (3-5) schools
- Short interviews with teachers to understand classroom-level perspectives
- Parent surveys to assess family support and potential participation barriers (e.g. communication to students, uptake and retention)
- School site visits to evaluate facilities, resources and logistical considerations
 - Contacting the school facilities manager
- Literature reviews of similar studies with other schools / contexts to compare survey results
 - Use them as inspiration for what they accounted for and what they didn't – e.g., cultural differences
- Phone interviews with parents if possible.

Time Management:

Create a Gantt chart ([template](#)) outlining your research strategy/timeline

Week 1: research design outline

Week 2: literature review; reach out to schools, confirm school contacts; draft and pilot surveys and interview questions; maybe try to start interviews with schools if possible

Week 3: start data collection: send out surveys, conduct interviews/focus groups, school visits

Week 4: finish up data collection in schools, continue data collection with parents and other stakeholders; start initial coding for interview transcripts

Week 5: finalise data collection, analyse transcripts, conduct thematic analysis

Week 6: finish up analysis and write report

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1dPMQbDEBxrvk_rEOvKmkqAUHDd83BHD6CSKUIuHMt04/edit?usp=sharing

References

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