

DEMOS

Scouts 

# THE EMPLOYABILITY BADGE

SKILLS FOR LIFE, WORK AND  
A STRONGER SOCIETY

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MAY 2023

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# CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>PAGE 4</b>
<b>FOREWORD</b>	<b>PAGE 5</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>PAGE 6</b>
<b>KEY RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>PAGE 9</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>PAGE 11</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: UNDERSTANDING THE EMPLOYABILITY HAPS</b>	<b>PAGE 15</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: HOW CAN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES HELP SOLVE THE EMPLOYABILITY CHALLENGES</b>	<b>PAGE 24</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: THE INEQUALITY CHALLENGE</b>	<b>PAGE 40</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4: RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>PAGE 45</b>

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Any errors remain the authors' responsibility.

Alice Dawson  
Dr. Kate Harrison

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# FOREWORD

This milestone report from Demos comes at a vital time, when the world of work and society is rapidly changing. Our young people are under more pressure than ever to have the right skills and experience to help them succeed – while protecting their mental health and wellbeing.

At the same time, employers are saying that they're struggling to find candidates with the resilience, teamwork and leadership skills they need. These are the skills that make all the difference, and yet are also the most challenging to develop. They're the kind of skills you only gain when you're given opportunities to challenge and stretch yourself – when you have the courage to reach out of your comfort zone to learn and grow.

This is where extra-curricular activities such as Scouts come in. For over 100 years we've prepared young people with skills for life. We help young people step up, speak and dream big. We raise aspirations and give them those vital opportunities. Other out of school activities can do this too of course.

It's clear from this report that those who get the opportunities to take part in these out of school activities are better prepared for the future. It's heartening to see that over half of former Scouts felt they were ready for the world of work.

That was certainly the case for me. It was Scouts, martial arts, climbing and adventure that helped me discover who I was, and what I could do. I know for sure these skills didn't all come from the classroom. It's expeditions, community projects and volunteering where these skills are forged. When it comes to the qualities that really matter, mud and rain have just as much a part to play as whiteboards and PowerPoints.

Our challenge now is to make these skills and opportunities available to all, and from every background. Let's make the best possible use of these insights. They make a compelling case for widening access to the power of skills learned outside the classroom - doing so would create real change – for the next generation and a stronger society.

Bear Grylls OBE  
Chief Scout

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bear". The signature is stylized and includes a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## **YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT REMAINS HIGH**

The UK is facing a significant youth unemployment challenge that is detrimental to the economy, society and the lives of young people. In the first quarter of 2023, the youth unemployment rate was 10.8%, considerably higher than the rate for all UK adults at 3.7%.

The cost of youth unemployment to the UK economy over the next decade has been estimated at £28 billion. The costs to young people themselves are just as dire - exposure to youth unemployment can have a life-long impact on an individual's earnings and mental health. If youth unemployment does not fall quickly, the UK will face lost talent and skills that will hinder economic growth and leave too many young people financially worse off, marginalised and lacking hope for the future.

## **YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY IS HINDERED BY A DOUBLE SKILLS GAP**

Equipping young people with the skills that employers need is key to tackling youth unemployment and promoting the UK's future prosperity. In this report, we identify what we call a double skills gap: a lack of both technical and transferable skills that are crucial in the workplace. We found that 60% of employers struggle to hire young people with sufficient technical skills, while 50% say they struggle to hire young people with sufficient transferable skills like leadership, teamwork and emotional resilience.

However, while technical skills are important, we found that transferable skills are particularly valuable for young people's employability. 57% of employers told us they value transferable skills over technical skills, compared to just 10% who say they value technical skills more.

## **YOUNG PEOPLE ARE BEING LET DOWN BY THE EDUCATION SYSTEM**

One of the factors driving this skills gap is a lack of emphasis on transferable skills at school. Education reforms over the last decade have narrowed the focus of education to academic subjects, with less emphasis on skills like teamwork, leadership and communication. Employers told us that they are concerned about young people not being given opportunities for work experience or to undertake coursework that helps them develop skills such as speaking and listening.

## **YOUNG PEOPLE NEED TO BE ABLE TO EFFECTIVELY ARTICULATE THEIR TRANSFERABLE SKILLS**

Young people do not feel that a lack of transferable skills is hindering their employability like employers do. Only 1% of 18-25-year-olds we surveyed said they felt a lack of transferable skills made them unprepared for work.

This mismatch can partly be explained by young people not effectively articulating the transferable skills they have in job applications. Employers we spoke to expressed concern that young people do

not know how to effectively articulate their transferable skills throughout the hiring process. Some of the young people we spoke to also said they didn't receive much support at school or university on how to demonstrate the skills they've learnt, even if they did feel confident that they had these skills. This suggests there is a need for young people to receive much more comprehensive careers support that not only helps them gain skills, but also show employers that they have them.

## **TRANSFERABLE SKILLS ARE GOING TO BE CRUCIAL FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK**

The future of work will be affected by automation, environmental sustainability, inequality and globalisation. For the young people of today, 'future-proofing' skills will therefore become increasingly important and research shows that it is transferable skills, like creativity and critical thinking, that set us apart from artificial intelligence (AI).

Extra-curricular activities are an important way for young people to develop the skills they need

We wanted to understand the impact that extracurricular activities have on filling the skills gap and boosting young people's employability with a particular focus on the model used by The Scout Association. Our research found that taking part in extracurricular activities is strongly associated with several positive outcomes including employment status, career optimism and preparedness for work:

- 78% of full-time employed people say extracurricular activity had a big impact on their lives compared to 62% of unemployed people.
- The majority of people who attended most of the extracurricular activities in our survey say they feel optimistic that they have what it takes to get what they want out of their career, but less than half (47%) of people who didn't attend any extracurricular activities said the same.
- The majority of people who attended each of the individual extracurricular activities in our survey say they felt prepared starting work for the first time after school or university, but only 37% of people who did not attend any extracurricular activities said the same.
- 53% of Scouts alumni said they were prepared for starting work for the first time compared with 48% of people who did not attend Scouts when they were younger.
- 74% of Scouts alumni say they feel optimistic that they have what it takes to get what they want out of their career in comparison to 62% of people who did not attend Scouts.

Extracurricular activities are particularly valuable in helping young people develop the key transferable skills that employers want. Of those in our survey who felt extracurricular activities had helped prepare them for work:

- 54% gained teamwork skills that have helped their careers.
- 43% gained leadership skills that have helped their careers.
- 42% gained emotional resilience skills that have helped their careers.

Extracurricular activities also help many young people to build their confidence. Several of the current Scouts and Scouts alumni we spoke to mentioned that being in Scouts had given them the confidence to talk to new people, for example. One employer we spoke to said the badge structure in Scouts helps make young people confident that they can achieve things, which can be especially powerful for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Boosting young people's confidence could be invaluable for helping them feel ready for work - not feeling ready for work (e.g. because of a lack of confidence) was one of the main reasons people we surveyed said they felt unprepared for work after school or university with 49% giving this reason.

## THE VALUE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Extracurricular activities can help young people build their social capital. 18% of people who told us that extracurricular activities helped prepare them for work said this was because of the connections they gained. Several of the current Scouts and Scouts alumni we spoke to said the contacts they gained through Scouts have been valuable sources of careers guidance. For some, their Scout connections had directly helped them secure jobs.

As Demos argues in *The Social State*, we believe strong relationships lead to better outcomes in almost every aspect of people's lives, including employment. We therefore argue in this report that extracurricular activities' role in building social capital is important for maximising young people's career development.

## MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE TO BOOST YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY

Despite these benefits, there are barriers to releasing the full impact extracurricular activities can have on young people's employability. Children from low socioeconomic backgrounds are still less likely to participate in extracurricular activities. This is due to a combination of factors including the cost of participating and poor social infrastructure that leaves many children without activities in their local area.

It is crucial that more is done to tackle youth unemployment, through supporting young people's development and increasing access to extracurricular activities. With this aim, we have identified three broad drivers for change that guide our policy recommendations to a cross-section of stakeholders, including national government, extracurricular organisations and employers. The 'key recommendations' section summarises our recommendations.

## DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

- 1. Harnessing the power of extracurricular activities to improve young people's skills and drive economic growth.** For example, national and local governments should provide extracurricular organisations with additional funding targeted at widening access to extracurricular activities to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, so that all young people have access to the skills that can support their employability.
- 2. Enhancing the impact of extracurricular activities on employability.** For example, Scouts and other uniformed extracurricular organisations should set up alumni mentoring schemes where alumni provide careers guidance to current members.
- 3. Improving access to work experience and careers guidance.** For example, more employers should aim to develop links with schools to support young people's career development, particularly highlighting to pupils the value of transferable skills and extracurricular activities.



# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

DRIVER FOR CHANGE	RECOMMENDATION
<p>Harnessing the power of extracurricular activities to improve young people’s skills and drive economic growth</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. National and local governments should provide extracurricular organisations with additional funding targeted at widening access to extracurricular activities to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, so that all young people have access to the skills that can support their employability.</li> <li>2. The UK Government should expand the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to include an element that funds extracurricular and volunteering organisations, giving more people in all parts of the UK opportunities to develop their transferable skills and improve their employability.</li> <li>3. The UK Government should work with employers to establish an employer-supported volunteering programme that gives employees time off once per month to volunteer with extracurricular organisations, helping to widen young people’s access to extracurricular activities.</li> <li>4. Local authorities and Multi-Academy Trusts should provide financial support to schools to allow volunteer extracurricular organisations to use their spaces after school for regular activities, again helping to widen young people’s access to extracurricular activities.</li> <li>5. Extracurricular organisations should continue to work on widening access to extracurricular activities for children from disadvantaged communities through outreach initiatives in schools in disadvantaged areas.</li> </ol>
<p>Enhancing the impact of extracurricular activities on employability</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Scouts and other uniformed extracurricular organisations should set up alumni mentoring schemes where alumni provide careers guidance to current members.</li> <li>7. Extracurricular organisations should aim to expand engagement with employers as a means to recruit more volunteers and widen access to extracurricular activities.</li> </ol>

DRIVER FOR CHANGE	RECOMMENDATION
	<p>8. Extracurricular groups and organisations, including those run by schools, should tailor their activities to help to futureproof young people’s employability skills. This means developing more activities that help young people build the skills they need for the future workforce, including digital skills and skills for the green economy.</p> <p>9. Researchers should aim to fill the evidence gaps on the links between extracurricular attendance, employability and inequality. More research is needed on the extent to which inequality in extracurricular attendance causes inequalities in employment outcomes between social grades.</p>
<p>Improving access to work experience and careers guidance</p>	<p>10. The UK Government should reintroduce the statutory requirement for Key Stage 4 pupils to undertake work experience ensuring more young people, particularly those from lower socioeconomic groups, can gain crucial exposure to the workplace.</p> <p>11. The Government and schools should work together to bring employers into schools more often to support students’ career development, with a particular focus on schools in deprived areas across the UK, building on the Access for Aspiration scheme which connects students on free school meals with businesses across London to deliver a range of impactful employer experiences such as work experience, mock interviews, and CV workshops.</p> <p>12. UCAS, the Association of Colleges and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education should encourage older teenagers to participate in extracurricular activities by promoting the benefits for university, further education, and apprenticeship applications. This should also include supporting young people to effectively articulate their skills in job applications and at interviews.</p> <p>13. More employers should aim to develop links with schools to support young people’s career development. This should involve using schools as a venue for career events for young people, where employers can explain to students what skills, experience and attributes they are looking for in job applicants, particularly highlighting the value of extracurricular activities.</p>

# INTRODUCTION

The UK is facing significant youth unemployment that is detrimental to the economy, society and the lives of young people. At the end of 2022, the youth unemployment rate was 11.3%, considerably higher than the unemployment rate for all UK adults at 3.7%.<sup>12</sup> This rate has been steadily declining from its peak in 2011 following the financial crisis, but progress is slow.<sup>3</sup> If youth unemployment does not drastically fall, the UK faces the loss of vital talent and skills. This will hinder economic growth and risks leaving many young people financially worse off, marginalised and lacking hope for the future.

This report aims to address the challenge of youth unemployment by exploring the role extracurricular activities can play in equipping young people with the skills and experiences they need to enter the workforce and progress in their careers. For this report, we focus on Scouts, as an example of how, through building strong relationships and social capital, young people can develop the skills and attributes employers value the most.

## THE CURRENT STATE OF THE UK'S LABOUR MARKET

The UK's labour market as a whole is facing multiple challenges. The UK is suffering from a significant skills shortage, with employers struggling to hire people with the right skills for the job. 80% of small firms face difficulties recruiting applicants with suitable skills, while 78% of UK organisations suffered a decline in output, profitability or growth due to a lack of available skills.<sup>4,5</sup> Further, the UK economy is grappling with slow productivity growth with rates substantially slower than comparable advanced economies.<sup>6</sup> This productivity crisis is intrinsically linked to the skills shortage: employees often lack the skills needed to maximise businesses' productivity.<sup>7,8</sup>

Given the particularly high rates of youth unemployment in the UK, addressing the youth unemployment challenge will be integral to solving these wider problems facing the UK labour market and economy.

1 Francis-Devine, B., Powell A. and Buchanan, I. *Youth unemployment statistics*. 2023. House of Commons Library. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn05871/> [accessed 22/03/2023]

2 Leaker, D. *Unemployment rate (aged 16 and over, seasonally adjusted): %*. 2023. Office for National Statistics. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/timeseries/mgsx/lms> [accessed 22/03/2023]

3 Francis-Devine, B., Powell A. and Buchanan, I. *Youth unemployment statistics*. 2023. House of Commons Library, 2023.

4 FSB. *Scaling Up Skills: Developing education and training to help small businesses and the economy*. FSB, August 2022. Available at: [Scaling Up Skills | FSB, The Federation of Small Businesses](#) [accessed 22/03/2023]

5 The Open University. *Business Barometer 2022*. The Open University, 2022. Available at: <https://www.open.ac.uk/business/barometer-2022> [accessed 22/03/2023]

6 Dr Samiri, I and Professor Millard, S. *Why is UK Productivity Low and How Can It Improve?* National Institute of Economic and Social Research, September 2022. Available at: <https://www.niesr.ac.uk/blog/why-uk-productivity-low-and-how-can-it-improve> [accessed 22/03/2023]

7 Ilzetzi, E. *If the UK is high tech, why is productivity growth slow? Economists weigh in*. LSE Blogs, March 2020. Available at <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2020/03/07/if-the-uk-is-high-tech-why-is-productivity-growth-slow-economists-weigh-in/> [accessed 22/03/2023]

8 Mullins, C. *The answer to the UK productivity slump "Fix the skills gap"*. Real Business, October 2019. Available at: <https://realbusiness.co.uk/fix-the-skills-gap> [accessed 22/03/2023]

## THE IMPACT OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Employment is a key driver of economic growth and growing the economy is the stated ambition of both the government and opposition. Youth unemployment is a direct threat to economic growth in the UK, as well as a blight to the lives of young people. In 2021, the Learning and Work Institute predicted that the economic cost of youth unemployment, in terms of lost national output, would rise to £6.9 billion in 2022.<sup>9</sup> The cost of youth unemployment over the next decade has been estimated at £28 billion and reducing the UK's NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) rate for 20 to 24 year olds (at 14% in 2022) by 5% would increase GDP by 1.8% in the long-term.<sup>10</sup>

Youth unemployment also has a concerning life-time impact on people's careers. Unemployment early on in a young person's career can negatively impact future earnings, career prospects and wellbeing.<sup>11</sup> The Learning and Work Institute predicted that the cost of unemployment for young people entering the labour market is forecast to be £14.4 billion over the next seven years. These scarring effects are not limited to young people's finances - research also shows that unemployment can have a long-term impact on young people's mental health.<sup>12</sup> If more is not done to significantly reduce youth unemployment, the costs to individuals and the UK economy will only worsen.

An increasing number of young people are also becoming economically inactive, meaning they are neither in work nor actively searching for work. This is distinct from youth unemployment which measures young people who are out of work but actively searching for work.<sup>13</sup> Like youth unemployment, economic inactivity can be detrimental to the economy and to individuals. It is beyond the scope of this report to analyse the drivers of economic inactivity in young people, but it emphasises the need for attention on young people's relationship with work.

## SKILLS TO DRIVE EMPLOYABILITY

In 2022, the House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee concluded that a skills shortage is one of the main "longstanding drivers" of youth unemployment.<sup>14</sup> Skills can be transferable, such as teamwork and communication, or technical, meaning job-specific skills that are needed to complete particular tasks. The Lords committee found that there is a skills gap in both transferable and technical skills.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, in a recent survey, 42% of UK employers said that a lack of skills was a major obstacle to young people accessing good quality employment.<sup>16</sup> The Learning and Work Institute has also argued that the UK has a lagging skills-base in comparison to other OECD countries. This includes weaker numeracy and literacy skills as well as transferable skills like problem-solving, teamwork and communication. They argue this is a "major cause of youth unemployment" and that enhancing this skills base is central to economic growth.<sup>17</sup>

Equipping young people with the skills that employers need is therefore key to tackling youth unemployment and promoting the UK's future prosperity.

9 Egglestone, C et al. *Facing the future - employment prospects for young people after Coronavirus*. Learning and Work Institute, 2021. Available at: <https://learningandwork.org.uk/news-and-policy/prolonged-youth-jobs-crisis-is-set-to-cost-uk-economy-almost-7-billion-next-year/> [accessed 22/03/2023]

10 PwC and Youth Futures Foundation. *Youth Employment Index 2022: Building a resilient workforce for the future*. PwC, 2022. Available at: <https://www.pwc.co.uk/economic-services/YWI/youth-employment-index-2022.pdf> [accessed 23/03/2023]

11 PwC and Youth Futures Foundation. *Youth Employment Index 2022: Building a resilient workforce for the future*, 2022.

12 Strandh, M et al. *Unemployment and mental health scarring during the life course*. European Journal of Public Health, February 2014. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/eurpub/article/24/3/440/477204?login=false> [accessed 23/03/2023]

13 Francis-Devine, B., Powell A. and Buchanan, I. *Youth unemployment statistics*. 2023. House of Commons Library, 2023.

14 Tudor, S. *Causes of youth unemployment: Lords committee report*. House of Lords Library, November 2022. Available at: <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/causes-of-youth-unemployment-lords-committee-report/> [accessed 23/03/2023]

15 Tudor, S. *Causes of youth unemployment: Lords committee report*. House of Lords Library, November 2022.

16 Orlanda, C, Winton, A and Alexander, A. *Bridging the Gap: Making young people a vital part of every workforce*. Institute for Employment Studies, January 2023. Available at <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/news/bridging-gap-making-young-people-vital-part-every-workforce> [accessed 23/03/2023]

17 <https://learningandwork.org.uk/news-and-policy/time-for-action-the-uk-must-act-now-to-improve-skills-or-risk-falling-further-behind-in-the-world/>

## EMPLOYABILITY AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Research shows that extracurricular activities are an important way for young people to develop their skills. Attendance at extracurricular activities is a predictor of intention to stay in education after compulsory schooling and boosts social networks and confidence in social interactions. Extracurricular activities are particularly associated with transferable skills, including readiness to learn, problem-solving and planning.<sup>18</sup> However, there are also benefits for educational achievement: the more intensively students attend, the more likely they are to benefit.<sup>19</sup> This suggests that extracurricular activities can be a good way for young people to improve their employability.

However, there is limited evidence on the link between extracurricular activities and employment. As such, this research explores the impact that extracurricular activities have on employability and the skills gap.

We used Scouts as a case study to understand how young people can develop teamwork, emotional resilience and problem-solving skills through extracurricular activities. Scouts is an extracurricular organisation where young people aged 4-25 take part in activities, like camping, sports, fundraising and volunteering, that are typically organised around challenges and rewarded with badges.<sup>20</sup>

We also spoke to employers, who told us which skills are necessary for adapting to and coping with the workplace of the present and the future. We found that through extracurricular activities young people develop skills that are crucial to filling the double skills gap of both technical and transferable skills as well as adapting young people to the future of work.

In *The Social State* we made the case that strong relationships lead to better outcomes in almost every aspect of people's lives, including employment.<sup>21</sup> This report applies this idea to extracurricular activities, as we argue that they play a role in building social capital, which is important for young people's career development. This builds on our earlier research in *Working Together* which showed that 'bridging' social capital - relationships between people who are different from each other - helps people move into work. This social capital helps people find jobs - between 30% and 70% of people say that their social connections helped them find their job.<sup>22</sup>

## RESEARCH METHODS

The research methods we used are as follows:

- Review of the existing literature on youth unemployment, the skills gap and extracurricular activities.
- 3,000-person nationally representative poll that includes 1,000 Scouts alumni.<sup>23</sup>
- 500-person poll of employers.
- In depth interviews with ten employers and employment experts.
- In depth interviews with ten current Scouts ten Scouts alumni.
- Three focus groups with 17 Scouts alumni.

Qualitative and quantitative data can be useful in understanding the relationship between extracurricular activities and employability, for example we were able to ask people whether they thought extracurricular activities affected their experiences of work. However, as we discuss in Chapter

18 Donnelly, M., Lažetić, P., Sandoval-Hernandez, A., Kumar, K. and Whewall, S. *An Unequal Playing Field*. 2019. Social Mobility Commission. Online. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/818679/An\\_Unequal\\_Playing\\_Field\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818679/An_Unequal_Playing_Field_report.pdf)

19 Schuepbach, M. Effects of extracurricular activities and their quality on primary school-age students' achievement in mathematics in Switzerland. 2015. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 26:2, 279-295, DOI: 10.1080/09243453.2014.929153

20 Scouts. *Scouts Activity Badges*. Scouts. Available at: <https://www.scouts.org.uk/scouts/activity-badges/> [accessed 04/04/2023]

21 Mackenzie, P. *The Social State: From Transactional to Relational Public Services*. Demos, 28 July 2021. Available at <https://demos.co.uk/project/the-social-state-from-transactional-to-relational-public-services> [accessed 21/02/2022]

22 Phillips, A. *Working Together: The case for universal employment support*. Demos, May 2022. Available at: <https://demos.co.uk/project/working-together-the-case-for-universal-employment-support/>. [accessed 31/02/2023]

23 Scouts alumni in this report are people who participated in Scouts when they were younger.

2, participation can be impacted by demographic factors, such as income, gender, ethnicity and geographic location.<sup>24</sup> It is therefore important to acknowledge that it is not always possible to identify causal relationships in quantitative data, even where we see strong correlations. Those who are less able to participate in extracurricular activities are also more likely to experience disadvantages in employment, so it is not always possible to separate out extraneous factors.

In particular, demographic variation in polling responses may reflect underlying social issues and variation in access to extracurricular activities, rather than the sole impact of those extracurricular activities. As such, we have been cautious in how we have drawn conclusions from the data, including about the relationship between attending extracurricular activities and employment status, for example.

<sup>24</sup> Donnelly, M., Lažetić, P., Sandoval-Hernandez, A., Kumar, K. and Whewall, S. *An Unequal Playing Field*. Social Mobility Commission, 2019

# CHAPTER 1

# UNDERSTANDING THE EMPLOYABILITY GAPS

To understand what is driving youth unemployment, it is important to explore the skills gap in more detail. To begin, in this chapter we examine what employers and employment experts told us are the main employability gaps they see today.

We show that there are significant gaps in both technical and transferable skills, but that employers value transferable skills the most. Transferable skills are expected to be vital for young people to adapt to the future of work, however currently the education system is not set up to adequately support young people to develop these skills. We also argue that where young people do have the skills they need for the future, they need better support in articulating the skills and experiences they already have. To achieve this, young people need better careers support and work experience opportunities, which they highlight as their biggest gaps in feeling ready for work.

## **THE DOUBLE SKILLS GAP**

Through our polling and interviews, we found that many young job applicants have a double skills gap: they often lack both the technical and transferable skills that employers most need. 60% of employers said they struggle to hire young people with sufficient technical skills, while half of employers said they lack transferable skills.

While more employers struggle to recruit young people with technical skills, narrowing the technical skills gap shouldn't take priority over enhancing transferable skills. First of all, the extent of each skills gap depends on the sector. Our survey found that employers in the private and third sectors more often struggle to hire people with sufficient technical skills, at 61% and 63% respectively, than in the public sector (56%). Meanwhile, the transferable skills gap is significantly higher in the third sector, at 71%, than in the private (48%) and public sectors (49%).

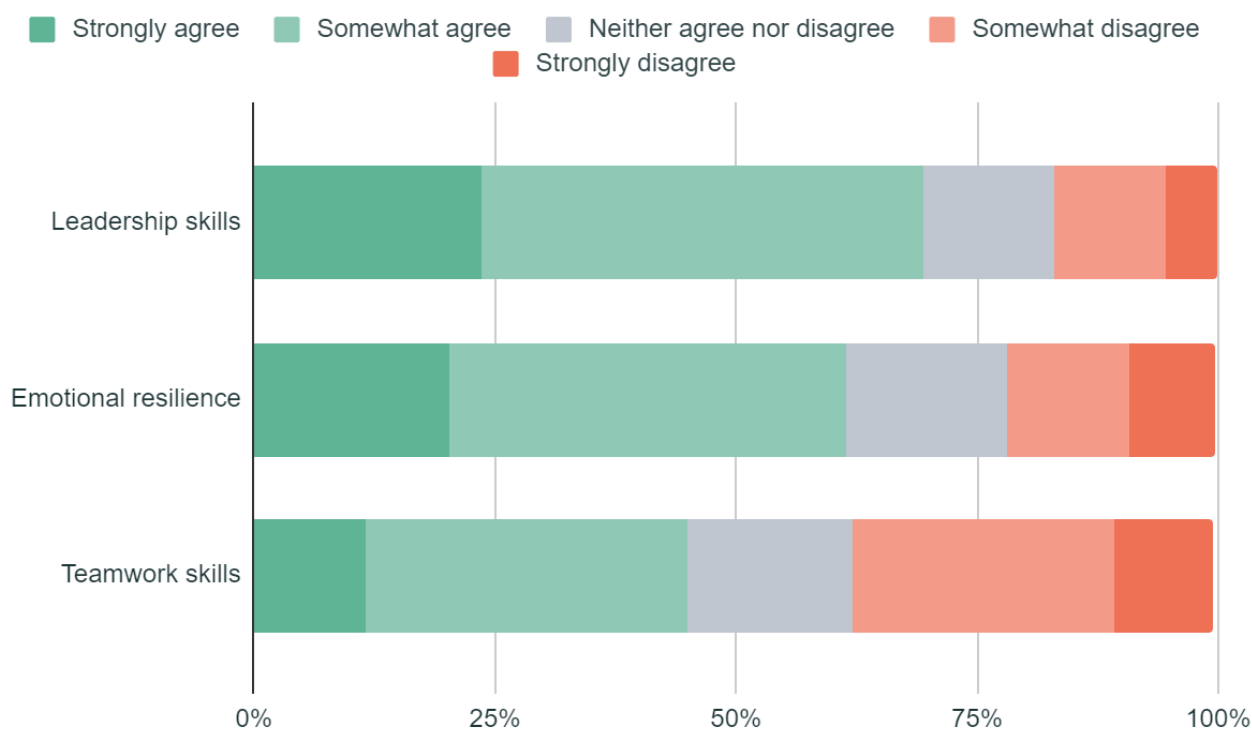
In our interviews with employers, there wasn't a consensus on whether the technical or transferable skills gap was greater - it varied by sector. For example, a chef recruiter told us he mainly struggled to recruit people with enough technical pastry experience. In contrast, some recruiters for office work told us they needed more people with a can-do attitude and a positive work mindset. This suggests that employability means different things for young people depending on their career plans and aspirations.

However, we found significant gaps when we asked employers about how much they struggle to hire young people with specific transferable skills. We asked about leadership (the ability to make

decisions, inspire others and take responsibility); teamwork (the ability to work well with others, even those you disagree with); and emotional resilience (the ability to deal with setbacks and criticism). As Figure 1 shows, leadership skills are particularly lacking, with 69% of employers saying they struggle to hire young people with sufficient leadership skills. In comparison, 61% said they struggled to hire emotionally resilient young people, while 45% said the same of teamwork skills. This shows there are gaps across the board in transferable skills.

**FIGURE 1**

STACKED BAR CHART SHOWING THE EXTENT TO WHICH EMPLOYERS AGREE OR DISAGREE THEY STRUGGLE TO HIRE YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SUFFICIENT TRANSFERABLE SKILLS



## THE EDUCATION CONTEXT

A narrow focus on academic education in schools is contributing to these skills gaps. Particularly, the Government’s education reforms that took place between 2010-2014 caused schools to move to a narrower focus on more academic education. For example, compulsory work experience was removed from the Key Stage 4 curriculum and the speaking and listening components were removed from GCSE English.<sup>25,26</sup> This has left many children lacking the essential transferable skills that they would previously have learnt in school.

In 2022, the House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee said that “the narrow focus of the national curriculum on academic subjects did not help young people to “learn and showcase” their digital, technical or creative skills, nor help them to develop “essential skills like teamwork, problem-solving and communication”.<sup>27</sup>

25 Guyoncourt S. *Bring back compulsory work experience in schools, say business leaders*. The Independent, April 2019. Available at: <https://inews.co.uk/news/business/business-leaders-say-bring-back-compulsory-work-experience-283744#:~:text=Work%20experience%20for%20Key%20Stage,taken%20to%20the%20next%20level>. [accessed 31/03/2023]

26 Walker. P. *GCSE English to drop speaking and listening components*. The Guardian, August 2013. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/aug/29/gcse-english-speaking-listening-drop>.

27 Tudor, S. *Causes of youth unemployment: Lords committee report*. House of Lords Library, November 2022.



Similarly, work by the Tony Blair Institute argues that the current education system incentivises cramming and knowledge rather than transferable skills. It sets out that children instead need more space to develop the overlooked '4Cs' - critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaborative problem-solving.<sup>28</sup>

Our own research with employers supports this. Some employers and employment experts we spoke to stated that schools are not equipping young people with sufficient transferable skills. They felt that schools now have a narrower focus on academic achievement than they did before the Government's reforms, for example with the speaking and listening components being taken out of GCSE English.

*"There's an imbalance. A focus on the academic side and route to university has created other issues for young people, where they're missing out...If we're looking at well-rounded individuals, for life, for career, for wellbeing, you need that well-rounded perspective"*  
- Employer

Further, some Scouts alumni we interviewed said that an overemphasis on academic achievement in schools did not help them feel prepared for work:

*"This was just my school experience. They only focused on the route of GCSEs, A Levels, then you go to uni. There was such a big focus on going to uni as the only next possible thing. There were so many people left behind that either couldn't afford to go to uni or didn't want to, or whatever. So, I think more focus on other options."* - A Scouts alumni

The 2022 review of the Government's Post-16 skills plan shows a recognition of the need to improve young people's employability skills.<sup>29</sup> However, the Government still appears to be placing greater value on academic education, for example with the recent announcement to make maths compulsory in schools until age 18. This was framed as making young people better equipped for jobs of the future.<sup>30</sup> While numeracy skills are important, an equal emphasis must be put on transferable skills for employability.

As one employment expert said, the overemphasis on academic achievement causes fewer problems for children planning to go to university. Young people are more likely to receive careers support at university as they typically have careers services that offer mock interviews and CV support.

Those who don't go to university miss out on much needed careers guidance and tailored support at school. According to our survey, lack of work experience (61%) and career guidance (44%) were the main reasons people did not feel sufficiently prepared for starting work after school or university. Interestingly, people who had university degrees (65%) were more likely to say that lack of work experience had left them feeling unprepared for work than those without degrees (59%). This suggests that a lack of emphasis on practical experience could be detrimental to some young people's job preparedness.

## **WHAT BEING EMPLOYABLE LOOKS LIKE**

When considering what makes young people employable today, it's not enough to just know what skills employers struggle to hire for. It's also key to understand the skills, attributes and experiences that employers most value.

### **The value of transferable skills**

The double skills gap comes with a paradox. While the overall technical skills gap is bigger, our survey of employers found that transferable skills are valued a lot more by employers than technical skills. As shown in Table 1, 57% of employers say they value transferable skills over technical skills, compared

28 Department for Education. *Review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below*. GOV.UK, March 2022. Available at: <https://institute.global/policy/ending-big-squeeze-skills-how-futureproof-education-england> [accessed 31/03/2023]

29 Department for Education. *Review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below*. GOV.UK, March 2022.

30 Scott, J. *All pupils in England and Wales to study maths until age 18 under Rishi Sunak's 'new mission'*. Sky News, January, 2023. Available at: <https://news.sky.com/story/all-pupils-in-england-to-study-maths-until-18-under-rishi-sunaks-new-mission-12779266> [accessed 31/03/2023]

to 10% who say they value technical skills more; 31% say equal. The higher value put on transferable skills was consistent across employers working in the private, public and third sector in our survey. This suggests that even if employers have a bigger shortage of technical skills, transferable skills are the priority when hiring young people, regardless of sector.

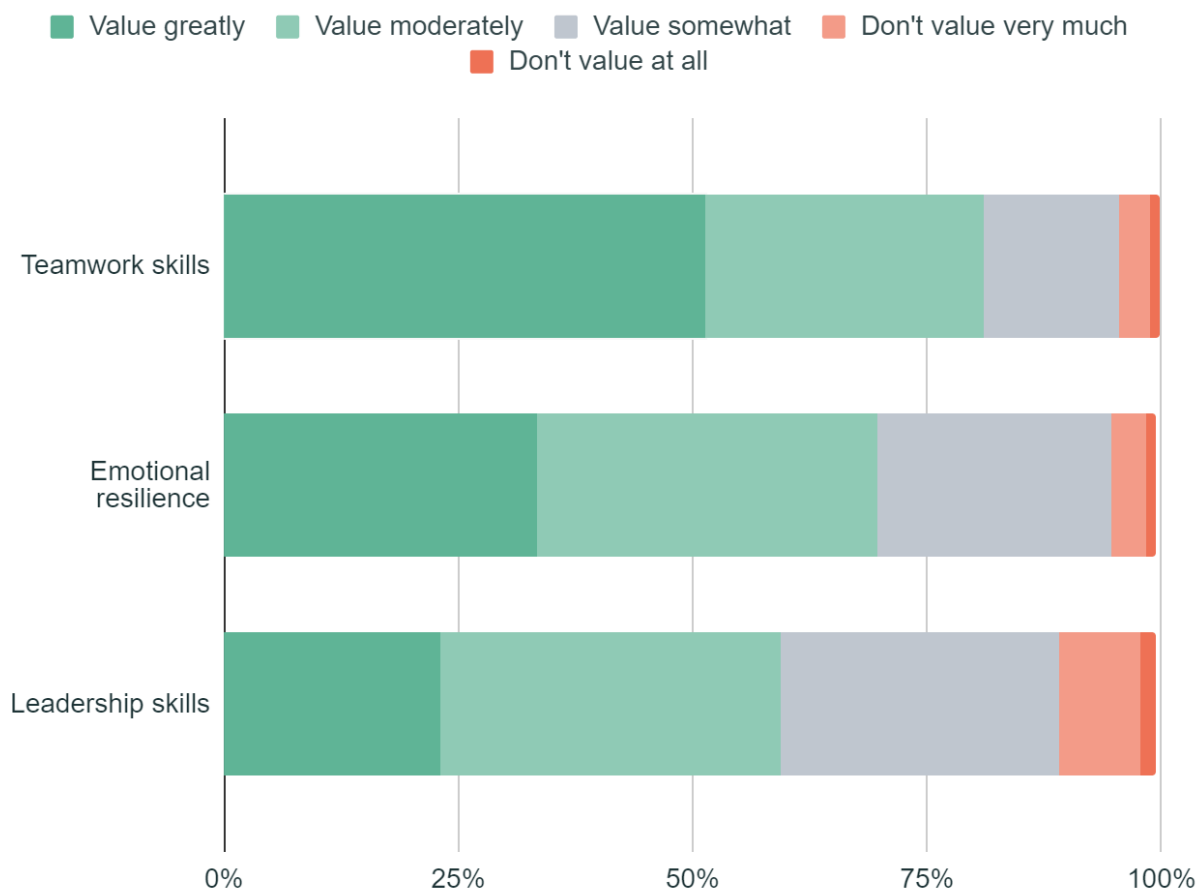
**TABLE 1**  
THE EXTENT TO WHICH EMPLOYERS VALUE TECHNICAL SKILLS OR TRANSFERABLE SKILLS MORE WHEN HIRING YOUNG PEOPLE

STATEMENT	OVERALL	PRIVATE SECTOR	PUBLIC SECTOR	THIRD SECTOR	OTHER
When hiring young recruits, I value technical skills more	10%	11%	10%	0%	15%
I value transferable skills more	57%	58%	58%	67%	23%
I equally value technical and transferable skills	31%	30%	30%	33%	54%

In terms of specific transferable skills, teamwork is the transferable skill most highly valued by employers, with 81% saying they value it moderately or greatly. Emotional resilience and leadership skills are also highly valued by employers: 70% valued emotional resilience and 59% valued leadership skills either greatly or moderately in young people.

**FIGURE 2**

STACKED BAR CHART SHOWING THE EXTENT TO WHICH EMPLOYERS VALUE DIFFERENT TRANSFERABLE SKILLS.



Similarly, the CBI found that employers most often sought 'soft skills and behaviours' in school and college leavers and 'attitudes and aptitude for work' in recent graduates.<sup>31</sup> This reinforces our argument that having those key transferable skills are particularly important for new job seekers entering the workforce.

The importance of transferable skills was also reflected in our interviews with employers and employment experts. One employer we interviewed told us that "softer employability skills" are the most important skills young people need to get hired - especially creativity, but also communication and teamwork. They said that even in the most technical of jobs, like working in a laboratory, it's not good enough to show that you can do the experiments, you need to be able to communicate and work with the team.

Another employer said they valued particular traits over technical skills - primarily being hardworking, a "grafter", goals-oriented and resilient. They said that these attributes show that a potential recruit is committed to the job and that if they had low resilience they would be more likely to be "quick to up and leave if things don't go their way".

Emotional resilience skills are also increasingly important in light of the impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on young people's mental health. Analysis from Nuffield Trust shows that in 2021, **one in six** children in England had a probable mental disorder, up from one in nine in 2017. They found that this can partly be attributed to pandemic restrictions including school closures that may have aggravated known triggers for poor mental health, through reduced social interaction, isolation and academic

31 CBI. *Skills for an inclusive economy: CBI/Birkbeck Education and Skills Survey 2021*. CBI, July 2021. Available at: [https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/7020/12684\\_tess\\_survey\\_2021.pdf](https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/7020/12684_tess_survey_2021.pdf) [accessed 31/03/2023]

stress.<sup>32</sup> There is also evidence that having good emotional resilience is strongly associated with better mental health in children and adolescents, suggesting that building these skills can play an important role in preventing poor mental health.<sup>33</sup>

While of course the causes of mental health problems are extremely complex, we cannot miss opportunities to support young people's mental wellbeing and reduce the risk of poor mental health. The ways extracurricular activities can benefit young people's mental and emotional wellbeing will be discussed further in chapter two.

### The value of technical skills

While transferable skills are valued most by employers, this does not mean they are the only solution to the youth unemployment challenge. Employers still value technical skills - 28% of employers we surveyed said they greatly value technical skills when hiring young people while 43% moderately value them. Qualifications are also important: one employer said that the only non-negotiable technical requirements are a basic standard of qualifications and knowledge, such as Maths and English to a GCSE level.

Further, in 2021, the CBI found that 60% of businesses identified industry-specific technical knowledge as their biggest priority area for skill development over the next three to five years.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, many of the employers we spoke to said that while technical skills are valuable, they can be developed on the job more easily than transferable skills. Transferable skills, meanwhile, are seen as essential to the modern workplace and are particularly important for those just starting out.

### Adapting to the future of work

As technologies develop, 'future-proofing' skills will become increasingly important. We need to not only consider the skills that will make young people employable today, but the skills that will sustain that employability throughout their lives.

The future of work is likely to be affected by automation, environmental sustainability, urbanisation, inequality and globalisation, among other factors. One in five people are in occupations that are expected to shrink as a percentage of the workforce, while only one in ten are in occupations likely to grow. Winners are likely to include creative, digital, design and engineering roles, especially green jobs, so the technical and transferable skills needed in these sectors are likely to be particularly valuable for young people.<sup>35</sup>

Both globalisation and technological developments could lead to a decline of many low and middle-skilled jobs, like manufacturing occupations, meaning it's even more crucial that all young people have access to high-skilled jobs, regardless of their socioeconomic background. In Chapter 3, we will explore further the impact Scouts has had on developing young people's interpersonal skills, and the role extracurricular activities can play in improving social mobility.

In McKinsey's work on the skills needed for the AI era, they found that, unsurprisingly, digital skills will become increasingly important. This includes digital literacy, digital ethics, programming literacy and data analysis skills.<sup>36</sup> However, Deloitte argues that employers overemphasise the need for digital skills, which ultimately are not immune to automation. They argue that transferable skills are particularly valuable because, unlike many technical skills, they are uniquely human and can't easily be replaced by

32 Morris, J and Dr Fisher, E. *Growing problems, in depth: The impact of Covid-19 on health care for children and young people in England*. Nuffield Trust, February 2022. Available at: <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/resource/growing-problems-in-detail-covid-19-s-impact-on-health-care-for-children-and-young-people-in-england>. [accessed 31/03/2023]

33 Mesman, E, Vreeker, A, and Hillegers, M. *Resilience and mental health in children and adolescents: an update of the recent literature and future directions*. Current Opinion in Psychiatry, November 2021. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8500371/> [accessed 31/03/2023]

34 CBI. *Skills for an inclusive economy: CBI/Birkbeck Education and Skills Survey 2021*. CBI, July 2021.

35 Bakhshi, H., Downing, J. M., Osborne, M. A. and Schneider, P. *The Future of Skills: Employment in 2030*. Pearson, 2017. Available at: [https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:86577437-1353-4743-8520-401c1f99ad1b/download\\_file?file\\_format=pdf&safe\\_filename=Future%20of%20skills%20VoR.pdf&type\\_of\\_work=Report](https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:86577437-1353-4743-8520-401c1f99ad1b/download_file?file_format=pdf&safe_filename=Future%20of%20skills%20VoR.pdf&type_of_work=Report) [accessed 31/03/2023]

36 Dondi, M, Klier, J, Panier, F et al. *Defining the skills citizens will need in the future world of work*. McKinsey and Company, June 2021. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/defining-the-skills-citizens-will-need-in-the-future-world-of-work> [accessed 31/03/2023]

technologies like AI. Skills such as creativity, leadership, and critical thinking are also key for adapting technical skills as business needs change.<sup>37</sup>

Research by Mckinsey supports this work, setting out 'foundational' skills needed for the AI era, which mostly consists of transferable skills. They argue that skills such as active listening, conflict resolution and self-leadership skills, including 'grit and persistence', will be critical.<sup>38</sup> Further, in an increasingly globalised world it is likely that companies will demand more interpersonal skills to navigate cultural contexts.<sup>39</sup>

New applications, like the AI chatbot ChatGPT, have prompted further discussions on the impact AI will have on skills in different sectors. For example, it's been suggested that Chat GPT could assist lawyers by creating summaries of case notes, creating lesson plans for teachers, or writing social media posts for Public Relations professionals.<sup>40</sup> This would remove the need for people to undertake such technical tasks themselves, leaving them with more time to focus on tasks that require a personal and human touch (like building relationships with clients, for example).<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile, the transition to Net Zero and tackling climate change will place further demands on the changing workforce. There is already a significant green skills gap which is affecting employers' ability to meet their net zero targets. There is high demand for technical skills in this sector (like design and construction skills), but also transferable skills like project management, change management, leadership and communication, which are needed to help organisations successfully reduce their carbon emissions.<sup>42</sup> Further, the Government has highlighted risk management and the ability to make environmental impact assessments as necessary skills for the green economy.<sup>43</sup>

While the demand for certain technical skills will change over time, the requirement for transferable skills will remain as an essential means of adapting to these changes. Such transferable skills are central to extracurricular activities, including Scouts, as we will learn in Chapter 2 of this report.

## Work experience

As part of the earlier education reforms, compulsory work experience at Key Stage 4 was removed from the curriculum. According to recent research by Youth Employment UK, only 36% of young people in education today have been able to access work experience.<sup>44</sup>

This leaves many young people feeling unprepared for work. According to our nationally representative survey, lack of work experience (61%) is the main reason people felt unprepared for starting work after school or university. Of the two youngest age groups in our survey, 48% of 18-24 year olds and 53% of 25-34-year-olds cited this reason. Similarly, the 2022 Youth Voices Census found that lack of work experience was one of the biggest barriers young people say they face to accessing work.<sup>45</sup>

While our research with employers shows they place less value on work experience than transferable skills, it is still considered important. 20% of employers we surveyed said they greatly value work

37 Radin, J, Hatfield, S, Schwartz, J et al. Closing the employability skills gap: The answer is simpler than you might think. Deloitte, January 2020. Available at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/focus/technology-and-the-future-of-work/closing-the-employability-skills-gap.html> [accessed 31/03/2023]

38 Dondi, M, Klier, J, Panier, F et al. *Defining the skills citizens will need in the future world of work*. McKinsey and Company, June 2021.

39 Bakhshi, H., Downing, J. M., Osborne, M. A. and Schneider, P. *The Future of Skills: Employment in 2030*. Peaston, 2017. Available at: [https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:86577437-1353-4743-8520-401c1f99ad1b/download\\_file?file\\_format=pdf&safe\\_filename=Future%20of%20skills%20VoR.pdf&type\\_of\\_work=Report](https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:86577437-1353-4743-8520-401c1f99ad1b/download_file?file_format=pdf&safe_filename=Future%20of%20skills%20VoR.pdf&type_of_work=Report) [accessed 31/03/2023]

40 Marr, B. *What Does ChatGPT Really Mean For Your Job?*. Forbes, February 2023. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2023/02/13/what-does-chatgpt-really-mean-for-your-job/?sh=58c416325bda> [accessed 31/03/2023]

41 Marr, B. *What Does ChatGPT Really Mean For Your Job?*. Forbes, February 2023.

42 Jones, E., Bradley, T. and White, Y. *Skills for a net-zero economy: Insights from employers and young people*. Learning & Work Institute, June 2022. Available at: <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/skills-for-net-zero/> [accessed 31/03/2023]

43 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. *Skills for a green economy: a report on the evidence*. GOV.UK, October 2011. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/32373/11-1315-skills-for-a-green-economy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32373/11-1315-skills-for-a-green-economy.pdf) [accessed 31/03/2023]

44 Youth Employment UK. *Youth Voice Census: 2022 report*. Youth Employment UK, September 2022. Available at: <https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/dev/wp-content/themes/yeuk/files/youth-voice-census-report-2022.pdf>. [accessed 31/03/2023]

45 Youth Employment UK. *Youth Voice Census: 2022 report*. Youth Employment UK, September 2022.

experience while 31% moderately value it. In our interviews they told us that it can be a means for young people to develop and demonstrate key transferable skills, like time management and self-management. One employer described it as the “gold standard” for young job seekers. However, she also acknowledged that these skills can be gained from extracurricular activities like being in a sports team or volunteering, as well as part-time work.

Another employment expert said that young people can become trapped in a cycle of being unable to get experience because they don’t already have experience:

*“Young people are trapped in an annoying cycle, they want to get experience, but can’t get experience. A blame has got to be at the door of cutting statutory work experience and cutting careers guidance (in schools). No exposure to the workplace.” - Employment expert*

Research by the Institute for Employment Studies also acknowledges this “catch-22 for young people who then struggle to get their foot in the door.” They found that certain hiring practices contribute to this issue, such as AI applicant screening and recruitment agencies that tend to hire based primarily on experience.<sup>46</sup>

One of the Scouts alumni we interviewed also expressed frustration with this challenge:

*“Trying to get into psychology and the social sciences is quite difficult without work experience but it is one of those things where it is like if you don’t have experience, they tell you to get experience. But you can’t get experience until you have got the experience. So I found that quite difficult.” - A Scouts alumni*

According to employers, a lack of work experience is problematic because young people lose crucial exposure to the workplace at a young age. One highlighted that work experience is more accessible for middle class and privately educated children, as they can more often afford to take gap years and unpaid internships. The removal of compulsory work experience is therefore likely to have a disproportionate impact on the employability of children from working class backgrounds.

Some employers do see work experience as having unique benefits for young job seekers that extracurricular activities do not necessarily have. One person told us that relevant work experience or volunteering was most important because it demonstrates an applicant’s passion and commitment to their industry in a way that unrelated extracurricular activities do not.

It is crucial that young people can access work experience so they have more opportunities to develop their transferable skills as well as gain valuable exposure to the workplace. However, the lack of compulsory work experience also emphasises the importance of extracurricular activities. Despite the unique benefits of work experience, young people can gain many of the transferable skills through extracurricular activities that they might have otherwise gained through work experience.

## **YOUNG PEOPLE’S PERCEPTIONS OF THE SKILLS GAP**

Having understood employers’ perspectives on the skills gap, we now draw on more of our polling and qualitative data to explore what young people think is holding them back in their careers. We identify a mismatch between young people’s and employers’ perceptions of what the main challenges are.

As discussed, employers highly value transferable skills, more so than technical skills, and cite a lack of these skills as a top reason they struggle to hire young people. However, only 1% of 18-25-year-olds we surveyed said they felt a lack of transferable skills made them unprepared for work. In contrast, 40% of 18-25-year-olds said that a lack of technical skills made them feel unprepared for work.

This suggests there is a mismatch between employers’ and young people’s perceptions of the transferable skills gap. Young people do not feel that a lack of transferable skills is hindering their employability like employers do.

46 Orlanda, C, Winton, A and Alexander, A. *Bridging the Gap: Making young people a vital part of every workforce*. Institute for Employment Studies, January 2023

Research by the Institute for Employment Studies found a similar inconsistency between employers' and young people's perspectives on the skills gap. Employers cited a lack of skills as the main obstacle young people feel to accessing good quality work (42%). Young people believed not having enough connections and poor mental health were the main obstacles they faced.<sup>47</sup>

This mismatch can partly be explained by young people not effectively articulating the transferable skills they have in job applications. A 2015 survey of employers by YouthNet found that about two-thirds reject young job candidates because they do not clearly articulate their abilities, including their transferable skills.<sup>48</sup>

One of the Scouts alumni we spoke to also said they found it difficult to effectively articulate their skills when looking for jobs:

*"For me, it's about learning practically, the skills that are useful when looking for a job. Like a lot of emphasis is put on gathering skills and stuff but not a lot of emphasis is put on how to apply them effectively when the time comes. For example, I was told all of the things I'd need to do to make a nice-looking CV, but I wasn't ever given anything like a mock interview or stuff like that. More practical simulations of the world of work, I think would have helped me feel like I was more prepared for it, I guess." - A Scouts alumni*

Similarly, several of the employers we spoke to emphasised the need for young people to clearly articulate the skills gained from extracurricular activities in job applications to demonstrate their employability. This suggests that, even if young people feel confident they have these transferable skills, many are not articulating this well enough to employers. This means that employers struggle to identify the transferable skills that young people do have. In the final chapter, we will recommend how young people can be better supported to articulate their skills and how employers can emphasise the importance of transferable skills.

47 Orlanda, C, Winton, A and Alexander, A. *Bridging the Gap: Making young people a vital part of every workforce*. Institute for Employment Studies, January 2023.

48 Alsop, R. *This is the real reason new graduates can't get hired*. BBC, November 2015. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20151118-this-is-the-real-reason-new-graduates-cant-get-hired> [accessed 02/04/2023]

# CHAPTER 2

# HOW CAN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES HELP SOLVE THESE YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY CHALLENGES?

In this chapter, we draw on our nationally representative survey and our qualitative research with current Scouts and Scouts alumni to examine the impact extracurricular activities have on people's skills and employability.

While we look at a range of extracurricular activities, including social clubs and sports, we focus on Scouts as a key example, looking at the impact the specific Scouts model of extracurricular activities has had on people's careers.

We found that taking part in extracurricular activities is strongly associated with several positive outcomes including employment status, career optimism and preparedness for work. As we will see, the impact of extracurricular activities on young people's transferable skills, including their teamwork, leadership and emotional resilience, has been particularly invaluable for improving their employability.

## **EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES**

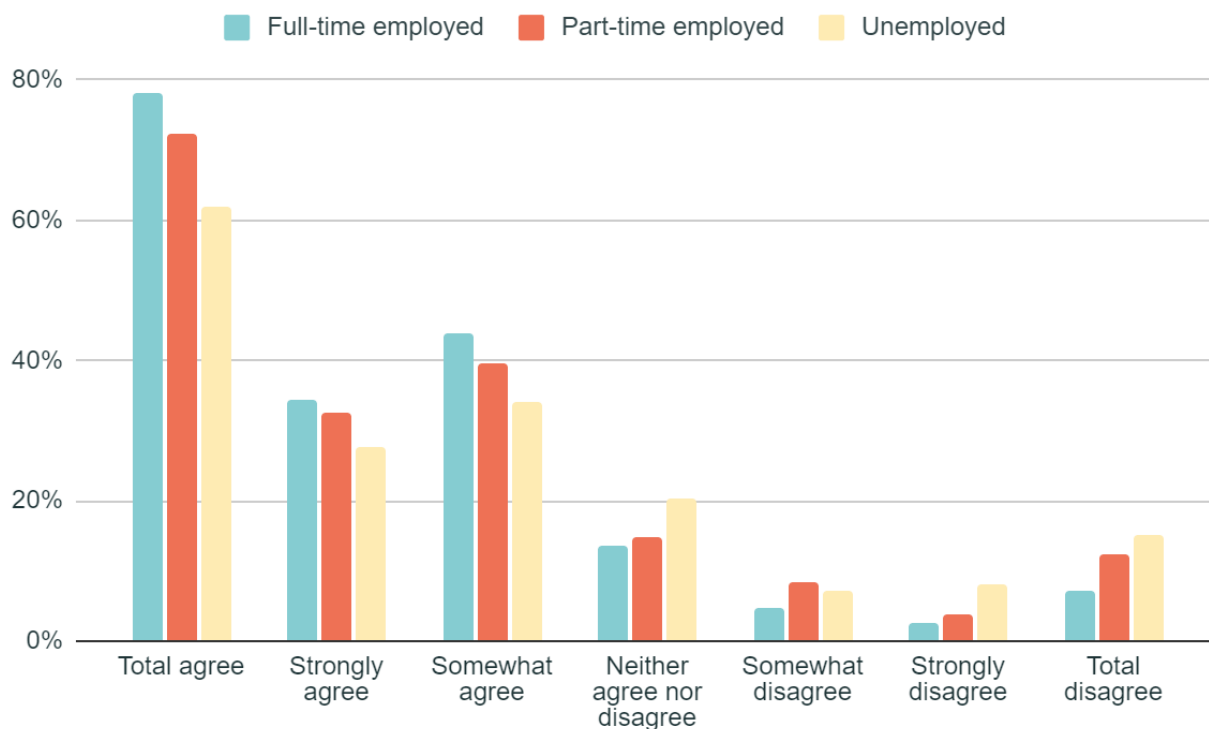
People who attended extracurricular activities when they were young are now more likely to be employed than those who did not. In our survey, 74% of full-time employed people say they attended an extracurricular at least every week compared to 66% of unemployed people. For people who had attended Scouts, 79% of full-time employed people attended every week in comparison to 74% of unemployed people.



Overall, 73% of people said the extracurricular activities they attended have had a big impact on their lives with this number being even higher for full-time employed people. As shown in Figure 3, 78% of full-time employed people say extracurricular activity had a big impact on their lives compared to 62% of unemployed people.

### FIGURE 3

BAR CHART SHOWING THE EXTENT TO WHICH PEOPLE AGREE OR DISAGREE THAT EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES HAD A BIG IMPACT ON THEIR LIVES.



Numerous factors, including socioeconomic status and health, can influence people’s likelihood of being employed, so it is difficult to draw a direct causal link between extracurricular activities and employment. However, it’s likely that the greater impact that extracurricular activities have had on the lives of employed people includes the impact it’s had on their careers and employability.

For example, several of the former and current Scouts we spoke to said they had been able to use some of their experiences at Scouts, like volunteering as a Young Leader,<sup>49</sup> as examples of leadership or teamwork in their job applications. As discussed in Chapter One, these are key transferable skills that employers want. We will discuss how Scouts has helped young people develop their skills and impacted their careers in more detail in the next chapter.

### CAREER OPTIMISM

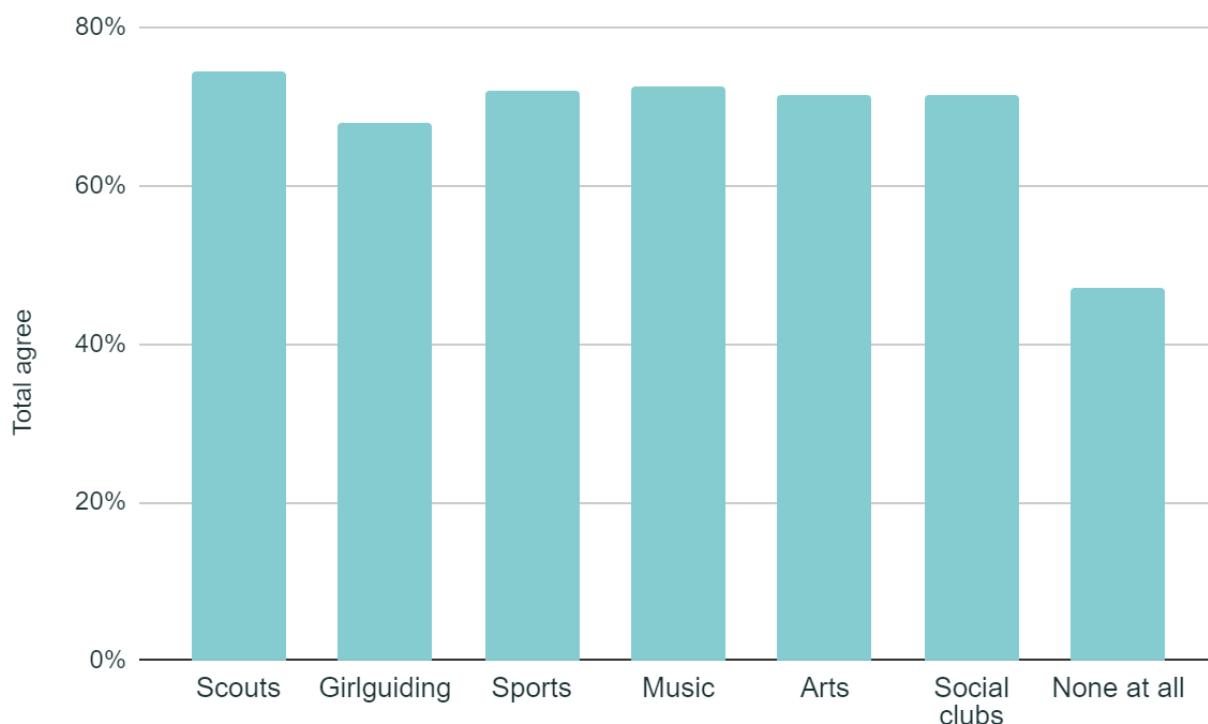
Extracurricular activities were also associated with greater career optimism. Of those who had never taken part in extracurricular activities while at school, only 47% agreed with the statement: ‘I feel optimistic that I have what it takes to get what I want out of my career’. People who had taken part in extracurricular activities felt markedly more optimistic. Notably, 74% of Scouts alumni agreed in comparison to 62% of people who did not attend Scouts when they were younger.

49 A Young Leader is a Explorer Scout between the ages of 14 and 18 who volunteers to be part of the leadership team for the Squirrel, Beaver, Cub or Scouts sections. See: Scouts. Young Leaders’ Scheme. Scouts. Available at: <https://www.scouts.org.uk/volunteers/running-your-section/running-an-explorer-unit/explorer-scout-young-leaders-scheme/> [accessed 04/04/2023]

That young people feel optimistic they can achieve their career aspirations is particularly important post-pandemic. A 2021 report by the UCL Institute of Education (IOE) found that 53% of 16-15 year-olds feel their career prospects are worsening as a result of the pandemic while 44% believe that their learning of “work skills” has worsened as a result of the pandemic, potentially because they have had less opportunities to pick up skills that would be needed in the workplace.<sup>50</sup>

As we will see, extracurricular activities can play an important role in supporting young people to develop the skills they need for their chosen career paths, and in turn help increase young people’s optimism that they have what it takes to achieve these goals.

**FIGURE 4**  
PROPORTION OF PEOPLE WHO FEEL OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THEIR CAREERS, BY TYPE OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITY



## PREPAREDNESS FOR WORK

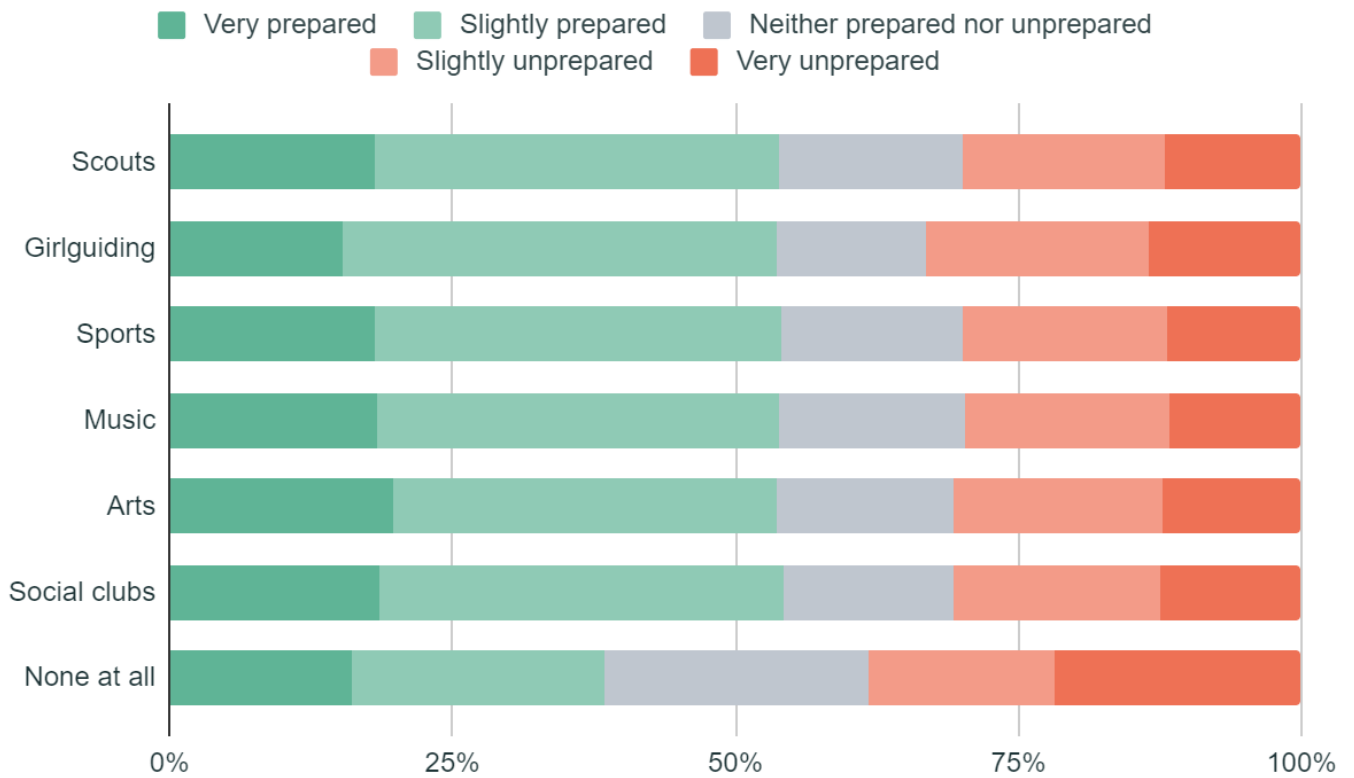
There is also a strong association between having attended extracurricular activities and how prepared people feel for work after leaving school or university. Only 37% of people who didn’t attend any extracurricular activities said they felt prepared starting work for the first time, while the majority of people who attended most of the extracurricular activities in our survey said they did feel prepared.

Scouts alumni are slightly more prepared for work with 53% of Scouts alumni saying they were prepared for starting work for the first time compared with 48% of people who did not attend Scouts. We don’t see a marked Scouts Impact here, however - as shown in Figure 5, 53% of people across almost all extracurricular activities said they felt prepared.

50 UCL Institute of Education. More than half of 16-25-year-olds fear for their futures and job prospects. UCL, April 2021. Available at: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/news/2021/apr/more-half-16-25-year-olds-fear-their-futures-and-job-prospects> [accessed 02/04/2023]

**FIGURE 5**

STACKED BAR CHART SHOWING THE EXTENT TO WHICH PEOPLE SAY THEY FELT PREPARED OR UNPREPARED FOR STARTING WORK AFTER SCHOOL OR UNIVERSITY.

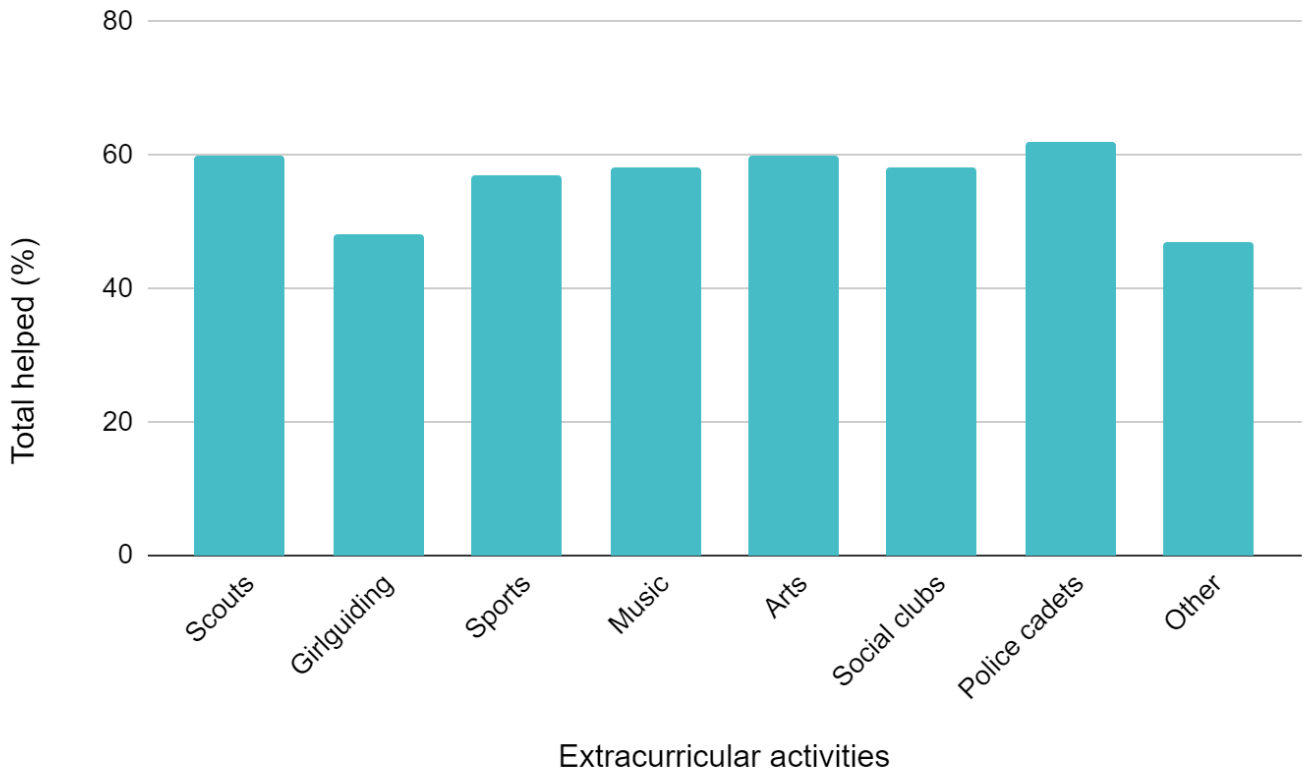


We also wanted to look at whether people believe that having attended extracurricular activities when they were younger contributed to their preparedness for work. We asked those who had participated in any extracurricular activity the question: "Did participating in extracurricular activities help prepare you for your career in any way?" Figure 6 below shows the percentage who agreed with this statement, broken down by the type of extracurricular activity they had engaged in. Scouts, Arts and Police Cadets were among the most impactful.

When comparing people who attended Scouts and those who did not - 60% of Scouts alumni agreed that participating in extracurricular activities helped prepare them for their career in comparison to 49% of non-Scouts (non-Scouts includes people who did no extracurricular activities at all). As we will see, the breadth of activities Scouts get involved in, from expeditions to community service, allow them to develop a range of important employability skills that many of the people we interviewed felt helped make them more prepared for work.

**FIGURE 6**

PROPORTION OF PEOPLE FOR WHOM EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES HELPED PREPARE THEM FOR THEIR CAREERS, BY TYPE OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITY.

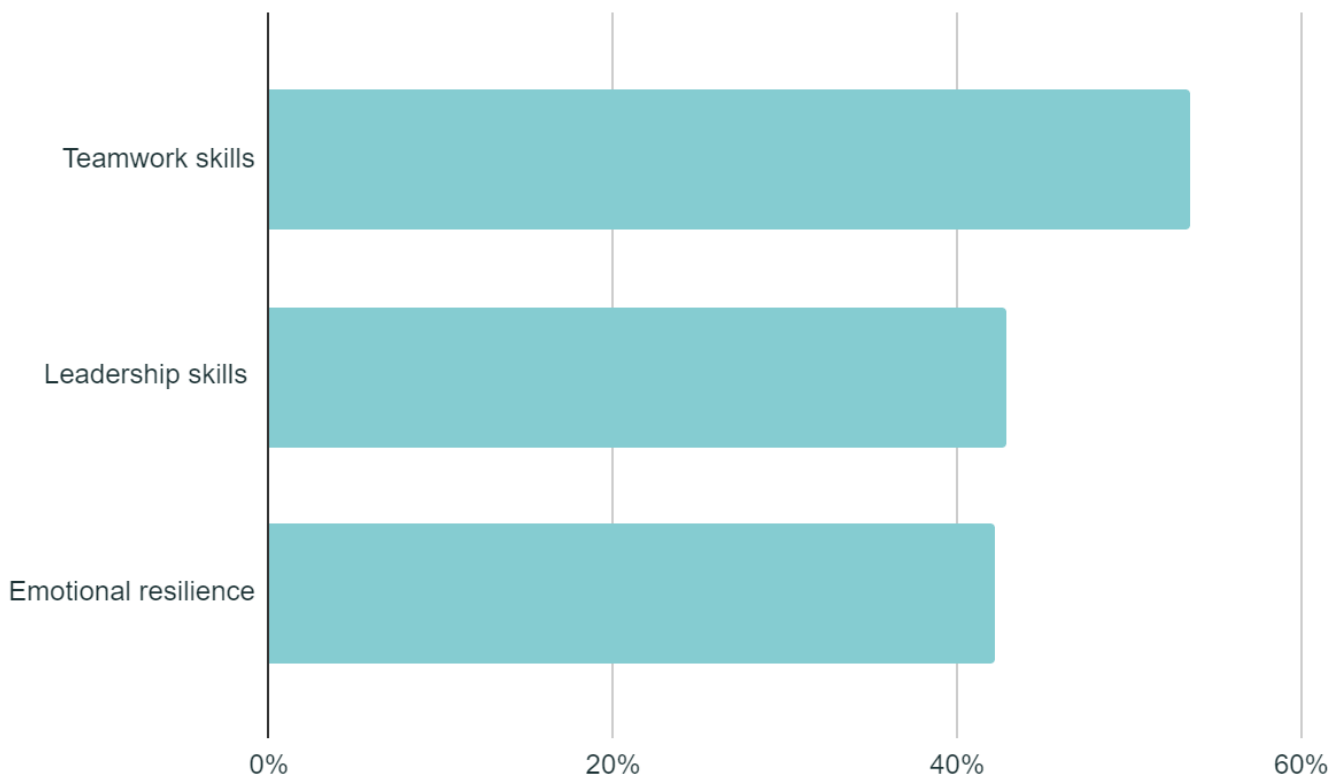


**TRANSFERABLE SKILLS**

The transferable skills people develop through extracurricular activities play a particularly important role in helping young people feel more ready for work. As discussed in chapter one, employers want to see job applicants who have a strong set of transferable skills like emotional resilience, leadership and teamwork. As shown in Figure 7, a significant amount of people who attended extracurricular activities when they were younger believe extracurricular activities have helped give them these skills.

**FIGURE 7**

BAR CHART SHOWING THE WAYS IN WHICH PARTICIPATING IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES HELPED CAREERS.



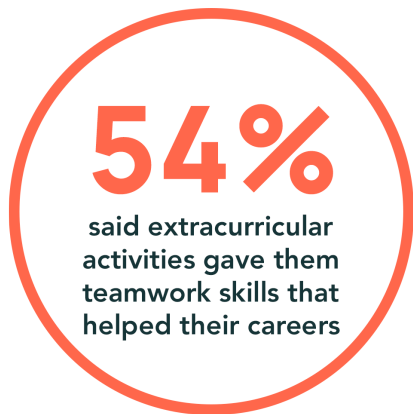
According to a 2019 report by the Social Mobility Commission, *An Unequal Playing Field*, taking part in extracurricular activities when younger can have substantial benefits for people’s employability.<sup>51</sup> The Commission set out the importance of extracurricular activities for developing transferable skills and social networks in particular:

*‘Extracurricular 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 extracurricular activities - specifically music classes and playing a wide range of sports – are important in predicting intentions to remain in education after compulsory schooling.’*

Similarly, research from SocStats on the impact Scouts has on people’s employability skills found Scouts score 19.5% higher on Life Skills and Employability than non-scouts. Over 90% of Scouts surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that by participating in Scouts they “got the chance to develop skills which will be useful to me in the future”. 99.6% of Scouts surveyed said they had worked in teams and 95.7% had made decisions and had taken leadership roles. The SocStats research also found that Scouts score higher than non-Scouts for leadership, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, resilience, responsibility and trustworthiness, and teamwork.<sup>52</sup>

We will now draw on our nationally representative survey and focus groups and interviews with current Scouts and Scouts alumni to explore the impact extracurricular activities have had on their employability. We find that the different skills and opportunities that people gain through extracurricular activities including the Scouts - such as leadership, teamwork, communication and emotional resilience are key to these improved employment outcomes.

51 Donnelly, M., Lažetić, P., Sandoval-Hernandez, A., Kumar, K. and Whewall, S. *An Unequal Playing Field*. Social Mobility Commission, 2019  
52 SocStats. *The Scout Association: Pilot impact survey analysis for the UK August 2017*. SocStats, August 2017. Available at: <https://cms.scouts.org.uk/media/3221/changing-lives-strengthening-communities-the-scout-association-2017-impact-report-technical-document.pdf> [accessed 03/04/2023]



## TEAMWORK

Teamwork was the most common transferable skill people gained through extracurricular activities. Of those in our survey who felt extracurricular activities had helped prepare them for work, 54% cited the teamwork skills they gained as being useful for their careers. For people who had been part of Scouts when they were younger, the same impact can be seen with 55% saying Scouts gave them teamwork skills that have helped them in their careers.

Scouts often undertake challenging tasks where they have to work with others to get things done, for example cooking for large groups of people or trekking through the night in the rain. Current Scouts and Scouts alumni we spoke to said that these experiences really helped build

their teamwork skills. One participant told us that at summer camps they and their fellow Scouts would be responsible for all the jobs including cooking and lighting fires to keep warm. They said, "you weren't getting babied and had to pull your weight." The need to contribute and help others with these tasks showed them the importance of looking after others and working as a team to get things done.

One current Scout told us that when learning practical skills, like knot-tying, he was able to identify where his own strengths were and help others who were struggling to develop these skills. This shows that the day-to-day activities Scouts get involved in play an invaluable role in developing their ability to work with and support others in their team.

More formally, the internal structures of Scouts, such as Sixes and Patrols, also enabled people to practise teamwork by giving them the opportunity to take on different roles within a team. As one person explained:

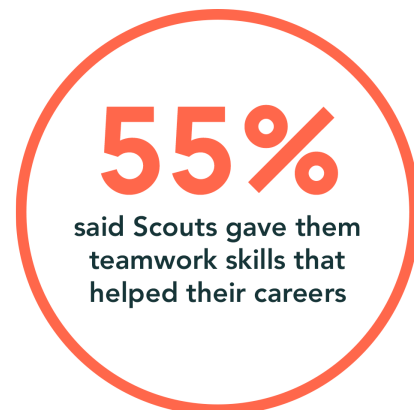
*"you run one of the sixes, they give you a bit of responsibility. The people that get given those responsibilities, you see them build confidence over time and can communicate with and lead other people." - A current Scout*

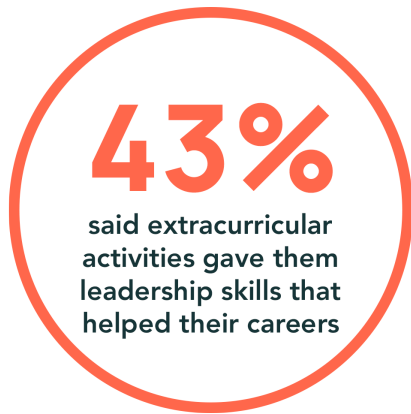
It's important to acknowledge that how frequently people attend Scouts and other extracurricular activities makes a difference to the impact it has. 59% of those who attended Scouts at least every week say their careers have benefited from the teamwork skills they gained, compared to 37% who attended at least every month. Beyond Scouts, 57% of people who attended any extracurricular activity weekly say they have benefited from the teamwork skills they gained in comparison to 39% who attended monthly.

As discussed earlier, teamwork is the transferable skill valued most highly by the employers we surveyed, with some of the employers we spoke to directly linking teamwork skills to Scouts. One employer told us that:

*Teamwork is very different from your class at school. Expeditionary learning is about bringing in outward bound learning into the school. The scouting movement replicates this in more of an informal, family group. Building that bond in a different way to school. - Employer*

This suggests that Scouts, by providing young people with opportunities to get involved in challenging and adventurous activities, and learn about the different roles that make up a team, is providing young people with the teamwork skills that make them employable, more than other key institutions like schools.





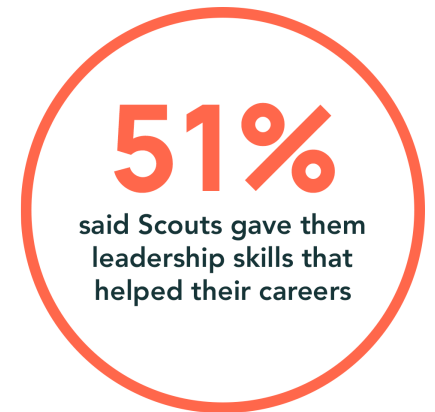
## LEADERSHIP

Leadership is another important transferable skill people gain through extracurricular activities. In our survey, 43% of people who said extracurricular activities have helped prepare them for work said the leadership skills they gained have helped their careers. Of the Scouts alumni we surveyed, 51% cited leadership skills as one of the skills they had learnt that had helped them in their careers.

Much of this can be attributed to some of the unique responsibilities and experiences Scouts gives young people. For example, Scouts are offered leadership responsibilities, like leading Patrols, from a young age while Cubs are also given the opportunity to lead Sixes.<sup>53</sup>

They also gain a lot of experience of being away from their parents and taking on challenging situations. One person who attended Scouts when they were younger told us that a boy on his trip had an allergic reaction, and due to the leadership and first aid skills they learnt in Scouts, they knew how to handle the situation themselves. Another told us that frequently being put in situations that he was “unaccustomed to” and having to find solutions to difficult circumstances really helped him develop his leadership skills:

*I think leadership opportunities were there if you grasped them... people who really grasped them could become head of your patrol or head of your Six, I did kind of grasp that a bit, I remember sitting at my last Scout camp before I went to Explorers, sitting in the rain and woods...there three or four eleven year olds, they were terrified and wet and they were looking at me like “he knows what to do...he’s been here quite a while”...It was through situations like that I got a bit of, kind of, leadership experience, and like, staying positive in adverse circumstances. - A Scouts alumni*



Older Scouts (18–25) also have the opportunity for more formalised leadership positions, such as the Youth Commissioner and Trustee roles.<sup>54,55</sup> Many of the Scouts alumni we spoke to told us that taking on these roles had been useful for their careers - particularly, many said that when looking for jobs these roles provided them with solid, demonstrable leadership experience that they could put on their CV. Others were able to apply what they had learnt about being a leader directly to the day-to-day work they do in their current jobs. For example, one of our focus group participants told us that, while she doesn’t feel like being in the Scouts has helped her in all the jobs she’s had, she can see that the leadership skills she gained have helped her career in hospitality:

*In terms of hospitality and stuff, I remember there were quite a few times in my Scouts days that leadership and training to be a Scout leader, you pick up a lot of skills. Then, later on, as I managed bars and things, I think it definitely influenced how I managed and how I was able to persuade people to do the jobs that they didn’t want to do. - A Scouts alumni*

Further, one current Scout told us that she applies what she learnt as a Scout Leader and District Youth Commissioner, particularly empathy and holding people accountable, in her job as a practice manager in a GP practice. Research on employers’ perceptions of trusteeships show that they believe it can play a valuable role in improving employees’ skills, like team building as well as leadership, and boosting their confidence, emphasising the value having experience of formal leadership roles can have in improving young people’s employability.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Patrols are smaller groups Scout troops are organised into, each group has a Patrol Leader. Sixes are smaller groups that Cub Scouts (aged 8-10) get split into, one member of the group is chosen to be a Sixer and gets to take on leadership responsibilities - usually sixers will rotate so that each Cub gets the opportunity to take on this role.

<sup>54</sup> Scouts. *Youth Commissioners*. Scouts. Available at: <https://www.scouts.org.uk/volunteers/running-your-section/youth-shaped/youth-commissioners/> [accessed 04/04/2023]

<sup>55</sup> Scouts. *Trustee Roles and Responsibilities*. Scouts. Available at: <https://www.scouts.org.uk/volunteers/running-things-locally/executive-committees/trustee-roles-and-responsibilities/> [accessed 04/04/2023]

<sup>56</sup> Yeowart, C and McKenzie, D. *The Benefits of Trusteeship*. New Philanthropy Capital, March 2012. Available at: <https://npproduction.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Benefits-of-trusteeship.pdf> [accessed 04/04/2023]

As discussed earlier, leadership is one of the main transferable skills employers say are lacking among young people. Our conversations with Scouts alumni show that extracurricular activities that entrust young people to take on important responsibilities, like formal leadership responsibilities, and empower them to have a level of independence from the adults in their lives, can play a valuable role in filling this leadership skills gap.

## COMMUNICATION

Communication is another important skill people develop in Scouts. A recurring theme that came through from our interviews was that, having attended Scouts, people felt able to communicate with people from different backgrounds, ages, and nationalities. For example, Jamboree - a celebratory gathering of Scouts from across the world - was frequently cited as an invaluable opportunity to meet new people:

*Spent two weeks on a campsite with all these different nationalities and people. The confidence I've got from that from speaking to new people, and speaking to people through language barriers.*  
- Current Scout

Through this experience they still had friends who lived in other countries. Another person who attended Scouts when they were younger told us that in the early stages of their career, he would put going to Jamboree in Chile on his CV as an example of team building.

One of our focus group participants also told us that they liked that being in Scouts gave them the opportunity to communicate with people both younger and older than them. This was something they didn't really do at school due to only ever working and socialising with people in their year group.

A number of people told us their Scout groups were more diverse than the schools they attended, which was something they valued. Research by the Youth United Foundation found that members of uniformed youth groups, including Scouts, Police Cadets and Girlguiding, are more likely to say they mix with people who are different to them, particularly people of different ages.<sup>57</sup> In this way, uniformed groups, including Scouts, can be more reflective of modern-day workplaces, where people will commonly need to work with people of different ages and increasingly due to globalisation, work with people from different cultural backgrounds.<sup>58</sup>

Another common theme was that Scouts taught people how to communicate with others they don't necessarily agree with. For example, some Scouts alumni from our focus groups told us that they had many debates at Scouts where they learnt how to effectively get their own points across, but also hear and understand other people's views. They were exposed to people with different views, so learnt empathy and how to understand other people's experiences. Some explicitly linked this to their careers, as working in a team with colleagues they don't necessarily like or agree with is something they often have to do.

*There was a lot of debates and stuff going on, quite a lot. So, I definitely learnt how to get my point across but also, hear other people's points. We put on big debate nights but also, a big thing was you were exposed to so many different people from different backgrounds that I think empathy became a big thing...just hearing about different people's experiences and different ways of living.*  
- A Scouts alumni

Many of the current Scouts alumni we spoke to also said being in Scouts has given them the confidence to communicate with different people, which has helped them at work. One person told us she uses the confidence she developed communicating to a range of different people, including those she doesn't know, in her fundraising job today:

*Being able to speak to people about something I'm passionate about is something I do with scouts anyway...RNLI is something I'm passionate about and it was very easy to go out and speak to the public all day.* - Current Scout

Another person noticed the benefits of Scouts when he took on his first job in retail. He explained that:

57 ComRes. *Social Integration: The role of uniformed youth groups*. Youth United Foundation, June 2018. Available at: <http://yuf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/FULL-REPORT-COMJ6149-Social-Integration-Youth-Groups-Report-0106-WEB.pdf> [accessed 04/04/2023]  
58 Eswaran, V. *The business case for diversity in the workplace is now overwhelming*. World Economic Forum, April 2019. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/04/business-case-for-diversity-in-the-workplace/> [accessed 04/04/2023]



*Scouting does give you confidence talking to people. That is what supermarkets are looking for, especially as a team leader you have to be bold and have a personality. - Current Scout*

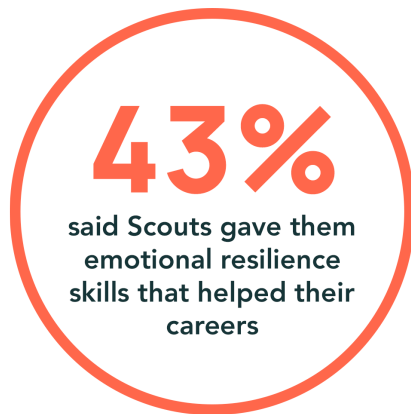
One current Scout said that the media training she received at Scouts has helped with her role as a Young Leader - particularly she feels confident in her ability to send emails and answer the phone and communicate with other Young Leaders and Scouts' parents as a result of this media training. It's clear that opportunities to interact with a diverse range of people at a young age play an important role in giving people the confidence they need to effectively communicate with others, a quality that is integral to the modern workplace.

## EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE AND WELLBEING

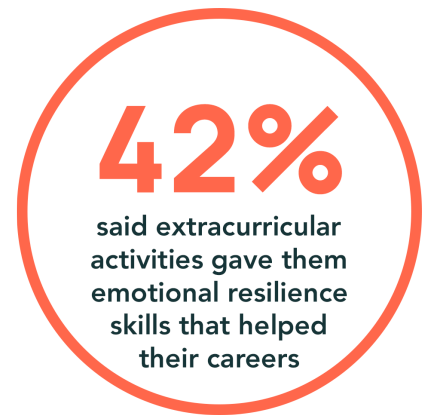
*The highest thing that Scouts gives you is attributes that are hard to capture on the CV. It makes you better at dealing with stress, good at taking responsibility, and leading. - Current Scout*

### Resilience

As well as skills like leadership and teamwork, extracurricular activities can also play a valuable role in developing qualities like emotional resilience. Of those in our survey who said extracurricular activities helped prepare them for work, 42% believe this was because of the emotional resilience they gained. Similarly, 43% of people who attended Scouts said that being in has helped them develop their emotional resilience.



As discussed in Chapter One, emotional resilience is a transferable skill valued by many employers. Having opportunities to develop the ability to deal with setbacks and cope with challenging situations in the workplace is therefore imperative for young people's employability.



In our interviews with Scouts and Scouts alumni, some people cited the expeditions and opportunities for international travel while they were in Scouts as being especially good for building their resilience. One person we spoke to told us that he struggled when he went to Japan with his Scouts group as it was a long way away from home, he disliked the food and the weather was so hot they had to sleep outside their tents.

However, he told us that having to find solutions to difficult situations like this had helped him build resilience, particularly as he didn't have his parents around to solve the issues for him.

Similarly, one person who volunteers as a Scout Leader explained how going camping over the weekend brought him out of his comfort zone, which helped build his resilience:

*I think that comes from the more adventurous side of things, pushing yourself out of your comfort zone...This weekend was really windy and was quite difficult, with the cubs it was no bother, they just got on with it. They weren't moaning about it or anything like that...It's like facing those challenges, next time you're put in that situation would be easier. - Current Scout*

Our participants really valued the emotional skills that Scouts had taught them, including that people felt validated to express their feelings. One interviewee told us:

*It wasn't a place where it was 'shut up and don't complain'. Part of the training was being wary of what people were feeling [...] It did build people up and took them out of their comfort zone [...] It proved to kids who were maybe under-confident that they could achieve things as part of the group and not let the team down. - Current Scout*

This suggests that despite the tough situations Scouts are put in, the reassurance that they can ask for support and be open about how they're feeling helps them to be more resilient to these challenging situations.

Further, the role models that Scouts gain can also help develop young people's emotional resilience. For example, one participant told us:

*You do have a different perspective on each (Scout) Leader, some you admire more. You build emotional resilience through communicating with them and how they deal with different situations.*  
- Current Scout

This suggests that being able to see how others cope with challenging situations can be useful for young people learning how to build their own emotional resilience. Research has shown that near-peer mentorship - where the mentor is close to the social, age and professional level of the mentee - can also help young people persist through academic difficulty, again emphasising the benefits of role models for building young people's resilience.<sup>59</sup>

This resilience had real-world benefits for many, including in their education and their careers. One participant explained that being in Scouts when he was a child "helped with the ability to cope under pressure" and that this had been valuable in helping him to deal with stress during his exams as he got older. Another participant told us that the emotional resilience they developed at Scouts helped them to cope with challenges in their job as a teacher, including her students being "mean" and feelings of being undervalued as a teacher.

As with teamwork, however, frequency of attendance matters here. Attending Scouts at least once a week was more strongly associated with emotional resilience - 45% of people who attended Scouts every week when they were younger said the emotional resilience they developed benefited their careers in comparison to 33% who attended monthly. Similarly, 45% of people who had attended any extracurricular activities every week said this gave them emotional resilience in comparison to 35% who attended monthly, suggesting that frequent and regular engagement with extracurricular activities is key for young people developing and benefiting from these important transferable skills.

## Wellbeing

As well as resilience, being in Scouts has helped some people learn how to look after their emotional and mental wellbeing in other ways. In particular, people told us that the support networks they have gained through Scouts have helped them look after their mental wellbeing during testing life events. Several people mentioned that participating in Scouts throughout GCSEs and A-Levels helped make them less stressed as going to Scouts gave them a designated time and space away from revision:

*To be able to take a step back from that [GCSEs and family problem], my explorers was a break from that one problem, that was going on doesn't have to take over everything.* - Current Scout

The opportunity to make friends and be part of a supportive community also benefited the emotional and mental wellbeing of some of the people we spoke to. One person told us that Scouts had helped them to make friends when they were struggling at school. Similarly, another participant told us that through Scouts they had developed a strong social network that has given him 'emotional support', both at school and university:

*Gives me the skills to know I can go to the support group when I'm sad, to not just panic and freak out. Being around people who are emotionally mature - much more open to talk about mental health or specific things going wrong with them.* - Current Scout

Another participant told us that the friend he made in Scouts had helped him cope with the death of his mother, even after he had left Scouts:

*The better friends I have, the best ones from that period of my life are the Scouty ones. When I left at 16 and a bit, my mother was diagnosed with cancer and she died at the end of upper sixth, and whilst the school were great, it was the friends and the parents of friends I made through Scouts in*

59 Destin, M et al. *A field experiment demonstrates near peer mentorship as an effective support for student persistence*. Basic and Applied Social Psychology, July 2018. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01973533.2018.1485101?journalCode=hbas20> [accessed 04/04/2023]

*that specific area, and they just scooped up, I wasn't coping that well with it...they really carried me through. - A Scouts alumni*

The views expressed by our interviewees here are reflected in research by the Commission for Young Lives. They found that young people see engaging with activities like sports, creative activities such as drama, being outdoors and volunteering as important for preventing ill-mental health. They want to be able to go for walks and for day trips, to sometimes escape the situations they find themselves within and 'reset'.<sup>60</sup>

The Commission also found that young people believe youth club groups and youth settings, and building relationships with people they know are also important for their mental wellbeing.<sup>61</sup> This reinforces the importance of extracurricular activities and support networks for young people's mental wellbeing.

However, it's important to acknowledge that not everyone we spoke to felt that being in Scouts had benefited their mental wellbeing. For example, one person who attended Scouts when they were younger told us that he had a "mixed experience" and "struggled to fit in a lot" when he was there. Another person said that while they enjoyed some of the activities, like camping, due to having autism and social anxiety, they didn't enjoy the weekly "forced socialising with large groups of people" - this played a role in them eventually quitting Scouts. Further, one person told us that he didn't enjoy Scouts partly because he was bullied, by some of the other children there, which he perceived to be racially motivated.

These are of course a small handful of individual experiences that do not reflect any systematic problems within Scouts. As we've seen, the overwhelming majority of people have had positive experiences. However, this does reinforce why it's so important for extracurricular groups and organisations to continue making active efforts to ensure everyone feels welcome and benefits from their experience.

Further, it's inevitable that Scouts will not be the right extracurricular activity for everyone. This is why it's important that young people and their parents/carers are aware of and have access to a wide variety of extracurricular activities, so young people can find activities that they are happy taking part in.

Given the link between mental health and employability we discussed earlier, the impact being in Scouts has had on some people's general emotional and mental wellbeing is important for young people's future careers. All extracurricular groups and organisations should consider these kinds of hidden benefits extracurricular activities can have on young people's future careers, and aim to maximise their impact in this area.

## **CONFIDENCE**

Confidence building was also a key theme in our interviews and focus groups. A number of people told us that attending Scouts had helped to build their confidence from a young age and that this had lasting effects:

*I was a lot shy when I was younger, scouting has boosted my confidence quite a lot and that stays with you. - Current Scout*

The confidence-boosting benefits of being in Scouts was also acknowledged by one of the employers we interviewed:

*I've seen that the badge structure can really help. One of the participants, only time he'd received any kind of recognition, taking the certificate home, he felt that he could achieve things. This can be incredibly powerful. - Employer*

They also said that this can be especially beneficial for kids from disadvantaged backgrounds:

*You can definitely tell that kids from independent schools are more confident, articulate from the beginning. The net benefit from being involved is greater for children not from independent schools. Especially profound for children with special educational needs. Gentler approach. - Employer*

<sup>60</sup> Commission on Young Lives. *Heads Up Rethinking mental health services for vulnerable young people*. Commission on Young Lives, July 2022. Available at: <https://thecommissiononyounglives.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/COYL-Heads-Up-Report-July-2022.pdf> [accessed 04/04/2023]

<sup>61</sup> Commission on Young Lives. *Heads Up Rethinking mental health services for vulnerable young people*. Commission on Young Lives, July 2022.

Lack of confidence was one of the main reasons the people we surveyed said they felt unprepared for starting work after school or university with 49% giving this reason. This means that the confidence-building benefits Scout has had for some people can play an important role in enhancing young people's readiness for the world of work.

## **FURTHER BENEFITS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE'S EMPLOYABILITY**

### **Technical skills**

The experiences that people gain through extracurricular activities are not limited to transferable skills. In our survey, 27% of people who said extracurricular activities helped prepare them for work said they gained technical skills - specialised skills or knowledge that can be applied directly to their area of work - that have helped their career. Among Scouts alumni who said Scouts had helped prepare them for work, 29% said it had given them technical skills that have helped their career.

From event organisations to map reading, the tasks and activities Scouts undertake can give them a range of technical skills that will be useful for their future careers. For example, one current Scout told us that he uses the technical skills he learnt in Scouts in his job in the RAF, including map reading and especially navigation. As a result, he felt that he had an advantage over others in the RAF who hadn't been in Scouts. Another current Scout we spoke to, said that carrying out risk assessments has given her an advantage at work over others who didn't go to Scouts:

*I learnt how to do a risk assessment when I was 14 in Explorers. I now go into a PhD and I do one every day. They thought they'd have to train me for it, but they didn't have to. When I did Engineering, most people failed the risk assessment. - Current Scout*

Some of the Scouts alumni we spoke to also said they had gained technical skills that have been useful for some of the jobs they've had. One person who attended Scouts when they were younger had previously worked as a historical reenactor and told us that archery and putting up tents were skills they learnt in Scouts that they directly used in this job role. Another person who organised charitable events and concerts for their job told us they believed that organising events and setting up camps in Scouts helped them with the logistical side of these jobs.

The examples given by the current Scouts and Scouts alumni we spoke to show that the technical skills young people develop in Scouts can be useful for a number of different careers. Fewer Scouts alumni (29%) say Scouting has given them technical skills that have helped them in their careers compared to transferable skills. However, our interviews show that activities like Scouts have the potential to go beyond transferable skills and help young people to develop some of the technical skills they need to boost their employability.

Not only can Scouts provide young people with some of the technical skills they need for their careers, it can also help share their career aspirations and drive their passion for their chosen career paths. One participant, an engineering student at university, told us that her interest in engineering stemmed from her experience of practical tasks in the Scouts. She said that building shelves and go-karts "piqued my interest, encouraged me to do a degree like engineering."

This is important for enhancing young people's employability. As discussed earlier, many employers greatly value job applicants who are driven and have a good work mindset, which can serve as a basis for them developing the technical skills and industry knowledge they need.

We know that employers face a significant technical skills gap when hiring young people. One employer we spoke to said how the experience that young job applicants gain from attending Scouts could sometimes be more valuable than other extra-curricular activities.

*If someone can communicate what skills they've learnt, that's a strong point to sell. If someone turns around to me and said I did the Scouts, and said I did all the registers and I planned this event, [that's more impressive than] playing in an ice hockey team. - Employer*

It's important then that young people have the opportunity to develop technical skills as well as transferable skills through extracurricular activities.

## Work experience

While people most often told us they had benefited from experience of specific tasks and skills through scouting activities, some described more formal work experience they had gained directly from attending extracurricular activities. 21% of people who said extracurricular activities helped prepare them for work cited work experience they gained as being helpful for their careers. 23% of Scouts alumni who said Scouts had helped prepare them for work said the work experience they got through the Scouts had benefited their careers.

As discussed in chapter one, lack of experience was the top reason people in our survey gave for not feeling prepared for work after leaving school or university. Likewise, many of the employers, Scouts and Scouts alumni we spoke to expressed frustration at the lack of work experience opportunities in schools, which as discussed is largely due to the removal of compulsory work experience from the KS4 curriculum. Therefore, it's valuable that some extracurricular activities can play a role in filling this gap.

The formal positions of responsibility some people get through Scouts was frequently mentioned by our interviewees as something that has given them valuable work experience. For example, one participant told us that he had the opportunity to sit on a youth council and to act as a trustee to Scouts. He really valued the mentorship that went along with this work. These experiences had directly helped him in his career - he told us that a role he had applied for asked for 5 years of experience and at 19 he was already able to demonstrate that he had that experience from working with Scouts since he was 14. One current Scout we spoke to aspires to be a human rights lawyer. She believes that her experience as a Youth Commissioner with Scouts has given her work experience in advocacy that is relevant and valuable for her career ambitions.

Similarly, one participant told us that Scouts afforded them experience that was directly relevant to his chosen career. He told us that he was the Treasurer of Scouts at university and through this role he had to run the accounts. This included documenting accounts according to the constitution, following strict protocols and following guidelines. This was ideal work experience for him as he wants to become an accountant, so he gained skills relevant to his future profession and demonstrable experience that he said he's been able to put on his CV.

Another participant had been part of the digital team at Scouts. Through this, he had helped to develop the website for Scouts, which as a computer science student was hugely valuable work experience. He explained:

*It allowed me to do a lot more than just my education does. In an actual real world, hands-on practice...the people there (at Scouts) knew that I had an interest in computing so they taught me it.*  
- Current Scout

Many of our participants with recent work experience told us that they didn't include Scouts on their CVs because they felt it was less relevant to job applications and increasingly so as they gained more direct work experience that they could draw on. However, people told us more often that they had included Scouts in their applications when they applied for their very first jobs:

*I don't think now, I'd put it on a CV, just because it feels like too long ago and I've done stuff since. But definitely, in my first jobs, when I was 16, it would have helped me get those first jobs. It was in retail, but it was just...more relevant, getting your first job, in my experience.* - A Scouts alumni

*For me it is way down at the bottom of my CV as extra skills rather than like a major employment gap. But I have definitely brought it up in the past, in job interviews, especially when I was trying to get first jobs and had less experience...I think at an early age it is really important to show that you have those skills, especially a lot of my early jobs were working in bars or retail and having that ability to prove you can talk to people is quite invaluable, I think.* - A Scouts alumni

As discussed earlier, many employers value work experience when hiring young people - it shows they have had exposure to the workplace and also helps them demonstrate a genuine passion for their chosen profession. To help more young people feel as prepared as they can for starting work, extracurricular organisations should strongly consider ways they can further support more young people to gain work experience.

## Networks and connections

Many people also gain connections through their time in Scouts that have helped them with their careers. 18% of people who said extracurricular activities helped prepare them for work said they gained connections that have helped with this. 19% of Scouts alumni who said Scouts had helped prepare them for work cited the connections they gained as being useful for their careers.

For some, these connections can directly help them secure a job. For example, one Scout we spoke to was offered two jobs through Scout leaders and is going to use his Scout leader connection to ask for work experience at a finance company:

*I do think it's helped in a lot of ways. When I got the job in Tesco, I'd been offered two other jobs both through Scouts, one of my Explorer leaders worked at Mountain Warehouse, and he was like, "I think you'd be excellent for it." It's exposed me to people who can employ me. - Current Scout*

As well as helping some people to gain employment, the contacts people gain through Scouts have also been a source of careers guidance. Several people we spoke to said that having older role models like Scout leaders was useful for having someone a few years older to speak to about university and careers. Another person told us that through her Scouts university group, she has gained connections with Scouts at other universities. She has found it particularly useful for meeting people with work experience in engineering, the industry she wants to work in:

*SAGGA [Scout and Guide Graduate Association] has helped...We're linked to lots of other universities, I've met people doing similar courses who are a couple of years older who are going into the industry now, who have done their placement years....all sorts of opportunities I may have never thought of or heard about without meeting those people. - Current Scout*

Lack of career guidance was one of the most commonly cited reasons for not feeling prepared for work by people in our survey, with 44% of people saying this made them feel unprepared for work. We also know that social capital helps people find jobs - between 30% and 70% of people say that their social connections helped them find their job. The experiences of the former and current Scouts we spoke to show that through role models and social connections, extracurricular activities can play a valuable role in supporting young people gain the guidance they need to feel more prepared for work, as well as helping them secure jobs through their Scouts connections.

## Shaping values

The final theme that came from our research with current Scouts and Scouts alumni was that people benefit from the way Scouts shapes their values, which can have positive repercussions for their careers. Several Scouts told us that their experience made them a better person. For some, this has made them want to do good in the world which in turn has influenced their education and career choices. One person said it gave him a sense of duty, public spiritedness and optimism about the world. He jokingly said he could "psychologise" that the reason he was struggling to become a corporate lawyer was because it went against his sense of giving back to the world and wants to do pro bono work. Similarly, one focus group participant said that the focus on charity in Scouts influenced their choice to work for a charity because they are aware of charity as a career option because of Scouts.

Another person told us that Scouts had impacted their degree choice at university:

*[Scouts made me] a happier, kinder and more virtuous person. I feel a bit responsible towards the world a bit. That's partially why I ended up doing my degree, my love for the planet, renewable energy. Scouts made me determined to do something to help the world a bit. - Current Scout*

One focus group participant also said that Scouts made her question traditions and ideas she wouldn't have questioned before. For example, they had debates about why women weren't included in the organisation earlier on in its history. This developed her ability to think critically which has not only helped shape the way she perceives the world, but is also an important skill for her current PhD research. She believes that having others at Scouts with other viewpoints was helpful in this sense.

By shaping people's values and outlook, Scouts has helped people develop careers that they are passionate

about and thrive in. As discussed, this is crucial for overall job satisfaction and supporting people's wellbeing at work which in turn benefits employers through increased job retention.

## CONCLUSION

Whether it is through leading a group of Cub Scouts or meeting new people through Jamboree, Scouts offers young people a variety of enriching experiences. As we've learnt, these experiences not only help young people develop their employability skills, but also help shape their values and aspirations. For example, formal leadership roles give people teamworking skills and enhance their ability to inspire others and take responsibility. Going abroad to Jamboree events provides young people with opportunities to meet new people from different cultures, strengthening their communication skills. Going on expeditions and spending time away from their parents also helps young people build their emotional resilience and problem-solving skills, all skills and attributes our research shows employers highly value and want young people to have more of.

Group work and relationships are at the core of how Scouts run these activities, and what we've seen is that these relationships have been integral to the impact Scouts has had on young people's lives. It is from working with diverse groups and having role models that people have been able to develop those crucial transferable skills that employers need. Scouts build participants' social capital, helping them to make friends that have been a source of emotional support through challenging times. It also builds connections that help people secure jobs and work experience.

As Demos sets out in *The Social State*, we believe strong relationships lead to better outcomes in almost every aspect of people's lives, including employment outcomes.<sup>62</sup> By prioritising relationships, extracurricular activities can play a valuable role in building the social capital needed to enrich young people's lives, develop their skills and boost their employability.

62 Mackenzie, P. *The Social State: From Transactional to Relational Public Services*. Demos, 28 July 2021.

# CHAPTER 3

# THE INEQUALITY CHALLENGE

We have heard clearly that being involved in extracurricular activities can help bridge the skills gap, helping young people to be more employable from the day they leave school or college. However, there are inequalities in who can access extracurricular activities which, if left unaddressed, can further exacerbate inequality. If extracurricular activities are accessed disproportionately by the more privileged, that can entrench advantage later in life.

## THE EXTENT OF THE INEQUALITY CHALLENGE

### Social grade

The stark contrast in participation levels between working-class and middle-class young people is made clear in a report by Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson<sup>63</sup> (cited in The Social Mobility Commission (SMC) report).<sup>64</sup> It states that nearly half of middle-class children (42%) took part in five or more extracurricular activities, compared to less than a tenth of working-class children (6.5%).

The SMC report, citing Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, says:

*“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.”*

Using data from the 2016–2018 wave of the Understanding Society survey, the SMC’s own analysis found that as household income rises, young people’s participation in different extracurricular activities also increases.<sup>65</sup> This was especially the case for music, with 11% of the lowest-income households taking part compared to 32% taking part from the highest income households.<sup>66</sup>

For “organised activities”, including Scouts and youth clubs, the gap was smaller but still notable with just over 30% of young people from the lowest income group taking part in comparison to around 46% of young people from the highest income group.<sup>67</sup>

In our survey, with the exception of social clubs such as youth groups, all other extracurricular activities were shown more likely to be attended by those in the higher social grades. Figure 8 shows the percentage of

63 Holloway, S L and Pimlott-Wilson, H. *Enriching Children, Institutionalizing Childhood? Geographies of Play, Extracurricular Activities, and Parenting in England*. Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Jan 2014. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00045608.2013.846167> [accessed 04/04/2023]

64 Donnelly, M., Lažetić, P., Sandoval-Hernandez, A., Kumar, K. and Whewall, S. *An Unequal Playing Field*. Social Mobility Commission, 2019

65 *ibid.*

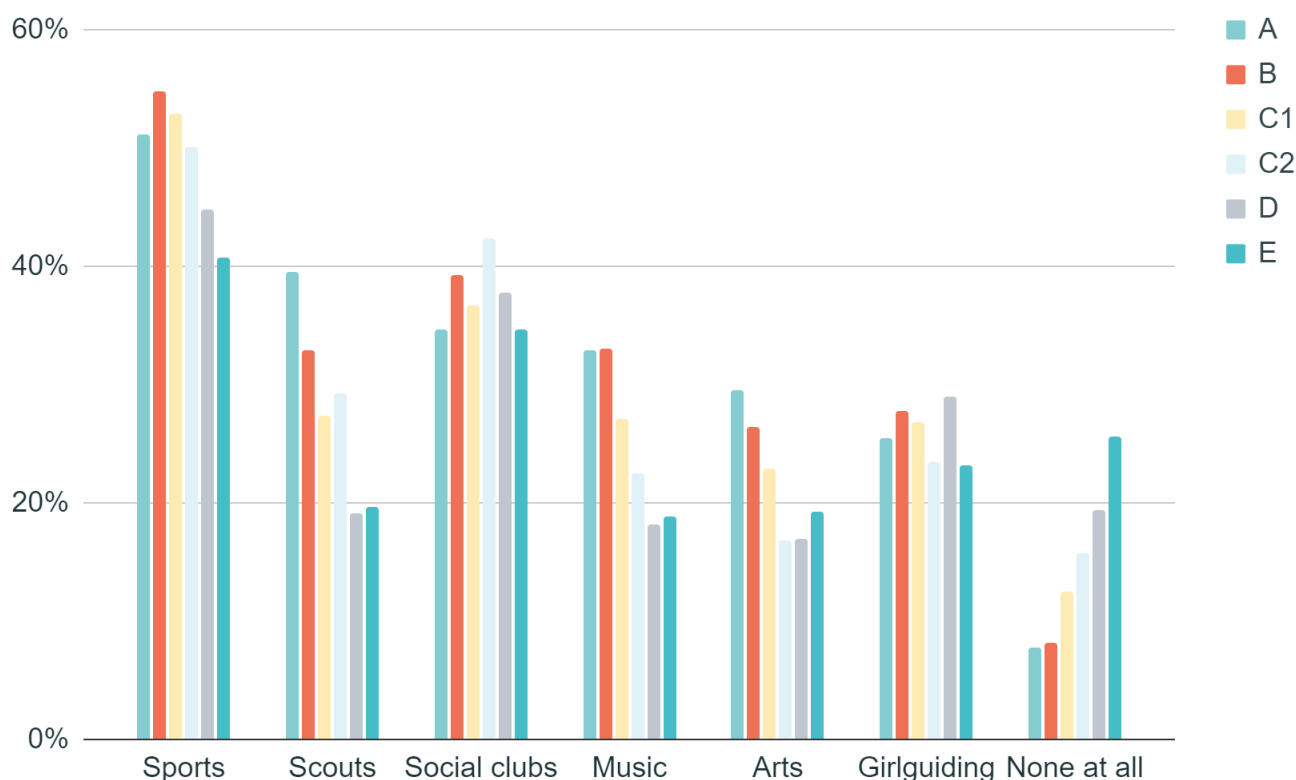
66 *ibid.*

67 *ibid.*



people from each social grade who attended each of the extracurricular activities listed when they were younger.<sup>68</sup> Many extracurricular activities are more likely to be accessed by higher social class groups, and that people who accessed no extracurricular activities were far more likely to be from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. One in four people from the lowest socio-economic grade E<sup>69</sup> had never accessed any form of extracurricular activity.

**FIGURE 8**  
BAR CHART SHOWING HISTORIC PARTICIPATION IN  
EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES BY SOCIAL GRADE



## CAUSES OF UNEQUAL ACCESS TO EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES BETWEEN SOCIAL GRADES

The SMC’s qualitative research with school children found several reasons for this inequality in access. Perceived financial risk for parents was a key barrier to taking part in some extracurricular activities. This was particularly the case for music clubs - many said that their parents couldn’t afford to buy the musical instruments they needed to take part. Other than music, one child said his mother couldn’t afford to buy the food for an after school food-tech club he wanted to join, which stopped him from joining. Others said that activities like badminton are provided by their local leisure centres, but the membership fees are too expensive, preventing them from getting involved.<sup>70</sup>

As well as the perceived financial risks, lack of confidence was another barrier surfaced in this study - working-class pupils tended to be less confident in their abilities to take part in extracurricular activities in comparison to the middle class kids, with some saying they would feel uncomfortable and shy about taking part.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, time and availability of parents was also an issue that tended to impact working-class children more than the middle-class children interviewed. Several pupils said that taking part in some extracurricular activities would require “a car journey” that their parents didn’t have time to do, for example.<sup>72</sup> This was

68 Note that respondents were able to select more than one answer to reflect that people often attend more than one extracurricular activity.

69 Defined as state pensioners, casual or lowest grade workers, and unemployed with state benefits only.

70 Donnelly, M., Lažetić, P., Sandoval-Hernandez, A., Kumar, K. and Whewall, S. *An Unequal Playing Field*. Social Mobility Commission, 2019.

71 *ibid.*

72 *ibid.*

particularly the case for the pupils in rural areas, where transport was often essential for taking part in extracurricular activities.<sup>73</sup> This suggests that there is a need to improve social infrastructure so children can access extracurricular activities close to where they live, without having their parents having to make long journeys.

## Ethnicity

The gap in access to extracurricular activities goes beyond economic status. Our polling found that ethnic minorities were much less likely than white people to say they attended extracurricular activities at least once a week when they were younger (56% vs 80%).

There are also notable disparities in the type of activity people from different ethnic groups attended. Of the people who responded to our survey, people from ethnic minority groups were significantly less likely to attend Girlguiding when they were younger than white people (18% vs 28%). On the other hand, people from ethnic minority groups were much more likely than white people to say they participated in arts activities when they were younger (32% vs 21%).

The SMC's research found that young people from different ethnic groups take part in particular activities to differing degrees. Their analysis of the Understanding Society survey showed that 60% of Black Caribbean youth attend organised activities (like youth groups, Scouts and Girl Guides) in comparison to only 12% of Indian and around a fifth of Black African, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Asian youth. By comparison, around 44% of white young people take part in these activities. Further, young people from ethnic minority groups were less likely than white young people to take part in music and dance.<sup>74</sup>

It's unclear from the data why these disparities exist. The SMC suggests that these disparities may partly be explained by "ethnic stereotypes associated with certain activities", but more focused research is needed to understand why different ethnic groups are less likely to participate in some extracurricular activities than others.

As we saw in the previous chapter, extracurricular activities can help young people identify what they're passionate about, which can help shape their career ambitions and put them on a path to finding a job they are happy in. Likewise, some people develop technical skills through extracurricular activities that are relevant to their chosen career path, boosting their chances of getting the job they want. This is why identifying barriers and addressing stereotypes that cause these disparities is important for ensuring young people can find an extracurricular activity they enjoy doing and that will help them find a career they are passionate about and thrive in.

## Gender

Our research also reveals significant disparities in the type of extracurricular activities men and women participated in when they were children or teenagers. As shown in Figure 9, women were much less likely than men to have participated in sport when they were younger (43% vs 58%) while men were much less likely than women to have attended music (22% vs 31%) and arts activities (15% vs 30%).

Women in our survey were also significantly less likely to have attended Scouts when they were younger (14% vs 44% of men). However, much of this disparity can be attributed to the fact that the people responding to our survey attended extracurricular activities in the past when Scouts used to be a youth group exclusively for boys. It was only in 1991 that UK Scouts became fully mixed<sup>75</sup> and many of the people responding to our survey attended Scouts before this.

The latest data shows that there are 325,350 boys in Scouts and 115,052 girls in Scouts who make up 73.3% and 25.9% of Scouts membership respectively.<sup>76</sup> While there are still disparities, it is likely that a much higher percentage of girls and young women now currently attend Scouts than the people who responded to our survey.

73 *ibid.*

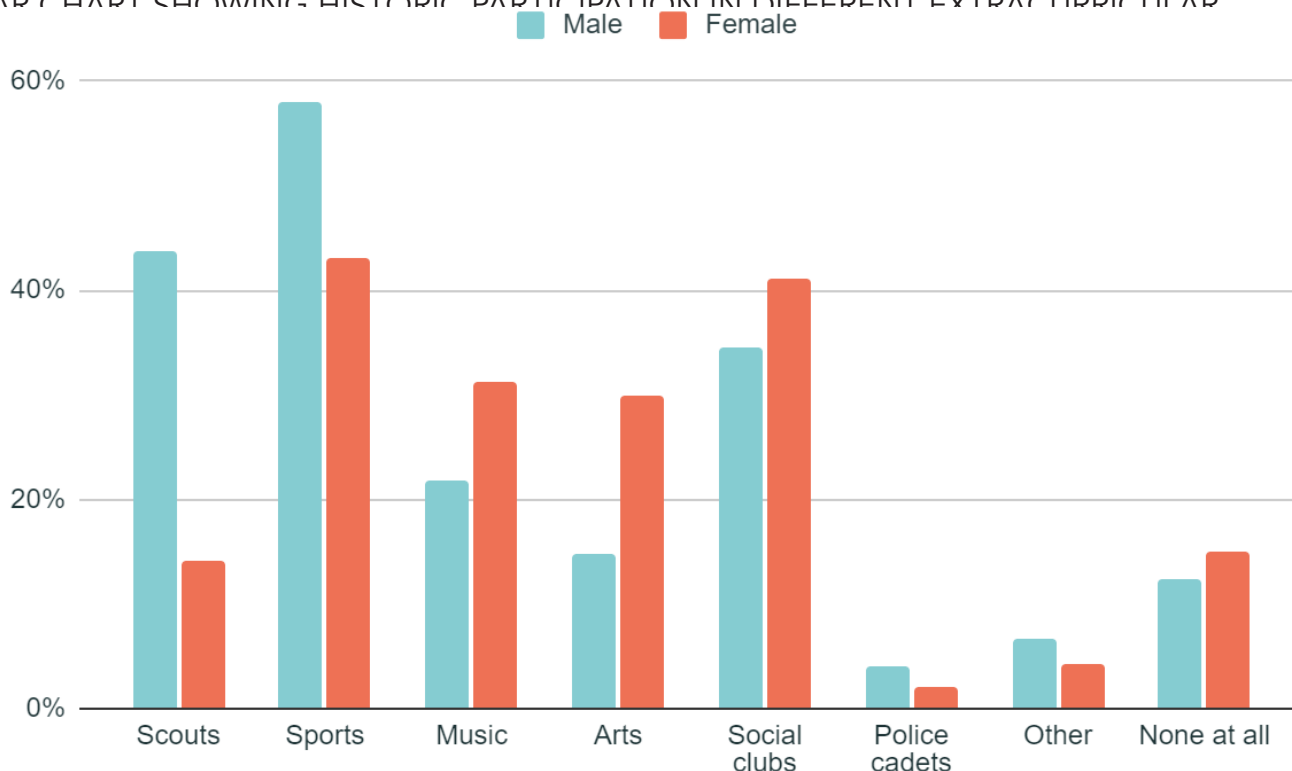
74 *ibid.*

75 Scouts. *Girls and Women in Scouts*. Scouts. Available at: <https://www.scouts.org.uk/volunteers/inclusion-and-diversity/including-everyone/girls-and-women-in-scouts/> [accessed 04/04/2023]

76 Scouts membership data, 2023.

**FIGURE 9**

BAR CHART SHOWING HISTORIC PARTICIPATION IN DIFFERENT EXTRACURRICULAR



The SMC's research shows that these gendered disparities in different extracurricular activities are still prevalent among young people today. They found that in the domains of music, dance, art, and voluntary work the percentage of women is found to be disproportionately higher than men. This gap is particularly notable for dance - 3% of boys said they took part in dance activities compared to 23% of girls. Like our survey, the SMC also found that sports are still particularly gendered, 63% of boys said they take part in sports compared to 41% of girls.<sup>77</sup>

Cultural and social perceptions help in part to explain why these gender disparities exist. For example, the SMC's qualitative research with school children found that one boy left his gymnastics club because he was the only boy there, which made him feel uncomfortable.<sup>78</sup> According to the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, perceptions that sport isn't 'feminine' enough is a key barrier to getting more girls to take part in sport activities.<sup>79</sup>

Lack of opportunities to take part in some extracurricular activities also partly explains these disparities. This is particularly the case for sports - the SMC's qualitative research found that some girls enjoyed playing football, but couldn't because there was no girls' team for their age group at their schools. Furthermore, research conducted by England Football in 2022 found that just over a third of secondary schools offered girls equal access to football coaching through extracurricular clubs outside school hours.<sup>80</sup>

## WHAT IS ALREADY BEING DONE ABOUT INEQUALITY OF ACCESS

It's important to acknowledge that many extracurricular organisations including Scouts are making active efforts to equalise access. For example, Scouts have incorporated growth plans in deprived areas into

77 Donnelly, M., Lažetić, P., Sandoval-Hernandez, A., Kumar, K. and Whewall, S. *An Unequal Playing Field*. Social Mobility Commission, 2019.

78 *ibid.*

79 Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation. *Barriers to Sports Participation for Women and Girls*. Active Together, August 2008. Available at: <https://www.active-together.org/uploads/barriers-to-sports-participation-for-women-girls-17.pdf> [accessed 04/04/2023]

80 Wood, P. *Football inequality revealed as just 44% of secondary schools teach girls same lessons as boys*. The Independent, July 2022. Available at: <https://www.inews.co.uk/news/girls-only-get-to-play-as-much-football-during-pe-classes-as-boys-in-44-of-english-secondary-schools-1765144> [accessed 04/04/2023]

their strategy to increase access to Scouts - in 2019, it was reported that over 20,000 young people in areas of deprivation had joined Scouts as a result of the new Scouts groups set up in these areas.<sup>81</sup> They also recently launched 'Squirrels' for 4-5-year-olds to help young people develop important life skills at an earlier age, targeting communities that may benefit most, including areas of deprivation and ethnic minority communities.<sup>82</sup>

Scouts also recently set up a Cost of Living Support Fund to help young people impacted by the UK's cost of living crisis to continue taking part in Scouts. As well as Scouts, Girlguiding also offers grants to 'units' in deprived areas that can help cover the costs of members' uniforms and entry fees.<sup>83</sup> Financial support like this can provide young people from low-income backgrounds with opportunities they otherwise wouldn't have had. One of the current Scouts we interviewed told us that he was from a working class background, but Scouts subsidised his travel to international scouting events:

*(Scouts) made me more internationally aware and want to travel and meet the world, and work across the world. I'm from a very deprived area. It has been a very unique experience to even have a passport and travel and go abroad. Scouts subsidises so much - half price of a school trip...Made me more aware of the world, and the things you can do to help to make the world a better place. I don't think I would do the voluntary part of the scouting stuff if I hadn't been abroad. - Current Scout*

The Government has also recently announced a large capital fund for the youth sector with over £300m allocated to rebuilding and renovating youth facilities in areas of deprivation.<sup>84</sup> Alongside this, they have announced £16.9m of funding to expand access to uniformed youth groups, aiming to create 20,000 places for 10-18-year-olds across the country.<sup>85</sup>

Nonetheless, tackling the inequality challenge will require increased and sustained efforts, so we will return to this issue in our recommendations.

Given that our polling shows that people who attended extracurricular activities have better employment outcomes, unequal access to extracurricular activities seriously risks exacerbating inequalities in employment outcomes between the richest and the poorest. Research has shown that children from poorer backgrounds are twice as likely to be out of work in later life than their better-off peers, even when their qualifications are just as good.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, university graduates from low-socioeconomic groups are less likely to enter top-level jobs in their 20s, suggesting that having high-level qualifications is not enough to narrow the gap in employment outcomes.<sup>87</sup> We believe there is an important evidence gap here charting the links between extracurricular activities, employability and social class that urgently needs addressing.

81 Slaughter, J. *Over 20,000 young people in areas of deprivation join Scouts*. Scouts, May 2019. Available at: <https://www.scouts.org.uk/news/2019/may/over-20-000-young-people-in-areas-of-deprivation-join-scouts/> [accessed 04/04/2023]

82 Scouts. *Squirrels - 4 to 6 years*. Scouts. Available at: <https://www.scouts.org.uk/squirrels/> [accessed 04/04/2023]

83 Girlguiding. *UK unites in need grant*. Girlguiding. Available at: <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/making-guiding-happen/running-your-unit/finance-insurance-and-property/grants-and-funding/uk-units-in-need-grant/> [accessed 04/04/2023]

84 Department for Culture, Media and Sport and The Rt Hon Frazer, L MP. *Hundreds of youth facilities in deprived areas to be transformed with new investment*. GOV.UK, March 2023. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hundreds-of-youth-facilities-in-deprived-areas-to-be-transformed-with-new-investment> [accessed 04/04/2023]

85 Simpson, F. *DCMS announces youth investment fund recipients*. Children and Young People Now, March 2023. Available at: <https://www.cypnow.co.uk/news/article/dcms-announces-youth-investment-fund-recipients> [accessed 04/04/2023]

86 Weale, S. *Poorer children 'twice as likely to be out of work in later life'*. The Guardian, April 2019. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/apr/24/poorer-children-twice-as-likely-to-be-out-of-work-in-later-life> [accessed 04/04/2023]

87 University of Edinburgh. *Social class still dictates graduate job trends*. University of Edinburgh, November 2020. Available at: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/news/2020/social-class-still-dictates-graduate-job-trends> [accessed 04/04/2023]

# CHAPTER 4

# RECOMMENDATIONS

As we've seen, the challenge of youth unemployment will not be solved unless the skills shortage among young people is addressed. In the final chapter of this report, we set out our recommendations for national and local government, employers, schools and extracurricular organisations to tackle this skills shortage and enhance young people's employability.

## **HARNESSING THE POWER OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE YOUNG PEOPLE'S SKILLS AND DRIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH**

### **National and local government:**

- 1. National and local governments should provide extracurricular organisations with additional funding targeted at widening access to extracurricular activities to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.**

We know that extracurricular activities can be even more beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. To enhance social mobility, it's even more important that children from such backgrounds access them.

As noted in the previous chapter, the Government has recently announced a large amount of funding for the youth sector and uniformed youth groups to expand access.

However, it is clear from our research that the scale of unequal access to extracurricular activities is substantial across a range of demographics. Whilst this large capital pot will be sure to improve the current situation, if future Governments are serious about turning the tide in overcoming gaps in access, there will need to be continued revenue funding on a sustained basis for youth organisations across the sector going forward.

There should also be system wide considerations for future Governments as to how they can help to directly tackle the barriers that prevent access to extracurricular activities for those in lower social grades. Whilst the current investment will provide welcome support for youth organisations to sustain and expand their infrastructure, consideration should also be made on how structural barriers, such as parental finances, and access to transport can be better overcome.

As we learnt earlier, financial costs for parents can be a barrier to children taking part in some extracurricular activities, for example, music classes. Scouts currently offers substantial financial support to its members from low-income backgrounds, including a cost of living fund and financial support for members with additional needs.<sup>88</sup> Additional funding should be provided to extracurricular organisations

<sup>88</sup> Scouts. *Cost of Living Support Fund*. Scouts. Available at: <https://www.scouts.org.uk/volunteers/running-things-locally/grants-and-funds-for-your-local-group/grants-from-ukhq/col-support-fund/> [accessed 04/04/2023]

to help them develop more financial support packages like this for young people from low-income backgrounds, removing the high-cost barriers many young people face.

Additional funding should also be provided to help extracurricular organisations set up more local groups or clubs in deprived communities. Ensuring more children have activities close by in their local areas should help to minimise the need for parents to make long journeys they don't have time for, widening access to extracurricular activities to those living in deprived areas.

Whether national government or local governments provide this funding will depend on the particular extracurricular organisation. National organisations, like The Scout Association or Girlguiding should be provided with regular, sustainable funding from the national government. Local governments should aim to fund smaller organisations, such as local youth clubs or sports teams. National and local governments should work with extracurricular organisations to determine how much funding is needed to effectively widen access.

Ensuring every young person has the opportunity to take part in extracurricular activities and develop their employability skills is key to boosting productivity and economic growth, helping the Government to save money in the long term.

### National government:

- 2. The UK Government should expand the criteria of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to include an element that funds extracurricular and volunteering organisations,** helping to give more people in all parts of the UK opportunities to develop their transferable skills and improve their employability.

Launched in 2022, the UKSPF provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment. A key part of the UK's Levelling Up agenda, the fund aims to improve life chances, partly by investing in employability skills.<sup>89</sup> The funding will be distributed across local authorities in the UK each year up until the end of the 2024-25 financial year.<sup>90</sup>

Currently, funding for skills mostly focuses on "core" technical skills (like numeracy skills). However, as our research with employers has shown, transferable skills are just as important for people's employability.

The UKSPF should therefore aim to expand its criteria to allow some of the funding it provides to local authorities to be allocated to extracurricular and volunteering organisations as means to support more people to develop the transferable skills they need to improve their employability.

### National government and employers:

- 3. The UK Government should work with employers to establish an employer-supported volunteering programme.** By supporting employees to volunteer with extracurricular organisations specifically, employers will be investing in the development of young people's skills which will help to reduce the skills shortage that has been so detrimental to employers and the wider UK economy.

This programme would enable employees to take time off work each month to volunteer with extracurricular organisations or in schools. As part of this programme, the Government should aim to facilitate engagement between businesses and relevant extracurricular groups, potentially by encouraging more employers to sign up to the Do IT volunteering database<sup>91</sup> and respond to volunteering advertisements posted by extracurricular organisations.

89 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. *UK Shared Prosperity Fund: prospectus*. GOV.UK, August 2022. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus> [accessed 04/04/2023]

90 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. *UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocations: methodology note*. GOV.UK, May 2022. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-allocations-methodology/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-allocations-methodology-note> [accessed 04/02023]

91 Do IT. *Find your next volunteering role*. Do IT. Available at: <https://doit.life/volunteer> [accessed 04/04/2023]

Volunteering for half a day once per month should be the target for employers in the programme. As extracurricular activities tend to take place in the evenings and at weekends, this time should be flexible e.g. allowing employers to take time off in lieu (TOIL) if volunteering in the evening or at the weekend falls outside their normal working hours. This time could also be accumulated, allowing employees to take 6 days off in a row each year to volunteer.

However, employers who cannot realistically give employees that much time off should still take part in the programme - even 1 or 2 days of volunteering per year can be valuable. This volunteering programme would create more opportunities for children to access affordable extracurricular activities, giving more children the opportunity to develop the skills they need for future career success.

The Government should aim to incentivise employers to take part in this programme by highlighting the benefits of allowing employees to take time off to volunteer. According to the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD), employer-supported volunteering can act as a cheaper form of employee development. Existing initiatives have helped employees develop transferable skills such as leadership, communication and presentation skills, as well as professional skills like advising businesses and providing pro bono support.<sup>92</sup> It can also help boost a company's reputation by showing that they are contributing to the community and also improve employee satisfaction.<sup>93</sup>

## Local government and Multi-Academy Trusts:

- 4. Local authorities and Multi-Academy Trusts should provide financial support to schools to allow volunteer extracurricular organisations to use their spaces after school for regular activities.** Research by the Social Mobility Commission found that one reason some children couldn't attend extracurricular activities was because of a general lack of extracurricular groups in their area, and extracurricular activities requiring a car journey that parents did not have time to make.<sup>94</sup>

While some schools already allow extracurricular organisations to use their space, if more schools across the UK are able to act as venues for these extracurricular activities, it would help to widen access to participation in extracurricular activities across regions and social grades. On-site after school activities would remove the need for students to travel to another venue, for example. Financial support should be provided to schools to make it easier for them to open up more of these spaces e.g. by covering maintenance costs.

Local governments and Multi-Academy Trusts should also aim to incentivise more schools to offer up their spaces by emphasising the positive impact extracurricular activities can have on children at school. According to the Social Mobility Commission, regular extracurricular attendance is associated with a range of positive outcomes for students including, achievement and attendance at school.<sup>95</sup> As our own research has shown, participation in Scouts enables many people to cope with the stress of school life and exams, by giving them a breather from studying, for example.

## Extracurricular organisations and local councils:

- 5. Extracurricular organisations should continue to work on widening access to extracurricular activities for children from disadvantaged communities and local councils should help facilitate this.** This should include widening access to children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds through targeted outreach in disadvantaged communities across the UK.

As discussed in Chapter Three, lack of confidence had been found to be a barrier to children from disadvantaged backgrounds taking part in extracurricular activities. This outreach should therefore involve

92 Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). *Employer-supported volunteering guide*. CIPD. Available at: [https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/employer-supported-volunteering-guide\\_tcm18-27612.pdf](https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/employer-supported-volunteering-guide_tcm18-27612.pdf) [accessed 04/04/2023]

93 Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). *Employer-supported volunteering guide*. CIPD.

94 Donnelly, M., Lažetić, P., Sandoval-Hernandez, A., Kumar, K. and Whewall, S. *An Unequal Playing Field*. Social Mobility Commission, 2019.

95 *ibid.*

extracurricular organisations going into schools in these communities, speaking with young people and their parents or carers to encourage them to participate, reassuring them of their capability to take part and the development support they will get. Extracurricular organisations should also promote the social and wellbeing benefits of extracurricular activities, as well as the benefits for young people's employability.

We also know that perceived financial risk is a barrier to participation. Therefore, this outreach should involve providing accessible information on the financial support on offer. Further, extracurricular organisations should ensure that they explicitly communicate the financial support they provide through the different media channels they use (e.g. on their websites, social media accounts, newsletters etc.).

Local Councils should help facilitate this engagement by linking up extracurricular organisations in their local areas with nearby schools, prioritising schools with a high proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. with a higher number of pupils eligible for free school meals).

## ENHANCING THE IMPACT OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES ON EMPLOYABILITY

### Scouts and extracurricular organisations:

#### 6. Scouts and other uniformed extracurricular organisations should set up alumni mentoring schemes where alumni provide careers guidance to current members.

As we've seen from our interviews with current Scouts and Scouts alumni, role models play a valuable role in building young people's transferable skills, and many people valued having older role models, like Scout Leaders, that they could go to for career advice. Therefore, uniformed extracurricular organisations should aim to set up mentoring schemes where alumni of these organisations can sign up to provide careers advice to current members, so current members can see how the experiences they've had and the skills they've gained can help them in their careers. This could include advice on writing CV's and preparing for job interviews as well as general advice on career paths and aspirations.

Uniformed groups typically have large networks with current Scouts and alumni living across the whole of the UK - the Scout Network (18-25 year olds) currently consists of 20,000 people, for example.<sup>96</sup> This means young people can benefit from being connected with alumni across the UK. To facilitate this, digital infrastructure could also be used to give mentors and mentees the option to connect virtually if needed or preferred.

As many of our interviewees told us they wouldn't want Scouts to be explicitly focused on employability, taking part in this mentoring scheme should be optional and aimed primarily at older teenagers and young adults who are more likely to be thinking about their careers than younger children.

#### 7. Extracurricular organisations should aim to expand engagement with employers as a means to recruit more volunteers and widen access to extracurricular activities. This should involve proactively reaching out to employers, whether they be large employers or smaller local organisations, promoting the benefits of volunteering as a way to upskill employees and give back to the community.

Scouts currently has a waiting list of around 100,000 children, largely result of there not being enough adult volunteers to meet demand.<sup>97</sup> This means that many young people are facing barriers to joining due to there being a lack of space available as a result of this volunteer shortage. Increasing the number of volunteers will help extracurricular organisations to offer activities to more young people.

#### 8. Extracurricular groups and organisations, including those run by schools, should tailor their activities to help to futureproof young people's employability skills. This means developing more activities that help young people build the skills they need for the future workforce, including digital skills and skills for

<sup>96</sup> Scouts. *Being Part of a Network*. Scouts. Available at: <https://www.scouts.org.uk/network/being-part-of-network/> [accessed 04/04/2023]

<sup>97</sup> Tominey, C. *Bear Grylls: Scouts weren't prepared for so many people on waiting lists*. The Telegraph, April 2022. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/04/28/bear-grylls-scouts-werent-prepared-many-people-waiting-lists/> [accessed 04/04/2023]



the green economy.

Some extracurricular organisations are already carrying out activities that will help young people build the skills they need for the future workforce. For example, the Scouts offers a Green Young Leaders scheme where participants assess the relevant environmental needs in their communities and then decide on the most beneficial and impactful course of action.<sup>98</sup> This involves activities like creating 'evaluation postcards' where Scouts make postcards to reflect on what they achieved and what else they could do to create more change.<sup>99</sup>

As explained earlier, being able to assess the impact that businesses' actions and decisions will have on the environment will become an increasingly crucial skill for the green economy. Extracurricular organisations should aim to develop more schemes or activities like this that help young people to develop the skills that will be increasingly demanded by employers in the future, ensuring they stay up to date with relevant research on the future of the labour market to help inform what these activities should look like.

### Researchers:

- 9. Researchers should aim to fill the evidence gaps on the links between extracurricular attendance, employability and inequality.** More research is needed on the extent to which inequality in extracurricular attendance causes inequalities in employment outcomes between social grades.

Existing research, including our own research in this report, shows that young people from low-income backgrounds are less likely to access extracurricular activities than those from wealthier backgrounds. Children from low-income backgrounds also tend to have poorer employment outcomes than children from wealthier families. We know from our research that attending extracurricular activities can improve employability, however, more evidence is needed on the causal relationship between unequal access to extracurricular activities and inequalities in employment outcomes.

### Employers:

- 10. Employers should encourage job applicants to talk about the skills and experience they have gained from extracurricular activities** by clearly stating the value of these activities in job descriptions, and by asking questions on extracurricular activities in job interviews.

As discussed in Chapter One, there is a mismatch between what employers most want from young job applicants (sufficient transferable skills) and what young people themselves believe is making them unprepared for work. Employers should use job descriptions and interview questions to show young job applicants that they highly value transferable skills, and recognise the role extracurriculars can play in building these transferable skills, helping to encourage more young people to talk about these experiences and skills when applying for jobs.

## IMPROVING ACCESS TO WORK EXPERIENCE AND CAREERS GUIDANCE

### National government:

- 11. The UK government should reintroduce the statutory requirement for Key Stage 4 pupils to undertake work experience.** As we've discussed in this report, the majority of young people today leave school without any work experience, leaving many of them feeling unprepared for work. The removal of work experience from the compulsory curriculum is likely to have had a disproportionate impact on the employability of children from working class backgrounds, who can't afford to do unpaid work experience

<sup>98</sup> Scouts. *Green Young Leaders' Scheme*. Scouts. Available at: <https://www.scouts.org.uk/volunteers/running-your-section/programme-guidance/take-part-in-generation-green/green-young-leaders-scheme/> [accessed 04/04/2023]

<sup>99</sup> Scouts. *Birds, Bugs and Bees*. Scouts. Available at: <https://www.scouts.org.uk/volunteers/running-your-section/programme-guidance/take-part-in-generation-green/birds-bugs-and-bees/#step1> [accessed 04/04/2023]

and internships during the summer.

Reintroducing the requirement for work experience will help to ensure that all children can receive important exposure to the workplace, explore potential career paths and have more opportunities to develop their skills, boosting their employability.

## National government and schools:

- 12. The government and schools should work together to bring employers into schools more often to support students' career development.** Widening young people's exposure to employers is crucial for tackling the problem of youth unemployment, social mobility and levelling up. The Department for Education (DfE) and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) can work with schools that have a high number of students from low-income families to develop more schemes for employer-led careers guidance.

Such a scheme should build on the Access for Aspiration scheme which connects students on free school meals with businesses across London to deliver a range of impactful employer experiences such as work experience, mock interviews, and CV workshops. To date, the programme has delivered over 22,000 employer encounters and supported over 15,000 students from across London.<sup>100</sup>

To broaden the benefits beyond London, DfE and DWP should provide funding for schools to carry out this scheme across the country. To maximise the chances of students developing a career path they are happy and can thrive in, the scheme should aim to include employers from a variety of industries to ensure students can meet employers from their chosen career field, or learn about different career paths if they don't know what this will be yet.

## UCAS, Association of Colleges, and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education:

- 13. UCAS, the Association of Colleges and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education should encourage older teenagers to participate in extracurricular activities by promoting the benefits for university, further education, and apprenticeship applications.**

Sustained participation can reap rewards for employability, so it is important to encourage more young people to participate in extracurricular activities during their late teens. To do this, these organisations should provide detailed and accessible information on their websites highlighting the benefits of extracurricular activities for further and higher education applications, as well as for future employability and general wellbeing. This information should also come with guidance on how to get involved in extracurricular activities at school or with relevant extracurricular organisations outside of school.

Furthermore, they should provide advice and guidance pages on their websites showing students how to articulate what they learnt, including the technical and transferable skills they gained through extracurricular activities in their applications and interviews. School teachers should also ensure they signpost students to this guidance.

As we learnt from our interviews with employers, simply stating that you attended an extracurricular on a job application is not enough, applicants need to be able to effectively articulate the skills they gained and link these skills to the job. Therefore, supporting students to do this at an earlier age in university, further education, and apprenticeship applications will help prepare them for doing this on future job applications.

<sup>100</sup> Mayor's Fund for London. *Access Aspiration Linking Young People and Business*. Mayor's Fund for London, 2021. Available at: <https://www.mayorsfundforlondon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Access-Aspiration-Impact-Report-v15.12.21-small.pdf> [accessed 04/04/2023]

## Employers:

- 14. More employers should aim to develop links with schools and extracurricular organisations to support young people's career development.** This should involve employers using schools as a venue for career events for young people, where employers can explain to students what skills, experience and attributes they are looking for in job applicants. In particular, employers should provide students with advice on what skills employers are looking for and how they can effectively articulate both the transferable and technical skills they have on their CVs.

Extracurricular organisations could also take part in these career events to highlight to students the activities they offer and how taking part in these activities can help them develop the skills that employers want.

Employer engagement with schools could be part of a government-supported scheme like the one we proposed in recommendation three, but employers should also aim to proactively reach out to schools themselves to maximise the number of students that can be reached. As this report has discussed, the skills shortage among young people is one of the biggest challenges facing employers today. It is therefore in employers' interests to proactively support young people to develop their skills and help them better articulate those skills on job applications.

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