

# Children's University

Review: November 2019

**Note on provider involvement:** This provider has agreed to EIF's terms of reference, and the assessment has been conducted and published with the full cooperation of the programme provider.

**Children's University (CU) is a universal school-based programme for children between the ages of 5 and 14. It is delivered in and outside of school and aims to improve children's aspirations, attainment, and skills by offering learning activities beyond the normal school day.**

Children's University works with learning providers and activity leaders and encourages participation in learning and 'social action' activities such as after-school clubs, visits to universities and museums, and volunteering in the community.

The programme is delivered universally and aims to have children complete at least 30 hours of activity per year. Activities are delivered by a variety of approved learning providers, such as museums, theatres and universities. Participation in activities is rewarded through credits, certificates, and a 'graduation' event attended by parents.

---

Evidence  
rating: 2

---

Cost rating: 1

---

# EIF Programme Assessment

Children's University has **preliminary evidence** of improving a child outcome, but we cannot be confident that the programme caused the improvement.

---

Evidence  
rating: **2**

## What does the evidence rating mean?

**Level 2** indicates that the programme has evidence of improving a child outcome from a study involving at least 20 participants, representing 60% of the sample, using validated instruments.

This programme does not receive a rating of 3 as its best evidence is not from a rigorously conducted RCT or QED evaluation.

---

## Cost rating

A rating of 1 indicates that a programme has a low cost to set up and deliver, compared with other interventions reviewed by EIF. This is equivalent to an estimated unit cost of less than £100.

---

Cost rating: **1**

---

## Child outcomes

According to the best available evidence for this programme's impact, it can achieve the following positive outcomes for children:

### Enhancing school achievement & employment

#### Improved maths achievement

Based on study 1

#### Improved reading achievement

Based on study 1

---

# Key programme characteristics

## Who is it for?

The best available evidence for this programme relates to the following age-groups:

- Primary school
- 

## How is it delivered?

The best available evidence for this programme relates to implementation through these delivery models:

- Group
- 

## Where is it delivered?

The best available evidence for this programme relates to its implementation in these settings:

- Primary school

The programme may also be delivered in these settings:

---

## How is it targeted?

The best available evidence for this programme relates to its implementation as:

- Universal
- 

## Where has it been implemented?

Australia, China, England, New Zealand, Scotland

---

## UK provision

This programme has been implemented in the UK.

---

## UK evaluation

This programme's best evidence includes evaluation conducted in the UK.

---

## Spotlight sets

EIF includes this programme in the following Spotlight sets:

- school based social emotional learning
-

---

# About the programme

## What happens during delivery?

### How is it delivered?

- The aim of Children's University is to deliver at least 30 hours of activity per year. The programme is delivered to pupils both in and out of school by a range of practitioners including school staff, and staff facilitating visits to museums and community centres. Some activities are self-led at home or online.

## What happens during the intervention?

- Children signed up to Children's University select the activities they wish to attend, with the target of completing at least 30 hours of activity per year.
- The activities are all pre-validated and recognised by Children's University as being of a certain quality and containing elements of structured learning.
- Some examples of CU activities are after-school clubs, visits to museums and community centres, and activities that are self-led at home or online.
- Children are issued with a 'Passport to Learning' and collect stamps for participation in activities.
- Children's achievements are typically celebrated at an end-of-term graduation ceremony.

## What are the implementation requirements?

### Who can deliver it?

- Every school that signs up to its local Children's University will have one lead teacher who coordinates the programme. The practitioner can be a Newly Qualified Teacher or a senior member of staff supported by teaching assistants.
- The practitioner spends around 50 hours a year coordinating the programme.

## **What are the training requirements?**

- There are no training requirements. However, typically practitioners will spend anything from a couple of hours to a full day with their local Children's University Manager to help coordinate the programme.

## **How are the practitioners supervised?**

- Practitioners are supported by their local Children's University Manager.
- Children's University Manager work within the education sector and are employed by local organisations. They are coordinated by Children's University Trust.
- The local Children's University Manager generally validates local public activities, organises graduation ceremonies and supports school staff.

## **What are the systems for maintaining fidelity?**

Programme fidelity is maintained through the following processes:

- The local Children's University Manager validates public activities to confirm they meet certain standards.

## **Is there a licensing requirement?**

Yes, there is a licence required to run this programme.

## How does it work? (Theory of Change)

### How does it work?

- The universal, school-based programme is designed to increase children's school success and a broad range of essential skills by promoting positive identification with school, self-confidence and resilience.
- Extra-curricular activities have been shown to be able to increase positive identification with school and build self-confidence and resilience.
- In the short term, the programme aims to increase attainment in maths and reading, improve confidence and self-belief and improve essential skills.
- In the long term, the programme aims to improve future life chances and aspirations.

### Intended outcomes

Enhancing school achievement & employment

### Contact details

Children's University [contactus@childrensuniversity.co.uk](mailto:contactus@childrensuniversity.co.uk)

[www.childrensuniversity.co.uk](http://www.childrensuniversity.co.uk)

---

## About the evidence

Children's University's most rigorous evidence comes from a cluster RCT which was conducted in the UK.

This study identified statistically significant positive impact on a number of children.

This programme is underpinned by one study with a Level 2, hence the programme receives a Level 2 rating overall.



## Study 1

**Citation:** Gorard et al., 2017; Siddiqui et al., 2019

---

**Design:** Cluster RCT

---

**Country:** United Kingdom

---

**Sample:** 1200 children enrolled in Year 5 in North England schools

---

**Timing:** Post-test

---

**Child outcomes:**

- Improved maths achievement
  - Improved reading achievement
- 

**Other outcomes:**

- None measured
- 

**Study rating:** 2

Gorard, S., Siddiqui, N., See, B. H., Smith, E., & White, P. (2017). "Children's University: Evaluation Report and Executive Summary". *Education Endowment Foundation*.

**Available at** <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED581159.pdf>

Siddiqui, N., Gorard, S., & See, B. H. (2019). "Can learning beyond the classroom impact on social responsibility and academic attainment? An evaluation of the Children's University youth social action programme". *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 61, 74-82.

**Available at** [www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0191491X1830292X](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0191491X1830292X)

**Study design and sample**

The first study is an RCT.

This study involved random assignment of children to a CU treatment group and a business as usual group.

This study was conducted in the UK, with a sample of children aged between 8 and 9 enrolled in Year 4 in North England schools. 39% of the children in the sample were eligible for free school meals.

**Measures**

Maths attainment was measured using Maths KS2 (achievement test)

Reading attainment was measured using Reading KS2 (achievement test)

**Findings**

This study identified statistically significant positive impact on a number of child outcomes.

This includes Maths KS2 and Reading KS2.

The conclusions that can be drawn from this study are limited by methodological issues pertaining to non-equivalent groups, and the treatment condition not being modelled at the level of assignment, hence why a higher rating is not achieved.

## Other studies

The following studies were identified for this programme but did not count towards the programme's overall evidence rating. A programme receives the same rating as its most robust study or studies.

Hamshaw, K. (2017). Sheffield Children's University. How does it make a difference? Evidencing the impact of out of school learning accredited and celebrated by Children's University in Sheffield - **This reference refers to a mixed-methods study, conducted in the UK.**

MacBeath, J. (2013). Evaluating provision, progress and quality of learning in the Children's University. Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, Cambridge - **This reference refers to a quasi-experimental design, conducted in the UK.**

MacBeath, J., & Waterhouse, J. (2008). Evaluation of the Children's University: First Report. Cambridge: University of Cambridge - **This reference refers to a process evaluation, conducted in the UK.**

MacBeath, J. (2011). Evaluation of the Children's University 2010. Manchester: National Children's University - This reference refers to a quasi-experimental design, conducted in the UK.

O'Donnell. (2017). UFA Young Researchers and Evaluators Impact Report.

Rose, P., & Rose, C. (2018). Black Country Children's University Evaluation Report. Tiller Research Ltd - **This reference refers to a mixed-methods study, conducted in the UK.**

Ooi, C.S., and Shelley, B. (2018). "Tourism, cultural capital and the transformational power of education: Lessons from the children's university Tasmania." CAUTHE 2018: Get Smart: Paradoxes and Possibilities in Tourism, Hospitality and Events Education and Research, 596.

---

## Guidebook

The EIF Guidebook provides information about early intervention programmes that have at least preliminary evidence of achieving positive outcomes for children. It provides information based on EIF's assessment of the strength of evidence for a programme's effectiveness, and on detail about programmes shared with us by those who design, run and deliver them.

The Guidebook serves an important starting point for commissioners to find out more about effective early interventions, and for programme providers to find out more about what good evidence of impact looks like and how it can be captured. As just one of our key resources for commissioners and practitioners, the Guidebook is an essential part of EIF's work to support the development of and investment in effective early intervention programmes.

Our assessment of the evidence for a programme's effectiveness can inform and support certain parts of a commissioning decision, but it is not a substitute for professional judgment. Evidence about what has worked in the past offers no guarantee that an approach will work in all circumstances. Crucially, the Guidebook is not a market comparison website: ratings and other information should not be interpreted as a specific recommendation, kite mark or endorsement for any programme.

---

[How to read the Guidebook](#)

---

[EIF evidence standards](#)

---

[About the EIF Guidebook](#)

---

---

## EIF

The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) is an independent charity and a member of the What Works network. We support the use of effective early intervention for children, young people and their families: identifying signals of risk, and responding with effective interventions to improve outcomes, reduce hardship and save the public money in the long term.

We work by generating evidence and knowledge of what works in our field, putting this information in the hands of commissioners, practitioners and policymakers, and supporting the adoption of the evidence in local areas and relevant sectors.

---

[www.EIF.org.uk](http://www.EIF.org.uk) | [@TheEIFoundation](https://twitter.com/TheEIFoundation)

---

10 Salamanca Place, London SE1 7HB | +44 (0)20 3542 2481

---

## Disclaimer

The EIF Guidebook is designed for the purposes of making available general information in relation to the matters discussed in the documents. Use of this document signifies acceptance of our legal disclaimers which set out the extent of our liability and which are incorporated herein by reference. To access our legal disclaimers regarding our website, documents and their contents, please visit [eif.org.uk/terms-conditions/](http://eif.org.uk/terms-conditions/). You can request a copy of the legal disclaimers by emailing [info@eif.org.uk](mailto:info@eif.org.uk) or writing to us at Early Intervention Foundation, 10 Salamanca Place, London SE1 7HB.