

# Extra-curricular activities, soft skills and social mobility

Children from the wealthiest backgrounds are 3 times more likely to take up music classes out of school hours than children from the poorest backgrounds. There is also a 20% participation gap in sport, a new report by the Social Mobility Commission reveals today (Friday 19 July).

The report, '[An Unequal Playing Field](#)', shows huge disparities in children's participation rates across a wide range of extra-curricular activities depending on their social background. Children aged 10 to 15 from wealthier families are much more likely to take part in every type of activity especially music and sport.

The report looks at activities such as arts, music, sport, dance, voluntary work, and youth clubs. It shows that children's participation in extra-curricular activities depends on the schools they attend; the area they are growing up and their socio-economic background.

As household income rises so does increased participation. Those from better-off families are also more likely to engage in a greater number of out of school activities. Children from the poorest families are 3 times more likely to not participate in any extra-curricular activities compared to those from wealthier families.

Some classes are expensive but there are other barriers for the less affluent. In some areas there are access difficulties – schools don't provide the activities and local councils have cut back on their provisions for children and young people. Sometimes, however, children from disadvantaged backgrounds do not take part because they lack confidence or fear they will not fit in.

The University of Bath, who conducted the research, found that children who do participate in extra-curricular activities gain confidence and build up their social skills which is much sought after by employers. They are also more likely to aspire to go on to higher or further education.

Dame Martina Milburn, Chair of the Social Mobility Commission said:

It is shocking that so many children from poorer backgrounds never get the chance to join a football team, learn to dance or play music. The activity either costs too much, isn't available or children just feel they won't fit in. As a result they miss out on important benefits – a sense of belonging, increased confidence and social skills which are invaluable to employers. It is high time to level the playing field.

The commission sets out 4 key recommendations for the government, voluntary

groups and schools. These are:

1. Introduce of a national extra-curricular bursary scheme for disadvantaged families
2. Provide of funding to develop and extend voluntary sector initiatives that allow access to activities
3. Increase the capacity of schools to provide extra-curricular activities and provision of extra information
4. Improve data collection and carrying out further research into soft skills development

The research, commissioned by Damian Hinds, the Secretary of State for Education, also discloses wide geographical differences in extra-curricular provision and participation rates. Children in Northern Ireland for example, joined in most activities such as attending youth clubs whilst the North East has the lowest participation in music classes. There are also big variations in activity take-up by ethnicity. Around 4% of British Pakistani youth take music classes compared to 28% of British Indian and 20% of White British youth.

The main findings:

- nearly 3 times as many children from the highest income households take part in music activities (32%) compared to the lowest income households (11%)
- 64% of young people from the highest income households take part in sport compared to 46% of young people from the lowest incomes
- around 4% of British Pakistani youth take music classes, compared to 28% of British Indian and 20% of White British youth
- fewer young people in the North East of England take music classes than anywhere else – 9%, compared to 22% in the South East
- sport is by far the most popular extra-curricular activity with nearly 50% of youth taking part compared to only 8% doing art
- children from the poorest backgrounds are 3 times more likely to not take part in any of the extra-curricular activities examined compared to those from the wealthiest backgrounds

John Herriman, Chief Executive of Greenhouse Sports, a charity helping disadvantaged children through sport, said:

Extra-curricular activity is so important for young people, and can be especially advantageous in helping to improve the life-chances of those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is the basis of our entire approach at Greenhouse Sports, where we deliver intensive sports coaching and mentoring.

Charlotte Hill, Chief Executive, #iwill Campaign said:

Great education leaders know that education is about more than grades. Taking part in volunteering and other activities is a great

way for young people to develop their character, confidence and vital skills for the future.

The Social Mobility Commission is an advisory, non-departmental public body established under the Life Chances Act 2010, as modified by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016.

It has a duty to assess progress in improving social mobility in the UK and to promote social mobility in England.

The commission includes:

- Dame Martina Milburn, Chair
- Alastair da Costa, Chair of Capital City College Group
- Farrah Storr, Editor-in-chief, Elle
- Harvey Matthewson, Aviation Activity Officer, Aerobility
- Jessica Oghenegweke, Broadcast and Digital Co-ordinator, The Roundhouse
- Jody Walker, Senior Vice President at TJX Europe (TK Maxx and Home Sense in the UK)
- Liz Williams, Group Director of Digital Society at BT
- Pippa Dunn, Founder of Broody, helping entrepreneurs and start ups
- Saeed Atcha, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Xplode magazine
- Sam Friedman, Associate Professor in Sociology at London School of Economics
- Sammy Wright, Vice Principal of Southmoor Academy, Sunderland
- Sandra Wallace, Partner and Joint Managing Director UK and Europe, DLA Piper
- Steven Cooper, Chief Executive Officer C.Hoare & Co

The functions of the commission includes:

- monitoring progress on improving social mobility
- providing published advice to ministers on matters relating to social mobility
- undertaking social mobility advocacy