

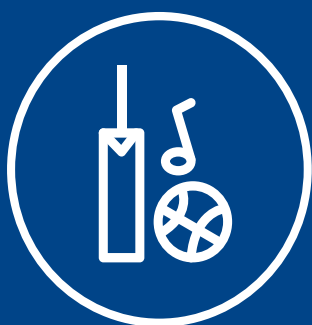
# LIFE LESSONS

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Improving essential life skills  
for young people

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Carl Cullinane and Rebecca Montacute  
– October 2017



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## Foreword

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With increasing pressure on young people around exams, and regular restructuring of GCSEs and A levels, it is easy to focus on academic results as the primary consideration for a young person's success in life. But education is, and should be, about a lot more than that. Adult life requires a range of skills in order for people to flourish, both in the workplace and in their daily lives, from the confidence and motivation to seek challenges and complete tasks, to the interpersonal skills that aid teamwork and other social interactions. These essential life skills are crucial to people achieving their potential, and therefore it is natural that they should also lie at the heart of our education system.

These essential skills have long been cultivated by the best independent schools. Visiting both state and independent schools recently, I saw some excellent work in state schools. However, I saw too how the extra resources available to independent schools allow them to impart essential life skills through lessons more consistently than in state schools. Discussions that often only take place at A level in the state sector are easier earlier in smaller independent school classes. Also, independent schools offer a broader array of co-curricular activities, such as drama, debating and public speaking. As Sutton Trust research has shown, those who have attended independent schools are consistently over-represented in the top professions in this country, from law and banking to medicine and the arts. This is not merely the result of the academic excellence of these schools, but also of the essential life skills they build in their pupils.

In fact, as research from Harvard University has shown, in the US social skills are becoming more important in the workplace all the time. With increasing automation, it is the ability to show flexibility, creativity and teamwork that are increasingly becoming just as valuable, if not more valuable, than academic knowledge and technical skills. At the Sutton Trust's Pathways to Banking launch earlier this year, our research showed that job candidates' presentation and 'work culture fit' were key priorities for employers as much as qualifications.

This is why it is crucial that the development of these essential life skills should not be reserved for those who can pay. Every young person should have the opportunity to build their confidence, motivation and resilience in ways that will benefit them for life. The Department for Education's recent moves towards a focus on these skills is welcome in this regard. But more needs to be done so that every state school embeds the development of life skills in their ethos, curriculum and extra-curricular activities so that they are as natural a part of school life as English and maths.

Young people from less well-off backgrounds in particular don't have access to the benefits that enrichment activities outside the classroom can bring, such as debating, volunteering and the performing arts. We need to ensure we close these gaps in access, so life skills can be harnessed as a driver of social mobility.

Our new research shows a staggering recognition among teachers, employers and young people on how important life skills are to the success of our young people. From the Education Endowment Foundation we increasingly have the evidence on which programmes work. We now need to build on this consensus in order to give every young person the chance to flourish.

I am very grateful to the authors for this important new research.

**Sir Peter Lampl**

**Founder and Chairman of the Sutton Trust and Chairman of the Education Endowment Foundation**

## Executive Summary

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- Essential life skills such as confidence, motivation, resilience and communication are associated with better academic outcomes and better prospects in the workplace, and there is an increasing emphasis on their value, given labour market trends towards automation. While 'character' has traditionally been at the centre of British private school education, provision in the state sector has been patchy, and it is only recently that a concerted move has been made towards prioritising life skills education for all children.
- There is wide recognition of the importance of such life skills, with 88% of young people, 94% of employers and 97% of teachers saying that they are as or more important than academic qualifications. In fact, more than half of teachers (53%) believe that life skills are more important than academic qualifications to young people's success and 72% believe their school should increase their focus on teaching life skills. However, they reported that only half of schools had a shared approach or policy on the issue, and just 13% knew where to get information to support the development of those skills in their pupils.
- Three quarters of young people believe that better life skills would help them get a job in the future, and 88% say that they are as or more important than getting good grades. However, only 1 in 5 pupils say that the school curriculum helps them 'a lot' with the development of life skills.
- Extra-curricular activities can contribute to the development of these skills, but there are substantial gaps between the level of provision of clubs and activities reported by teachers, and actual take up by pupils. 78% of teachers report the availability of volunteering programmes to build life skills, but only 8% of pupils say they take part. 45% of teachers said their school provided debating, yet just 2% of young people reported participating. Almost two in five young people (37%) don't take part in any clubs or activities.
- There are also substantial socio-economic gaps in access to extra-curricular activities, with pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds less likely to take up activities than their better off peers (46% compared to 66%), with just half of those receiving free school meals (FSM) taking part. This is concerning, as it is disadvantaged groups that have most to gain from taking part in such activities. There are also substantial gaps in provision, with schools with higher numbers of FSM pupils less likely to offer certain activities. Schools with the lowest proportion of FSM pupils are twice as likely to offer debating clubs as schools with the highest (70% compared to 35%).
- Secondary schools provide a wider range of extra-curricular activities than primary schools, however classroom strategies to improve life skills, such as small group/collaborative approaches and social and emotional learning programmes are substantially less common in secondaries. As secondary pupils get older they value life skills more, but report lower levels of provision, particularly in Years 10 and 11 when pupils are approaching their GCSEs.

- 94% of employers say that life skills are at least as important as academic results for the success of young people, with nearly one third saying even more so, however 68% say 18 year old school leavers they are looking to recruit don't have the required skills for the workplace. Employers' confidence in university graduates is higher, yet little over half (52%) believe they have the skills required.
- Employers believe that young people who have completed apprenticeships are best prepared with the life skills needed in the workplace, with two thirds (64%) agreeing that apprentices have the right skills, significantly higher than university graduates. Almost two thirds of employers (62%) also feel that more apprenticeships are one of the best ways of filling the skills gap in the workplace.
- Unequal access to opportunities for developing life skills plays a role in the over-representation of those with independent school backgrounds of the UK's top professions. Giving young people from all backgrounds a greater opportunity to develop those skills can therefore be an engine for opportunity and social mobility.

## Recommendations

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- Schools should focus on ensuring a wider range of their pupils develop a broad array of non-academic skills, through both classroom strategies and extra-curricular enrichment activities such as debating, cultural visits and volunteering. There should be a particular focus on increasing take-up by those from a disadvantaged background.
- The Government should introduce a means-tested voucher system, or encourage schools to do so, as part of the pupil premium. Through this, lower income families could access additional support and enrichment, including extra-curricular activities and one-to-one tuition.
- Schools should take a 'whole-school' approach to engendering life skills in young people. Life skills education should be embedded in the day to day curriculum, through extra-curricular activities, and through dedicated programmes. Social and Emotional Learning programmes and the Personal Social Health and Economic Education curriculum can help to develop skills such as confidence, resilience and ability to work with others. These values should be embedded in the school ethos, assemblies, lessons, school clubs and societies, and in staff-student and staff-parent relationships. It is this consistency of message and environment that is crucial for embedding life skills. A dedicated school lead would help to facilitate this approach.
- Government and Ofsted should work with the sector to provide a greater level of resources, information and tools to support teachers who wish to develop the essential life skills of their pupils. Greater co-ordination between government and organisations such as the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) would help highlight these resources to teachers. Evidence should be at the heart of life skills education and resources provided by the EEF and Early Intervention Foundation should be used to inform the most effective strategies for schools and teachers. The EEF has already funded 12 trials in this area, and is planning a number more over the next three years.
- Programmes for developing life skills require robust evaluation, so that schools have better guidance on the most effective approaches. A number of approaches currently being trialled appear promising: including training teachers to improve mindsets and resilience in their students, structured after-school clubs, social action activities, and social and emotional learning programmes.
- The development of essential life skills by schools should be incentivised and rewarded. While significant challenges remain to the reliable measurement of outcomes, the extent to which schools are actively promoting life skills development through the curriculum, extra-curricular activities and dedicated programmes – particularly for those from more disadvantaged groups – should be included in Ofsted inspection criteria.
- With the Department for Education encouraging greater cooperation between employers and schools, employers should engage with schools and young people to develop their understanding of the wider non-academic skills that are most needed in different workplaces. Businesses could also expand their work experience and apprenticeship programmes to ensure that young people entering the job market are better prepared for the workplace. Young people should also have access to high quality careers guidance that promotes the development of these skills.

## Methodology

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The study of life skills remains a complex area, with a variety of definitions, frameworks and concepts, and little consensus. Drawing on literature reviews conducted in 2013 and 2015, this report focuses on five core skill areas: self-control, self-perceptions (including self-confidence and self-efficacy), social skills (including teamwork and communications skills), motivation and resilience.<sup>1</sup>

For the purposes of the surveys conducted for this report, these domains were expressed in terms that could be easily understood by the groups under research.

**Table 1. Life skills domains and terminology**

Domain	Survey Measure
Self-control	Self-control
Self-perceptions	Confidence
Social skills	Communication
Motivation	Motivation
Resilience	Ability to cope with stress

In order to explore perceptions about the importance, provision and demand for life skills, the Sutton Trust, along with the EEF, commissioned three surveys from key populations: state school teachers, employers and young people in schools themselves.

Teachers were surveyed through the National Foundation for Educational Research's Teacher Voice survey, a three-times yearly poll conducted online with teachers from the maintained sector in England, in both primary and secondary schools. 1,361 practising teachers, from headteachers to newly qualified class teachers, were surveyed in March 2017. The school sample is nationally representative of key factors, including free school meals eligibility, region, school performance, school type and local authority type.

Employers were surveyed via the YouGov Business Omnibus, a poll of senior business decision makers (excluding sole traders) in Great Britain. 1,133 employers were surveyed at the end of May/ beginning of June 2017 through an online questionnaire. Data are weighted and are nationally representative of business size.

Young people were surveyed through the Ipsos MORI Young People Omnibus, a representative survey of 11-16 year olds attending mainstream state schools in England and Wales. Interviews of 2,612 young people were carried out through a self-completion questionnaire across over 100 schools between February and May 2017. Data are weighted by sex, age and region to match the population.

Ipsos MORI determines the affluence of young people's backgrounds through a series of four questions in the questionnaire (frequency of family holidays, having one's own bedroom in the family home, number of computers in household, whether the family owns a vehicle). Of the total number of 11-16 year olds interviewed, 1,449 were determined to come from 'high' affluence backgrounds and 220 from 'low' affluence backgrounds.

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<sup>1</sup> Gutman and Schoon (2013) *The impact of non-cognitive skills on outcomes for young people*. London: UCL Institute of Education. Goodman et al (2015) *Social and emotional skills in childhood and their long-term effects on adult life*. London: UCL Institute of Education.

## 1. Introduction

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Schools' main focus is on developing children's core academic knowledge and skills in literacy, numeracy, and range of curriculum subjects. But there are other skills that are increasingly seen as important to children's wider development: 'essential life skills' such as confidence, social skills, self-control, motivation, and resilience. These are the attitudes, skills and behaviours that are thought to underpin success in school and work, and include the ability to respond to setbacks, work well with others, build relationships, communicate effectively, manage emotions, and cope with difficult situations. Such skills are often referred to as 'social and emotional skills', 'soft skills', 'non-cognitive skills' or 'character'. They are usually seen as distinct from academic knowledge and skills, however, they are increasingly thought to play an important part in learning, as well as contributing to children's wider development, well-being and readiness for life beyond school. When we refer to 'life skills' in this report, we are referring to these essential life skills.

### ***Why do these skills matter?***

There is growing evidence that these life skills are associated with a range of positive outcomes at school and later in life. For example, many longitudinal studies show that non-academic skills in childhood, including self-control, self-perceptions and social skills, are strong predictors of adult outcomes, including employment, well-being, and physical and mental health.<sup>2</sup> For example, research shows that having an 'internal locus of control' – one's belief in their ability to influence events – appears important in shaping a broad range of outcomes such as educational attainment, labour market success, socio-economic status, mental health and wellbeing, and some physical health outcomes.<sup>3</sup> Another study shows that young children's self-control skills, such as conscientiousness, self-discipline and perseverance, predict their health, wealth and criminal history in later life regardless of IQ or social background.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, some argue that these skills are as important, or more important, than academic skills – and that their importance in the future jobs market is growing. For example, recent research from the United States has argued that there are clear benefits to life skills in the workplace, arguing that jobs requiring high levels of social interaction have grown substantially.<sup>5</sup> While labour market returns for cognitive abilities have stalled over the last 30 years in the US, the returns for both social skills and non-cognitive skills have substantially increased. As this work and a recent report from the Sutton Trust point out, technological trends in the labour market affecting routine occupations mean that the value of interpersonal skills is likely to be even greater as automation takes further hold, and those with the educational background to take advantage will benefit the most.<sup>6</sup>

Reinforcing this message, the Confederation for British Industry's (CBI) most recent survey of employers on education and skills found that "businesses are clear that first and foremost they want to recruit young people with attitudes and attributes such as resilience, enthusiasm and creativity. They are not selecting simply on the basis of academic ability."<sup>7</sup> The CBI emphasises the central importance to employers of young people having a positive attitude and resilience, demonstrated for example by a

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<sup>2</sup> Goodman et al (2015), Gutman and Schoon (2013)

<sup>3</sup> Goodman et al (2015)

<sup>4</sup> Moffitt et al (2011) *A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety* in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Vol. 108:7.

<sup>5</sup> Deming (2017) *The Growing Importance of Social Skills in the Labor Market: NBER Working Paper No. 21473*. Cambridge: NBER.

<sup>6</sup> Sutton Trust (2017) *The State of Social Mobility in the UK*. London: Sutton Trust.

<sup>7</sup> Confederation for British Industry (2016) *The Right Combination: Education and Skills Survey 2016*. London: CBI.



readiness to take part, openness to new ideas and activities, a desire to achieve, and an understanding that hard work and effort yields results.

### ***The role of life skills in social mobility***

The growing focus of employers on non-academic skills can be both a threat and an opportunity to social mobility. There is evidence that children from disadvantaged families are likely to have lower levels of these skills than their more affluent peers and have fewer opportunities to develop them. Some gaps in skills appear to emerge very early. For example, by age three, poorer children display weaker social and emotional skills, on average, than their wealthier peers, and these differences persist through school. There is also some indication that the socio-economic gaps in children's social and emotional skills at age 11 are larger now than they were in the 1970s.<sup>8</sup>

Research by the Sutton Trust in *Extra Time* shows that while less well-off parents focus their resources on core subjects, better-off parents focus on providing their children with a range of broader 'enrichment' activities like music lessons, sports and drama.<sup>9</sup> The Trust's *Extra-curricular Inequality* also shows that the cultural capital gained through these activities can have a positive effect on both educational attainment and career outcomes. In 2014 the Sutton Trust asked parents what extra-curricular activities children were taking, with 76% reporting their child regularly participated in some activities, but with a gap between the social grades of 15 percentage points (84% for the higher ABC1 grade compared to 69% for C2DE).<sup>10</sup>

Research has shown that private schools in the UK are particularly focused on the building of 'character' through school ethos and the provision of a rich programme of extra-curricular activities.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the increased 'locus of control' and aspirations associated with these schools form a component of the private school earnings premium, contributing to a long term advantage in the labour market. Other research has shown that private school pupils tend to have higher scores across a range of 'soft skills' measures, including 'toughness', commitment and openness to challenge.<sup>12</sup> As the Sutton Trust's series of reports *Leading People* has prominently displayed, the elite levels of UK society are dominated by those with a background in private education.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, there is evidence that differences in social and emotional skills are one reason why children whose parents have professional occupations are more likely to end up in top professions themselves. Analysis by UCL Institute of Education found that social and emotional skills at age 10 accounted for some of the transmission of top job status between generations.<sup>14</sup> Social and emotional skills transmitted top job advantage predominantly (but not exclusively) through their influence on educational attainment, particularly at age 16. This suggests that interventions to improve these early skills could be an effective route for improving individual's educational attainment and their chances of accessing a competitive top job.

### ***What do we know about how to improve life skills?***

The role of parents is thought to be particularly important in the early development of these skills, with schools and extra-curricular activities playing increasingly important roles as children get older. However,

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<sup>8</sup> Goodman et al (2015)

<sup>9</sup> Jerrim (2017) *Extra Time*. London: Sutton Trust.

<sup>10</sup> Sutton Trust (2014) *Extra-curricular Inequality*. London: Sutton Trust.

<sup>11</sup> Green et al (2015) *Dreaming Big: Self-Evaluations, Aspirations, High-Valued Social Networks, and the Private-School Earnings Premium*. London: UCL Institute of Education.

<sup>12</sup> AQR International (2017) *Understanding "soft skills" development at Independent Schools*. London: Independent Schools Council.

<sup>13</sup> Sutton Trust (2016) *Leading People*. London: Sutton Trust.

<sup>14</sup> Goodman et al (2015)

whilst there is good evidence of associations between skills in childhood and long-term outcomes, less is known about the most effective ways of developing these skills in policy or practice. A review of evidence by the OECD has argued that tasks that promote achieving goals, working with others and managing emotions are thought to be particularly important for developing life skills.<sup>15</sup> Their report highlights a range of approaches including high quality early years support, parenting programmes, school curricula, and extra-curricular activities.

Evidence from the Sutton Trust-EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit and systematic reviews, suggest that social and emotional learning (SEL) programmes in schools can have a positive impact on both academic and non-cognitive outcomes: 'On average, SEL interventions have an identifiable and significant impact on attitudes to learning, social relationships in school, and attainment itself.'<sup>16</sup> However, most of this evidence comes from programmes that have been developed and tested in the US, so there remain some questions about how effective they will be in UK contexts. These programmes can focus on whole-school change, class-level approaches, or targeted interventions for small groups of children. Many of the most promising social and emotional learning programmes have been highlighted in reviews by the Early Intervention Foundation,<sup>17</sup> and are currently being trialled in schools by the EEF.

Extra-curricular activities are often thought to be particularly beneficial for developing children's wider skills, as a complement to what happens in the classroom. Activities such as debating, volunteering or team sports provide real-life situations where students can learn to develop relevant skills such as teamwork, responsibility and perseverance with the help of adult mentors. Recent analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study showed that after-school clubs, sports and physical activities were positively associated with both attainment and social, emotional and behavioural outcomes at age 11, when controlling for prior attainment.<sup>18</sup> Among economically disadvantaged children, after school clubs emerged as important to child outcomes, where participation was linked to both higher Key Stage 2 attainment and prosocial skills. Evidence from the United States has also indicated that debating can be associated with increased attainment among disadvantaged students.<sup>19</sup>

### ***What is currently being done?***

There is growing recognition of life skills in education, with the Department for Education increasingly pursuing a focus on building 'character': "There has been increasing recognition of the role that certain character traits or attributes such as resilience, self-regulation, and emotional and social skills can play in enabling children and young people to achieve positive health, education, employment and other outcomes."<sup>20</sup> DfE's central rationale for this agenda acknowledges the effect of such life skills on supporting academic attainment, meeting the needs of employers, and general contributions to society.

A Department for Education survey earlier this year showed that while 97% of school leaders sought to promote desirable character traits, only 54% were familiar with the term 'character' education, only 17% of schools had a formalised policy and 25% a dedicated lead. However 43% offered staff training in the development of character traits.<sup>21</sup> Lack of time, capacity and knowledge were identified as key constraints. More recently, former Secretary of State for Education Nicky Morgan has also authored a

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<sup>15</sup> OECD (2015) *Skills for Social Progress: the power of social and emotional skills*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

<sup>16</sup> EEF (2017) *Teaching and Learning Toolkit: Social and emotional learning*. Retrieved October 6, 2017 from: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/resources/teaching-learning-toolkit/social-and-emotional-learning/>

<sup>17</sup> Early Intervention Foundation (2017) *Social and emotional skills: Strand 2 Report*. London: EIF.

<sup>18</sup> Chanfreau et al (2016) *Out of School Activities during Primary School and KS2 attainment*. London: UCL Institute of Education.

<sup>19</sup> Mezuk (2009) *Urban Debate and High School Educational Outcomes for African American Males: The Case of the Chicago Debate League*. The Journal of Negro Education. Vol. 78:3.

<sup>20</sup> Department for Education (2017) *Developing character skills in schools: Summary report*. London: DfE. (p3)

<sup>21</sup> DfE (2017)

publication on the character agenda, arguing for the benefits of such a focus on academic outcomes, employment outcomes and overall “personal flourishing”.<sup>22</sup>

In terms of curriculum time, the main focus for developing children’s wider skills has been in Personal Social Health and Economic (PSHE) lessons. The national curriculum states that ‘all schools should make provision for personal, social, health and economic education, drawing on good practice’. These lessons focus on helping pupils to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to keep themselves healthy and safe, and prepare for life and work in modern Britain.<sup>23</sup> The PSHE curriculum aims towards building young people’s ‘essential skills’ in confidence, resilience, self-esteem, communication and ability to work with others. The skills and attributes focused on by the curriculum fall under the three main headings of ‘Personal effectiveness’, ‘Interpersonal and social effectiveness’ and ‘Managing risk and decision-making’, and range from self-regulation to empathy and leadership.<sup>24</sup> However, given other pressures, there are indications that schools are reducing their support for PSHE, with a 2016 survey showing that the time spent teaching PSHE education has fallen by over 32% in four years.<sup>25</sup>

Internationally, organisations such as the OECD have published several reports drawing attention to the importance of these skills, and are increasingly looking at capturing a wider set of skills in its international surveys. There is some evidence of an increasing focus on life skills from high-performing nations. For example, Singapore has recently introduced a new curriculum of ‘Character Development and Education’, and has committed to putting character “at the core” of its education. UK schools appear to be slightly below the OECD average in valuing life skills relative to academic attainment. In the UK, 67% of schools say they value the social and emotional development of their students as much as their students’ academic proficiency. The OECD average for this is 71%.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Where are the gaps?***

Despite the growing interest in and enthusiasm for developing children’s life skills, the central focus of policy and accountability remains on academic attainment. Relatively little is known about what schools, teachers, and pupils think about life skills: their perception of how important they are; how this varies at different phases of education; what activities they currently provide; and what the barriers are to doing more. So too for employers: whilst we know from CBI surveys that employers want young people to arrive with positive attitudes towards work, and good character, a more detailed understanding of the skills they want (and feel are lacking) would help to inform the extent to which schools and policy are supporting young people for success in adult life.

The Sutton Trust commissioned this survey, jointly funded with the Education Endowment Foundation, to understand more about the current interest in life skills from teachers and pupils, to understand more about their perceived importance, and what is currently being done to develop them. We also surveyed employers to get their view on the importance of non-academic skills, and the extent to which young people they recruit were arriving with the skills they needed for the workplace.

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<sup>22</sup> Morgan (2017) *Taught Not Caught*. Woodbridge: John Catt.

<sup>23</sup> PSHE Association (2017) Retrieved October 6, 2017 from: <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/>

<sup>24</sup> PSHE Association (2017) *PHSE Education Programme of Study*. London: PSHE Association.

<sup>25</sup> PSHE Association (2017) ‘PSHE Association raises concerns about drop in provision’. Retrieved October 6, 2017 from: <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/news/pshe-association-raises-concerns-about-drop-pshe>

<sup>26</sup> OECD (2015)

## 2. The importance of life skills

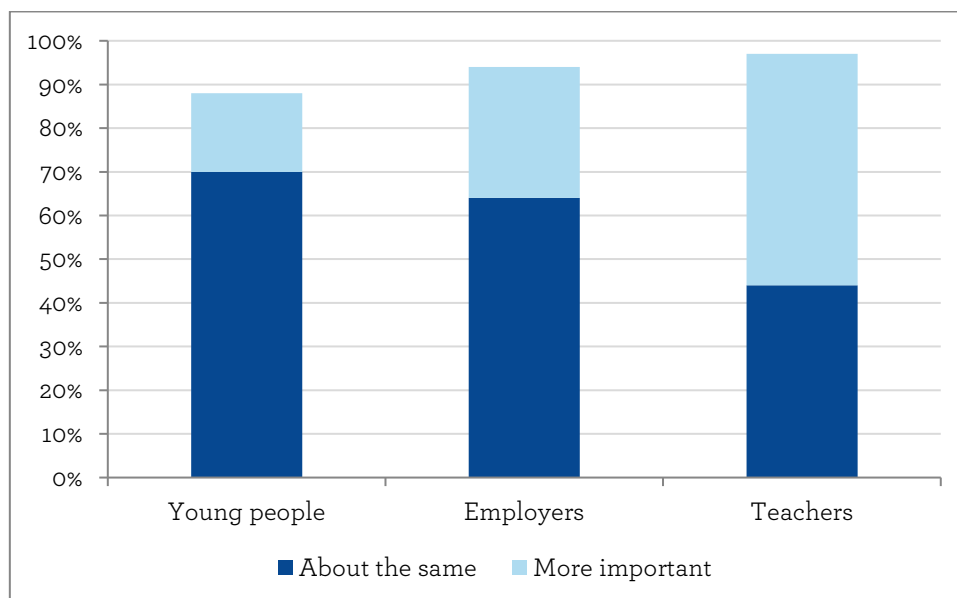
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The surveys first sought to understand the value that young people, teachers and employers placed on wider skills relative to academic grades.

The three surveys were consistent in their findings: large majorities of all groups stated that life skills are just as important as academic results. 88% of young people, 97% of teachers and 94% of employers say that life skills are the same or more important than academic qualifications. Just 4%, 1% and 1% respectively felt that they were less important.

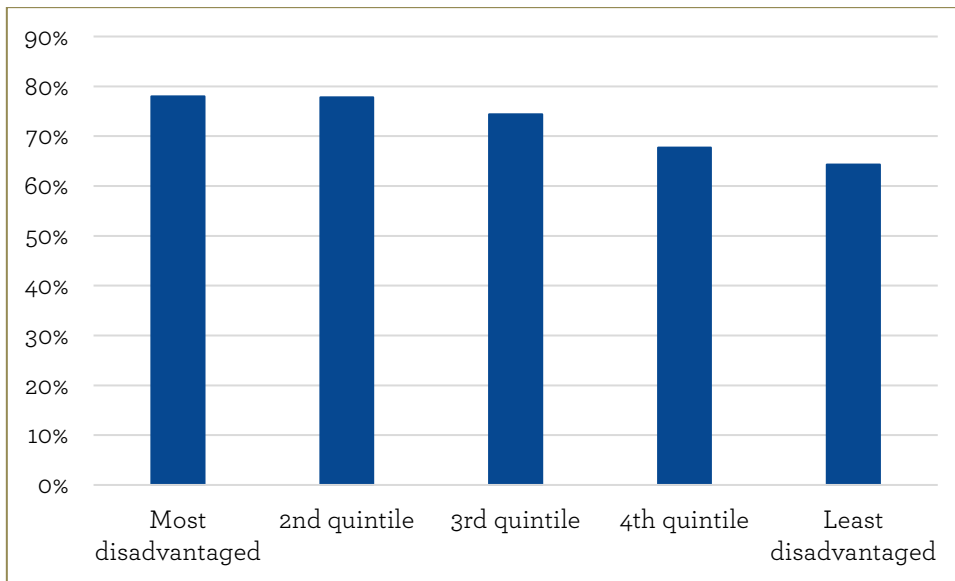
Of these groups, it is particularly notable that state school teachers placed most emphasis on the development of life skills, with over half (53%) saying that they are *more* important than grades.

**Figure 1. Proportion comparing the importance of life skills to academic results**



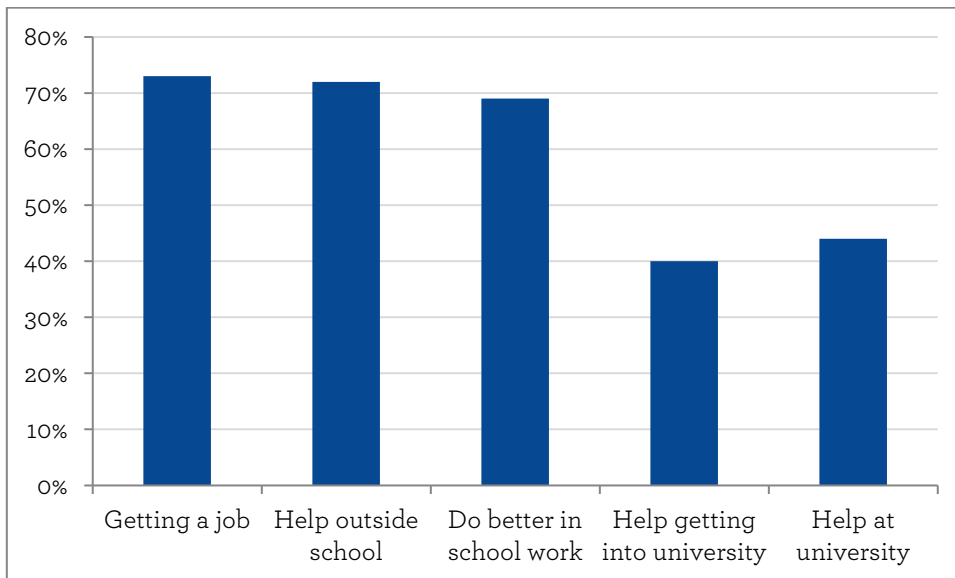
Furthermore, teachers also believe that they should be doing more to help their pupils. 72% of teachers think that their school should increase their focus on improving life skills, indicative of widespread recognition of its importance, and the level of demand from teachers that it be improved. This demand is highest in the schools with the greatest proportions of free school meal eligible pupils (78% in favour), compared to 64% in schools with the least disadvantaged intakes. This is important for improving equity in access, as will be explored below.

**Figure 2. Proportion of teachers who believe their school should increase its focus on life skills**



Young people in schools also clearly see the importance of life skills, with 18% overall saying that they are more important than good grades, and 70% saying they are equally important. They are also keenly aware of the employment aspect of these skills, with 73% agreeing that these skills would help them get a job later in life, the most important category, followed by 'helping outside of school'. When forced to select one priority, getting a job was also the top category, selected by a third of respondents.

**Figure 3. Young people's perceptions of how life skills may help them**



While teachers are emphatic about the importance of life skills for young people, and young people themselves want more, a fundamental disconnect remains. With 94% of employers saying that life skills are as or more important in the workplace than academic qualifications, it is clear the importance that they say they afford to such skills. However, as detailed below, a substantial majority of them say that school leavers don't have the life skills required in the workplace. Despite a high level of demand from across the spectrum, there remains, from employers' perspective, a shortfall in skill levels. This raises two questions: what is currently being done in the education system, and how can the disconnect be tackled?

### **Case Study 1: School 21**

School 21 is a free school in London with a comprehensive admissions policy, and a higher than average proportion of students on free school meals. The school was set up in 2012 and prioritises developing students' oracy skills (the use of spoken language). School 21 employs a range of strategies to help students develop these skills, including encouraging students to speak throughout all lessons, to speak regularly in assemblies, and to give presentations on their own progress at parents' evenings. Students are also encouraged to evaluate one another's work, and re-draft work based on feedback they have received. The school achieved an "Outstanding" rating following its first Ofsted inspection, who commented that "pupils develop extraordinary skills in listening, speaking and questioning and become skilled at planning and redrafting their work so that they can continually improve."

Headteacher and one of the school's founders, Oli de Botton, said that "the aim of the school is to empower children to be able to change the world. We focus on developing three core elements – the head, heart and hand, and it's important for all three to be in balance. The head is the academic aspect of school life, the heart focuses on wellbeing and self-reflection, and the hand is developing a student's abilities to create beautiful work.

One of the ways we nurture the faculties associated with the head, heart and hand is through coaching time; one teacher with a 'circle' of 12 students four times a week. Each year, students first start by focusing on wellbeing (the heart), using rich texts to allow them distance to develop a sense of self. Next, we develop student's oracy skills (the head); in Year 7 this involves students delivering a five-minute speech with no notes on a topic of their passion. In Year 8, 'ignite speeches' build from subject knowledge. By Year 9 they are debating politically. The last element is that students carry out a project 'the hand', for example sixth-form students are working with younger pupils to redesign their playground. Outside of coaching time, the head, heart and the hand remain in balance through rigorous academic teaching, a focus on building resilience and termly exhibitions of beautiful work to showcase what children have produce."

The approach used by School 21 to develop oracy skills in students has had promising results in early pilot studies. The EEF previously funded a pilot project, designed by School 21 and the University of Cambridge, to improve Year 7 student's oracy skills. In this project, the oracy programme used in School 21 was tested, and was found to successfully help students to develop their speaking and listening skills. A second pilot project is now being funded by the EEF, in which the approach will be tested in 12 other schools to determine the impact on academic attainment, how much oracy skills improve in students during the programme, and whether the interventions are ready to be more extensively tested in future as part of a large-scale randomised control trial.

### 3. Current provision of life skills

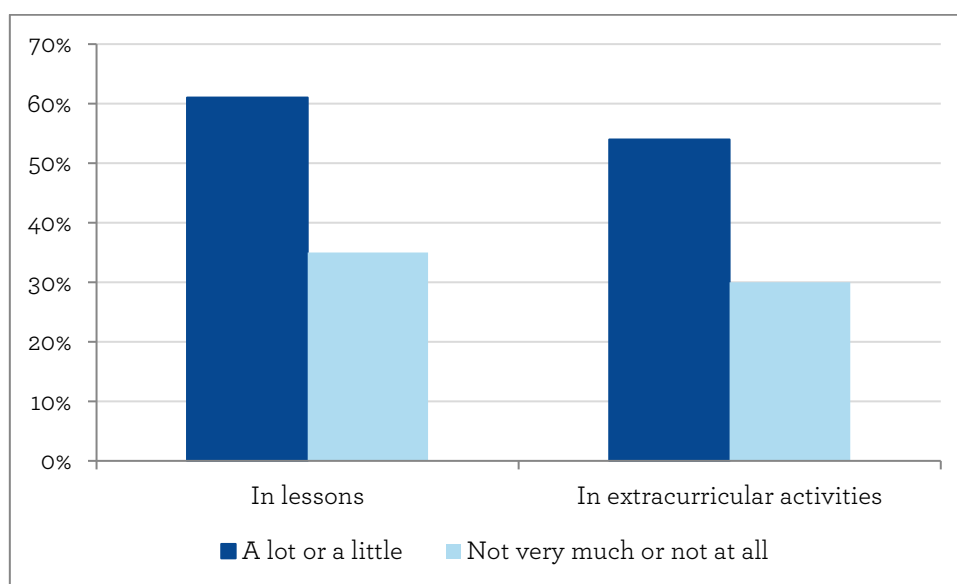
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#### *Extent of life skills provision in state schools*

State schools must be at the centre of any broad-based solution to this issue, and both pupils and teachers in the sector were surveyed to gauge their perceptions of the extent and nature of current life skills education. As outlined in the introduction, schools use a combination of classroom-based teaching, often through the PSHE curriculum, along with extra-curricular activities to develop the wider skills of their pupils. Just 57% of teachers in the sector believe that their school's curriculum helps the development of pupils' life skills, indicating substantial room for improvement. 42% of teachers say provision for life skills teaching has increased in their school in recent years, indicative of the recent push in the sector. Nonetheless, almost three quarters believe their school should increase its focus.

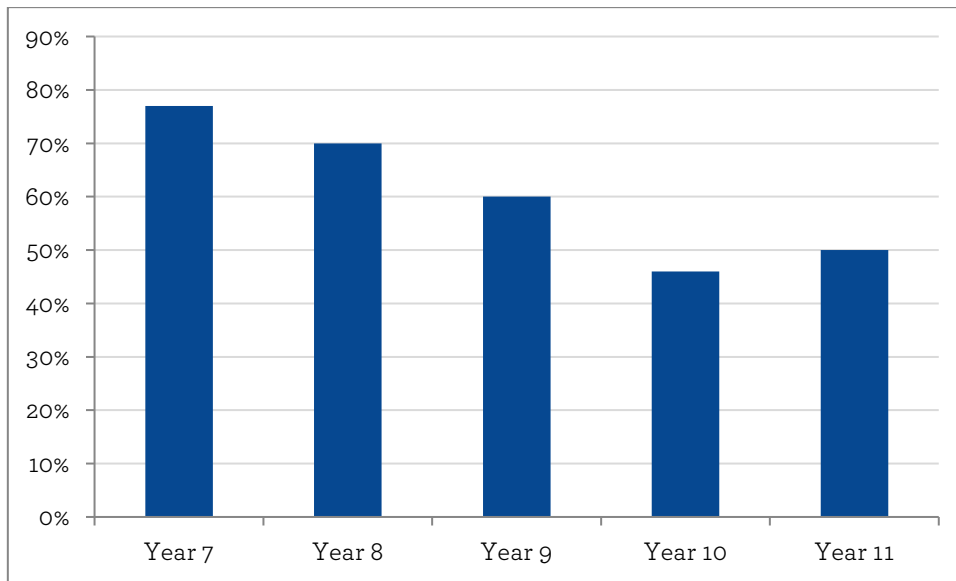
Young people's feelings on whether their school is helping them develop the life skills they need presents a more mixed picture. While overall 61% of pupils feel that lessons in school are helping to some extent, only one in five (20%) of young people believe they help a lot. Slightly smaller numbers perceive that their school assists their development of these characteristics through extra-curricular activities (54% a little or a lot), with a greater percentage not sure whether they help or not.

**Figure 4. Young people's perceptions of whether and how schools develop their life skills**



Levels of current provision are uneven across schools however, and are actually lower in secondary schools than in primaries. 66% of primary teachers agree that the curriculum helps the development of life skills compared to 47% of secondary school teachers. The pattern also seems to change during the secondary years. While 77% of Year 7's starting secondary school report that the curriculum helps them with life skills, this falls year on year to 50% or below in Years 10 and 11 while pupils are preparing for GCSEs. This contrasts with their perceived importance, which increases as pupils get older. While 15% of Year 7's believe life skills are more important than grades, 22% of Year 11's agree. So, during secondary school, pupils become less satisfied with the provision of life skills education as they progress, while simultaneously placing a greater value on those skills.

Figure 5. Proportion of young people who agree that lessons help them foster their life skills



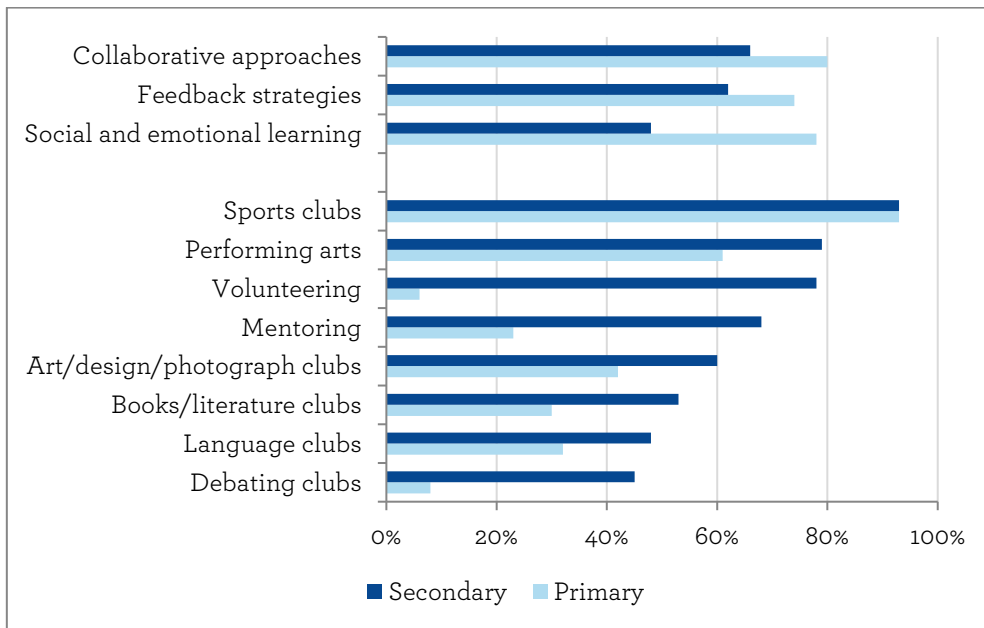
### *How schools are providing for life skills*

When asked how schools build life skills, teachers reported a mix of classroom-based strategies and extra-curricular activities, with 93% reporting that sports clubs were used and 70% saying performing arts, including music and drama. Lower proportions reported the existence of debating and language clubs (Figure 6). Substantial numbers of teachers also reported classroom-based activities, with 73% reporting collaborative approaches such as small group learning, 68% feedback strategies, and 64% social and emotional learning. However, while the provision of extra-curricular activities is the same or higher at secondary level compared to primary, the classroom-based approaches all dropped substantially at secondary school. In particular, social and emotional learning falls from 78% of primary teachers to 48% of secondary teachers.

This change in balance is significant, as integrating the development of these skills with the day-to-day curriculum in the classroom is key to a rounded approach to life skills education.



**Figure 6. Curricular and extra-curricular activities reported by teachers as provided to help develop pupils' life skills**



Secondary schools report that they offer a range of extra-curricular clubs and activities. However, there are substantial differences between what activities teachers say are on offer, and what pupils are actually doing. Take-up of activities appears to be substantially lower than the level of provision would suggest. For example, 78% of teachers report the availability of volunteering programmes to build life skills, but only 8% of pupils say they take part. 51% of teachers felt that their school helped to build life skills through art or photography clubs, but only 8% of young people reported participation in such clubs, and 45% of teachers report that their school provides debating, but only 2% of young people say they participate.

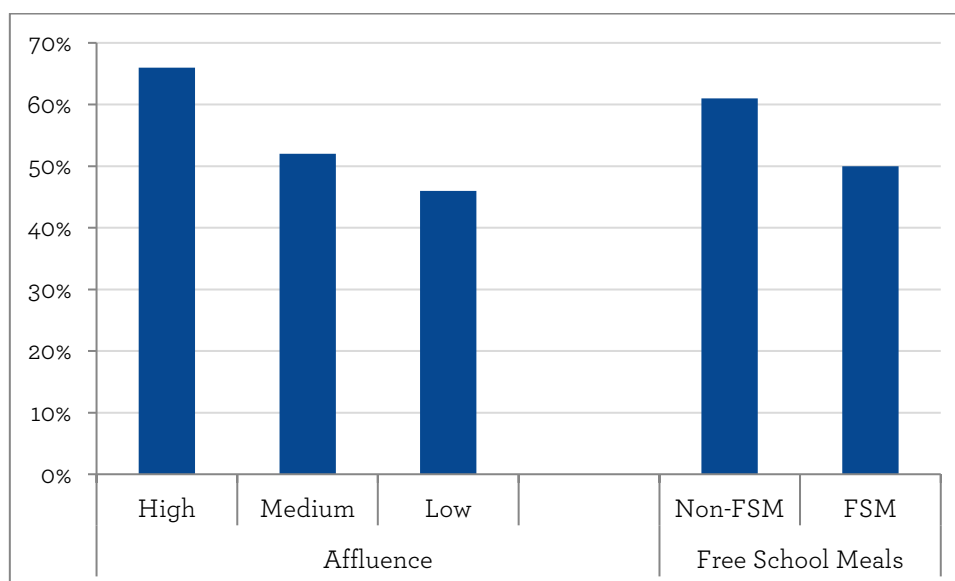
There is a lack of take-up of extra-curricular activities among young people in general. While 41% of young people take part in sports clubs, almost all other activities (apart from performing arts) report participation rates of less than 10% with, significantly, over a third of young people (37%) reporting they don't take part in any such activities.

**Table 2. Participation by young people in extra-curricular activities**

Activity	Participation rate
Sports clubs (e.g. football, netball, rugby, gymnastics etc)	41%
Performing arts clubs (e.g. music, drama etc)	12%
Art, design or photography clubs	8%
Volunteering (e.g. National Citizenship Service, Duke of Edinburgh etc)	8%
Language clubs (e.g. French, Spanish etc)	3%
Book / literature/ reading club	3%
Mentoring another pupil at your school	3%
Being mentored by an adult or another pupil	3%
Debating club	2%
Chess club	2%
Science club	1%
Homework club	1%
Maths club	1%
Computer club	1%
Games club	1%
English club	1%
Other extra-curricular activity	1%
I do not take part in any clubs/ extra-curricular activities run by my school	37%

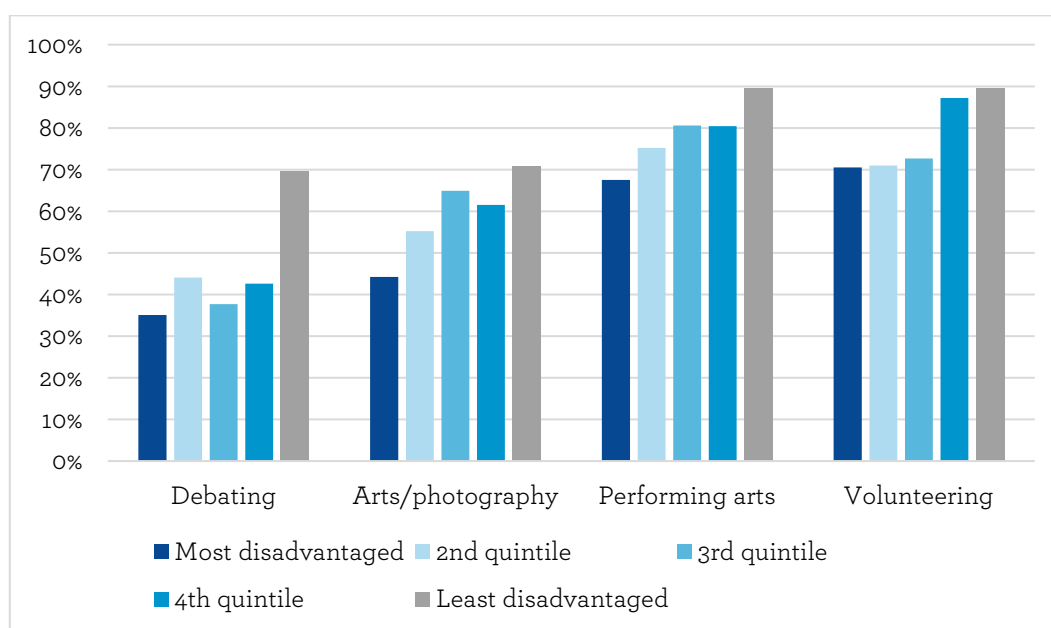
There are also stark social inequalities in access to and take up of extra-curricular activities. While two thirds (66%) of those from a 'high affluence' background – the measure used by Ipsos MORI to reflect family background - take part in extra-curricular activities, only 46% of those from a 'low affluence' background do. Similarly, just half of those receiving Free School Meals take part, but 61% of non-FSM young people participate in at least one activity. This inequality in access to activities helps to feed the inequality in life skills development.

**Figure 7. Extra-curricular activity take-up by social background**



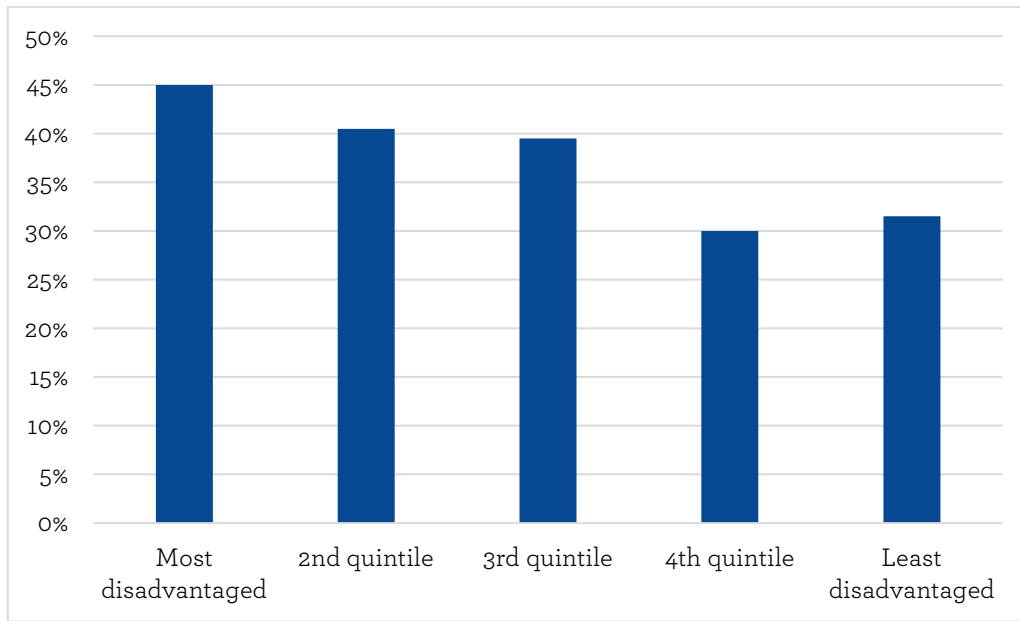
The level of provision in schools is also unequal, with schools serving higher proportions of disadvantaged pupils less likely to offer a range of clubs and societies. Secondary schools with the lowest proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals are twice as likely to offer debating clubs as schools with the highest (70% compared to 35%). 90% of the most advantaged state schools offer performing arts activities, but just 68% of the least advantaged do so. Similarly, 90% of the most advantaged offer volunteering compared to 71% of the least. These inequalities are particularly concerning from a social mobility perspective, with young people from less well-off backgrounds less likely to have access to the types of activities that develop their confidence and interpersonal skills in school.

**Figure 8. Extra-curricular provision by quintile of free school meal eligibility in school**



These differences in provision are also reflected in take up. While 37% of young pupil overall do not take part in any activities, these pupils are more likely to attend schools with more disadvantaged intakes. Young people in the most disadvantaged schools are 13 percentage points more likely to not be involved in any extra-curricular activities than the least disadvantaged schools (45% compared to 32%).

**Figure 9. Proportion of young people taking part in extra-curricular activities by free school meals intake of school**



While the differences are less stark, schools with less disadvantaged intakes are also more likely to focus on wider skills development through the curriculum or classroom strategies: 50% utilising the three strategies from Figure 6 in schools with the most advantaged intakes, compared to 41% with the least advantaged.

Echoing previous findings, participation in extra-curricular activities is associated with young people reporting better academic performance, as well as the likelihood they will go to university. While 62% of those who take part in extra-curricular activities report doing well at school, only 37% of those who do not take part report doing well. Those who don't do extra-curricular activities are also twice as likely to say they're not planning to attend higher education (10% vs. 19%).

### **Case Study 2: St Francis Xavier's College, Liverpool**

St Francis Xavier's College is a comprehensive school in Liverpool, with a slightly higher than average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. The school's debate club started ten years ago, when their English teacher Ms Clare Boughy began to take students aged 14-18 to local debating competitions. When she approached judges whom they met at these events, Dr Dan Bradley, who had coached debating for several years, offered to help teach their students, being paid a small amount to cover his travel expenses to the school. St Francis Xavier has since been successful at several competitions normally dominated by private school pupils, including this year reaching the Grand Final of the English Speaking Union Schools Mace, the largest debating competition for schools in England.

When asked what had been the impact of debating on pupils at the school, Dr Bradley emphasised that "it depends on the pupil. For some pupils, debating has brought them out of their shell. Shy pupils have been noticed to raise their hand more in class and be generally more confident. The vast majority of pupils who take part in debating get top marks in English presentations and their general reasoning and argumentation in schoolwork has improved. For the gifted and talented pupils, it offers them a chance to really stretch themselves and work with adults who aren't teachers. Several debaters at the school have received outstanding marks in GCSE and A-Level English, to the extent of not dropping a single mark."

When asked how other schools could mirror what has been achieved at St Francis Xavier, Dr Bradley is realistic - "It's difficult for any teacher to start from scratch, in addition to the huge pressures on the time of a teacher in the public sector, the rules and forms of competitive debating can be difficult to understand. My advice would be to find someone with experience to help, even if it's just advice by email or over the phone. To have success at English school level competitions, you will need clever dedicated pupils and a teacher or coach with top level debating experience at either schools or university level, and even then it will take years. But it's important to remember that a debating club can be tremendously worthwhile for pupils, without ever becoming concerned with winning competitions."

Schools can also get help to start debating through charities such as Debate Mate and the English Speaking Union, which offer a range of support including training sessions in schools and online resources on how to set up a club.

## 4. Life skills and the workplace

With both pupils and teachers agreeing both on the importance of life skills, and the necessity to improve provision, how is this situation perceived by those meeting young people once they emerge from the education system? 94% of employers say that life skills are as or more important than academic qualifications in determining the success of young people, including almost one in three (30%) who say they are more important. When offered a list of cognitive, social and life skills that employers might seek in their own workplace, the two highest results were for communication and motivation (78% for both), followed by 71% for verbal and language skills. This held across a range of organisation sizes and sectors. It was also particularly pronounced for decision makers working in human resources departments, so it is clear that life skills are crucial for a wide variety of jobs, reflecting findings showing the increased value of social and life skills in the labour market.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 3. Attributes employers want to see in young people entering the workplace**

Skill group	Attribute	Percentage
Life skills	Communication	78%
	Motivation	78%
	Confidence	57%
	Self-control	42%
	Resilience	40%
	Coping with stress	39%
	Teamwork	59%
Cognitive skills	Verbal/language skills	71%
	Numeracy skills	68%
	Coding skills	15%

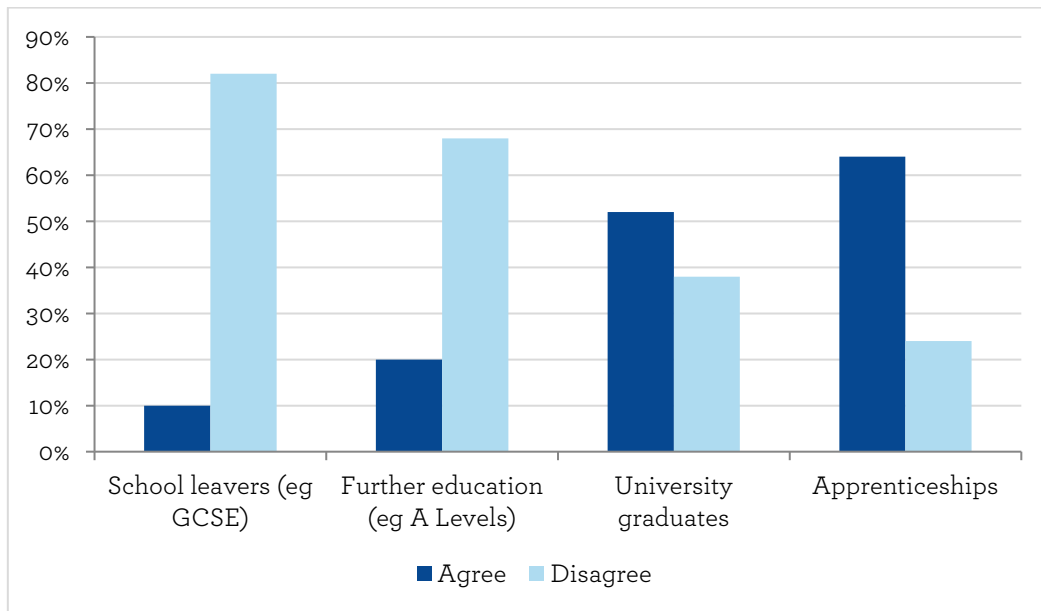
However, survey responses showed that there is currently a gap between what life skills employers say they want, and what skills they see in the young people they are recruiting. Even for university graduates, only just over half of employers (52%) agreed that they had the right skills for the workplace. For school leavers at GCSE level (10%), and A level/further education (20%) the picture is even worse. What is notable however, is that the group of young people that employers feel are most prepared are apprentices: 64% of employers felt that apprentices did have the right life skills for the workplace.

Previous Sutton Trust research has indicated that, on average, someone with a higher apprenticeship (level 5) will achieve greater lifetime earnings than from an undergraduate degree from a non-Russell Group university.<sup>28</sup> That employers perceive higher levels of workplace preparedness among apprentices than university graduates is a testament to the value of a good apprenticeship to a young person's career.

<sup>27</sup> Deming (2017)

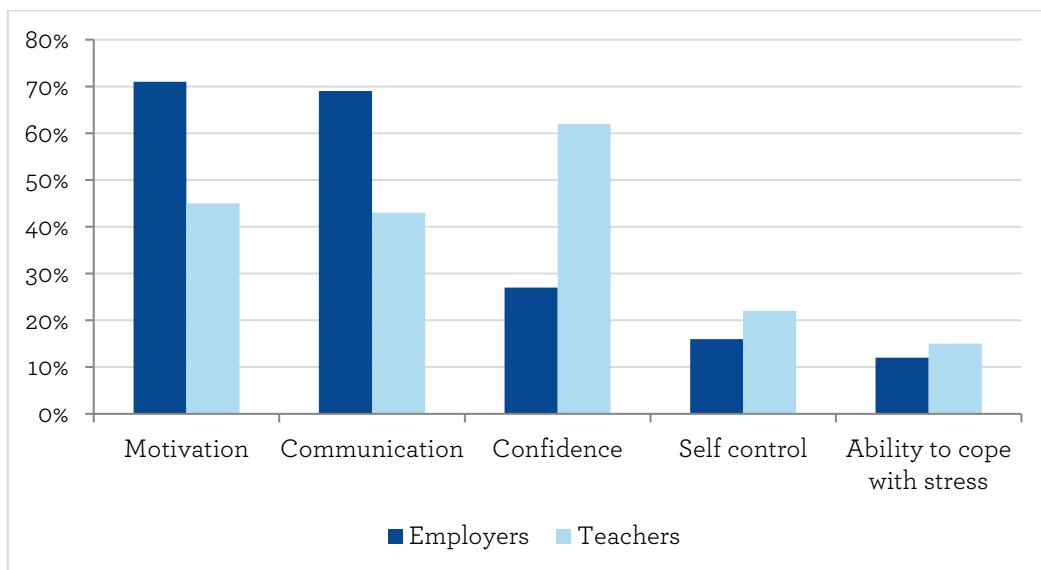
<sup>28</sup> Sutton Trust (2015) *Levels of Success*. London: Sutton Trust.

**Figure 10. Proportion of employers agreeing that young people have the required life skills for the workplace, by level of qualification**



When asked to choose which life skills should be a priority, there were some differences in emphasis between employers and teachers. While confidence was the priority for teachers, with 62% choosing it in their top two priorities, communication (69%) and motivation (71%) were the priorities for employers. This is likely to be a natural result of the different situations and priorities of the two groups, with teachers keen to give young people the confidence to approach adult life and the world of work, and employers more interested in their day-to-day motivation once they are in the workplace. Coping with stress and self-control were low in priority for both groups.

**Figure 11. Proportion of teachers and employers ranking each measure of life skills in their top priorities**

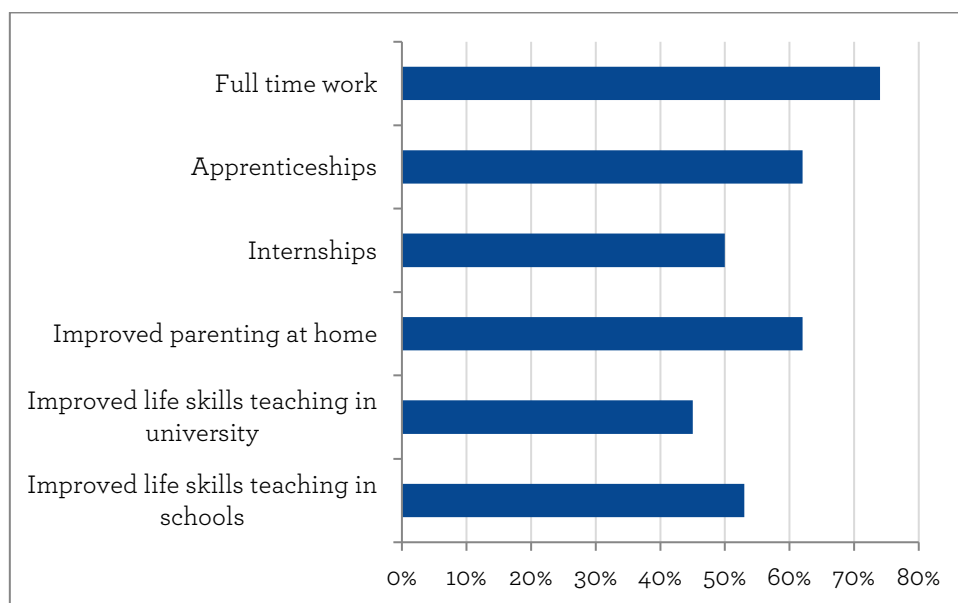


Employers were also asked for their perceptions of how the disconnect between the supply and demand for life skills could be rectified. Greater experience through full time work was highlighted by 74% of employers as something young people can do to improve their life skills, potentially reflecting

the effects of the decline of the 'Saturday afternoon job'. The number of teenagers taking on part time work while studying has halved over the last two decades, and thus young people are leaving education with significantly lower levels of hands on experience in the workplace.<sup>29</sup>

Notably, the second highest priority, chosen by 62% of employers, was that of apprenticeships. With the increasing policy focus on apprenticeships, this could help fill these skills gaps, provided they are of good quality. Additionally, as well as work and education focused measures, the home environment was also cited by 62% of respondents, who said improved parenting in the home would be of benefit, indicating that it is not just the education system that plays a role in the development of young people. However, it is this inequality in the home environment that the school system should seek to balance, by prioritising the development, motivation and confidence of those from disadvantaged backgrounds who have access to lower financial and other resources in the household.

**Figure 12. Employers perceptions of how young people can best improve their life skills**



<sup>29</sup> Independent (2015) 'Teenagers are shunning Saturday jobs as they opt for revision over riches'. Retrieved 25 September, 2017 from: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/teenagers-are-shunning-saturday-jobs-as-they-opt-for-revision-over-riches-10321335.html>



## **Case Study – Envision**

Envision is a charity which runs programmes for disadvantaged young people in Birmingham, Bristol and London. During Envision’s Community-Apprentice programme (loosely based on the reality TV show the Apprentice), teams of students develop and implement their own ideas to tackle social problems in their communities, with support from Envision coaches and business mentors. Teams then compete in an interschool competition, where they are assessed for positive impacts their project has had on the community, and on how well students on their team have developed skills including leadership, empathy, collaboration, communication and problem solving. Previous projects have focused on a wide variety of different issues, from food poverty to mental health.

Envision CEO Jennie Butterworth described the work of the charity - “We engage young people on our Year 12 programme by provoking them to tell us what makes them angry. Your average 16-year-old cares passionately about injustice. 16 year olds from disadvantaged communities care even more; many have experienced discrimination, felt the impact of gang culture or have friends facing severe food poverty. We give them the opportunity to do something about these social problems. Although we empower students to run their own social action projects, our coaches help them set realistic goals and solve their own problems so that they experience success. Business mentors provide positive feedback on their achievements and enable young people to appreciate how much the qualities and skills they demonstrate on the programme are valued by employers.”

Mariam, a student from BSix Sixth Form College who took part in the Community-Apprentice programme, said that “Envision has given me the first real opportunity I’ve ever had to put myself out there and experience building something from a mere idea to something which actually takes place. Just being able to talk to them every week and share my ideas and opinions, even if they were unrealistic and might never even come to fruition, was great as it meant that I never felt limited and wasn’t scared to just go for it.”

The Community-Apprentice programme has been tested in a randomised control trial, which found promising results for character outcomes. Based on this previous work, the EEF, with Careers and Enterprise Company and Bank of America Merrill Lynch, are currently carrying out a further evaluation of the programme to assess its impact on students’ resilience and self-efficacy, as well as whether the programme has any impact on students’ performance at GCSE.

## 5. What are the challenges for schools in supporting skill development?

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How could the educational system begin to address the workplace gap in life skills? While our results indicate there is substantial desire to do so, and room to improve, there remain significant barriers to progress. A recent Department for Education report on the issue emphasises the benefits of a whole-school approach to tackling life skills, because of their multi-dimensional aspects.<sup>30</sup> However, overall, only about half of teachers (53%) reported their school had a shared approach or policy on life skills. There is more of a shared approach at primary (59%) than at secondary (46%) schools. In secondaries, there is also a substantial gap between whether senior leaders (61%) or classroom teachers (42%) report the existence of a policy. This gap is indicative that, even in schools where there is a policy, there needs to be better communication and awareness among classroom teachers.

It is crucial that life skills education is embedded using a range of strategies in school, including in the classroom through integration with the day to day curriculum, using strategies like feedback, small group learning and collaboration. This can be complemented with extra-curricular activities, and dedicated programmes that focus on life skills, such as social and emotional learning, particularly at younger ages. However, it is important that life skills education is not relegated to discrete programmes, which may not have an evidential base of success behind them. Life skills shouldn't be regarded as an 'add on', or a tick box series of activities, but integrated as much as possible into the general curriculum and the school's ethos.

Personal, Social, Health and Economic education also has a substantial role to play. While currently not statutory, its curriculum has a welcome focus on developing the 'essential skills' of confidence, resilience, self-esteem, communications and ability to work with others.<sup>31</sup> Despite its recent decline, schools should use the resource of the PSHE curriculum to inform their life skills provision for pupils of all ages, and provide training and support to teachers in how to use this time effectively.

'All ages' is an important element of this. As indicated by the fall in pupils' perceptions of life skills provision in Years 10 and 11, one of the barriers to life skills education is the focus in secondary schools on key stage 4 exam results. Accountability mechanisms currently don't take into account the development of life skills, so when it comes to the crunch, with schools under pressure to hit targets, such provision is easier to side-line. Less than a quarter of teachers believed that their effectiveness in building pupils life skills was reflected in how their school's performance is judged.

This poses a problem for equity, as the Education Endowment Foundation points out: "good provision relies on confident heads who, largely, have attainment outcomes secure."<sup>32</sup> This means schools with high disadvantaged intakes or large proportions of low attainers cannot afford the time or resources to focus on life skills, perhaps for the pupils that would have the most to gain. The inspection and accountability system is often portrayed as a source of frustration for teachers. In that context, it is perhaps a surprising finding that substantial numbers of teachers were in favour of measuring and reporting on pupils' progress in relation to life skills, with most teachers in favour of including life skills in formative feedback to parents as part of a report card (49%), reporting on progress in order to learn from other schools (54%), and including life skills progress in how schools are judged (49%). Majorities of senior leaders were also in favour of all three.

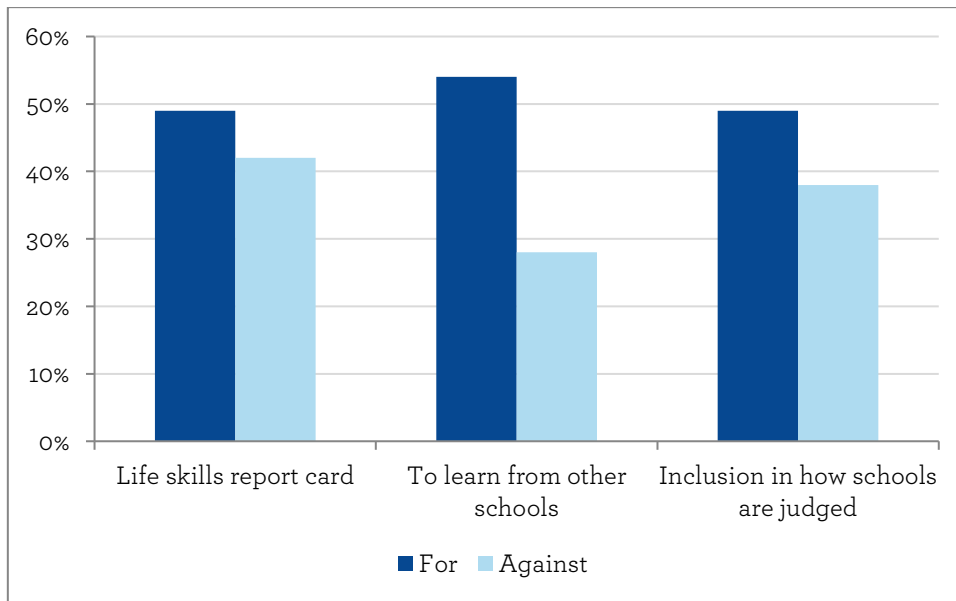
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<sup>30</sup> DfE (2017)

<sup>31</sup> PSHE Association (2017)

<sup>32</sup> EEF (2016) *Essential Skills Taskforce Update*. London: EEF. (p1)

Figure 13. Teachers' perception of different types of life skills measurement and accountability



However, measurement and inclusion of life skills in the school accountability system pose substantial challenges, both technical and practical. There is no consensus on a practical way of measuring life skills development that could be used as an accurate and reliable yardstick of progress. Nonetheless, there are other ways that life skills could be integrated into judgements of schools, including through the inspection process, where schools could be rewarded for policies, planning and activities that actively promote the development of life skills in a whole-school approach, while avoiding turning it into a 'tick box' exercise. This would provide a powerful incentive to developing this area of young people's education.

Another challenge is the availability of information. Only 13% of teachers knew of information sources where they could find help on how best to develop students' life skills. This is a substantial barrier to improved life skills education. Of those who specified, most found networking with other schools, websites and mindset materials the most useful sources of advice. However, it is clear that there needs to be a focus on access to support and materials that teachers and school leaders can use to most effectively improve the focus on life skills in school. The Department for Education has identified the lack of a database of approaches as a key weakness for their 'character' agenda, and an approach to tackle this would be very welcome. In partnership with Ofsted and the sector, there should be more collaboration to provide guidance and resources for teachers who wish to implement life skills strategies in their lessons. The Sutton Trust-EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit can form a key element of this, highlighting the most effective and cost-efficient interventions. Greater promotion and signposting is also important to raise awareness of what can be done.

## 6. Conclusion

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Our surveys show wide recognition of the importance of developing young people's wider skills from employers, teachers and young people themselves. These skills can play a substantial role in the 'flourishing' of an individual, from education to the workplace and beyond. However, there are problems with the supply of such skills among young people entering the workplace, with large numbers of employers saying that school leavers and university graduates alike are not equipped with the life skills they want to see in young applicants. Nevertheless, there is recognition and an increasing movement among school leaders and teachers to address this shortfall in the state school system. Teachers report life skills provision as having improved in recent years, but agree that more needs to be done. Yet barriers remain, including a lack of school-level coordination, lack of access to information, and the challenges of providing a well-rounded education while also adequately preparing for important academic exams.

There is substantial room for improvement in schools, with increasing evidence of programmes that work for the development of life skills, including classroom strategies, social action and volunteering activities, social and emotional learning activities and structured after-school clubs. Crucial to improving the development of these skills is a 'whole school' approach, with the importance of life skills embedded in the day-to-day curriculum, alongside a variety of extra-curricular activities and dedicated programmes. Consistency is vital to reinforcing this ethos, as well as maintaining age-appropriate provision at all stages, including for young people in their later years of schooling.

There are some notes of caution however. As the EEF has emphasised, there remains a lack of evidence demonstrating a causal relationship between academic success and life skills.<sup>33</sup> There are also questions around the extent to which 'character' traits are malleable and can be taught, or, conversely, which are stable personality traits. However, greater life skills have been consistently associated with better attainment outcomes, and there is evidence that many life skills can be improved with the right interventions at the right age, both in school, and in the early years.

There is also the danger that efforts to develop life skills are treated as separate from rather than integral to curriculum learning, or that extra-curricular activities are seen as a softer option: such skills should complement the acquisition of knowledge, not substitute for it. It is vital for schools and teachers to recognise that emphasis on academic results and wider skills is not an either/or question, but one of approach. As success in the two tend to go hand in hand, with the use of carefully selected strategies and approaches based on evidence, it should be possible to improve both.

However, one of the significant challenges which remains is addressing the socio-economic gaps in access to life skills development. The independent sector has long had an advantage over the state sector in the resources and attention it can give to the development of 'character' among pupils. But there are also inequalities within the state system itself. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to engage in the extra-curricular activities that can be invaluable for their wider development, and are more likely to attend schools with lower levels of extra-curricular provision. This is something that needs to be rectified, as every young person deserves the opportunity to develop themselves more broadly through their education.

This is crucial to improving access to the top professions which seek such skills. However, research has suggested that the 'soft skills' sought by some employers, such as 'poise' and 'polish' are often defined

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<sup>33</sup> Gutman and Schoon (2013)

in such a way as to be socially exclusive.<sup>34</sup> From the perspective of improving equality of opportunity in the labour market, this would raise a concern that, in some cases, it is not the skills *per se* that are being sought, but the indicators of high socio-economic status. Elite groups are adaptable to social change, and when even shoe colour can be used to distinguish between candidates,<sup>35</sup> the democratisation of life skills could see employers in elite professions shifting their criteria in a way that limits the effects on social mobility. This means that an agenda to increase the wider skills of all young people must be accompanied by further developments in the workplace to discourage discrimination based on socio-economic background, and to focus on the tangible skills that will maximise an employee's ability to do their job. With these important accompaniments, this approach can mean life skills education can act as a driver for greater opportunity and social mobility, rather than a basis for stratification it has been too often until now.

### **About the report**

Carl Cullinane is Research and Policy Manager at the Sutton Trust.

Rebecca Montacute is Research Fellow at the Sutton Trust.

Surveys of young people, employers and teachers were co-funded with the Education Endowment Foundation.



<sup>34</sup> Ashley et al (2015) *A qualitative evaluation of non-educational barriers to the elite professions*. London: Social Mobility Commission.

<sup>35</sup> The 'Brown shoes effect', as explored in Ashley et al (2015)

The Sutton Trust  
9th Floor  
Millbank Tower  
21-24 Millbank  
London, SW1P 4QP

T: 020 7802 1660

F: 020 7802 1661

E: [info@suttontrust.com](mailto:info@suttontrust.com)

W: [www.suttontrust.com](http://www.suttontrust.com)

Twitter: [@suttontrust](https://twitter.com/suttontrust)

