Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology

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What do additional school activities offer to pupils in secondary schools? A research study examining the views of young people and school staff.

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Declaration

I, Zeta Meheux, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

Additional school activities, including extra-curricular and enrichment activities are offered in many secondary schools in England. The study aimed to examine the value of additional school activities in English secondary schools, as less is known about activities in this context, as well as identifying perceived barriers to participation. Much of the existing literature base in England focuses on primary schools and university settings. The study also sought to understand the opportunities young people have to access such additional school activities and their motivations to participate. This single-case study involved conducting two student focus groups with a total of 9 students who were in Year 10 and a focus group with 4 members of school staff. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the focus group data.

Findings highlighted that whilst students could engage in a range of activities, there could be more on offer to them; particularly for students in Key Stage 4. Furthermore, current participation levels appeared to be low. Motivators to engagement in activities included having passion and enjoyment of activities and having positive relationships with staff. There were a number of perceived benefits associated with additional school activities, including supporting academic achievement and social development. Barriers to participation related to the times that activities took place during the day as well as growing academic pressures limiting students' availability to engage in activities.

The study highlighted the value that schools may find in reviewing their current provision around additional school activities. Schools may benefit from considering how students can have more involvement and collaboration in how activities are organised and delivered, including the opportunity for some student-led activities. There are implications for EPs in how they can support schools to develop, evaluate and refine their provision in order to ensure that it is accessible, engaging and motivating for students to attend.

Impact Statement

This study explored the perceived value of additional school activities within an English secondary school context and revealed both some of the promise and challenges potentially associated with provision. The research demonstrated that while students have access to a range of activities, the majority of these opportunities are adult-led and structured. In contrast, student-led initiatives were limited, with participants reporting that the activities largely reflected adult preferences rather than the interests of young people. Furthermore, the research highlighted some disparity between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 provision. Younger students benefitted from a more varied range of activities, whereas older students experienced a narrowing of options, compounded by increased academic pressures and a shift in activity focus reflecting this. The study indicated that positive relationships between students and staff can enhance engagement; however, these relationships also acted as a barrier when staff were perceived less favourably by students. The findings point to the potential need for a more inclusive and collaborative approach—one that incorporates student voice in the planning and delivery of activities—to better align provision with the diverse interests and needs of secondary school pupils.

The findings of this study have implications for schools and Educational Psychologists (EPs), which are as follows:

For schools:

- The findings offer some guidance on how to reflect on current practices to better meet the needs of their students. Schools are encouraged to review and widen the range of activities to ensure they reflect the diverse interests of the student body.

- By actively gathering and responding to student and staff feedback, schools can continually adapt and evolve their offer so that activities remain relevant and meaningful for students.
- Schools would benefit from increasing opportunities for student-led activities, where young people play a more active role in the delivery of activities.
- Enhancing collaboration between students and staff and in the planning, delivery and evaluation process around additional school activities can ensure that activities address the needs and priorities of both groups.

For EPs:

- By applying theories around motivation, development and learning, such as Self-Determination Theory, EPs can support staff to understand how principles relating to autonomy, competence and relatedness can contribute to developing an offer that aligns with student interests, and in turn increase levels of participation.
- EPs can work with schools to develop their awareness around the potential benefits of additional school activities. In light of this, EPs can advocate for participation in such activities for young people; including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- EPs can support schools in establishing processes to evaluate their provision of additional school activities and respond to feedback.

List of Abbreviations

DfE   Department for Education

EP(s)   Educational Psychologist(s)

GCSEs   General Certificate in Secondary Education

KS3   Key Stage 3

KS4   Key Stage 4

LA   Local Authority

Ofsted   Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

SDT   Self-Determination Theory

SEND   Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SES   Socio-Economic Status

SLT   Senior Leadership Team

UK   United Kingdom

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

Additional school activities, including extra-curricular and enrichment activities are offered in many secondary schools in England (Donnelly et al., 2019; Education Policy Institute (EPI), 2024). Research recognises the potential of such activities in supporting adolescents' social, emotional, and academic development (see section 2.4). However, their perceived value in the context of English secondary schools is less understood. A growing body of research suggests that participation in such activities can foster a sense of belonging, improve wellbeing, and enhance motivation and engagement for learning in school (Centre for Social Justice, 2021; Knifsend & Graham, 2012). At the same time, students often experience limited autonomy throughout the school day, even when it's supposed to be their "free time." This seems to be part of a broader trend where schools are becoming more structured and adult-led, which can restrict students' sense of agency and decision making. Additional school activities offer a potential opportunity for students to exercise greater independence and make meaningful choices about how they spend their time both during and after school.

There have been initiatives employed to widen access to additional school activities (Bertram et al., 2017; Donnelly et al., 2019), but there is variation in what this looks like in secondary schools and how much students partake in these activities. Additionally, there appears to be a disconnect between how students and staff perceive the role and value of these activities, and whether they are considered an important part of the educational experience for young people. Understanding these perceptions is key in establishing the value of additional school activities and how this can support schools to develop a provision of additional school activities that is both engaging and can support the holistic development of young people. This study seeks to explore the opportunities students have to engage in additional school activities. It also aims to find out their motivations to attend and the perceived value and barriers to participation, from the perspectives of students and school staff.

1.2 Defining Additional School Activities

There are inconsistencies in the terminology used within existing literature that describes the types of activities that secondary school students can access outside of formal lesson time. Some refer to these as extra-curricular activities, others as enrichment activities. Some distinctions can be made (see table 1) with the literature characterising them differently based on when they occur, their formality, structure, level of adult involvement and the type of content included.

In the context of secondary schools, extra-curricular activities are generally understood to be voluntary, non-academic pursuits that take place outside of the standard school timetable—typically during lunch breaks or after school (Bartkus et al., 2012; Bertram et al., 2017; Knifsend & Graham, 2012). They tend to be less formal than academic lessons and often centre around students' personal interests, such as sports, drama or music (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; OECD, 2010). Adults at school act as supervisors or facilitators, supporting but not dominating the activity (Mahoney et al., 2006). Enrichment activities, on the other hand, are usually more formally embedded into the school's broader educational offer and are often curriculum-related or designed to deepen students' understanding of subject matter (Schiever & Maker, 2003). These may take place both during the school day or outside normal school hours (Larson & Verma, 1999). Enrichment activities are typically more structured (Reis & Peters, 2021) and goal-driven, often with clear learning outcomes. These activities often involve active facilitation by school staff and are designed to stretch high-attaining students or engage those who might benefit from additional challenge (Archer et al., 2014).

Although this is broadly how the two terms are differentiated, inconsistencies remain within the literature. In light of there being no agreed definitions, this research did not want to exclude one type of activity as the study seeks to understand all types of activities that students in secondary school have access to. Therefore, the term

"*additional school activities*" has been devised to encompass a range of different activities that students may have the opportunity to access, including what literature refers to as extra-curricular and enrichment activities.

Table 1 – Differentiating extra-curricular and enrichment activities

	Extra-curricular Activities	**Enrichment Activities**
Definition	Voluntary academic or non-academic activities which sit outside of the main curriculum that young people can do during their leisure time (Bartkus et al., 2012; Bertram et al., 2017; Knifsend & Graham, 2012).	Aim to extend, supplement and enhance the curriculum (Subotnik et al., 2011; Renzulli et al., 2021) providing more depth and breadth than is offered within the main curriculum that occur during or beyond school hours (Larson & Verna, 1999)
Purpose	Personal development, social engagement, leisure, and interests beyond academics (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005)	Deepen understanding, extend subject knowledge, provide academic challenge (Archer et al., 2014; Schiever & Maker, 2003)
Structure	Range in formality, can be optional, student-led or adult-supervised (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Mahoney et al, 2006)	More formal; organised and often adult-led (Reis & Peters, 2021).
Examples	Activities linked to sports, music, performing arts, chess club, volunteering	Specialised academic activities (e.g. robotics or computer club), science project club, subject-specific competitions

In the context of this study, additional school activities are defined as activities which students have access to, that take place on the school premises outside of formal and compulsory lesson time (before school, during break/lunch times, after school).

- Students can do these activities individually or in a group
- Activities may be free to students, or ones they (or their parents/carers) may have to pay for

- Students may be invited to engage in these activities by adults, or it may be optional for them to do
- The activities may be organised by adults, or something that students organise amongst themselves

The breadth of activities includes those linked to sport, the creative arts (e.g. music, drama, dance, drawing) as well as academic subjects and those linked to other interests that students may have.

The researcher acknowledged the difficulties in establishing a clear term that can be universally understood by those within education and beyond. Throughout the development of this research, various terms were considered to describe the activities secondary school students engage in beyond the standard curriculum. Terms such as *"optional wider curricular activities," "optional clubs and activities at school"* and *"optional non-curricular activities"* were explored for their inclusivity and applicability. Among these, *"optional wider curricular activities"* emerged as a potentially useful, comprehensive term that reflects both curricular and non-curricular activities. However, in recognition of consistency and fidelity to the language employed during the research process, the term *"additional school activities"* will be used throughout this thesis. This term aligns with the terminology used by participants and in data collection instruments, ensuring clarity and coherence in presenting the findings.

1.3 Background and Context

Some schools offer additional school activities during the free time available to young people during the school day. According to OECD data (OECD, 2010), students in the UK (United Kingdom) have more extra-curricular activities available to them compared to other OECD countries such as Denmark, Norway and Switzerland. UK research on enrichment activities focuses on younger children (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2014) and those in higher education (Buckley & Lee, 2021). Internationally, the literature on

enrichment activities for adolescents has focused on those students who are considered to be "gifted" (Reis & Renzulli, 2021; Tan et al., 2020). Not much is therefore known about the nature of the additional school activities offered more widely to students in UK secondary schools. This includes what contribution they may have to the development of young people.

Understanding the potential of additional school activities from the perspectives of young people is key to ensuring these activities are meaningful and aligned with their interests. Engaging school staff in the conversation provides essential insights into logistical considerations and strategic planning of activities as well as offering suggestions on how the provision can be enhanced. Involving young people more in the planning of additional school activities can give them a sense of choice and autonomy. At a time when the mental health and wellbeing of young people is a priority in England (Hamilton, 2024; YoungMinds, 2022), engaging in meaningful activities may contribute to positive wellbeing as well as the development and overall school experience of young people.

1.3.1 Political and Legislative Context

Politically in England, enrichment was high on the agenda of successive Labour governments from the late 1990s and has become a focus once more of recent Conservative government in the 2010s**.** This renewed focus may be in part due to a decline in young people, including adolescents, attending and engaging in after school activities (Baines & Blatchford, 2019).

The Labour government of 1997-2010 supported schools providing enrichment activities (Cummings et al., 2011; Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson 2012). As part of the Every Child Matters agenda, with the following outcomes for young people (to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, achieve economic wellbeing) were proposed. With this in mind, the Labour government rolled out the "Extended Services

in School" programme between 2003 and 2010 in England and Wales. This offered a variety of different activities (study support, play/recreation, sport, music, arts and craft and other special interest clubs, volunteering and business and enterprise activities).

Whilst enrichment activities were less of a focus for the coalition government of 2010-2015 (Cummings et al., 2011; Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson 2012), recent Conservative governments have had enrichment activities on their agenda, pledging in 2019 (Conservatives UK) to an 'arts premium' to support secondary schools to provide enriching activities for all students. The Essential Life Skills Programme was delivered by the government in 2018-19 aimed at increasing extra-curricular activities (including sports, arts, debating and information technology) in schools in disadvantaged areas. Evaluation of the programme (Department for Education (DfE), 2020) involved online surveys with providers delivering the projects including schools and colleges, consultations with area representatives who had a responsibility for overseeing the programme in their local area (comprised of staff from local authorities and the DfE). The surveys and consultations were both carried out in two waves: the first focusing on early implementation and the second reflecting on delivery and outcomes of the programme. Furthermore, the evaluation also included focus groups (n=240) with pupils both who participated (along with their parents/carers) in addition to those who did not participate in the programme, and analysing attendance data for the programme.

Survey responses from programme providers (n=172) suggested that young people's confidence, resilience, team working, and social emotional skills had improved. Schools and area representatives also reported improvements in behaviour, attendance and aspirations. These positive outcomes that relate both to individual students and to wider-school issues provide reasons for encouragement and support for why secondary schools should be focusing on enrichment activities. However, as the evaluation measured short-term outcomes, it is difficult to know whether the benefits of the programme were sustained or whether young people need to be engaged in enrichment

activities for a longer and more consistent period of time for these outcomes to be long-term.

The Centre for Social Justice Report (2021) called on the government to provide further funding support for an enrichment programme in schools. The government aimed to follow up on the success of 'Essential Life Skills' Programme by piloting a new programme; The Enrichment Partnerships Pilot commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2023) in partnership with the DfE. Running from 2023-2025, the pilot aimed to improve access and participation of enrichment activities for students in up to 200 secondary schools in the North West, North East and East of England. It planned to do this by working with organisations in order to provide centralised enrichment support for schools without incurring extra resources or costs. The enrichment activities included sports and arts activities as well as experiences volunteering and being outdoors. The pilot is currently being evaluated, but the emphasis placed on enrichment activities may reflect an acknowledgment of their value (Vincent & Ball, 2007).

In Ofsted's most recent published guidance on school inspections (Ofsted, 2024) 'personal development' is included as part of its inspection framework. There is an emphasis on young people being prepared for future success, developing character and independence as well as confidence and resilience in relation to their mental health. Given the many benefits that will be discussed later (see section 2.4), as well as the limited opportunities within formal learning that afford young people the chance to gain such skills, additional school activities are potentially one way that schools can be working towards achieving this. The framework also notes that schools will have to evidence that they offer a wide range and high quality of extra-curricular activities which are taken up by students. Furthermore, for schools to be considered as outstanding in the area of personal development, students, in particular those who are disadvantaged, should access to exceptional provision that allows them to develop their talents and

interests. Additional school activities therefore may support the monitoring processes that schools need to adhere to.

1.3.2 Policy Around Extending the School Day

In England, policies around the school day and extended activities have been developed to enhance educational opportunities and support student development. In 2012, the DfE published a review into the Extended Schools Programme that aimed to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged students by providing additional support beyond regular school hours (DfE, 2012). This included sports, arts, and drama activities, breakfast and homework clubs and community engagement programmes. The review highlighted that these activities contributed to improved student engagement and academic performance. This extended provision, offered additional support and engagement beyond the traditional curriculum.

The DfE's 2023 guidance (DfE, 2023a) established an expectation for all state-funded mainstream schools to provide a school week of at least 32.5 hours, encompassing teaching time, breaks, and enrichment activities within the regular school day. The guidance encourages schools to use the core school day to incorporate additional school activities into the school day to promote a well-rounded educational experience which goes beyond traditional learning. A review of the length of the school day by the EPI (2024) suggested that non-academic extra-curricular activities are an effective use of additional time at school, noting the positive impact on academic achievement as well as contribute to young people's holistic development and wellbeing.

1.4 Research Rationale

Additional school activities have the potential to address a number of issues currently facing schools such as attendance and engagement, and the broader re-envisioning of

education beyond academic outcomes (Baines & Blatchford, 2023). Potential benefits relating to individual outcomes will be discussed in a later chapter (see section 2.4).

1.4.1 Attendance and Engagement

Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) has become a significant issue for schools in recent years. Data from the DfE (2023b) identified that 21.2% of pupils were persistently absent in the 2022-23 academic year, an increase from the 10.9% who were persistently absent in the 2018-19 academic year. Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic may be a contributing factor to this increase, there is an impetus for schools to be prioritising creating a school environment that young people not only want to attend but can also thrive whilst they are there. Being involved in additional school activities can provide a sense of belonging and purpose for some young people who may find it difficult to attend school. Activities can therefore be a motivating reason to attend school.

There is some evidence suggesting that additional school activities have the potential to support young people's engagement in school (Fredricks & Eccles 2005; Knifsend & Graham, 2012), which in turn could improve school attendance and lower the risk of young people dropping out of school (Stearns & Glennie, 2010). The Centre for Social Justice report (2021) refers to data from the 'Extended Services in School' programme (DfE, 2010) in which 1,500 schools extended their school days, which included offering activities including sport, music, arts/crafts, study support, volunteering and business/enterprise activities. Evaluation of the "Extended Services in School" programme (DfE, 2010) drew on telephone surveys of 1500 schools, postal surveys of over 350 schools, face-to-face surveys of over 2250 parents and 1300 pupils. Qualitative case studies of 10 schools as well as longitudinal case studies in a further 20 schools and qualitative case studies also formed part of the evaluation. The evaluation data found that schools reported improvements in both attendance and in pupil engagement in learning, as well as reducing exclusion rates in schools. However,

as this was based mainly on staff perceptions, there was limited evidence regarding the specific mechanisms through which these activities contributed to the reported improvements.

More recent research conducted by the Centre for Young Lives (2025) addressed this shortcoming and may provide further evidence for the suggestion that additional school activities could support school engagement. This research looked into whether there was a link between a good enrichment offer and attendance. The research included case studies of 7 schools across England (composed of observations of enrichment activities, interviews with school leaders and enrichment leaders/practitioners and focus groups/individual interviews with young people) as well as speaking with an advisory group of professionals and youth advisory panel. The research revealed that students with low attendance were more likely to attend school on days when their favourite activity or club was scheduled. Young people also expressed a clear preference for enrichment activities over the standard school day. However, there was limited understanding of the specific aspects of these activities that made them more appealing or impactful compared to the traditional school day or classroom learning. This could be something that future research investigates. The EPI (2024) report also recognised the potential a well-designed extended school day programme could have in contributing to improving school attendance. Furthermore, additional school activities have been noted to contribute to improved attitudes towards learning, which can in turn have a positive impact on attendance (Ofsted, 2024).

Attendance issues are complex and shaped by a range of different factors, and as such, a multifaceted approach is needed in tackling this. The provision of additional school activities may represent one valuable component, with research indicating that activities offer opportunities to enhance pupil engagement, sense of belonging, and motivation to attend.

There are views that the education system in its current form has a narrow academic focus which may be neglecting some opportunities for a more holistic vision of education with creativity, collaboration and wellbeing at its heart (Keddie, 2012; McGregor, 2018). Additional school activities could provide some of this through a platform where academic skills can be developed through hands-on, creative and collaborative projects whilst cultivating soft skills such as leadership, communication, and critical thinking. Evidence from Bertram et al. (2017) indicated that diverse learning opportunities can spark innovation and adaptability, preparing students more effectively for the challenges of modern society. Rogers and McGrath (2021) also propose that extra-curricular activities are one way that can contribute to students being able to engage in an education which involves real-world contexts. Furthermore, the OECD's Learning Compass 2030 (OECD, 2019) advocates for agency, wellbeing and lifelong learning to be the focus of future oriented education models. Additional school activities could provide a space for these values and skills to be promoted and developed and offer a more creative educational experience for young people.

1.5 Autonomy and Choice

Students have little autonomy and choice within many aspects of their lives with Baines and Blatchford (2019) suggesting there may be a culture whereby young people's lives are increasingly managed and controlled for them both within and outside of school. Autonomy is defined as an individual being able to control their life and having "*a choice and a voice*" (British Psychological Society, 2022). Autonomy is known to be related to positive wellbeing (Shucksmith et al., 2009; The Good Childhood Report, 2015; 2023). Being involved with decisions at school can make a valuable contribution to mental health (Leurent et al., 2021).

Many contexts within the school environment are organised and led by adults, which could indicate that schools offer little opportunity for young people to make decisions for

themselves or to explore self-chosen activities. Young people are required to attend school and have a very limited choice over the subjects they study as many are compulsory throughout their secondary education. Furthermore, students have to engage with the curriculum (whether they have an interest in what's being taught or not) and on the rare occasions where there is any sort of opportunity for choice e.g. text to study or syllabus, this has been decided by their teachers.

This presents a picture of young people lacking autonomy and choice within their education and would suggest that they need to be given back some sense of this in order to feel like they have some control in their lives. This may in turn support their motivations to attend school and contribute to a feeling that school is a valuable place to be. One possible way to do this within education is through school enrichment activities. Having this autonomy and engaging in meaningful and valuable activities during the school day could have a positive impact on their school experiences and wellbeing.

1.6 Relevance to EP Role

Educational Psychologists (EPs) have a role in supporting the learning, development and wellbeing of young people. Fallon et al. (2010) note that EPs support positive social, emotional mental health, promote an opportunity for achievement and success and promote the opportunity for young people to meaningfully participate in society. Additional school activities are an area of education which has potential benefits to young people in all of these areas and EPs should therefore have an understanding and awareness of best practice for schools around additional school activities. It is something that they can be supporting schools with developing, implementing and monitoring.

Furthermore, in supporting young people EPs often take a holistic approach which includes looking at the impact of different systems and structures around a young person in light of Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Model (2005). This includes what is

happening in the school environment; raising the profile and awareness of additional school activities has the potential to lead to positive outcomes for young people. EP practice also includes working systemically, providing whole-school support through looking at policies and practices that impact on young people. Some schools have policies on additional school activities; EPs can support schools in their policies as well as promote this to other schools. This will help to make schools further their thinking and be more accountable in regard to their offer.

The 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision' Green Paper (2017) recognised the role that schools and services such as EP services have in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of young people. The paper called for all schools and colleges to have a designated senior mental health lead, and in some areas these members of staff receive training and supervision from EPs. This provides further indication that EPs are well placed to support schools systemically with mental health and wellbeing and that guidance in relation to additional school activities can be incorporated into such support.

1.7 Present Study

This research sought to gain an insight into the additional school activities that young people in secondary schools have the opportunity to engage in, what motivates them to engage with such activities, potential barriers to participation, as well as the perceived value of additional school activities. The study focused on the perspectives of Year 10 students as it acknowledged their developmental ability to reflect on and articulate their experiences and share their views on alternative options. Furthermore, Year 10 represents a shift for young people in relation to their development and academic expectations and therefore potentially an important time to reflect on the role and function of additional school activities.

The research also included the views of school staff who alongside students are key stakeholders involved with additional school activities. It was thought that as school staff often organise and lead activities, they could provide an understanding on how activities were perceived and implemented from a more structural perspective. Furthermore, they could offer insights around facilitators and barriers to engagement as well as on the benefits of additional school activities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

This chapter will review the literature relating to additional school activities. As the term 'additional school activities' encompasses both extra-curricular and enrichment activities, this literature review will cover research in both fields. Further information on search terms can be found in the appendices (see Appendix A). Firstly, information around access and engagement of additional school activities and motivators to participation will be presented. The potential benefits of additional school activities for students will be considered, followed by relevant theoretical frameworks before the research questions are outlined.

2.1 Access and Engagement in Additional School Activities

Access to and engagement with additional school activities is a key area of focus within the literature, as it directly influences which pupils are able to benefit from the positive outcomes associated with participation. Understanding the factors (individual and societal) that shape who takes part, and who does not or cannot take part is essential for addressing inequalities, to ensure provision is inclusive and reflective of the needs of all pupils.

Participation in additional school activities has been the subject of research by prominent UK institutions such as the Nuffield Foundation, Centre for Social Justice and Educational Policy Institute (EPI) highlighting this as an area of importance for policy and practice. Looking at attendance of extra-curricular activity in Year 9 and 10 students, EPI research (2024) found that 60-70% of students attended a club (including sport) or received out of class exam support as part of their extra-curricular involvement in school. Less detail is known about what types of clubs or activities this involves. The Centre for Social Justice (2021) defined enrichment activities *as 'a wide variety of structured activities and clubs, such as: sports, music, art, drama, dance,*

outdoor/adventure, debating, volunteering, business/enterprise, tech/ digital, and cooking' Centre for Social Justice (2021, p. 1) in commissioning a YouGov poll around participation in such activities. The survey of over 1500 parents of young people under the age of 18 revealed that the majority of secondary school students (70%) engaged in at least one hour of enrichment activity in an average week. It appears that activities defined as extra-curricular and enrichment seem to be spanning a wide range of domains; further highlighting inconsistencies within the terms used and the need for a clearer, consistent and definitive term, which 'additional school activities' aims to address. Although a clearer definition is needed, activities across a wide range of domains appear to offer young people many potential benefits which will be discussed later (see section 2.4).

Baines and Blatchford's (2019) comprehensive research commissioned by the Nuffield Foundation were able to provide more specificity around the types of activities young people engaged with as well as highlight a decline in participation compared to previously and amongst older students. This research involved over 1600 pupils in Years 5, 8 and 10 in 23 primary schools and 14 secondary schools across England completing questionnaires; some of which asked questions around their social lives both within and outside of school. In terms of the types of activities young people took part in, team sports were most popular both inside and outside of school. Within school, other sports and music were then the most popular activities with other sports and youth organisations (such as Brownies or Scouts) being most popular outside of school. Compared to 2006 figures, the research found that the number of young people attending activities after school decreased by nearly 30%. There were age differences in participation of after school clubs with more Year 5 children (63%) reporting attending than Year 10 students (26%). Year 10 students were more likely to attend activities outside of school than within school.

These findings highlighted two key issues; firstly, activities outside of school are more appealing to older students and secondly participation in general decreases as students

get older. This research contributes to understanding these issues in looking at what secondary schools are actually offering young people in terms of additional school activities and what some of the motivations to participating such activities may be. For example, is the decision down to young people themselves or are there other factors such as parents (Mahoney et al., 2006), peers (Schaefer et al., 2024) and more systemic factors around the resources available to schools (Donnelly et al., 2019) which affect how likely young people are to engage in additional school activities. These factors are discussed further on in the chapter (see section 2.2).

2.1.1 Declining Participation in Later Adolescence

The research in the previous section (Baines & Blatchford, 2019) revealed the trend for participation in additional school activities to decline later in adolescence. Sallis (2000) also suggested that additional activities linked to sport tended to reduce between the ages of 13 and 18. However, others such as Simpkins et al. (2016) argue that the number of adolescents engaging in organised activities usually peaks at this time. An alternative perspective is that whilst the breadth of activity participation lessens (Denault & Poulin, 2009) participation intensity (i.e. the time spent in specific activities) increases (Mahoney et al., 2005). Whilst the literature identifies different trends around participation during adolescence, it remains important to consider some of the factors that may be contributing to a decline in participation for some young people when they are later in adolescence.

Two potential reasons for this trend are academic and social factors: including peers. One possible reason that participation in activities may decline as students get older is due to academic pressures. A stronger focus on exams means that students often have to shift their time away from involvement in such activities in order to fulfil their academic obligations. Students report feeling conflicted in how they use their time and feel they need to sacrifice hobbies and extra-curricular activities due to increased time spent revising (Pascoe et al., 2019; Smith & Thompson, 2017). Whilst this may feel

necessary for students, a reduction of additional school activities can impact their development (Eccles et al., 2003); although the concept of development in this context is broad and could be further defined to gain a better understanding. It could also be argued that spending time on their academic work could positively impact young people's development e.g. academic achievement, which in turn can contribute to future success.

As well as academic demands, social factors such as reduced self-confidence, heightened fear of judgment, and the struggle to balance competing interests, can diminish students' willingness to engage in activities outside of the core curriculum (Furda & Shuleski, 2019). Research also acknowledges peers as a mediating factor to a difference in engagement as students get older. According to Knifsend and Juvonen (2016), shifting peer groups and social identities contributed to decreased participation in extra-curricular activities amongst young people. This was also found to be the case in Denault and Poulin's (2019) longitudinal study, which described a mismatch between young people's evolving identity during adolescence and the group culture of certain activities resulting in disengagement. Whilst the evidence suggests many young people reduce their involvement in activities during adolescence, earlier research by Denault and Poulin (2009) suggested otherwise, proposing that some young people may be more likely to increase their involvement at this time in order to meet their future needs and goals.

While multiple factors may be influencing the decline in participation of additional school activities as young people get older, the evidence reviewed suggests that increasing academic pressures could be playing a particularly notable role in this trend. Schools should be considering all factors when thinking about how young people can be kept engaged in activities throughout their secondary school education.

2.1.2 Social Inequalities to Access and Engagement

Access and engagement in additional school activities can be affected by social inequalities. The measurement of social inequality varies significantly across the literature, with different studies focusing on distinct indicators such as socio-economic status (SES), class, free school meals eligibility, and disadvantage. These varied measures offer different perspectives on inequality, highlighting the complexity of assessing disadvantage and its impact. However, the literature offers helpful insights into understanding how inequalities affect engagement with activities, mostly those that take place outside of school, and gives consideration to how additional school activity provision can potentially address some of the existing inequalities.

The Centre for Social Justice's 2021 YouGov poll revealed that one in five secondary school students do no enrichment activities during an average week, with this figure rising to one in four students who are from disadvantaged backgrounds. The poll showed that free school meals appeared to be a factor in the take up of enrichment activities, with those eligible for free school meals taking up fewer activities, on average than their peers. Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2014) further reported that primary school aged children from middle-class families engaged in significantly more enrichment activities than those from working-class families. The study surveyed a total of around 320 middle and working-class parents with children in Year 2 and Year 6 in 17 primary schools in the West Midlands region of England. Their findings highlighted that whilst parents across both social classes regarded enrichment activities similarly in terms of fun and good social opportunities for their children, structural inequalities (such as cost, availability, and transport) limit access for working-class families. Whilst the study provided some evidence of potential inequalities in access to additional school activities, this was in a primary school context and so these findings may not transfer to the secondary school context. Furthermore, grouping participants into the broad categories of "middle class" and "working class" may oversimplify the inequalities that exist within society and SES may be a more appropriate way to measure this.

International research (Behtoui et al., 2019; Caetano et al., 2024) also highlighted the economic inequalities that appear to exist within additional school activity accessibility. Schwartz et al., (2015) argued that not only were fewer activities found in low SES geographic areas, but students from low SES backgrounds were also less likely to participate, even when activities were available. Limited school resources can further impact the activities that are available and therefore what young people are able to access (Donnelly et al., 2019; Stearns & Glennie, 2010).

Research outlined in a report for the Social Mobility Commission by Donnelly et al. (2019) offers further evidence of how access to additional school activities such as sports, music, and clubs is unevenly distributed across socio-economic groups. Drawing on a nationally representative quantitative dataset involving surveys of parents and young people across the UK, the study found that those from higher-income families were significantly more likely to participate in enrichment activities in music and sport compared to those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. The report highlights key barriers to participation, including financial costs, transport issues, and a lack of parental time, which disproportionately affect low-income families. An example given in the report related to a secondary school pupil who was not able to attend an additional school activity in food technology because their parent was unable to afford the ingredients needed on a weekly basis. Methodologically, the study's strength lies in its scale and rigour, enabling generalisable conclusions which can inform policy. It is also strengthened by including qualitative insights into how young people themselves experience barriers; providing a richer understanding of what some of these inequalities look like in the school context.

This study built on earlier work by the Sutton Trust (2014) which drew on a quantitative survey of over 2,800 parents and carers in England and investigated participation rates and how much money was spent on extra-curricular and enrichment activities. It found that children from higher-income families were significantly more likely to participate in structured activities, such as private tuition, music lessons, and sports coaching, with

spending patterns revealing inequalities: 29% of higher-income parents spent over £500 annually on such activities, compared to just 8% of lower-income families. This highlighted how access to activities can be shaped by the financial capacity of parents and carers. In light of the many benefits associated with additional school activities (see section 2.4), it is a concern that many young people appear to be missing out on these activities and the advantages that come with them (Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Kreisman & Stange, 2020).

While both the Sutton Trust (2014) and Donnelly et al. (2019) highlighted socio-economic disparities in access to activities, they also pointed to the potential of school-based provision as a levelling force, echoed by Boat et al. (2024). Donnelly et al. (2019) noted that when schools provide structured extra-curricular activities, such as lunchtime clubs, after-school sports, or music activities, these opportunities are more equitably accessed across income groups, as financial and logistical barriers are reduced. Similarly, the Sutton Trust emphasised that lower-income families often rely on school-provided activities, given the prohibitive costs of private provision. These findings suggest that schools can play a vital role in compensating for inequalities in family resources, making provision more inclusive. However, the extent to which schools are currently equipped fulfil this role remains underexplored.

This presents rationale for the current study to focus on school-based additional school activities; in both assessing their accessibility and inclusivity as well as explore their perceived benefits. Having a high-quality provision in this area has the potential to reduce the inequality gap in accessing activities. Furthermore, in the context of ongoing austerity (Donnelly et al., 2019) and narrowing school curriculums, there is a need to understand how such activities are being prioritised (or marginalised) within educational policy and practice. Including the views of young people from a range of backgrounds in this study can help to gain a better understanding of how schools can support the participation of all students in additional school activities.

2.1.3 Compulsory or Voluntary Offer

The previous section outlined the potential that additional school activity provision can have in reducing inequalities to access and participation. This raises important questions about how such provision should be implemented—specifically, whether participation should be encouraged through voluntary engagement or mandated as a compulsory part of the school experience.

There are different perspectives on whether additional school activities should be mandatory, including being part of a compulsory extended school day. One advocate for a mandatory enrichment programme is the Centre for Social Justice (2021) arguing that the predictability of a structured programme would support schools with their planning. They further argue that not only would a non-mandatory enrichment programme lessen the perceived importance of enrichment in schools, but it is also likely to continue excluding disadvantaged students who are already less likely to participate in enrichment activities (Donnelley et al., 2019; Sutton Trust, 2014). A more likely solution could lie in making sure disadvantaged students have access to exciting and varied additional school activities, where they are able to have some influence over what happens. This is instead of forcing them to do activities they may not be interested in so that they have fulfilled a criterion of participating in additional school activities that may not be meaningful for them. Making activities compulsory seemingly becomes another decision that young people have little control over. The Centre of Social Justice (2021) position of wanting to make enrichment part of school culture and something embedded in their everyday practice is understandable. Whilst agreeing with their intentions, some disagree that a mandatory approach is the best way to go about achieving this.

Extended activity provision in secondary schools was explored by Bertram et al. (2017). Conducted by the Department for Education, this large and rigorous research involved a comprehensive examination of the landscape of extended activity provision across secondary schools in England. The study used a mixed-methods approach, combining

quantitative data analysis with qualitative interviews and case studies to gather a holistic understanding. Quantitative data was collected through surveys administered to a representative sample of 1,000 secondary schools in England, capturing information on the types of activities offered, participation rates, and the resources allocated for the provision. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 school leaders, 25 semi-structured interviews with commercial, voluntary and community sector (CVCS) organisations and seven case studies with a purposive sample of secondary schools. Each case study included interviews with school leaders, those with budget-holding responsibilities for extended provision, teachers and other school staff, in addition to one parent and one pupil focus group.

From the findings, school leaders, students and teachers were all generally against the idea to extend the school day on a compulsory basis. They felt that participation in activities should be voluntary so that students are motivated to participate and also to make sure that they were not put under pressure to attend. There was some agreement amongst schools with the Centre for Social Justice (2021) perspective that a compulsory offer would target those students who are less likely to engage in enrichment activities as well as raise the profile of such activities across the school. Nevertheless, the importance of students having choice and being able to have some decision-making capacity (and the responsibility this comes with) was recognised and valued by school leaders. It is clear that deciding whether additional school activities should be compulsory, or voluntary is a key consideration for schools. A compulsory offer may benefit disengaged students by removing barriers to access and normalising participation in activities, potentially helping to close engagement gaps. However, voluntary participation seems more aligned with fostering intrinsic motivation and in giving young people more choice within their school life.

2.2 Motivations to Participate in Additional School Activities

As highlighted in the previous section, understanding what motivates young people to participate and engage in additional school activities is important to increase and sustain levels of engagement and ensure provision is inclusive and meaningful for young people. The literature identifies a range of intrinsic motivators, such as autonomy and interest, and sense of belonging, as well as extrinsic factors, including perceived benefits for academic or career aspirations and peer influences.

2.2.1 Intrinsic Motivations

2.2.1.1 Autonomy and Interest

According to Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (2017), intrinsic motivation is fostered when students perceive autonomy and find activities inherently interesting. The theory is discussed at greater length later in this chapter (see section 2.6.1). Students are likely to engage with additional school activities if the focus aligns with their intrinsic interests (Akiva & Horner, 2016; Fredricks et al., 2002), they present as an attractive prospect to them (Aoyagi et al., 2019; Stearns & Glennie, 2010) or they are simply fun (Borden et al., 2005). A study conducted by Denault et al. (2022) used SDT to understand the motivation of 250 students aged 12-18 across 14 Canadian schools who participated in extra-curricular activities. They found that students identified as autonomously motivated were more likely to continue their participation in activities the following year. Students were assigned motivational profiles based on intrinsic motivation (students taking part because they enjoy the activity), identified motivation (students taking part because they felt it was personally important) and introjected motivation (participation due to feeling guilt or pressure). The resulting profiles were poorly motivated (low scores on all types), moderately motivated (average scores on all types), highly motivated (high scores on all types), and autonomously motivated (high scores on intrinsic and identified, and low scores on introjected motivation).

Students were more likely to fall into the positive profiles (highly motivated and autonomously motivated) when they felt supported by activity leaders and believed they were good at what they were doing. From these findings, the conclusion could be drawn that activities which enable young people to feel confident and have a choice can support them to continue to engage in activities over time. Whilst this could be the case, it is likely that there may be stronger factors at play and that motivation may be multi-faceted. Furthermore, these findings may not be applicable to English school settings, hence this research examining the motivations of young people in the context of an English secondary school.

2.2.1.2 Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging may be another factor driving participation in additional school activities. Research by Fredricks and Eccles (2006b) found that for older adolescents in particular, involvement in extra-curricular activities was a predictor of school belonging. Knifsend and Graham (2012) found that students involved in multiple extra-curricular activities reported higher levels of school belonging, which in turn enhanced their motivation to attend activities. Similarly, more recent research by O'Donnell et al. (2023) found that those engaged in a breadth of extra-curricular activities reported higher levels of school belonging two years later. These findings should be interpreted with caution. Although the data suggested that participation in additional school activities fostered a sense of belonging, the study did not specifically examine motivational factors. As a result, no causal conclusions can be drawn about whether this sense of belonging influenced young people's motivation to participate.

2.2.2 Extrinsic Motivations

2.2.2.1 Academic and Career Aspirations

Engagement in additional school activities can be driven by the desire to enhance academic performance and improve future career prospects. In the UK, limited peer-reviewed research directly explores this link at the secondary school level. However, in

a qualitative case study of an English secondary school, Pitts (2007) found that students involved in extra-curricular activities linked to the performing arts, often viewed these experiences as enhancing their confidence and potentially supporting future educational or career pathways and in turn continued to engage in such activities. However, this only looks into one specific type of activity, and it may be that the nature of performing arts activities is more likely to lend itself to outcomes such as increased confidence.

Internationally, there appears to be more evidence. Denault and Guay (2017), in a longitudinal Canadian study with adolescents, found that students with higher levels of intrinsic and identified motivation to participate in extra-curricular activities reported improved academic motivation over time, suggesting that engagement may be linked to longer-term educational goals as well as present enjoyment. It should be noted that these findings suggest but do not establish substantive causal evidence about motivations to attend activities linking directly to academic goals. More recently in China, Tan et al. (2021) found that students' engagement in extra-curricular activities was shaped by the desire to accumulate cultural capital (competencies such as linguistic and cognitive skills, behaviours, that are valued by the education system and can improve a person's social mobility, Bourdieu, 1986; Sullivan, 2001) in order to enhance future educational and career opportunities. Whilst both studies provide some useful insights, there are significant cultural differences, including within the education systems of the research and the English education system and as such, findings are unlikely to be directly applicable to an English school context.

There may be more to learn from the increased body of evidence that has looked at the motivation to engage in extra-curricular activities because of future career aspirations in university settings. In a mixed methods study using retrospective surveys and interviews, Stuart et al. (2011) examined the perspectives of students across four UK universities and found that students perceived their involvement in extra-curricular activities, such as student societies, volunteering, and leadership roles as instrumental in developing transferable skills relevant to future employment. Participants often

framed these activities as opportunities to build social networks, enhance their Curriculum Vitae (CV) and gain practical experience, particularly in light of the competitive graduate job market. Swiss research from Roulin and Bangerter (2013) suggested that students participated in extra-curricular activities at university in order to stand out amongst their peers as they entered into the competitive job market. Whilst these studies are of an older age group, they provide some indication of some of the motivations that possibly start to develop when students are at secondary school. The lack of clear evidence in the English secondary school context provides further rationale for the current study to look into the motivating factors in participation of additional school activities for young people.

2.2.2.2 Social Recognition and Peer Influence

Social recognition and peer influence appear to be strong motivating factors that drive secondary school students to participate in extra-curricular activities. Research by Eccles et al. (2003) highlights that the desire for social acceptance and belonging prompts many teenagers to join clubs, sports teams, or other after-school groups, as these contexts provide a platform to forge meaningful connections while also reinforcing self-identity. In line with this, Juvonen et al. (2012) demonstrated that positive peer interactions and the modelling of behaviour significantly increased the likelihood of involvement, as adolescents often emulate the extra-curricular choices of close friends to solidify their group identity. This suggests that social recognition serves as an important extrinsic motivator for involvement in activities, particularly when students perceive these activities as opportunities for social validation. The study linked the desire for peer approval directly to increased participation in extra-curricular activities, providing evidence that social context and recognition from peers are influential in shaping student engagement in activities. Furthermore, participation in activities were more likely if young people received support (or at least minimal discouragement) from their peers to participate (Oberle et al., 2019; Stearns & Glennie, 2010). It is not just strengthening existing friendships that motivate young people to attend additional

activities, some also participate to make new friends (Akiva & Horner, 2016; Persson et al., 2007).

Fredricks and Eccles (2005) reviewed research across several countries, including the US and Australia, to examine how peer norms affected extra-curricular participation. Their findings indicated that students who perceived a high level of peer support and a sense of social belonging within certain activities, such as sports teams or academic clubs, were more likely to persist in these activities. The desire to fit in with peer groups, coupled with positive peer reinforcement, enhanced the motivation to stay engaged in activities as students sought both social belonging and recognition. In a large-scale study, Schaefer et al. (2011) extended this understanding using an innovative social network analysis approach to examine how extra-curricular activities contributed to school-based friendships in adolescents in over 100 middle and high schools in the US. They found that adolescents were more likely to join activities if their close friends were involved, with social proximity strongly predicting both initial and continued participation. Whilst the research presented mostly uses self-report data which may be subject to some bias, they contribute to the evidence base regarding the role of peers in motivating young people to attend additional school activities. Furthermore, these findings focus on the extrinsic factors, more research is needed to explore the interaction between such extrinsic factors and the intrinsic motivational factors highlighted by Denault et al. (2022).

Whilst much of the research indicates peers can have a supportive role in participation, there is evidence to suggest that peers can also have a negative impact on involvement. Social experiences, including peer rejection, bullying, or feeling excluded from dominant social circles, can deter adolescents from engaging in activities outside the classroom (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Juvonen et al., 2012). This is particularly the case for highly competitive activities or ones where cliques were more likely to be found. In such instances, the pressure to conform to social expectations can leave some students feeling marginalised, reducing their interest in partaking in these activities

(Mahoney et al., 2006). Collectively, these findings indicate that the impact of peers on extra-curricular involvement can be multifaceted, and peer dynamics should be carefully considered in these environments.

On the basis of the evidence reviewed, it appears reasonable to suggest that there are a number of different reasons that young people may choose to engage in additional school activities. Dawes and Larson (2011) found that those who joined for personal interests or who were connected personally to the activities were more likely to feel engaged in the activity, whilst those who joined for external reasons needed to find a personal connection (such as seeing how that activity may be useful for their future career) to reach a stronger level of engagement. It is likely that a combination of intrinsic (e.g. personal interest) and extrinsic (e.g. peer influence) factors contribute to their motivations to participate (Aoyagi et al., 2019).

2.3 Barriers to Participation

Some of the systemic barriers to access and participation of additional school activities were outlined earlier (see section 2.1.2). Individual barriers to participation have been less of a focus within the literature, with much of the literature focusing on university settings. UK research in the university context has found a lack of time and confidence to be a barrier to participation in extra-curricular activities (Dickinson et al., 2020). International research has indicated that heavy demands of course structure is a key contributing factor to low extra-curricular participation amongst students (Crispin et al., 2017; Iddrisu et al., 2023; Konold et al., 2018). In the secondary school context, such findings seem to have some resonance to research suggesting that academic demands reduce the participation in additional school activities (Pascoe et al., 2019; Smith & Thompson, 2017). Effective time management between academic work and extra-curricular activities results in higher participation amongst students (Iddrisu et al., 2023). In light of this, secondary schools could be thinking about how they can encourage and support students to manage their time effectively in this respect. Furthermore,

inadequate facilities were also found to deter students from participating in extra-curricular activities. (Haque et al., 2018; Hughes et al., 2016). By looking into the barriers to participation of additional school activities in the English secondary school context, this study aims to contribute to a relatively underexplored area of research.

2.4 Potential Benefits of Additional School Activities

A substantial body of literature recognises the value additional school activities can have in contributing to a range of positive outcomes for young people. The potential benefits explored include those linked to systemic issues such as school attendance/engagement (see section 1.4.1) as well as those linked to more individual outcomes around academic performance, personal development, skills for the future and social skills which are presented in this section. The Centre for Social Justice (2021) report suggested that improving access to extra-curricular activities could contribute to providing a rounded education as well as help tackle many of the challenges facing young people and schools. This includes pupil disengagement from school, mental health issues, youth crime and equipping young people with the soft skills they need to succeed in later life. The explanations for the benefits are varied (Stearns & Glennie, 2010) and will be discussed throughout this section. Exploring the potential benefits is integral for understanding what additional school activities can offer young people and may indicate that they should be placed higher on the agenda of schools.

2.4.1 Personal Development and Skills for the Future

Additional school activities can provide young people with the opportunity to develop skills and attributes that support both their personal development and equip them for their future beyond school (Reaves et al., 2010). At a time of their lives when young people are forming identities (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008) which distinguish themselves from who they were when they were younger (Anderman & Mueller, 2010), activities are a chance for adolescents to develop and establish their sense of identity (Hansen et al.,

2003; Larson et al., 2006; Lerner et al., 2010). Participating in extracurricular activities contributes to building adolescents' self-concept, self-worth and character development (Blomfield & Barber, 2009; Christison, 2013; Metsapelo & Pulkkinen, 2012). Research suggests that adult-led enrichment activities that take place after-school can help secondary students develop and apply new skills as well as new interests and passions (Eccles & Templeton, 2002). Furthermore, Larson (2011) emphasised that organised after-school settings allow adolescents to explore personal interests that may not emerge in formal classroom environments, thereby enhancing motivation and purpose, as well as having the chance to discover their strengths and weaknesses, vital to self-exploration (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008; Knifsend & Graham, 2012).

Durlak et al.'s (2010) meta-analysis of 68 US studies captured some of the mixed evidence around the impact of structure and adult involvement in activities and the potential benefits for young people. On one hand their findings highlighted the importance of adult mentorship within after-school programmes, with programmes lacking intentional design or skilled facilitation tending to show weaker outcomes for young people. This contrasted with other findings within the study that found that less structured activities can promote young people's initiative, autonomy and leadership skills and giving students such leadership roles can provide them with a sense of self-efficacy. Symonds and Hagell (2011) further suggest that extended free time after school can benefit those young people who like unsupervised learning to pursue their interests independently. In light of their mixed findings, Durlak et al. (2010) argued that most activities contained multiple components enabling a combination of both structured and unstructured approaches to be used at different times. Furthermore, they suggest that there are opportunities within structured activities to empower young people to take more of an active role, for example, being role models, trainers or group leaders. This seems like a sensible approach for schools to use, and perhaps a good starting point for those who may want to introduce activities which are student-led.

Research further highlights a particular benefit of additional school activities in preparing young people for their future beyond school. Participation in activities provides students with skills such as leadership, self-confidence, teamwork, problem-solving (supporting resilience) and time management which are vital for success in their future careers in the workplace (Barnett, 2008; Christison, 2013; Clark et al., 2015). The Centre for Social Justice Report (2021) identifies a link between high quality enrichment activities and a range of soft skills, such as self-control, self-efficacy and resilience, that young people need to succeed in life. Furthermore, evaluation of the Essential Life Skills programme (DfE, 2020) which improved access to extra-curricular activities for disadvantaged pupils aged 5-19 found positive outcomes related to confidence, resilience, team working and social and emotional skills. Resilience in this context included academic and emotional resilience; in particular, being able to cope with setbacks and having strategies they could draw on to support them. The evaluative data had strengths that incorporated questionnaire data from providers of the activities with qualitative insights from young people and their families. However, the evaluation only covered short-term outcomes of the programme and less was therefore known about whether the positive outcomes were sustained. The Unequal Playing Field Report (Donnelly et al., 2019) found an association between extra-curricular activities, educational outcomes and soft skills. However, this analysis used a Program for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2015) index of collaborative problem solving as a proxy measure of soft skills. The authors acknowledge that this proxy measure may not fully capture soft skills and therefore their findings should be interpreted with some caution.

Although more robust and longitudinal research is needed, there does appear to be some research that indicates the positive role that additional school activities can have on developing skills that support young people in their futures. Such benefits provide a compelling case for why secondary schools should be prioritising their offer of additional school activities. Furthermore, a recent report by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) (2025) identified that 15-16 year olds in England

possessed significantly weaker socio-emotional skills compared to their counterparts in many other developed countries. The study, which analysed data from PISA (2022) assessed attributes such as emotional control, assertiveness, perseverance, and empathy. England ranked among the bottom ten of the 31 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in these areas. In light of this, it could be argued that integrating some of these skills into education is needed, and additional school activities is one place that schools could incorporate this.

2.4.2 Academic Benefits

Research has indicated a positive relationship between extra-curricular activity participation and academic achievement among adolescents (Broh, 2002; Fejgin, 2001; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). Students involved in activities tended to achieve higher grades, score better on exams, and exhibit greater school engagement and aspirations (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005, 2006a; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; Stearns & Glennie, 2010). Participation was also associated with a 10% increase in the expectation of attaining a university degree (Lipscomb, 2007). Through these activities, adolescents learn to follow instructions, persist through challenges, set goals, and solve problems—skills that contribute directly to academic success (Wormington et al., 2012; Christison, 2013). The type of extra-curricular activity may be of some importance. Students in academic clubs typically demonstrated higher academic attainment (Shulruf, 2010), while those involved in sports clubs tended to show improved scores in Maths, Science, and Literacy specifically. (Lipscomb, 2007; Shulruf et al., 2008). Additionally, sports participation has been linked to the development of problem-solving abilities (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008). Frequent participation amplifies these benefits, correlating with better overall academic performance and more positive school experiences (Fredricks, 2011). These students also tended to associate with peers who are academically motivated and more likely to attend higher educational settings, further reinforcing educational goals (Barber et al., 2001; Eccles et al., 2003). Moreover, the cognitive and motivational gains from extra-curricular activities enhance students' desire to achieve academically (Feraco et al., 2022; Haque et al., 2018).

A meta-analysis review of 52 North American studies in this area (published between 2004 and 2009) was conducted by Farb and Matjasko (2012). The studies in the analysis were primarily quantitative, with a focus on correlational research, although some studies incorporated mixed-methods approaches. A number of longitudinal and cross-sectional research was also included. The sample sizes varied widely, and whilst most studies focused on high school students, some included middle school samples. Many of the studies also considered socioeconomic status (SES) as a key factor. Their analysis found that generally, a positive relationship could be found between participation in extra-curricular activities and academic outcomes. Specifically, the review found that structured school-based extra-curricular activities were linked to lower dropout rates, higher attainment levels, and improved academic performance, as well as increased educational aspirations. However, the impact on educational achievement was found to be short-term with longer-term impacts not found to be significant. The meta-analysis highlighted the limitations within the existing literature, particularly the reliance on correlational studies, particularly the overreliance on correlational studies, which limits the ability to draw clear causal conclusions. The authors also noted that more nuanced measures are needed that account for the quality and context of activities, rather than a focus on the quantity of involvement. Furthermore, the inclusion of some non-school-based activities in the review makes it unclear whether the observed outcomes can be fully attributed to school-based extra-curricular activities.

Much of the literature into enrichment activities in secondary schools has been undertaken in countries outside of the United Kingdom (UK) and tend to focus on activities that are specifically targeted at those students of higher academic ability (Reis & Renzulli, 2021; Tan et al., 2020) or focused on particular parts of the curriculum such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) (Banerjee, 2016). An Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) meta-review in 2016 of over 90 studies examined the impact of targeted enrichment programmes on secondary school pupils, revealing that participants made additional academic progress compared to their peers.

This effect was particularly strong for enrichment activities with a specific focus on learning, such as peer tutoring or small group teaching. The review included studies involving early years and school-age learners, aged 3 to 18. The interventions tested were educational in nature, incorporating clearly defined programmes and approaches. In addition, an EEF review of 80 studies in 2021 examined arts-based enrichment, such as dance, drama, music, and visual arts, found that these activities led to up to three months of additional academic progress in subjects like English, Mathematics, and Science, with the greatest gains in writing and Maths. These arts activities also showed potential in re-engaging older students in their learning, which had a positive effect on their wider academic performance. Many of these studies were correlation, therefore while evidence suggests that targeted enrichment programmes can enhance academic outcomes, further research is needed to better understand which types of enrichment have the most impact and for whom.

2.4.3 Social Benefits

Additional school activities can provide students with opportunities to interact with peers and adults outside of the formal classroom environment. Engaging in these activities can enhance adolescents' social development by fostering essential teamwork and interpersonal skills (Hancock et al., 2012) and supportive relationships. Activities can potentially provide a social benefit to young people, in a climate where young people have limited free time during the school day and at a period in their lives where they are strengthening their friendships (Bukowski et al., 2018). Group-based activities contribute to improved teamwork, communication, and peer relationships (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012), while also supporting appropriate social conduct and prosocial behaviour (Christison, 2013). These experiences help students establish a sense of belonging and identity during a critical developmental phase when peer connections become increasingly important (Lerner & Steinberg, 2004).

Additional school activities provide adolescents with valuable opportunities to connect with peers who share similar interests, which can lead to the formation of meaningful friendships and the expansion of social networks. Schaefer et al. (2011) found that those who participated in the same activity were over two times more likely to be friends than those who did not share an activity. The study also accounted for homophily on a number of different factors including race, gender and SES and found that only being in the same school grade was a stronger predictor of friendships than co-participating in the same activity, further reinforcing the role that additional school activities can have in peer relationships. Positive peer relations can contribute to broader social competence (Antonio, 2004; Chang et al., 2006; Molinuevo et al., 2010) and such connections can provide access to prosocial peer groups, which reinforce positive norms and reduce social alienation (Ryan, 2000; Veltz & Shakib, 2013). Research has shown that shared interests within structured group settings significantly increase the likelihood of friendship formation (Knifsend et al., 2018). Mixed-aged interactions can promote collaborative learning and the development of empathy, as older students often take on mentorship roles, guiding their younger peers (Kos, 2019).

Importantly, additional school activities also create opportunities for adolescents to build meaningful relationships and informal interactions with supportive adults at school who can act as mentors and role models (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fredricks, 2011; Hirsch et al., 2002). As young people begin to individuate from their parents, they often seek emotional support from such adults in non-familial settings (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008; Stearns & Glennie, 2010). These adult-student relationships help can facilitate the internalisation of norms and expectations (Stuart et al., 2011). Through these experiences, students gain social capital—networks of relationships that provide emotional support, access to opportunities, and reinforcement of educational aspirations (Behtoui, 2017; Devine, 2009; Shulruf, 2010). Participation in extracurricular activities not only connects students with like-minded peers but also fosters environments where adolescents can safely experiment with social roles and build self-identity (Youniss et al., 2001). Schools should therefore be considering the social connections that young

people can make by partaking in additional school activities and the social implications this may have for students if opportunities for activities are not available.

2.4.4 Mental Health Benefits

Engaging in additional school activities has been linked to improved mental health and emotional wellbeing benefits including higher self-esteem, greater psychological resilience, and lower levels of depression (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006a; Mahoney et al., 2002). These activities can contribute to emotional wellbeing by providing structured opportunities for social interaction, fostering a sense of belonging, and allowing students to engage in meaningful and valued experiences (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). Such activities can also offer students with a space to relief stress and build confidence. Participation in clubs and social groups was linked to higher wellbeing scores amongst adolescents (Children's Society Good Childhood Report, 2023). Furthermore, activities such as art, music and sport, which are often offered as additional school activities, are known to have therapeutic effects, including alleviating anxiety as well as promoting self-esteem (Taylor et.al, 2015).

There is limited research into the impact of additional school activities on mental health. Oberle et al. (2019) sought to address this gap in the literature; their robust longitudinal study across 3 years used survey data to examine the impact of participation and non-participation of extra-curricular activities of 10,000 Canadian young people aged 9-10 years old and again at 12-13 years old. The study used latent class analysis—a statistical method that groups individuals into hidden subgroups based on similar response patterns—to identify distinct participation patterns across the student population. Then, latent transition analysis allowed them to track how these groups shifted over time. It was found that those young people who went from no participation in extra-curricular activities to participation had higher levels of positive mental health, though this was mediated by peer belonging (feeling a sense of connectedness to peers). Further evidence of the importance of peer belonging was supported from the

finding that when looking at sporting extra-curricular activities, the trend for positive mental health when taking up such activities was only found for team sports and not sporting activities of a more individualistic nature. The study's large sample and methodological approach strengthen the credibility of its findings, suggesting a link between positive mental health and extra-curricular activities (mediated by peer belonging), though more research in this area is needed ascertain if mental health benefits are consistently found as an outcome in additional school activity involvement.

2.6 Importance of Pupil Voice

Recognising and incorporating pupil voice has become an increasingly important focus within education and research. Involving young people in discussions about their experiences, needs, and preferences is widely seen as essential for developing inclusive, responsive, and effective school environments. As such, listening to the views of young people is a key focus of this research. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) which the UK is a signatory of states that children have a right to express their views which should be taken seriously. The Children and Families Act (2014) and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (2015) are legislation that EPs are guided by in their practice advocates that young people have a right to have an active role in decisions that are made about them. Young people's voices tend not to be heard in various settings such as the extended family and school (Sener, 2006) and feel they have minimal influence over their school environment (Hyndman et al., 2012), they likely do not feel empowered to express their feelings here.

The Pupil Views Collaborative Group (2021) suggest that there should be a focus from those working in education, including policy makers, in promoting the agency and autonomy of young people, ensuring they feel seen and heard and involving young people in decisions that affect them. This is important in light of the earlier point raised (see section 1.5) by Baines and Blatchford (2019) regarding the increased management

and control of young people implied by increased supervision and reduced free time and additional activities for young people. There is, however, an important balance to be struck when considering pupil voice and the impact it has for change. Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2014) point out that whilst engaging with young people's views on enrichment activities is valuable, it needs to be balanced with the perspectives of other stakeholders such as school staff and parents. Such stakeholders have legitimate views which come from having different experiences and knowledge to young people and there is a value in hearing different perspectives which can contribute to a richer understanding of an issue. When listening to the views of young people within research it is important for young people to not only be able be heard, but for the views they express to be taken seriously by adults and acted upon where possible (Lundy, 2007).

Many of the qualitative studies reviewed in the literature tend to narrowly focus on student perspectives, often overlooking the broader context within which additional school activities take place. While pupil voice is essential, a limited focus can restrict the depth and applicability of findings to real-world school settings. Student insights cannot be fully understood without considering the systems and structures of schools. Staff often have valuable knowledge of these and are well positioned to provide that context. While existing research has explored quantitative outcomes in relation to additional school activities, less is known about the experiences, meanings and perceptions of both students and staff around this topic. The current study aimed to address this by using a qualitative approach to explore not only what is happening in schools, but how additional activities are perceived and experienced by students and staff, while also recognising the wider school context. Whilst pupil voice is central to the study, this is crucially balanced with staff perspectives to allow for a richer, more contextualised interpretation of findings. This triangulation strengthens the research by situating the perspectives of students within the realities of school systems, offering a more holistic picture of additional school activities in practice.

2.7 Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding the Potential Value of Additional School Activities

Psychological theory can be helpful in providing a framework for which the potential value of additional school activities can be understood. The theoretical frameworks—SDT, Contact Theory and Over-Scheduling Hypothesis—presented in this section does not represent an exhaustive list and it is recognised that there could be a number of frameworks that can be applied to the context of additional school activities.

2.7.1 Self-Determination Theory

SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) proposes that autonomy (having control and choices over actions and decisions), competence (feeling that you can succeed and achieve goals) and relatedness (having a sense of connection and belonging) are key to motivation. Furthermore, individuals can be motivated intrinsically (doing things because they are interesting, enjoyable or create a sense of curiosity) to extrinsic (doing things for external rewards). Intrinsic motivation, driven by genuine interest and personal satisfaction tends to foster deeper, more sustained engagement among young people in additional school activities. When students participate because they find the activity meaningful or enjoyable, they are more likely to persevere, develop a stronger sense of ownership over their learning, and build authentic connections with peers and adults. In contrast, extrinsic motivation, such as rewards or recognition, may encourage short-term participation but often lacks the enduring impact needed for long-term learning and a sense of belonging.

In relation to additional school activities, this represents an opportunity for young people to engage in something of their choosing, where most of their school day (formal lesson time and within this, learning through the curriculum) is often determined by others. Students are likely to feel more motivated to participate in activities that they have a choice over. When students have a sense of choice in the activities they participate in,

they are more likely to feel motivated and engaged. Activities that align with their interests, provide opportunities for success, and promote social connection tend to foster deeper involvement; both in additional school activities and in school life more broadly. In order to support autonomy, competence, and relatedness, Standage et al. (2005) suggested the following; increasing opportunities for student input to facilitate choice, creating peer-learning groups to encourage autonomous support, reducing competitive evaluated outcomes to foster competence and using small group activities and reward structures that encourage cooperation in order for young people to have a sense of relatedness to one another.

Denault et al. (2022) in their study exploring students' motivation for engaging in extra-curricular activities found a difference in motivational profiles, whereby some students were driven to engage by intrinsic interests and others for external reasons (such as escaping negative environments or gain peer approval). Furthermore, those who were intrinsically motivated to engage in extra-curricular activities were more likely to continue with such activities the following academic year than those who were extrinsically motivated. Although the study is limited because of its use of self-report measures, with it being noted that some students had difficultly identifying any reasons or motivations for participating in extra-curricular activities, the study helpfully highlights different profiles of motivation which explain varying levels of engagement and success in extra-curricular activities.

Much of the existing research focuses specifically on the application of SDT in relation to physical activities; some of which has been conducted in England. Chatzisarantis and Hagger (2009) found that an autonomy-supportive intervention, grounded in SDT, significantly increased adolescents' self-reported leisure-time physical activity by enhancing their autonomous motivation. Similarly, Ntoumanis (2005) demonstrated that students who perceived greater autonomy support from teachers were more likely to participate in optional school physical education. These studies suggest that environments that support autonomy may play an important role in encouraging

sustained physical activity by fostering intrinsic and identified motivation, in line with the principles of SDT. However, there are limits with the conclusions that can be drawn as this evidence is based on physical activity, it may not extend to other types of additional school activities.

Using the SDT framework, Yeo et al. (2022) more recently looked further into the effects of different motivational profiles related to participation in extra-curicular activities in over 1100 young people aged 12-19 in Singapore using survey methods. They found that students who participated in extra-curricular activities for intrinsic reasons (e.g. personal interest, skill development) experienced more positive developmental outcomes, including higher academic achievement, better emotional well-being, and improved social skills than extrinsically motivated students. Extrinsically motivated students who participated to get rewards or because of external pressures had less positive developmental outcomes. This study emphasises the importance of additional school activities aligning with students' intrinsic motivations and the potential importance of autonomy in choice. Further research exploring how SDT can be applied to a broader range of additional school activities in the English secondary school context is needed to expand the evidence-base in this area.

2.7.2 Contact Theory

Contact Theory (Allport, 1954) provides a valuable framework for understanding how additional school activities which promote intergroup interactions can promote social integration and cohesion. According to the theory, effective intergroup contact requires conditions such as equal status, common goals, cooperative interdependence, and support from authorities or institutions. Many additional school activities across various domains, bring together young people from diverse social, cultural, and academic backgrounds, who may not typically interact within traditional classroom settings. Young people are also able to interact with peers in different year groups that they would not otherwise have the opportunity to. These activities create settings that may meet the

key conditions for effective intergroup contact. These conditions have since been refined and empirically validated through numerous studies across various contexts, including education (Dovidio et al., 2003; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Applied to school settings, these findings suggest that well planned additional school activities can foster increased peer acceptance and provide meaningful intergroup contact (Aboud & Spears Brown., 2013; Turner & Cameron, 2016). For example, activities that emphasise teamwork through sports or collaborative projects not only provide shared goals (e.g. winning a match, completing a project) but also facilitate consistent, meaningful interactions among those students from different backgrounds (Eccles & Gootman, 2002); enabling students to break down preconceived stereotypes and build mutual respect. Further positive effects of intergroup contact in school includes more inclusive peer attitudes, greater cross-group friendships, and reduced intergroup anxiety (Cameron et al., 2006; Vezzali & Stathi, 2016).

Furthermore, research in inclusive education supports the notion that interventions combining direct intergroup contact with structured educational content can significantly enhance peer relations and foster a more inclusive school climate (Rademaker et al., 2020). This highlights the idea that the benefits of additional school activities extend far beyond leisure or academic support; they can play a vital role in developing interpersonal skills essential for the personal and social development of young people. Whilst such research is helpful in contributing to the understanding of the theory's application to additional school activities, these activities encompass more than structured educational activities and therefore more research is needed to establish the impact of interpersonal contact within a wider range of activities.

Although Contact Theory offers promising insights into the benefits of intergroup contact, it is important to acknowledge that not all contact automatically results in positive outcomes. The quality and structure of the interaction appear to be of significant

importance. According to Durlak et al. (2010), the design and quality of activities are crucial as superficial interactions without genuine engagement or structured activities may provide limited benefits and fail to meet the necessary conditions for effective intergroup contact. The depth and quality of social interactions are noted to be important as well as the role of intentional facilitation (Crisp & Turner, 2012). While existing evidence often emphasises the importance of structure and adult facilitation for effective intergroup contact, this focus may overlook instances where unstructured or peer-led interactions have also fostered positive intergroup relationships. It is worth considering that more informal or unstructured contexts that additional school activities can offer may also provide meaningful opportunities for positive intergroup engagement.

Contact Theory provides a valuable lens through which to understand how additional school activities may foster positive intergroup relations among students. However, there are mixed findings on whether contact can always be associated with positive outcomes. While structured and adult-facilitated environments often align well with the theory's optimal conditions, focusing solely on this may overlook the potential of informal or peer-led interactions to produce similarly positive outcomes.

2.7.3 Over-Scheduling Hypothesis

The over-scheduling hypothesis proposes that excessive involvement in extra-curricular activities may lead to negative developmental outcomes for adolescents. Whilst activities can have academic and social benefits, too much participation can lead to negative outcomes such as stress and burnout (Mahoney et al., 2006). Additionally, excessive commitments in extra-curricular activities, can also contribute to declines in academic performance and overall school engagement (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Perry et al., 2010). Such research recognises that the quality of activities as well as the demands of activities play a crucial role in determining outcomes.

The interplay between academic pressures and the commitments of additional school activities further complicates the overall impact of over-scheduling. Secondary school students frequently must navigate rigorous academic schedules alongside the substantial time demands imposed by multiple activities. This balancing act often results in role conflict and fatigue, thereby providing empirical support for the over-scheduling hypothesis (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). Although extra-curricular activities are typically linked to enhanced school engagement and positive youth development (Eccles, 2003; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006b), an excessive load of such commitments may hinder both academic achievement and personal well-being.

It is important to note that the literature suggests that all young people do not equally experience the effects of over-scheduling. Differences in family support, SES and individual time management skills, socioeconomic background, and personal time can significantly influence whether high levels of extra-curricular engagement foster positive skill development or contribute to increases stress (Lerner, 2004; Mahoney et al., 2006). Although the over-scheduling hypothesis raises valid concerns about the potential risks of excessive involvement in additional school activities, particularly in relation to stress and reduced free time, the evidence across the literature remains mixed. Nonetheless, it remains important for schools and young people to balance the potential benefits of activities with an awareness of the over-scheduling hypothesis to ensure participation supports, rather than undermines wellbeing.

2.8 Research Aims and Research Questions

The present study aims to examine the value of additional school activities in English secondary schools from the perspectives of students themselves as well as school staff. It also aims to understand the nature of additional school activities that young people can engage in and what motivates them to engage in these activities.

The following research questions will be explored:

- Research Question 1: What opportunities do young people have to access and engage in additional school activities?
- Research Question 2: Why do young people participate in additional school activities?
- Research Question 3: What do young people and school staff perceive the benefits and barriers to participating in additional school activities to be?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

This chapter will outline the epistemological and ontological perspective of the research, as well as the researcher's position. It will discuss details of, and decisions made in relation to the research design, methodology, sample, data analysis and ethical considerations.

3.1 Epistemological and Ontological Position

The present study adopted a social constructionist approach. This theory proposes that our understanding of reality is constructed through social interactions and shared meanings, and that subjective knowledge is influenced and shaped by cultural, historical and social contexts (Burr, 2003). Placing this research within a social constructionist framework aims to better understand a particular topic (Robson & McCartan, 2016), in this case, additional school activities.

In adopting a social constructionist position, the research questions in this study aim to explore how participants have constructed meaning within their specific school context, rather than seeking to identify cause-and-effect relationships. The research questions (see section 2.7) are exploratory in their nature in order to understand how the additional school activities are experienced and valued by participants. The research questions explore opportunities, motivations and benefits in relation to additional school activities which are not fixed or experienced the same way by all, but rather are shaped by school, societal and relational contexts. Furthermore, the inclusion of open-ended questions and prompts within the focus group interview schedules allowed for further exploration and for participants to bring their own experiences and insights into the research.

As this perspective recognises that social processes create knowledge, the researcher acknowledges that multiple constructions can exist between people. By taking a social constructionist stance, it is important to understand the contexts in which individuals perceive the world. Within the same context, people can have different and unique experiences and viewpoints. The use of focus group interviews allowed the researcher to explore the different constructions around additional school activities that exist both within and between students and staff groups. By using a social constructionist approach, the researcher is able to gather the diverse perspectives of different stakeholders (students and staff). This method of triangulating data allows for the comparison of different views and experiences regarding additional school activities, while also identifying potential shared perspectives. As such, perspectives that are not widely shared are not dismissed as they help to identify areas of agreement and difference between the two groups of participants. By sharing and discussing each other's views there was the opportunity for new meanings to be developed.

While social constructionism offers a valuable framework for exploring the interpretive and contextual nature of additional school activities, the researcher recognised some of the potential limitations. This approach allowed the researcher to be active in the process of meaning-making with participants. However, as well as knowledge being shaped by the interactions between participants and with the researcher, it is also influenced by the values, experiences and interpretations of the researcher. To examine their own role within the research, the researcher engaged in reflexivity throughout the research process. The researcher's positionality may influence the interpretation of the data (see section 3.3). Some of the potential bias and subjectivity in constructing meaning was addressed through the use of inter-coding triangulation (see section 3.8.2.1). Furthermore, the researcher engaged in reflexive journaling through the development stage of the research, data collection and data analysis.

As a result of focusing on specific contexts and meaning making within the social constructionist approach, findings are not able to be generalised to all secondary school

contexts. However, the study provides meaningful insights that may be able to be applied and transferred to similar contexts and contribute to a wider conversation that informs practice around additional school activities.

Consideration was given to alternative epistemological approaches such as critical realism and pragmatism. Critical realism, developed by Bhaskar (1978) proposes that an objective reality exists, but that different people can come to knowledge of this reality in different ways and as such our understanding of this is not absolute. Critical realism seeks to uncover causal mechanisms with a focus on systems. This study aimed to explore how meaning is constructed rather than establish causal relationships and accepted that multiple realities may exist between different participants, aligning more with a social constructionist perspective than critical realism. Pragmatism has more of a focus on outcomes and views knowledge as tools that can be used and tested within research but does not seek to find out where this knowledge comes from. This research wanted to use the voices and experiences of participants to understand how knowledge and meaning is co-created and therefore social constructionism was felt to be most appropriate.

3.2 Reflexivity and Researcher Position

It is important that the researcher acknowledged how their own values and beliefs could have impacted on the research (Yardley, 2015). This included how the data was collected and how findings were interpreted and presented.

It is also important that the researcher is transparent about their prior experiences and how this may also have influenced the research. The researcher spent many years volunteering for a social charity as a mentor which involved supporting young people of secondary school age in additional activities; some of which were academic in their nature e.g. Maths and English support, as well as others with a focus around entrepreneurship and debating/public speaking. These activities were planned by an

external organisation, though took place on the school premises. The researcher was able to see first-hand how additional activities benefitted young people's development and therefore had a personal motivation to explore this topic in the context of such activities taking place more widely across the school day. Furthermore, the researcher's role as a Trainee EP means that professionally they are involved in promoting positive outcomes for young people and as such is driven to explore areas within education that can support this, including the current topic.

As discussed earlier in the section, the position and previous experiences of the researcher had the potential to influence how they may have interpreted the data in the analysis phase. Being reflexive within qualitative research contributes to transparency and reducing potential biases (Yardley, 2015). The use of reflexive journalling, (particularly in the data collection and analysis stages) and engaging in supervision was a helpful way for the researcher to continually be reflexive during the research process and minimise the impact of potential biases.

It should be noted that the position and the experiences of the researcher was also a strength within the research. The previous and current experiences of the researcher supported them to build rapport with participants. Furthermore, as a trainee EP, the researcher had an understanding of school systems and had developed skills in how to reduce power imbalances when working in different contexts; something that they were able to apply when facilitating the focus groups.

3.3 Ethics

Ethical approval for this research was gained from the Departmental Ethics Committee at the Institute of Education, University College London (see Appendix B). The study was conducted in adherence with the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics (2021). As the student participants were under the age of 16, parental consent was gained in addition to individual student consent. At the start of the

focus groups, the researcher informed participants of their right to withdraw as well as procedures that would be followed if any safeguarding concerns came to light. To ensure confidentiality, data was anonymised prior to data analysis to ensure any identifying information about participants, or school was removed. Pseudonyms were created for participants. Anonymised data was stored securely on a university network, which could only be accessed via a password-protected folder.

3.4 Participants and Inclusion Criteria

3.4.1 Recruitment

An email was sent to the EPs in one Local Authority (LA) asking to identify any of their link secondary schools that would be interested in being involved in the research as one of two case study schools. The rationale for this was that link EPs often have an idea of their school's provision (such as additional school activities) as well as those who would potentially be more motivated to engage in the research. The decision was taken by the researcher to recruit two schools due to the time constraints and remit of the doctoral research project and the practicalities involved. It was hoped that two schools would provide an in-depth exploration of the research questions within their specific contexts in a manageable way, whilst allowing for some comparisons of views between the two schools. Four schools were initially identified by EPs in the LA as being schools that may potentially be interested in reflecting on their provision of additional school activities. It was recognised by the researcher that this approach to recruiting schools may have potentially excluded some schools, but it was felt that it was important that the schools taking part in the research were already motivated to engage in some reflection and development in their provision of additional school activities for the research to be most impactful.

Out of these initial four schools, two of these schools were discounted for being single-gender settings. These settings are unique contexts and as the majority (78%) of mainstream secondary schools in the LA were mixed-gender, it was felt that the

insights, findings and recommendations from mixed-gender schools would have more potential to be applicable to a larger number of settings both in the LA and more widely. While this exclusion may limit the generalisability of the findings to single-gender school contexts, the focus of the study was to explore additional school activities in mainstream secondary school settings, that are typically mixed-gender. Nevertheless, the exclusion of single-gender schools is acknowledged as a potential limitation and future research may benefit from including a broader range of schools, including single-gender schools to explore whether findings from this study are consistent and can be applicable across different types of schools.

The two schools (School X and School Y) invited to participate in the research were asked to confirm their interest via email at which point a virtual call was arranged with a school contact to discuss their participation further. Details such as time commitments and practical arrangements for the focus groups were confirmed as well as the criteria for inclusion for both young people and school staff. Both schools provided email consent that they were happy for the research to take place at their school. Information sheets and consent forms for students (see Appendix C), their parents (see Appendix D) and school staff (see Appendix E) were shared with the school contact.

The initial date planned for the focus groups was unable to be fulfilled by School Y. Every effort was made by the researcher to be flexible and understanding the school's needs and circumstances. However, the contact for School Y subsequently felt that the school was unable to take part in the research at this time. School Y therefore did not participate in the research.

3.4.2 Participating School

The participating secondary school (School X) was located in an outer London LA where the researcher was on placement. This was a mixed-gender mainstream school. Further details of the school can be seen below (see table 2).

Table 2 - Characteristics of participating school (shared by school contact member)

Number of pupils on roll	Male to Female ratio	Proportion of students with SEN	Proportion of students with EAL	Proportion of students on pupil premium	Ofsted Rating (most recent)
700 approximately	Males = (48%) Females = (52%)	25%	16%	27%	Good

3.4.3 Sample

3.4.3.1 Pupils

The pupils that participated were in Year 10 (14-15 years of age). Potential pupil participants received information sheets and consent forms seeking parental permission and for pupils to understand the project and consent to participate in adherence with ethical guidelines (see section 3.4). It was felt that at this point in their secondary school lives, this particular year group would be well placed to reflect on their experiences during their earlier years of secondary school (Key Stage 3 (KS3) as well as comment on what was currently on offer to them. Furthermore, previous research in the UK has focused predominantly on students in higher and further education. The key contact was asked to identify potential pupils to take part in focus groups in accordance with the inclusion criteria shared in the initial discussions. This criteria stipulated that the participants represented the school population e.g. gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status. Students were not required to have previously been or currently attending an organised additional school activity (e.g. club) with a mixture of experiences in relation to this valued and encouraged to get a wider range of views. A total of 9 students participated in two focus groups. Further information on the composition of the focus groups can be found below (see table 3).

Table 3 – Composition of student focus groups

	<u>Focus Group 1</u>	**<u>Focus Group 2</u>**
Number of students	5	4
Gender	3 female, 2 male	3 female, 1 male
Ethnicities represented	Asian, Black British Caribbean, White British	Asian, Black British Caribbean, White British

One male participant from the second focus group decided that they no longer wished to take part in the focus group on the day. This resulted in there being a particular gender imbalance within this focus group. The gender imbalance overall within the focus groups is acknowledged as a potential limitation in terms of how representative the findings are of the wider student population.

3.4.3.2 Staff

The staff inclusion criteria encouraged staff members with a variety of roles within the school e.g. teaching, support staff and those who were part of the senior leadership team. The school contact shared a recruitment poster (see Appendix F) with school staff. It was reported by the school contact that due to teaching commitments (including leading an additional school activity), there were practical difficulties that arose finding availability for all interested staff members to be able to join a focus group at the same time. The researcher offered paired and individual interviews to suit the needs of the school staff. However, four members of staff were available to form one focus group. The roles of the staff members who participated in the focus group are outlined below (see table 4).

Table 4 – Characteristics of staff sample

Pseudonym	Gender	Role	Additional Responsibilities
Laura	Female	Teacher	SLT (wider curriculum)
Stuart	Male	Teacher	
Jessica	Female	Support staff	
Mark	Male	Teacher	Head of department

3.5 Research Design

As the study aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of participants, a qualitative design was used through conducting focus group interviews. This gave students and staff the space to share and elaborate on their views relating to the research questions. Using a qualitative approach to data analysis also allowed key themes to be uncovered and to gain a richer understanding of the insights shared by participants.

A case study design was chosen for this research as it allowed the researcher to examine how participants experience and make sense of additional school activities in the real-life context of a secondary school. Initially, the researcher sought to recruit a few secondary schools in a collective (multiple) case study design to gain a broad understanding of additional school activities across a number of different settings. However, due to the aforementioned challenges with recruitment the research took place in only one school. This was an instrumental single-case study design (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018) used to gain further insight into the topic of additional school activities in order to understand this in more depth. It recognises that it is not a unique setting and therefore not an intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995) but that these insights may be able to be transferred to other similar contexts, helping those in schools and EPs to develop their knowledge in this area. An instrumental case study also allowed for the integrations of different views across participant groups within this particular context,

further adding to the understanding of additional school activities in secondary schools, which has the potential to inform practice beyond this specific setting.

3.6 Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews involve a structured discussion where individuals can come together to share their opinions and ideas on a focus topic (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Using focus groups are felt to be beneficial as participants are able to prompt each other and think collaboratively about a topic. In the case of students, they are likely to feel more at ease being with their peers, particularly in the presence of an unfamiliar adult such as a researcher (Barbour, 2007). Rich data can be gained from focus groups (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2020) and they can be an efficient way to gain the views of multiple participants.

The researcher considered using individual interviews, as this method can provide in-depth and personal insights into participants' experiences, without the influence of others which can be helpful in seeking to understand motivations for example (Cohen et al., 2018). Individual interviews also provide a confidential space for participants to share perspectives that they may feel reluctant to discuss in a group setting (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). However, in this study it was felt that focus group interviews would provide the opportunity for participants to reflect on their own experiences in relation to others, proving a rich exchange and discussion of ideas (Morgan, 1997). By capturing multiple experiences, focus groups can reveal shared values, disagreements, and differing interpretations that individual interviews may not uncover (Breen, 2006). Practically, individual interviews can be time consuming to arrange, conduct, transcribe and analyse. In contrast, focus groups allow multiple viewpoints to be collected in a shorter amount of time, making them a more efficient way to gather data.

While focus group interviews provide opportunities to explore how participants co-construct meaning through rich discussion, there can be some limitations with using

them. This includes the influence of group dynamics where there can be dominant voices which may lead the discussion or cause other participants to feel reluctant to fully contribute (Barbour, 2007; Sim, 1998). This can cause further issues if power imbalances exist within the groups, which can impact who feels comfortable to openly express their views. It is also possible that social desirability bias may occur where participants may give responses they feel are expected or more socially acceptable and not give their honest opinions (Cohen et al., 2018).

To mitigate some of these issues, clear ground rules and expectations were established at the start of the focus groups which emphasised participants being respectful of each other's views (Krueger & Casey, 2015) and that all opinions (whether positive or negative in their nature) would be valued and contribute to the discussion. Furthermore, the researcher was non-judgemental in their approach, used open-ended prompts and actively invited quieter participants to share their views. The researcher reflected on group dynamics following each focus group.

3.6.1 Focus Group Interview Schedule

The focus group interview schedules were developed in relation to the study's aims and three research questions. Questions were focused on participants' perceptions and experiences around additional school activities. The schedule of the questions and prompts used in the focus groups can be found in the appendices for students (see Appendix G) and school staff (see Appendix H). The wording of questions were reviewed through piloting (see section 3.7.4) to ensure language was age-appropriate for students and that the use of any jargon was avoided. The plan and structure used for the focus group sessions for students (see Appendix I) and staff (see Appendix J) can be found in the appendices.

3.6.2 Icebreaker Activity

An icebreaker activity was used in the student focus groups to develop rapport within the group and support engagement around the topic. Research suggests that adolescents may be particularly sensitive to peer evaluation and social dynamics (Eccles & Roeser, 2011), which can prevent them from participating freely in group-based research settings. The activity consisted of a scenario-based discussion (see Appendix K). Scenario-based tasks allow participants to discuss ideas indirectly through fictional or hypothetical situations, rather than being immediately asked to share personal experiences (Barbour, 2007; Krueger & Casey, 2015). This indirect approach can help to reduce any perceived social pressure that young people may have been feeling. Furthermore, scenario-based activities can enable young people with different communication styles or confidence levels to contribute on equal terms (Wilkinson, 2004), supporting inclusive participation. As the scenario was based on the topic of additional school activities, some of the discussion provided valuable insights from the students and as such this data was analysed.

3.6.3 Cross-Group Feedback

The study used a cross-group feedback method which involved presenting the views of young people gathered in the student focus groups to the staff during their focus group. This approach enabled staff to respond and reflect on the perspectives of the young people. This method facilitates cross-fertilisation of ideas and can create a richer dialogue by inviting staff participants to consider viewpoints beyond their own (Liamputtong, 2011). The method aligns with Morgan's (1997) view of focus groups as interactive environments where meaning is socially constructed, and it provides a form of indirect member checking by allowing participants to validate or challenge views offered by others (Duggleby, 2005). It was hoped that using such an approach would bring together the views of young people who (potentially) engage in additional school activities with staff who can often hold the power in decision-making and implementing change within the school context. This sharing of views aimed to reduce some of this

power and ensure that young people are able to contribute to discussions and planning around additional school activities and collaborate with school staff.

In the study, the cross-group feeding was done by asking students to write down one or two (anonymous) key ideas or thoughts on post-it notes on the topic of additional school activities that they thought would be important for staff members to know. During the staff focus group, the student views were presented to the staff participants to give their reflections.

3.6.4 Development Phase

The development phase of the study involved piloting both the student and staff focus groups, including the interview schedule/prompts and activities. Piloting allowed the researcher to gather feedback on the different elements of the focus group, how participants experienced the focus group as well as practical considerations around facilitating the focus group. According to Robson and McCartan (2016) piloting can be beneficial in checking whether the methods selected are suitable in answering the intended research questions. Methods can then be reviewed and adjusted accordingly. Piloting the focus groups also provided an opportunity for the researcher to reflect on their role as a facilitator.

The student focus group was piloted on a group of Year 10 students (three male and two female) who attended a school in the same LA as the participating school. Time constraints meant that it was not possible to pilot the focus groups on students from the participating school, though the schools were perceived to be similar in terms of their location within a comparable socio-economic area within the LA with a similar proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium. Both were mixed schools and also part of Academy Trusts. The student focus groups were also piloted on a group of six Trainee EPs, the majority of which had experiences working with secondary school aged pupils and so were well placed to comment on the accessibility and suitability for students. The staff

focus group was piloted on a group of Trainee EPs (N=6) and a group of Assistant/Trainee EPs (N=6), as it was not possible to pilot with school staff due to their unavailability. However, many of the Trainee/Assistant EPs who took part in the pilot study had previous roles as members of school staff and therefore it was felt they would be able to provide appropriate feedback regarding the staff focus group.

Where possible, the pilot focus groups aimed to run for the same duration as in the main study. Where this was not possible due to time constraints and availability of participants, activities that were not able to be experienced fully (e.g. with sufficient time) were explained with comments and feedback around how this would potentially work shared. The areas that the researcher sought feedback on were the definitions, questions/prompts, activities, practicalities and facilitating. Minor changes were made in light of feedback (see appendices G & H) and reflections of the researcher.

3.7 Data Analysis

3.7.1 Transcription of Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews were transcribed based on audio and video recordings. With the study taking on a social constructionist perspective, the social interactions between focus group members were important for the researcher to consider. As such, verbal and non-verbal linguistic features (e.g. a participant nodding in agreement with another) were included as part of the transcriptions. These features were an important contribution to meaning making in group discussions. Therefore, including such features provided contextual richness allowing for a more accurate interpretation of participants' engagement, agreement or disagreement. The transcription feature of Microsoft Word was used to help the researcher efficiently transcribe the verbal elements of the focus group interviews. The researcher spent time reviewing and editing the transcripts alongside the recordings to ensure accuracy as well as including the non-verbal features.

3.7.2 Process of Analysis

The transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This type of analysis was chosen as it allowed for flexibility in gaining a rich understanding of the data and enabled the researcher to identify patterns and themes relating to the research questions. It also enabled a comparison of such themes between the two groups of students and staff to understand where views aligned and where they differed.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Grounded Theory are methods of data analysis that were considered by the researcher. IPA could have been used in this study because of its depth of exploration into individual experiences and its focus on how people make sense of their experiences (Smith, 2004). However, using this method involves a detailed case-by-case analysis of each participant which in addition to being time consuming would not allow for the identification of shared patterns and themes across a group of participants as effectively as using thematic analysis. Grounded Theory involves an iterative process of generating theory (Charmaz, 2014); this study although aiming to identify themes and patterns across participant experiences was not seeking to develop a theory from the data. The iterative nature of Grounded Theory was also deemed to not be feasible and appropriate for this study.

The researcher was guided by the six stages of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) (see table 5). An inductive approach to coding was taken, with themes being driven by the data rather than fitting a pre-existing coding frame or being driven by theory. The process of thematic analysis does not follow a strict linear process; it is bi-directional allowing the researcher to move back and forth through the different stages and frequently revisit stages. Data from the focus groups were coded (see Appendix L) using the software programme NVivo, which supported the organisation and grouping of codes during the coding process. Codes, including the frequency of references for each code were exported to Microsoft Excel.

As part of the thematic analysis process, there was an ongoing process of refinement in the development of themes, consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2021) approach. Initial coding was conducted inductively, generating a wide range of codes that were organised into provisional themes that were relevant to the research questions. During the refinement phase, some themes were discarded for being too broad or for lacking sufficient supporting data. Other themes were combined where they were capturing a shared idea. In some cases, themes were revised and renamed to better reflect the meaning of their content.

Table 5 – Stages of thematic analysis for this research (Braun & Clarke, 2021)

Phase	Description of phase	Actions taken by researcher to follow phase
Phase 1: Familiarisation	Establish familiarity of data through immersion – repeatedly reviewing recordings and transcripts.	Reviewing audio and video recordings and editing transcripts (including adding non-verbal elements). This allowed the researcher to familiarise themselves with the data. Transcripts were re-read and visual familiarisation notes were made.
Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes	Identifying parts of the data that are potentially interesting, relevant and meaningful to research questions and assign these a code label.	Transcripts were imported onto the software programme NVivo and codes were given to sections of text by the researcher. The initial codes were reviewed with some codes changed or discarded. Codes with common patterns were collated.
Phase 3: Generating Initial Themes	Identifying shared patterns of meaning across the data in relation to research questions. Potential themes are identified through grouping codes.	Subthemes were generated through combining different codes that were categorised under overarching themes. Codes were printed so that the researcher could physically move codes into different combinations of potential themes.

Phase 4: Review Themes	Assessing themes in relation to the original data.	Themes were checked to ensure they aligned with codes. This involved reviewing the data relevant to each theme. Emerging themes were also checked against original transcripts.
Phase 5: Refining, Defining and Naming Themes	Refining themes ensuring they are built around a core concept and given an appropriate name.	Theme names and definitions were developed to ensure themes captured each concept clearly and accurately reflected the data.
Phase 6: Write-up	Writing up the analysis – communicating how the analysis of the data collected addresses research questions.	The themes that emerged from the analysis are presented in the Findings section (Chapter 4) and interpreted further in the Discussion section (Chapter 5).

3.7.2.1 Inter-coder triangulation

During the coding process, the researcher used peer supervision with Trainee EP colleagues to compare codes on a transcript excerpt with the coding of the researcher. This inter-coder triangulation enhanced the understanding and engagement with the data. The overall coding between the researcher and their Trainee EP colleagues was found to be largely consistent, with a high degree of agreement on the core ideas represented in the data. The development of codes and themes were also shared with supervisors for their feedback on their appropriateness and clarity. Taking such measures ensured that the researcher's coding was an accurate representation of the data and the interpretations of the researcher (Yardley, 2015). These measures also contributed to further refinement of themes.

Chapter 4: Findings

Overview

This chapter will outline the findings of the study. Findings that arose from student focus groups will be presented followed by staff focus groups. It will be highlighted whether a particular theme or subtheme arose from a separate part of the focus group to the main question (e.g. sharing of views or icebreaker activity in the case of students or reflecting on student views in the case of staff). Finally, this section will present a comparison of views highlighting key areas of similarity and inconsistency between the student and staff participant groups.

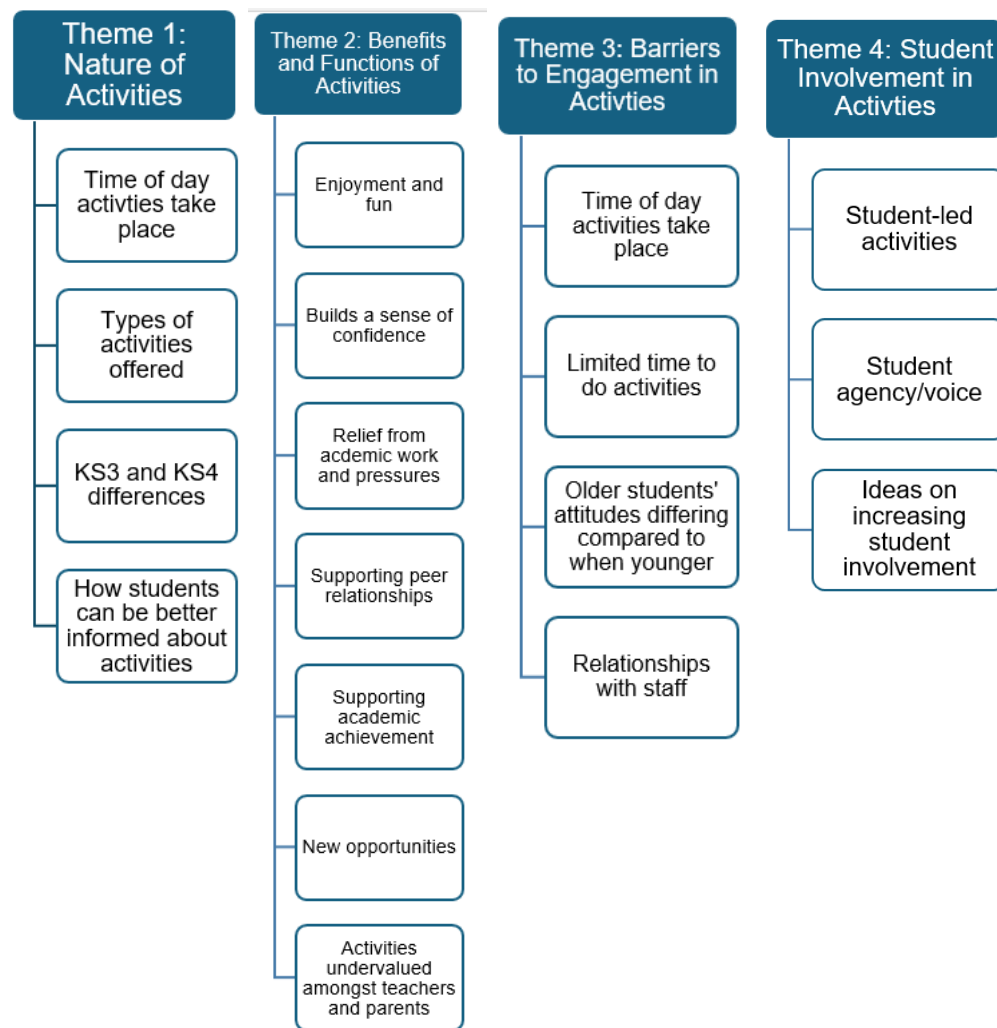## 4.1 School Context – Additional School Activities

Field notes were collected from conversations with the contact member for School X who was an assistant headteacher with responsibility for the wider curriculum through which some information regarding the context of the school in relation to additional school activities were shared.

It was noted that before there was a specific staff role with responsibility for additional school activities, such activities were very limited for students, with only the departments of PE, Drama and Science offering any type of additional school activities to students. There was a timetable introduced for additional school activities (referred to by School X clubs) that are run throughout the school week. Furthermore, all staff members in School X are required to lead an additional school activity for one hour a week as part of their teaching time. Each department at School X offers one event per year as well as each year group having one trip outside of school per year.

4.2 Student Focus Groups

An overview of the themes and subthemes emerging from the student focus groups is presented below (see figure 1). A total of 4 main themes and 18 subthemes arose across all parts of the focus group.

Figure 1 – Thematic map of themes and subthemes arising from student focus groups

This theme highlights the nature of additional school activities that are available to students. This theme produced four subthemes covering when activities take place, the types of activities that are offered as well as the differences of available activities between students in KS3 and those in Key Stage 4 (KS4). Lastly the theme highlighted ways in which students felt they could be better informed about what activities are available to them.

4.2.1.1: Time of Day Activities Take Place

Students spoke about the time of day at which additional school activities take place throughout the day. Formal organised activities (e.g. clubs) mainly took place either before or after school. Students identified that the majority of additional school activities relating to sports occurred before school. During lunch times, there were fewer formal activities identified with students sharing there were spaces around the school e.g. the library or the SEN base that were available for them to use:

"You can go to SEN, that's an option…they have a few games and like books up there…usually most days there's chess, chess going on, which I enjoy doing chess, up there."

(Student L)

4.1.1.2: Types of Activities Offered

Following on from when additional activities take place, students also outlined the types of activities offered at their school. Activities included sports (football, rugby, netball, trampolining), academic (interventions, homework) and others such as art, drama, debating and social enterprise. Students also mentioned spaces that they could access to do additional school activities, such as the library and computer rooms to do homework. Furthermore, students wanted staff to know that they felt the school should

be offering more variety in activities and that such activities should be providing them with a chance to have more fun.

4.2.1.3: KS3 and KS4 Differences

This subtheme reflected the differences that were identified by students between the amount and range of additional school activities available for those in KS3 in comparison to those in KS4. According to students, activities were *"mostly for like Key Stage 3".* As well as a difference in the number of activities available for the two key stages, students spoke of a difference in the types of activities on offer between the two key stages, namely that activities for KS4 are mostly related to academic work. For example, referring to what is on offer to KS4 students, one student remarked that *"there's more like homework and revision club rather than like the PE clubs."*

4.2.1.4: How Students Can Be Better Informed About Activities

Students felt that additional school activities could be better shared across the school and had some ideas about how this could happen. There was one particular teacher noted by students who frequently stood outside their classroom encouraging students to attend and promoting their activity:

"He'll [teacher] just be outside the room and be like come"

(Student A)

"He's got this little sign that he holds up and it's got like stuff written on it"

(Student H)

The activity that this teacher led was reported to be well attended by students.

The ideas students had around being better informed focused on finding central places around the school that could signpost any formal activities which students could check

on a daily basis as well as there being more information provided about such activities so that students are able to make an informed decision about whether they want to engage in them. One student said, *"Tell us what clubs have what benefits sort of, so people will be more interested."*

4.2.1.5: What activities could look like

This final subtheme emerged mostly from the icebreaker activity and was related to ideas that students had on the potential of what additional school activities could look like. Students felt that additional school activities should provide academic support. This includes activities having more of a focus around revision when exams are approaching. There was also a desire for there to be more activities that were based around academic subjects, such as History and Geography.

In addition to students wanting activities to have an academic focus, students also acknowledged that they should also have a fun and enjoyable element to them. The following comment from one student highlighted the need for this balance, *"…you want it [activities] to be like fun…but like you also need to get work done as well".* Furthermore, or lastly, students were keen to share with staff their view that additional school activities should be longer. Comments such as *"longer clubs"* and *"extending the time of clubs"* were made. The impact of increasing the length of activities was anticipated to be increased attendance for students with one saying, *"If the clubs were longer more people would go."*

4.2.2 Theme 2: Benefits and Functions of Activities

This theme represents the benefits and functions that students perceived additional school activities to have. The subthemes emerging were: enjoyment and fun, builds a sense of confidence and achievement, relief from academic work and pressures, supporting peer relationships, supporting academic achievement, providing new

opportunities. There was also a subtheme relating to activities being undervalued by teachers and parents

4.2.2.1: Enjoyment and Fun

There was a sense amongst students that additional school activities provide them with enjoyment and fun during their school day. Students spoke about activities being *"something that you can just go to and have fun".* This was echoed by students sharing that their motivations for engaging in additional activities was shared enjoyment with their friends and other students. The importance of activities being fun was emphasised by students wanting staff to know that additional school activities should be fun and that the offer of activities available should reflect this.

4.2.2.2 Builds a Sense of Confidence and Achievement

Students spoke of the confidence and achievement that can come with engaging in additional school activities and the impact this can have. For example, one student spoke of the *"sense of achievement"* that can occur as a result of competing in sporting activities and how experiencing success in such activities would *"boost your self-esteem"*. Additionally, the confidence gained from doing well in additional school activities was felt to be something that students could apply to the real-world context:

"…outside of school, you're gonna be like, maybe more confident if you bring it out into the real world."

(Student D)

4.2.2.3 Relief from Academic Work and Pressures

The enjoyment and fun that students described (Section 4.1.2.1) seemed to be of particular importance in light of them identifying that one of the values of additional school activities is taking their minds off of their academic work. It seemed that this was

particularly the case for this cohort of students who are in Year 10, which appeared to have represented a shift in academic pressures and demands from previous years. One student expressed that:

"For our year group as well like…for a club that isn't necessarily like revision based, work based, so like a sports club, gives you a chance to like for like an hour just, not to focus on school."

(Student H)

Students recognised the positive feelings that this relief from academic work such as revision gave them. It appeared to be important for students that staff were aware that one of the key functions of additional school activities was providing a relief from academic pressures. One student shared their perspective that activities are *"something that's not so focused on, you know, GCSEs",* which highlighted the pressure students faced in terms of their GCSEs and seeking a break from this through engaging in additional school activities.

4.2.2.4 Supporting Peer Relationships

Additional school activities had a perceived positive impact on students' friendships. There was a real sense from the students that having a chance to spend time with their friends was something they particularly valued from engaging in additional school activities:

"…so like a sports club, gives you a chance to like for like an hour…just to be with your friends, have fun."

(Student H)

Amongst the benefits of doing activities with peers was the pleasure students noted, for example: *"Have a laugh, enjoy"* which one participant mentions occurs when they get to

do activities with their friends. The value of engaging in activities with peers was further highlighted in the desire for there to be "*more opportunities for us to just, like, do clubs with our friends".* Furthermore, it was also recognised the function additional school activities could play in supporting new friendships to develop:

"…you get to meet new people as well, and that you may have never spoken to, but you could become really good friends from just meeting at a club"

(Student L)

4.2.2.5 Supporting academic achievement

Despite the earlier subtheme around additional school activities taking student's minds off academic work (Section 4.1.2.3), students also acknowledged the academic benefits that these activities can provide. One student shared:

"I think clubs could push your [academic] opportunities a lot more higher…And give just give you that little bit more boost to hopefully, exceed your expectations."

(Student L)

Students described that academic additional school activities provided an opportunity for them to receive support from teachers if they have not understood something in class. This support alleviated feelings of frustration felt by not understanding and instead resulted in confidence around the particular area:

"And cause like what I think as well, say if you don't get something in class and then you like go to like, you're kind of like annoyed about it, like everyone else around you is understanding it but you just like can't get [it] and then you go to a club like, so like personally with the teacher and they explain it to you more and like you get it and you feel like a lot more confident about it."

(Student H)

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Students reported this support meaning they felt less stressed when it came to exams. Furthermore, they also spoke of the long term academic benefits that resulted from being able to revise as part of engaging in activities.

4.2.2.6 New Opportunities

Students recognised that additional school activities brought some new opportunities for them. This includes having the chance to do new things that they may not have previously or otherwise been able to do and learning new skills:

"…it [activities] opens a wide opportunity of different things that people would do"

(Student L)

Furthermore, activities facilitated students meeting peers that they may have not otherwise interacted with students acknowledging the role that this could play in developing friendships.

4.2.2.7 Activities Undervalued Amongst Teachers and Parents

In contrast to the benefits of additional school activities that have been identified within this theme so far, this subtheme captured the sense that students had in regards activities being less valued amongst their teachers and parents. For both teachers and parents, students felt that they placed less importance on activities in comparison to academic work, highlighted by one particular student feeling that their parents *"are more like, academic based…they don't really care about my clubs"*. In the case of teachers, some students felt that activities were *"kind of ignored"* by them.

<u>*4.2.3 Theme 3: Barriers to students engaging in additional school activities*</u>

There were comments from students around factors that affect the level of engagement in additional school activities. These were; time of day activities take place, limited time to do activities, older students' attitudes differing compared to when younger and relationships with staff.

4.2.3.1 Time of Day Activities Take Place

This subtheme reflected that the times of day that activities take place can prevent students from engaging in them. Section 4.1.1.1 outlined when additional school activities took place. Many formally arranged activities e.g. clubs tended to take place either before or after school. For those taking place in the morning, students felt that this was often inconvenient for students, particularly those who lived further away from the school. One student who was part of the football team described how themselves and many of the team were *"kicked out of team cause we didn't er…show up to training"* and that was due to it being in the morning. Students also felt that in general, activities that took place before school did not appeal to many students and therefore engagement in such activities were lower. There was a comment from a student that *"No one wants to go to clubs in the morning"* with students feeling that activities took place *"too early"*, reflecting that students did not feel like they could or wanted to participate in activities at this time of the day.

There also appeared to be some difficulty with activities taking place after school in terms of the safety of students going home after doing activities with them making reference to it being dark at such times. For the few activities that occurred during school break times, students reflected that there was insufficient time to do them. One student remarked, *"I guess there's not much time during break and lunch to do those clubs"* which students felt was a barrier to students attending and engaging in additional school activities. Students spoke of competing demands at lunch time in particular, such as getting lunch and having to get changed and set up for activities (mainly sports

activities). As a result, students felt that it would be beneficial to have more time available at break and lunch times for additional school activities and in sharing their views staff suggested the lengths of school breaks could be increased.

4.2.3.2 Limited Time to do Activities

Students reflected that having limited time to do activities was a barrier with attendance and engagement in activities going down as in their words, *"people are going to clubs a lot less because they generally just don't have the time"*. Amongst many of the students, it was clear that being in Year 10 represented a difference in the amount of time they have available to engage in additional school activities. Some reflected that they did more clubs when they were in their younger years of secondary school citing that *"we had more time [in previous years]. We didn't have as much homework."*

4.2.3.3 Older Students' Attitudes Differing Compared to When Younger

On a similar note to older students having less time to engage in additional school activities, their attitudes towards these activities also seemingly changes as they progress through secondary school. They spoke of not being as motivated to engage in activities with the enjoyment and possibly novelty of these activities wearing off by the time they are in Year 10. For example, one student said, *"Once you get into the older years you kind of like, the joy kinda dies out. It's like you're not really as excited to go and spend time after school to do that [activities]"*. Furthermore, students also felt that as they got older, and academic pressures increased, when they did have a break from work they had a preference not to spend this time in a classroom environment.

4.2.3.4 Relationships with staff

This subtheme relates to some students feeling that the staff member leading additional school activity impacts whether they want to attend that activity or not. One student remarked:

"If you don't like the teachers that's running it but you love the club you're kind of less likely to go".

(Student M)

Other students agreed with this view. This emphasised the idea that teacher connection affected engagement in activities and appears is a stronger indicator of whether students attend activities than the activity itself.

4.2.4 Theme 4: Increased Student Involvement in Activities

A key theme that arose was in relation to students' views on their current involvement in additional school activities as well as what this could potentially look like going forward. The subthemes that emerged were student-led activities and student agency/voice.

4.2.4.1 Student-led activities

This subtheme represented the view from students that adults need to provide more opportunities for students to lead activities, reflected in comments such as *"Let students run clubs"* and *"More student-led clubs"* that students wanted to share with staff. There were benefits to more student-led activities which students identified. One was the positive impact this would have for their future in terms of developing skills and having experiences that could support their future prospects. Skills such as leadership were cited by students as something they would gain by leading activities that would support them in future beyond school. For example, students thought that such skills and the experience of leading activities *"would look good on like applications"* for jobs they applied for in the future. Furthermore, student-led activities could have a positive impact on student's wellbeing. They described examples of how this had happened in the past with one participant explaining how they ran a club alongside a teacher and that helping *"made me feel good".*

Students also felt that student-led activities would positively impact attendance and engagement in activities. They felt that student-led activities would result in students being more likely to attend such activities with one student saying, *"If students erm like lead it [activities], other students would be more like encouraged to join"*. Furthermore, some students were of the view that student-led activities would reduce the pressure that students may feel being in activities that are adult-led. This includes being reluctant to approach a teacher during an activity or in situations where they may be the only student in attendance.

4.2.4.2 Student Agency/Voice

There was a view amongst students that they had little input into what additional school activities that their school offered, despite such activities being for them, and that they wanted to have a more active role in this. One student shared: *"Like we said with clubs they're for us but we don't really get much say"*. Students were keen to inform staff that additional school activities should be based on and catered to the interests of students. There was also an emphasis on the fact that there should be more student involvement (and in turn less staff involvement) around what activities are offered. In the words of one student, *"… [students] have the idea of what people their age like to do at the time, like with trends"*. This reflects the idea that adults mainly decide which activities are on offer and that they may not always be attuned to what students are interested in and therefore students would be well placed to provide more of insight of what students may be interested in.

Students felt that whilst there had been attempts in the past to collect their views, they did not see any changes as a result from sharing their opinions around additional school activities, with their views seemingly being overlooked. One student described how a survey was previously done around clubs to gain student feedback

but *"nothing came of it".* Furthermore, as a result of their views not being acted upon, students have lost confidence and faith when adults at school ask about their views and as a result are less motivated to share their views:

"I feel like we just don't really care anymore, when they [adults] ask"

(Student Z)

### 4.2.4.3 Ideas on Increasing Student Involvement

As well as expressing that they have minimal input into additional school activities, students also shared some ways in which they could have more involvement in the future. One idea was around there being a dialogue between students and teachers whereby students could have *"like the chance like to talk to a teacher and be like we want this club can you make it happen?"* Students felt that this could help activities be more based on student's wants and interests.

Students also felt that having a vote around activities would be helpful as this would be a good way to get the views of students across the school. There was also recognition that there would have to be a role for teachers within a vote, for example teachers choosing a few options from the initial vote to be put forward for a further vote. Finally, as discussed in the previous subtheme (Section 4.1.4.2) students spoke of students being able to lead and help to run activities as an idea they would like to see in relation to students having more involvement in additional school activities. There was a sense that further opportunities should be created for students to directly involved in leading activities.

4.3. Staff Focus Group

The thematic map below (see figure 2) outlines the themes that arose from staff the focus group. In total, 5 themes and 16 subthemes emerged.

Figure 2 – Thematic map of themes and subthemes emerging from staff focus group
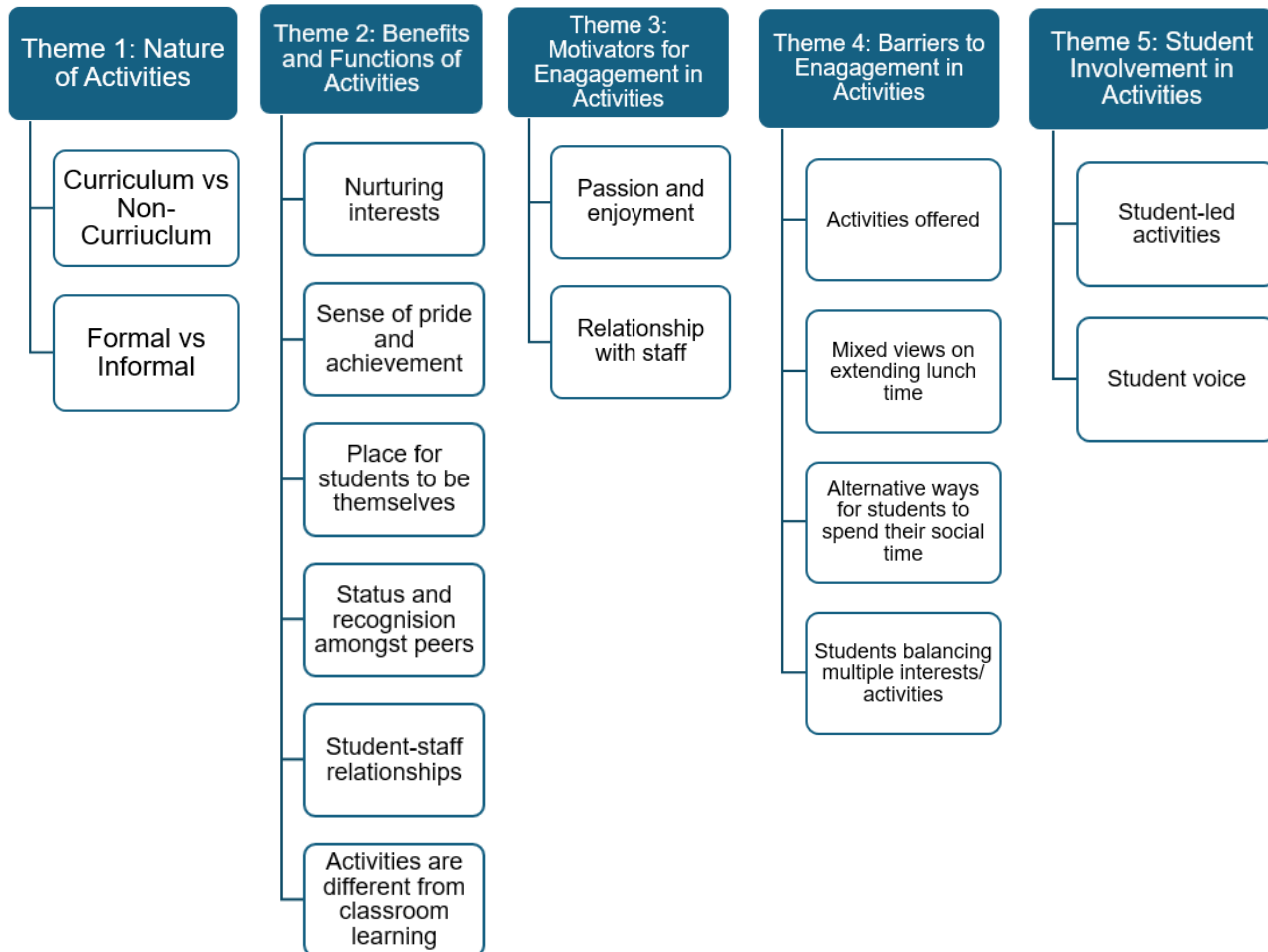
4.3.1 Theme 1: Nature of Activities

Staff spoke about the nature of additional school activities and in particular made distinctions between curriculum and non-curriculum activities as well as formal and informal activities.

4.3.1.1 Curriculum vs Non-curriculum

When describing the types of additional school activities that are available for students, staff mentioned that activities *"can be curriculum based"* and referred to activities such as interventions. There were also activities such as 'Science Project' that was noted not to follow the curriculum and an example of students being able to engage in activities around music journalism. Furthermore, staff referred to activities that were based on the interests or expertise of adults rather than the curriculum:

> *"Our head of French does a speak Italian club, something a bit different"*
>
> (Laura)

4.3.1.2 Formal vs Informal

The additional school activities that were spoken about by staff also identified differences in how formal these activities were. Formal activities were mainly clubs that students could engage with and examples included 'Science Club' and 'Drama Club' that occur at a particular time each week. In contrast to this, there were opportunities for students to engage in more informal activities that are available as and when students want to do them and require less commitment than more formal activities. There were drop-in sessions that students could do across subjects including Maths and Science, and in the case of Music, one member of staff shared that having access to music spaces led to *"students just jamming and seeing what's happening"*.

4.3.2: Theme 2 Benefits and Functions of Activities

This theme represents the perceived benefits that staff felt additional school activities had for students. There were six subthemes arising: Nurturing interests, sense of pride and achievement, promoting acceptance, status and recognition amongst peers, student-staff relationships and activities are different from classroom learning.

4.3.2.1 Nurturing Interests

Staff felt that additional school activities provided an opportunity for students' interests to be further developed. It was highlighted that staff being aware of the things that students are interested in meant that they were able to *"direct where their interests are".* Additionally, staff spoke of students having particular interests when they begin secondary school that they could pursue and that could be nurtured throughout their time at secondary school.

4.3.2.2 Sense of Pride and Achievement

This subtheme captured the idea that additional school activities provided students with a sense of pride and achievement. Staff described how students *"feel like they've achieved something"* and appreciated that some of this is in part due to the short nature of activities. According to staff, students appear to recognise what they have been able to achieve in what they perceive to be a short space of time. Staff referenced that such pride can be evidenced by students taking photos of things they have made:

"So with our little origami things that we'd make, they've made that you know, they've took pictures of it. It's something that they've, they've done, they've achieved something in that sort of 30,40 minutes."

(Laura)

4.3.2.3 Place for Students to be Themselves

There was a strong sense amongst staff that additional school activities provided students with a place where they could be accepted for being themselves. It was noted that those students who attended and engaged with activities were often those who *"weren't necessarily socially acceptable"* and these students get a chance to express themselves without being judged by others. Staff reflected that this allows students to feel more comfortable in this environment which fosters a sense of safety or what one member of staff described as a *"little haven"* for them.

4.3.2.4 Status and Recognition Amongst Peers

School staff felt that students could gain status and recognition amongst their peers by engaging in additional school activities. It described that for some activities, such as those related to music, the status of students can be elevated within the school community. In such cases, being able to showcase talents results in admiration and praise from their peers, with one member of staff describing students gaining a form of "celebrity" status and receiving positive comments such as *"Oh, my God, you're a sick drummer"* from other students. Furthermore, staff also felt that this meant older students had a positive influence on those who were younger as these students saw the older ones as role models who they could look up to.

4.3.2.5 Student-staff Relationships

Staff were of the view that additional school activities positively impacted student-staff relationships. This seemed to be in part due to students having differing perceptions and experiences of staff when in the context of an additional school activity compared to when in more formal lessons. Staff recalled their own experiences of students having this realisation about their teachers presenting somewhat differently to what they are used to. Furthermore, staff described how students seem to enjoy having *"a normal conversation"* with adults at school when partaking in additional school activities. For example, one member of staff shared how they connected with a student over a music band that the student was surprised that the member of staff was familiar with. On such occasions, staff felt that it was these interactions that keep students engaged in the activities more than the actual activity itself.

4.3.2.6 Activities are different from Classroom Learning

Similar to the previous theme, as well as there being a fundamental difference in the relationships between students and staff when it comes to additional school activities compared to in lessons during the school day, there is also a recognition that the activities themselves are different to what lessons are usually like. Staff felt that

students benefit from engaging with various topics and concepts in different ways that they typically are able to in the classroom. One member of staff commented on how activities that are not linked to the curriculum give students a chance to *"explore and think and question"* things that lessons do not always afford them the opportunity to. Staff also felt that additional school activities gave students the chance to share knowledge with staff that they cannot always do in their classroom learning environment:

"…it's an opportunity for them to express the additional information which they have because in class we don't always get the opportunity…we're focused more on the learning intentions, but when they come out with 'Oh sir, did you know this, this, that?'"

(Stuart)

4.3.3 Theme 3: Motivators for Engagement in Activities

This theme summarised the motivators that staff felt encouraged students to engage in additional school activities. The subthemes that emerged were passion and enjoyment and relationships with staff.

4.3.3.1 Passion and Enjoyment

According to staff, a key motivator for students engaging in additional school activities was being passionate about particular activities as well as enjoying them:

"I'd say students go because they enjoy that club"

(Laura)

Staff commented on how students' passion about certain interests and activities drives them to attend. This was felt to be of significance for activities that that take place after school, as staff recognised that this was a time when students are giving up their time to

attend and it's the students who are most passionate that engage in such additional school activities. Staff also acknowledged the enjoyment that students have when they engage in additional school activities, citing some of the benefits included in Section 4.4.2 such as being somewhere they are accepted and having good relationships with adults as factors that positively influenced on students' enjoyment.

4.3.2.2 Relationships with Staff

Similar to the subtheme 'Student-Staff Relationships' staff felt that relationships with staff was a motivating factor to engage in additional school activities. Additionally to what the previous subtheme highlighted around staff being perceived as different when in additional school activities, staff spoke of students wanting to come to activities due to the relationships they have formed with staff. For example, one member of staff commented on the *"short term bond"* that is built and that is appreciated by students. This sense of connection was thought to encourage students to continue to engage in additional school activities:

"…it's difficult to get them out then because it ends up being, oh, we're having a normal conversation with these adults, which is quite engaging. So I think that's what keeps them coming in."

(Stuart)

4.3.4 Theme 4: Barriers to Engagement in Activities

This theme represents the factors that staff identified were barriers to students engaging in additional school activities. The subthemes produced were activities offered, mixed views on extending lunch time, alternative ways for students to spend their social time and students balancing multiple interests/activities.

4.3.4.1 Activities Offered

This subtheme captured the view that the types and number of additional activities on offer to students acts as a barrier to engagement. In terms of break and lunch times, staff identified there was minimal things available for students to do:

> "There's not really much in the way of activities for them to do …they are just outside, there's, there's no particular sort of games that are going on. There's no football on the field."
>
> (Laura)

Staff recognised that a lack of funding limited what was on offer. One participant felt that it would be beneficial *"to have a little pot of money"* available to support additional school activities. Staff reflected that not having enough funding as well as resources made catering activities to student interests particularly difficult. There was also an example given of an activity that currently takes place that is funded by the National Theatre which involves someone coming in to lead this activity. Staff recognised the school could not afford for this to happen otherwise and that when this funding comes to an end after the current academic year, this activity would no longer able to run.

Reflecting on comments made by students highlighted to staff that this particular cohort of students (Year 10) did not have access to many additional school activities and *"get the lowest offer".* Therefore, engagement was also lower amongst this group with one member of staff reflecting that it was likely that students only attended the additional school activity that they oversaw because there were no alternatives for them:

> *"I wonder if maybe it's because they come because there's not much else for them"*
>
> (Mark)

4.3.4.2 Mixed Views on Extending Lunch Time

It was identified by some students that lunch time should be extended to accommodate additional school activities taking place at this time (see Section 4.1.3.1) as they felt this was a barrier to them engaging in activities and something they wanted to share with staff. When reflecting on this suggestion, there were mixed views from staff. On one hand, staff could see how this would be beneficial for additional school activities as it would allow more of them to take place, for example: *"It would be good for clubs…like PE could then do clubs"*. Whilst the positive impact extending lunch time was recognised, staff also raised behavioural concerns that they felt came with longer lunch times. Staff shared previous experiences of having longer lunch breaks where behavioural incidents took place towards the end of this time and concluded that *"the incidents of issues at lunchtime drop massively with a shorter lunch".* Overall, it was felt that whilst extending the lunch break would benefit the students who would be engaging in additional school activities, for the majority of students not involved in activities, such benefits would not be seen.

4.2.4.3 Alternative Ways for Students to Spend Social Time

This subtheme emerged through staff feeling that a barrier to students engaging in additional school activities was their preference to spend their social time in other ways. This particularly applied to social time at the end of the school day. One member of staff reflected that at the end of the day, many students had a desire to leave the school premises and spend their free time elsewhere. They said, *"As the bell goes…most of them [students] want to leave and go out and actually have their general social time."* As well as wanting to leave the school premises, staff also felt that students were motivated by their phones and wanted to re-engage with this at the end of the school day; something that they cannot do if participating in an additional school activity due to rules around phones not being allowed to be used.

4.3.4.4 Students Balancing Multiple Interests/Activities

This theme reflected the idea that from staff's perspective, the students who engaged with additional school activities, particularly after school were the same group of students attending across the week. These students therefore have multiple interests and for some, they face the practical challenge of balancing these interests. For example, if there are two additional school activities that occur at the same time, students have to choose which one to go to, which can leave certain activities with not many students attending. One member of staff acknowledged that *"the kids that wanna be in the [drama] show are also in the Science Club and also playing in the football team"* highlighting that students with many interests are having to select one activity to commit to, at the expense of others that they may also want to engage in. Staff did make reference to *"drop-ins"* as one potential way that they are currently able to help students to manage some of these competing demands. Drop-ins were seen as positive because of their non-committal nature which meant there was less pressure for students to have to attend on a regular basis. This provides them with flexibility to attend different drop-ins each week or even within the same day.

4.3.5 Theme Five: Student Involvement in Activities

This theme arose predominantly from staff discussions reflecting on what students had shared around this topic. Two subthemes of student-led activities and student voice came from this theme.

4.2.5.1 Student-led Activities

Staff generally felt that more student-led activities was a good suggestion by the students and identified some benefits. Firstly, it was felt that student-led activities would equip students with skills for the future e.g. leadership. Students would be able to reference such skills when applying for jobs with one staff member commenting that it would *"look good or their CV leaving school if they led a club"* highlighting the impact that student-led activities could have beyond their time at school. Furthermore, staff felt

that student-led activities could give more ownership of additional school activities to students, resulting in less ownership and responsibility for staff. There was a reflection that there were *"staff members who are 'running clubs' that nobody goes to"* indicating that staff were planning for activities that were not being attended and as such, student-led activities would reduce some of the pressures on their workload, which at that time some were not reaping the rewards of.
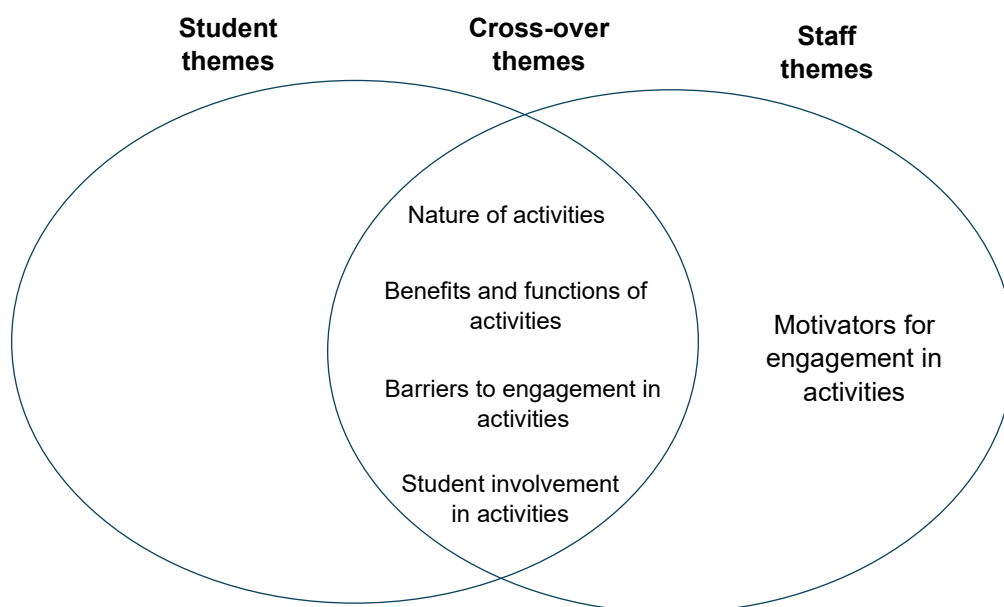
4.3.5.2 Student Voice

This subtheme was in relation to how student voice could be used more by staff to support the wider involvement that students can have with additional school activities. Staff reflected that there needed to be further opportunities to collect and listen to the views of students. It appeared to be helpful for staff to hear some ideas directly from students with one saying that *"…it might be that there's something that we can tap into [in relation to considering suggestions from students]"* indicating that staff appreciated hearing from students and would be something they looked into doing more of in the future. Linked to this, staff also referenced communication with students around their views being more open as well as facilitating more collaboration between students and staff. This included explaining to students why suggestions may not be able to be implemented as well as students having some responsibility to engage with additional school activities in light of their suggestions being acted upon.

4.4 Comparison of Themes

This section will compare the themes that emerged from the two participant groups and outline the similarities and differences in themes/subthemes between students and staff, as illustrated below (see figure 3).

Figure 3 – Cross-over themes between student and staff groups

Student themes   **Cross-over themes**   **Staff themes**

Nature of activities

Benefits and functions of activities

Barriers to engagement in activities

Student involvement in activities

Motivators for engagement in activities

<u>4.4.1 Shared Themes</u>

4.4.1.1 Nature of Activities

Both groups described what additional school activities were available for students to engage in, though there were differences in how groups spoke about the activities. Staff made distinctions between formal and non-formal activities and curricular and non-curricular activities. Meanwhile, students highlighted differences in relation to who activities are available according to students' key stage. They also mentioned what times activities take place, how they can be better informed about activities as well as the potential of what additional school activities could look like.

4.4.1.2 Benefits and Functions of Activities

Both students and staff identified perceived benefits and functions of additional school activities. However, their views varied about what such benefits and functions are. Students themselves felt that their views on the importance of activities were different to those of their teachers and parents.

Students mentioned academics in relation to additional school activities supporting their academic achievement as well as being a relief from academic pressures. In contrast, staff did not identify any academic benefits and instead highlighted how activities being different from classroom learning was itself a benefit. Both groups commented on achievement with students linking this to confidence, whilst staff linked achievement to pride. In terms of benefits to relationships, students were more focused on additional school activities providing a chance to spend time with friends. Staff identified peer benefits of a different nature, relating to increased status and recognition. A further area related to relationships that was brought up by staff was the benefits to student-staff relationships, which students did not comment on within this theme. Other differences included students identifying enjoyment and fun and new as benefits, whilst for staff nurturing interests and promoting acceptance were key benefits.

4.4.1.3 Barriers to Engagement in Activities

Whilst both groups identified that there were barriers for students engaging in additional school activities, they had different views on what these barriers were. For students, time appeared to be a key factor with students feeling the time of day when activities took place was a barrier as well as them not having enough time to engage in activities. Staff had mixed views on whether extending the duration of lunch time could reduce some of these barriers. Students also reflected on those who are older having differing attitudes to younger students as a barrier in addition to relationships with staff. Barriers identified by staff included activities that were offered, their view that students have

alternative ways to spend their social time and students having to balance multiple activities.

4.4.1.4 Student Involvement

This theme arose from both students and staff and the two subthemes of student-led activities and student voice were also consistent across both groups. Both identified benefits of student-led activities being providing skills for the future, namely leadership skills that would support applying for jobs in the future. Students felt that student-led activities would increase attendance and engagement in activities, whilst staff reflected that student-led activities could potentially reduce the responsibility given to staff in relation to this. For students, they identified that their voice should be included more when it comes to additional school activities and how previous attempts to do this had not been effective. Staff agreed with students that there should be increased opportunities to collect and listen to their views and additionally felt that there could be more collaboration and open communication with students. Furthermore, a subtheme emerged for students more explicitly around how they could have more involvement in additional school activities.

4.4.2 Differences in Themes

4.4.2.1 Motivators for Engagement in Activities

This theme was only mentioned by staff members. Enjoyment and passion was noted as a motivator for students choosing to engage in additional school activities. For students, they felt enjoyment (along with fun) was a key benefit of activities, but this did not extend to a key motivator of why they participated in them. Interestingly staff felt that relationships with staff was a motivator to students engaging in additional school activities, whilst this was identified by students as a barrier.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

This chapter presents a discussion of the main findings in relation to each of the study's research questions and existing theory and literature. Strengths and limitations of the research as well as implications for schools and EPs will be discussed. Considerations will also be given to areas for future research.

5.1 Terminology

The difference in the terminology used around extra-curricular and enrichment activities was highlighted earlier (see section 1.2). Participants largely referred to additional school activities as either extra-curricular activities or clubs. Whilst the definition presented to participants outlined the range of activities that constituted additional school activities, for the purposes of this research, participants predominantly focused on formal activities organised by adults, reflecting that they had not experienced many student-led activities.

Reflecting on the terminology used to describe activities beyond the formal curriculum, this study recognises that multiple terms exist, each with slightly different connotations and scopes. While *"optional wider curricular activities"* may offer a clearer, more inclusive descriptor for such activities, this thesis has maintained the use of *"additional school activities"* to remain consistent with participant language and the research context. This decision supports the integrity of the analysis and avoids imposing terminology that might not have been familiar or meaningful to participants during the research process. It would be helpful going forward if adopted or developed an agreed term such as *"optional wider curricular activities"* to enhance clarity.

5.2 Research Question 1 – What opportunities do young people have to access and engage in additional school activities?

The present findings highlighted that, although a variety of activities were available for young people, there was a perceived need to broaden the range further. Additionally, certain year groups seemed to be excluded from the existing provision.

The activities offered ranged from curricular to non-curricular, and from formal to non-formal in nature. However, the most commonly mentioned were formally organised activities, such as clubs, that took place before or after school. The finding that many activities took place before school contrasted with previous research (Bartkus et al., 2012; Bertram et al., 2017; Knifsend & Graham, 2012) which indicated that many activities are typically scheduled during lunch breaks. This discrepancy may suggest that students' opportunities to participate are limited, as engagement requires them to give up their own free time outside regular school hours. Students might prefer options that allow them to participate during the natural breaks in the school day, such as break or lunch time. The findings also indicated that most activities were adult-led, with relatively few opportunities for student-led initiatives. While there was a degree of variety; including sports, academic clubs, debating, creative arts, and niche options such as origami and social enterprise, the overall range was still perceived as limited by participants. Although the types of activities reflected those noted in earlier studies (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; OECD, 2010), students and staff expressed a desire for a broader selection, suggesting that current offerings may not fully meet the needs and interests of students across the school population. Expanding the range of activities may require additional resources, as highlighted by Donnelly et al. (2019), who argued for increased government funding to support school-based provision. Beyond funding, schools may also require staff with the appropriate skills and knowledge to introduce new activities. For instance, one staff member shared that they lacked the expertise to run a photography club, despite student interest.

In light of these findings, schools may need to consider the range of activities that are offered and whether this needs to be expanded to engage a wider range of students. To achieve this, schools might need to adopt more creative approaches and reflect on the expertise and resources available within the school community. For instance, staff members with personal interests or prior experience in specific activities could provide valuable insight or support in developing new offerings. Extending this further, fostering greater collaboration between students and staff could enhance the planning of additional school activities. Involving students in decision-making processes may help ensure that activities better align with their interests and could enable schools to make more effective use of the knowledge and enthusiasm that students bring. Such involvement has the potential to support schools in drawing on a broader range of available resources, which might contribute to a more inclusive and engaging provision. This, in turn, could help increase the likelihood that a wider range of students have opportunities to access these activities.

Despite the availability of a range of activities, overall participation among students was low, with only one-third of participants in this study currently engaged in in activities. This finding aligns with Baines and Blatchford's (2019) research, which reported lower participation rates among Year 10 students compared to younger cohorts. However, the participation rate observed in this study was lower than figures reported by both the EPI (2025) and the Centre for Social Justice (2021). Some of the factors contributing to this decline, such as increasing academic pressures, have been documented in previous literature (Pascoe et al., 2019; Smith & Thompson, 2017) and were similarly echoed by participants in this study. This suggests that students may perceive a trade-off between academic success and participation in additional school activities. Such a trend may reflect a broader developmental shift in priorities, characterised by higher academic expectations and intensified curriculum demands, in the lead up to GCSEs. In response, schools may wish to consider how to foster an ethos that values both academic achievement and engagement in additional school activities. This could involve recognising and celebrating students' involvement and accomplishments in additional

school activities alongside their academic performance, thereby promoting a more balanced and holistic view of success.

Participation in additional school activities also appeared to be influenced by school-specific contextual factors. In this study, low participation rates among student participants can be partially attributed to the fact that they were largely excluded from the additional school activity offer at their school. Notably, there were perceived differences in the provision between Key Stage 3 (Years 7–9) and Key Stage 4 (Years 10–11), with reportedly fewer opportunities available to students in KS4; the group from which this study's participants were drawn. Students suggested that KS3 pupils had access to a broader and more diverse range of activities, whereas those in KS4 were offered a more limited selection, primarily focused on academics, such as revision or homework sessions. These findings appear to support previous research that, during the later stages of secondary education, there is a shift in emphasis towards GCSE preparation, which in turn may contribute to a reduction in both the number and variety of activities available. This trend may indicate a diminished perceived value of non-academic activities in KS4, with such engagement seen as less important than during KS3.

While this pattern may be specific to the school studied and may not reflect wider practice, it highlights the importance of considering the role of additional school activities across all key stages. Schools could benefit from reflecting on the perceived benefits and functions of these activities (see Sections 4.1.2 and 4.2.2) when reviewing their provision. Ensuring a broad and inclusive range of opportunities for all students, regardless of year group, could help reduce the possibility of excluding particular cohorts. Furthermore, offering activities that vary in time commitment could support greater participation, particularly among KS4 students managing academic pressures. For instance, short-term or drop-in activities (e.g. four-week programmes or flexible sessions) may enable students to engage without compromising their academic responsibilities.

5.3 Research Question 2 – Why do young people participate in additional school activities?

When considering the reasons why young people choose to engage in additional school activities, a few potential motivators emerged. However, student participants in this study did not identify strong or consistent motivating factors. This may reflect the fact that only three of the nine students were actively participating in activities at the time of the research. As previously discussed, the limited availability of opportunities for KS4 students in this school (see Section 5.2) may help explain these lower participation rates.

Despite this, all but one student had engaged in activities during KS3 and were therefore able to reflect on earlier experiences. Some of the perceived benefits of extracurricular engagement are explored in more detail elsewhere (see Section 5.4). It is possible that if more students had been actively participating at the time of the study, they might have identified these benefits as motivating factors. One student explicitly suggested that raising awareness of the benefits of extracurricular activities could increase interest and participation among peers (see Section 4.2.1.4).

One key motivator that did emerge from the findings was enjoyment or passion for the activity itself. This aligns with existing literature, which highlights that students are more likely to engage in activities that align with their personal interests and intrinsic motivations (Akiva & Horner, 2016; Fredricks et al., 2002). Enjoyment and fun have consistently been found to be important factors in encouraging participation (Aoyagi et al., 2019; Borden et al., 2005; Stearns & Glennie, 2010). When students choose activities they enjoy or feel passionate about, they are more likely to experience a sense of ownership and relevance, which can lead to greater investment, a stronger sense of accomplishment, and sustained engagement. These findings can also be interpreted through the lens of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to SDT, when young people

engage in activities that they enjoy or feel passionate about, they are more likely to experience autonomy, as their participation is self-directed rather than externally pressured. Moreover, when students feel competent in an activity, their enjoyment is likely to increase, which further supports both autonomy and motivation (Denault et al., 2022). Given the barriers to participation identified in this study (see Section 5.4.2), it may be beneficial for schools to reflect on how additional school activity provision can better align with students' interests and intrinsic motivations. By designing activities that are enjoyable and relevant, schools may be able to increase engagement and foster a more inclusive and appealing extracurricular environment.

Relationships with staff emerged as another key motivator for participation in additional school activities. Participants described perceiving staff differently in additional school activity environment compared to the traditional classroom environment. This aligns with previous research by Fredricks (2011) and Hirsch et al. (2002), which suggests that extra-curricular contexts can foster more supportive student–adult relationships, not only by providing access to positive role models but also by offering a setting in which staff are more approachable and accessible. These findings highlight the possible value of relational approaches within the context of additional school activities and point to the potential for these relationships to positively influence wider student–staff dynamics within the school. In light of this, schools may benefit from considering how to ensure staff involved in these activities are not only knowledgeable and enthusiastic, but also approachable and skilled at building rapport with students. Encouragement, warmth, and the ability to foster trust are likely to enhance students' willingness to engage. Importantly, this finding also suggests that student engagement may not be driven solely by the content or type of activity on offer, but also by interpersonal and relational factors.

The student–staff connection identified by participants can be viewed through the lens of SDT), specifically the need for relatedness. Supportive adult relationships within extracurricular contexts may help meet this need, reinforcing engagement and

contributing to students' sense of belonging. Previous research also supports this view; Denault et al. (2022) and Ntoumanis (2005) have shown that when adults validate students' skills and provide encouragement, this not only fosters relatedness but also promotes autonomy and competence; key components of SDT that underpin sustained motivation. Interestingly, while positive staff relationships were identified as a motivator, participants also noted that negative perceptions of staff could act as a barrier. Several students indicated they would be less likely to participate in an activity they were otherwise interested in if it was led by a staff member they disliked. This highlights the significance of interpersonal dynamics in determining whether students choose to engage and suggests that staff–student relationships may both facilitate and inhibit participation, depending on their quality.

A notable and somewhat surprising finding of this study was that peers were only briefly mentioned as a motivating factor for participation in additional school activities and did not emerge as a significant theme or subtheme. This contrasts with a substantial body of research that consistently identifies peers as central to motivating participation (Eccles et al., 2003; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Juvonen et al., 2012; Oberle et al., 2019; Schaefer et al., 2011). Moreover, these findings appear to challenge the relatedness component of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which highlights the importance of social connections in motivation. There may be a few reasons which explain this discrepancy. First, the activities experienced by participants in this study were predominantly structured and adult-led. Such settings may limit opportunities for peer socialising and interaction, thereby reducing the salience of peer influence as a motivator. Additionally, adult-led activities tend to emphasise relationships between students and staff, which aligns with earlier findings in this study that student–staff relationships were a significant motivator for participation. Second, the developmental stage of the participants (Year 10 students) may also play a role. At this age, many students have established friendship groups and may be less motivated to join activities for the purpose of making new friends. Instead, participation may be more strongly driven by personal interests rather than a desire to expand or maintain social networks. Supporting this, one participant

noted that their enjoyment of an activity was a stronger factor in their decision to participate than peer attendance, stating they would continue to engage even if their friends no longer participated. This observation aligns with Denault et al. (2022), who found that intrinsic motivations such as personal interests tend to sustain continued engagement more than external factors like peer influence. However, as the present study did not explore ongoing participation in depth, this represents a promising area for future research to further investigate. In conclusion, whilst the findings relating to peers are surprising, they should be interpreted with caution within this small-scale study.

The limited motivating factors identified by both students and staff may suggest that the current provision of additional school activities is not fully meeting the needs or interests of students; at least those who are willing to participate. A case could also be made that the existing offer may not be serving school staff effectively, especially when some activities, which require staff to commit time regularly (often at least once a week), are poorly attended. One staff member noted that they were *"running clubs that nobody goes to,"* highlighting potential challenges in staff engagement and resource allocation. Consequently, schools aiming to enhance motivation for participation could benefit both students and staff by creating more appealing and well-supported activity offerings.

5.4 Research Question 3 – What do young people and school staff perceive the benefits and barriers to participating in additional school activities to be?

The findings revealed that participants identified a range of perceived benefits associated with additional school activities, including supporting academic achievement and social development. In addition to these benefits, several participants suggested that even greater advantages could be realised if students were given more opportunities to engage in student-led activities. Alongside these perceived benefits, participants also highlighted a number of barriers to participation from their perspective, pointing to areas where schools may be able to improve accessibility and engagement.

5.4.1 Perceived Benefits of Additional School Activities

The present study's finding that additional school activities can support academic achievement aligns with existing research (Broh, 2002; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Marsh & Kleitman, 2003; Wormington et al., 2012). However, as this study did not directly measure academic performance, these findings should be interpreted with caution and situated tentatively within the broader literature. Nonetheless, the research provides valuable insights into potential mechanisms through which such activities may positively influence academic outcomes. Students reported that participating in additional school activities related to academic subjects allowed them to access further support from teachers, which helped to deepen their understanding and boost their confidence in specific subject areas. While some students felt that this contributed to improved exam performance, causal or long-term academic impacts cannot be established from the current data. Still, it appears that certain activities offer environments conducive to developing skills and knowledge that may indirectly support academic success. Unlike previous studies (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008; Lipscomb, 2007; Shulruf, 2010), which examined the effects of specific activities on particular academic domains, the current study did not explore this dimension in detail; suggesting an area for future research that could inform schools about the academic value of particular types of activities.

In addition to academic outcomes, the study also found some evidence that additional school activities can offer meaningful social benefits for young people. This is consistent with a wide body of research highlighting the role of such activities in promoting social development (Antonio, 2004; Chang et al., 2006; Molinuevo et al., 2010). Participants valued the opportunity to spend time with peers through extracurricular engagement, supporting the notion that these settings can foster stronger peer relationships. In line with Bukowski et al. (2018), these interactions may play a role in strengthening existing friendships during adolescence. Participants also perceived activities as places where new friendships could form, echoing prior research suggesting that shared interests within these environments can lead to the development of new peer connections

(Knifsend et al., 2018) and that young people often join activities with the intention of meeting new friends (Akiva & Horner, 2016; Persson, Kerr, & Stattin, 2007). In this way, the findings indicate some social functions of additional school activity participation. Additionally, this study found that peer recognition was a valued outcome of involvement in activities. Students reported that these settings provided opportunities to showcase their skills and talents, which often led to recognition and validation from their peers. In some cases, participants described becoming role models for others, including those in different year groups; a finding supported by Kos (2019). Such opportunities for recognition and leadership may be limited within the formal curriculum, further highlighting the potential value in engaging in additional school activities.

In addition to peer relationships, the findings indicated that additional school activities have the potential to strengthen student–staff relationships. Informal interactions that occur within these settings appear to foster more positive and supportive dynamics between students and staff (Fredricks, 2011; Hirsch et al., 2002). This study potentially provides some support for these findings, with participants noting that staff were perceived differently in additional school activity contexts compared to classroom settings. The less formal nature of these environments allowed for more relaxed, personal interactions, which in turn can help develop trust and rapport. Such relationships may evolve into broader support networks that positively impact students' wellbeing and educational aspirations (Behtoui, 2017; Devine, 2009; Shulruf, 2010). Given that some students identified negative student–staff relationships as a barrier to participation (see Section 5.3.2), schools may wish to reflect on how additional school activities can be designed to foster positive connections. Doing so may increase student engagement while also enhancing staff satisfaction and motivation to contribute to the wider school experience.

Although this study did not identify a direct link between participation and the development of skills for the future, an important theme that emerged was the potential value of student-led activities in preparing young people for life beyond school. Several

participants suggested that these types of opportunities could support the development of leadership and transferable skills, such as teamwork, problem-solving, confidence, and autonomy, which are essential for future employment and higher education (Barnett, 2008; Christison, 2013; Clark et al., 2015). While structured, adult-led enrichment activities can offer valuable skill-building experiences (Eccles & Templeton, 2002), the literature also emphasises the benefits of more student-driven approaches. Durlak et al.'s (2010) meta-analysis found that less structured, student-led activities were particularly effective in promoting initiative, autonomy, and leadership. Students who assumed roles such as group leaders or mentors reported increased self-efficacy and a stronger sense of ownership over their experiences. Symonds and Hagell (2011) further argued that post-school hours, when used flexibly, provide space for independent exploration; particularly beneficial for those who thrive under reduced adult supervision.

The suggestion that student-led initiatives may contribute meaningfully to students' long-term development points to the possible value of incorporating active student involvement into additional school activity provision. Such opportunities not only help foster key competencies but also offer a context in which young people can explore leadership and independence in a supported, yet autonomous, environment. In light of these findings, schools may consider adopting more facilitative adult roles; guiding rather than directing students in order to support the development of student-led initiatives. By embedding opportunities for student leadership within the additional school activity offer, schools might encourage a greater sense of responsibility and engagement for young people. This shift may require a balanced approach, combining structured support with flexible, self-directed elements, to ensure that students are both empowered and equipped to take ownership of their experiences. In doing so, schools may be better placed to help prepare students for the challenges of higher education, the workplace, and broader adult life.

While participants in this study identified relatively few motivating factors for engagement in additional school activities, a number of barriers to participation emerged more clearly. As previously discussed (see Section 5.3.1), student–staff relationships were one such barrier, with students reporting that negative relationships with staff could discourage them from participating. Beyond relational factors, some practical challenges were also identified, including the timing of activities, competing time demands, and the limited variety of opportunities available.

One key issue raised by both students and staff was the timing of activities. Activities held before school were described as inconvenient and unappealing, while there was broad agreement that break and lunch times were too short to accommodate meaningful participation. In the school where this study took place, break time lasted 20 minutes and lunch 40 minutes; durations that staff and students alike acknowledged were insufficient for engagement. While staff recognised the potential value of using these periods for additional school activities, they also expressed concerns about student behaviour during longer unstructured times. Some reflected on previous experiences of extended lunch times, recalling an increase in behavioural incidents; an observation consistent with findings from Baines and Blatchford (2019), where school leaders cited behaviour management as a key reason for shortening school breaks. This finding illustrates a tension between staff and student perspectives. Students' suggestions to extend lunchtime reflect a desire for more agency and inclusion in school decision-making. As Lundy (2007) argues, student voice should not only be heard but meaningfully considered. However, staff concerns about behaviour appear to limit the likelihood of these suggestions being implemented. This could offer a valuable opportunity for collaboration between students and staff.

Rather than allowing one perspective to dominate, schools might benefit from creating structured forums where students and staff can engage in open dialogue around shared

concerns and possible solutions. Such collaborative approaches could facilitate joint decision-making on how to extend opportunities for additional school activities without compromising school expectations around behaviour. For instance, students could help co-create behavioural expectations and activity guidelines for extended lunch times, promoting both empowerment and accountability. One possible approach could involve a trial period where lunch time is extended on selected days. This could allow staff to evaluate behavioural outcomes while providing students with a chance to demonstrate responsible engagement. Any new initiatives may benefit from being accompanied by mechanisms for feedback and review, fostering a culture of listening, reflection, and adaptation rather than one of top-down rule enforcement.

In addition to issues around scheduling, students also expressed that they lacked sufficient time to participate in after-school activities, particularly in KS4 where the aforementioned academic demands such as increased homework and revision took priority. This appears to align with a broader body of research indicating that participation in extracurricular activities tends to decline with age due to growing academic pressures (Furda & Shuleski, 2019; Pascoe et al., 2019; Smith & Thompson, 2017). This suggests that embedding opportunities for participation within the school day, such as through an extended lunch period or designated enrichment slots, could reduce this barrier. Doing so may help ensure that access to additional school activities is not limited by academic pressures and that all students, regardless of year group, have the chance to benefit from wider school engagement.

Another barrier to engagement identified by staff was the limited variety of activities on offer. While there was a recognition of the need to expand the range of options available, staff also pointed to constraints such as funding and staffing capacity as key challenges. Donnelly et al. (2019) similarly highlighted the impact of austerity and reductions in public service funding on schools' ability to deliver a diverse extra-curricular programme, arguing that government investment is essential to support sustainable provision. Students echoed concerns about the relevance of the current

offer, noting that many of the available activities appeared to reflect the interests of staff rather than being tailored to the preferences of young people. This perceived disconnect was seen as a contributing factor to disengagement. As noted earlier (see Section 1.5), additional school activities may represent one of the few areas within the school day where students have some degree of choice. However, findings from this study suggest that while students may technically have a choice to engage, they may have limited influence over what activities are actually made available or how they are delivered. This lack of autonomy was seen as a barrier in itself, with participants expressing a desire for greater involvement in shaping the offer. The appeal of more student-led opportunities may also reflect this underlying need for increased agency.

SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) provides a useful lens through which to interpret these findings. According to SDT, intrinsic motivation is strengthened when individuals experience a sense of autonomy and control over their actions. When students feel that they have a meaningful say in the content and structure of additional school activities, they are more likely to engage, persist, and derive value from their involvement. In contrast, when activities are perceived as adult-directed or irrelevant, motivation and commitment are likely to decline. In light of this, schools could explore ways to embed greater student agency in the design and delivery of extracurricular provision. Involving students directly in the planning process can enhance relevance, ownership, and engagement. One approach may be to establish student-led committees or councils, similar to the model of university societies, that are tasked with developing, managing, and promoting activities. These groups could serve as a formal mechanism through which students liaise with staff, gather input from peers, and advocate for a wider, more responsive activity offer. Such structures may encourage democratic participation but also foster leadership, collaboration, and accountability among students. By creating systems that support student voice and co-production, schools may be better positioned to align additional school activity provision in line with students' interests and needs, thereby enhancing both participation and impact.

5.5 Strengths and Limitations

5.5.1 Strengths

The present study contributes to the relatively underexplored field of additional school activities within English secondary schools. Unlike much of the existing literature, which often focuses narrowly on either extra-curricular or enrichment activities, this research considered the broad spectrum of activities accessible to secondary school students. The use of focus groups facilitated open and interactive discussions, enabling participants to share rich and meaningful insights. To enhance the quality of data collection, the researcher piloted focus group procedures and developed a tailored interview schedule. By engaging both students and school staff, the study incorporated perspectives from multiple stakeholders, each offering distinct experiences and viewpoints. This triangulation of perspectives was further enriched through cross-feeding, where staff reflected upon student contributions, yielding more nuanced and comprehensive data. Such interplay revealed areas of both consensus and divergence, deepening the understanding of the subject matter.

Thematic Analysis was employed to systematically identify key themes and uncover patterns across the student and staff groups. The single case study design enabled an in-depth exploration of the specific contextual factors within one secondary school setting. While findings are situated within this context, they offer valuable insights for schools, EPs and policymakers, and suggest avenues for future research. Key areas emerging from the study include the importance of aligning provision with student needs and interests, enhancing access and participation, and recognising the potential academic, social, and developmental benefits that additional school activities can provide.

5.5.2 Limitations

Conducted within a single case study school, the findings of this research offer valuable depth but are inherently context-specific, limiting their generalisability beyond this

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setting. Contextual factors unique to the school, such as its policies and culture, likely influenced the results, reducing their transferability to other educational environments. Additionally, the study involved a small sample size across both student and staff groups, which may not fully represent the broader populations. Certain perspectives, including those of specific student groups such as pupils with SEND were not captured. Employing a mixed-methods approach, for example combining surveys with focus groups, might have enabled the collection of a wider range of views and further enriched data analysis. The limited number of staff participants meant that insights were primarily drawn from experiences with a relatively narrow scope of additional school activities. However, the inclusion of a SLT member responsible for overseeing such activities provided broader contextual knowledge and diverse perspectives beyond those of other staff members.

Student participants were selected by staff rather than through voluntary opt-in, which may have introduced selection bias. Future research could mitigate this by inviting all interested students to opt in, from which a representative sample could be drawn. Recruitment of staff participants posed challenges, largely due to high workloads and scheduling conflicts related to teaching commitments and involvement in additional school activities. These practical constraints limited the duration of focus groups, occasionally restricting opportunities for deeper exploration of certain topics—a limitation that individual interviews might have addressed.

When utilising focus groups, particularly with adolescents, responses may be influenced by peer pressure or social desirability bias, potentially leading participants to conform or withhold dissenting views. Moreover, one student focus group was dominated by a few vocal individuals, possibly limiting the breadth of perspectives shared. Due to the small sample size, only student views were cross-fed with staff perspectives; reciprocal sharing of staff insights with students might have further enhanced the richness and nuance of the data.

5.6 Implications for Practice

5.6.1 Implications for Schools

The findings of this research offer important implications for schools in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of additional school activities. Schools may benefit from adopting a more strategic and inclusive approach to the provision of these activities, considering their role within the broader educational experience. A key implication arising from this study points to the potential value of schools reviewing their current activity offerings, particularly with regard to student interests and accessibility. Expanding the variety and diversity of activities available may attract students who are not engaged by traditional options. Offering activities are relevant, enjoyable, and responsive to student preferences may enhance their appeal and inclusivity, potentially reducing barriers to participation and encouraging involvement from a broader range of students.

This raises the consideration of how regular and structured mechanisms for eliciting student feedback, such as surveys, student councils, or focus groups can support schools in aligning provision with student preferences. Participants expressed a desire for increased involvement in the design and leadership of activities, indicating that schools might consider ways in which they can encourage student-led initiatives. Moreover, fostering meaningful collaboration between students and staff could further enhance this process. The establishment of joint forums or committees where students and staff co-create plans and make decisions is one possible way in which activities can be shaped by shared priorities. Such collaborative approaches can amplify student voice but also contribute to richer and more relevant activity provision.

The challenges related to scheduling and competing academic demands underscore the potential need for structural adjustments within the school timetable. Schools might consider incorporating formal time within the school day, such as an extended lunch period or dedicated activity slots, to facilitate greater participation. Such structural

changes could provide built-in opportunities for engagement, enabling students to participate without compromising their academic responsibilities.

5.6.2 Implications for EP Practice

The findings of this research have important implications for the role of EPs, particularly in how they support schools to develop, evaluate, and refine their provision of additional school activities in light of the considerations outlined above. EPs can apply their knowledge in a number of different ways and draw on core psychological skills; including consultation, systemic thinking, training, and research, to contribute meaningfully to this area.

EPs can apply their knowledge of motivation, development, and learning theories to assist schools in designing and delivering meaningful, student-centred activity provision. Specifically, they can provide guidance and training to school staff on embedding the SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) principles of autonomy, competence, and relatedness within the planning and facilitation of activities. For example, EPs might lead workshops that enable staff to critically reflect on their school's current provision and explore how to integrate relevant psychological principles. Additionally, EPs could equip staff with the skills to facilitate similar workshops with students, fostering collaborative practices between students and staff as identified in the study's findings. By enhancing staff understanding of how these psychological needs influence motivation and engagement, EPs can support the development of activities that are intrinsically motivating, inclusive, and aligned with students' interests and developmental stages.

Furthermore, EPs can play a pivotal role in raising staff awareness of the motivations behind, and benefits of, student participation in additional school activities. Through consultation and training, they can encourage schools to consider the broad developmental outcomes these activities promote, including social connection and academic engagement. This may be particularly valuable for students who may struggle

within traditional classroom settings; EPs are well-positioned to advocate for alternative avenues of engagement. In their work with individual students, EPs can explore opportunities for participation in additional school activities during consultations. When positive engagement is observed, EPs can prompt school staff to consider what factors within these contexts contribute to greater student support and effectiveness compared to the classroom environment. Such insights are especially pertinent for students who benefit from less structured, more flexible learning opportunities.

This perspective also informs systemic work by EPs with schools. By highlighting the potential benefits and characteristics of additional school activities, EPs can support schools in reflecting on how these features might be adapted and incorporated into classroom learning environments more widely to better support students experiencing challenges in formal learning contexts. These discussions may take place through whole-school training, planning meetings with SENCos, and during consultations. This approach could benefit students who are disengaged, at risk of exclusion, or have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), as additional school activities often provide more informal, relational, and strengths-based learning opportunities. Additionally, considering the study's finding that timing of activities can be a barrier, EPs can assist schools in strategically integrating such activities into the school day, especially for students less likely to engage outside school hours. This might involve collaborative timetable reviews, piloting activities at alternative times, and gathering feedback from both students and staff to inform ongoing practice.

Finally, this research underscores the importance of establishing robust evaluation processes for additional school activities. EPs can support schools in designing and implementing effective systems for collecting and analysing participation data, gathering feedback, and assessing the impact of activities on student outcomes. This may include facilitating surveys, focus groups, or the cross-feeding of views as exemplified in this study. Utilising consultation skills and organisational change models, EPs can guide schools in responding to feedback and implementing improvements. Moreover, EPs can

offer supervision or reflective spaces to enable schools to continually review and adapt their provision, fostering a culture of ongoing development and responsiveness.

5.7 Future Research

This study has contributed to the body of literature on additional school activities in secondary schools by exploring issues related to access, participation, motivation, and perceived benefits. While it offers valuable insights, there are a number of ways in which future research could build on the findings in this study.

To enhance the generalisability of future research, studies should aim to include larger sample sizes drawn from a more diverse range of participants and school contexts. Expanding research across different geographical locations, school types, and demographic groups will help ensure that findings are robust, representative, and applicable across various educational settings. A broader sample scope can help ensure that insights into participation and engagement are reflective of a wide array of experiences, thereby providing a more robust foundation for policy and practice recommendations.

There is a need for greater conceptual clarity regarding what constitutes "additional school activities." While this study adopted a broad working definition, future research could seek input from a wider range of stakeholders, including students, school staff, parents, and policymakers, to co-develop a shared and more nuanced definition. Such work would help to ensure consistency across studies and improve the comparability of findings.

Future studies would benefit from adopting longitudinal designs to examine both participation patterns and long-term outcomes associated with involvement in school activities. Tracking students' participation over time could offer valuable insights into

how engagement develops, sustains, or declines, and how benefits such as academic attainment, wellbeing, and social connectedness unfold across different stages of secondary education.

The findings also highlight important considerations regarding the design and delivery of school activities, particularly students' desire for greater autonomy, flexibility, and influence in shaping their experiences. Action research offers a valuable approach for exploring the implementation and impact of more student-led and co-designed activities. Such approaches would help assess the feasibility and effectiveness of more participatory approaches to activity design and potentially student involvement and enhanced staff-student collaboration more broadly within education.

Complementing the in-school perspective, future research might consider drawing on organisations or professionals—as demonstrated in studies such as Bertram et al. (2017)—to explore engagement strategies from outside the school environment. This may include youth workers or community-based organisations, particularly those with experience in working with disengaged or hard-to-reach young people. Drawing on such external expertise can offer alternative insights into what activities might genuinely captivate young people's interests beyond those typically available in the academic context, and how to make them accessible to a broader range of students. Including these perspectives could broaden understanding and offer innovative ideas for effective engagement.

Finally, subsequent research could make more explicit use of SDT as a guiding framework for investigating student motivation in participating in additional school activities. Studies such as Denault et al. (2022) and Yeo et al. (2022) have demonstrated the value of SDT in exploring how autonomy, competence, and relatedness contribute to sustained participation. Applying this framework more

systematically could help clarify why certain activities resonate with students and how schools might design experiences that foster deeper and more meaningful engagement.

5.8 Dissemination

In terms of disseminating these findings, a research summary will be shared with the participating school (including students). The researcher will also discuss the findings and implications in more detail in a follow-up session with the school. Findings and implications will be presented to the researcher's Trainee EP peers on their doctoral course as well as EP colleagues in their EP service.

5.9 Conclusion

This research sought to understand the current landscape of additional school activities in an English secondary school context by exploring the opportunities, motivation, and perceived benefits of participation from both student and staff perspectives. The findings indicated that while a range of activities were available, in the context of the specific school in the study, access to activities is reduced for those in KS4, with participation rates also low within this age group. The design and implementation of activities were often shaped—and limited—by factors such as scheduling constraints, restricted student autonomy, and a reliance on adult-led formats. These limitations suggest a need to review provision of activities so that they better reflect students' intrinsic interests, thereby fostering more meaningful and sustained engagement.

The research further uncovered some barriers to participation—such as inconvenient timing, limited availability and the types of activities offered—which can negatively influence student engagement. Conversely, activities that align with students' intrinsic passions and are supported by positive student–staff relationships are more engaging for students to attend. The study shows some consistency with SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) suggesting that when students experience increased autonomy, competence,

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and relatedness in their additional school activities, this had the potential to increase their motivation to engage in activities. Findings also revealed some perceived benefits of additional school activities academically and socially. Students expressed a desire for more involvement in planning and leading activities, with them identifying that this could potentially have a positive impact on both engagement and benefits. By integrating the perspectives of both students and school staff, the research identified some ways in which student voice and student-staff collaboration could be adopted in schools in their approach to planning and delivering additional school activities.

While the single-case focus provides in-depth insights, the limitations in sample size and context-specific factors indicate that caution must be taken in generalising these findings. Further research across a more diverse range of settings, incorporating mixed-method and longitudinal designs, would be valuable in deepening the understanding of the long-term impacts of additional school activities. Nevertheless, this study contributes to existing knowledge in this area as well as providing directions for future research. It offers some implications for schools in reviewing their provision around additional school activities as well as the role EPs can play in supporting schools with this and developing their understanding in this area, so that additional activities can be a positive contribution to the school experience of young people.

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Chapter 7: Appendices

Appendix A – Literature Search Terms

An exploratory search of the literature was conducted and the following databases were accessed: ERIC, PsychINFO, ProQuest, Google Scholar and UCL library catalogues. These databases were explored between November 2023 and April 2025. Key search terms used were: extra-curricular activity/activities, extracurricular activity/activities, extra-curriculum activities, extra-curricular school activities, enrichment, enrichment program, after school activities, after school clubs, after school program, co-curricular activities, extended activity, extended learning, Secondary school, secondary schools, secondary education, high school, middle school adolescent, adolescents, adolescence, adolescent development, youth development, student, teenagers.

Appendix B - Ethics Form

Doctoral Student Ethics Application Form

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute of Education (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants, is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in simple terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

Registering your study with the UCL Data Protection Officer as part of the UCL Research Ethics Review Process

If you are proposing to collect personal data i.e. data from which a living individual can be identified **you must be registered with the UCL Data Protection Office before you submit your ethics application for review**. To do this, email the complete ethics form to the UCL Data Protection Office. Once your registration number is received, add it to the form* and submit it to your supervisor for approval. If the Data Protection Office advises you to make changes to the way in which you propose to collect and store the data this should be reflected in your ethics application form.

Please note that the completion of the UCL GDPR online training is mandatory for all PhD students.

Section 1 – Project details

    a. Project title: What do additional school activities offer to pupils in secondary school? A research study examining the views of young people and school staff.

    b. Student name and ID number (e.g. ABC12345678): Zeta Meheux: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

    c. ***UCL Data Protection Registration Number:** ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
        a. Date Issued: 10/10/2024

    d. Supervisor/Personal Tutor: Ed Baines & Jeremy Monsen

    e. Department: Psychology and Human Development

    f. Course category (Tick one):

        PhD   ☐

        EdD   ☐

        DEdPsy ☒

    g. **If applicable**, state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.

    h. Intended research start date: September 2024

    i. Intended research end date: June 2025

    j. Country fieldwork will be conducted in: England

k. If research to be conducted abroad please check the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)](#) and submit a completed travel risk assessment form (see guidelines). If the FCO advice is against travel this will be required before ethical approval can be granted: *[UCL travel advice webpage](#)*

l. Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?

Yes   ☐
External Committee Name: Enter text
Date of Approval: Enter text

No   ☒   ***go to Section 2***

If yes:
- Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application.
- Proceed to Section 10 Attachments.

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the [National Research Ethics Service](#) (NRES) or [Social Care Research Ethics Committee](#) (SCREC). In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.

Section 2 - Research methods summary (tick all that apply)

☐ Interviews
☒ Focus Groups
☐ Questionnaires
☐ Action Research
☐ Observation
☐ Literature Review
☐ Controlled trial/other intervention study
☐ Use of personal records
☐ Systematic review **– if only method used go to Section 5**
☐ Secondary data analysis **– *if secondary analysis used go to Section 6***
☐ Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups
☐ Other, give details: Enter text

Please provide an overview of the project, focusing on your methodology. This should include some or all of the following: purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, data collection (including justifications for methods chosen and description of topics/questions to be asked), reporting and dissemination. Please focus on your methodology; the theory, policy, or literary background of your work can be provided in an attached document (i.e. a full research proposal or case for support document). *Minimum 150 words required.*

This research project is looking into the "additional school activities" that young people in mainstream secondary schools have the opportunity to access and engage in. The project offers an opportunity for pupils and school staff to share their thoughts around these activities and any ideas they have for alternative activities. This will enable schools to have an insight into additional school activities from the perspective of pupils and staff in order to highlight their good practice and identify areas to develop in order to meet the needs and interests of pupils. These activities refer to those that take place on the school premises outside of formal and compulsory lesson time (before school, break/lunch times, after school). Such activities may take place individually or within a group, be optional or formally organised and be free or paid for. The breadth of activities includes those linked to sport, the creative arts (e.g. music, drama, dance, drawing) as well as academic subjects and those linked to other interests that young people may have (e.g. chess).

The research aims to explore the types of additional school activities available to young people, their motivations for participating in these activities and perceived benefits of additional school activities.

The following research questions will be explored:

1. What opportunities do young people have to access and engage in additional school activities?
2. Why do young people participate in additional school activities?
3. What do young people and school staff perceive the benefits of additional school activities school activities to be?

The views of young people and school staff will be collected using focus group interviews. This method will allow participants to discuss and share their views around the topic of additional school activities. Questions, prompts and scenario-based activities will be developed to facilitate discussions in relation to the research questions. The focus group will also involve the discussion of ideas and thoughts that other focus groups have shared (anonymously) to develop different ideas and themes beyond the initial discussions.

Focus groups will last approximately 45 minutes with young people in Year 10 (aged 14-15) and school staff separately. Schools will be recruited via an email to Educational Psychologists (EPs) in one Local Authority asking for recommendations of schools that would be interested and motivated in taking part in a research project relating to additional school activities. The SENCo of the recommended schools will be contacted via email inviting their school to take part in the research. A telephone or virtual call will be arranged with interested schools to discuss their participation and what the research will look like in their school.

Purposive criteria sampling will be used as there are certain characteristics that the sample wants to capture. For the young people, this includes both those who engage and do not engage in additional school activities and a sample that represents the pupils in terms of gender, socio-economic status and ethnicity. The criteria for the staff sample will aim for representation across the school in relation to staff roles. Focus group interviews will be recorded digitally via video and audio recording. Results of the study will be written up in a thesis report and participating schools will receive a summary of findings.

Section 3 – research Participants (tick all that apply)

☐ Early years/pre-school
☐ Ages 5-11
☒ Ages 12-16
☐ Young people aged 17-18
☒ Adults please specify below
☐ Unknown – specify below
☐ No participants

Young people aged 14-15, adults (secondary school staff)

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) or Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC).

Section 4 - Security-sensitive material (only complete if applicable)

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call;   involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

    a. Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?
        Yes* ☐ No ☒
    b. Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?
        Yes* ☐ No ☒
    c. Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts?
        Yes* ☐ No ☒

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

Section 5 – Systematic reviews of research (only complete if applicable)

    a. Will you be collecting any new data from participants?
        Yes* ☐ No ☐
    b.   Will you be analysing any secondary data?
        Yes* ☐ No ☐

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

*If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review) **and** if you have answered **No** to both questions, please go to **Section 8 Attachments.***

Section 6 - Secondary data analysis (only complete if applicable)

    a. Name of dataset/s: Enter text
    b. Owner of dataset/s: Enter text
    c. Are the data in the public domain?
        Yes ☐ No ☐

If no, do you have the owner's permission/license?

Yes ☐ No* ☐

d. Are the data special category personal data (i.e. personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation)?

Yes* ☐ No ☐

e. Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?

Yes ☐ No* ☐

f. **If no**, was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?

Yes ☐ No* ☐

g. **If no,** was data collected prior to ethics approval process?

Yes ☐ No* ☐

 * *Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

 *If secondary analysis is only method used **and** no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to **Section 9 Attachments.***

Section 7 – Data Storage and Security

Please ensure that you include all hard and electronic data when completing this section.

a. Data subjects - Who will the data be collected from?
Young people aged 14-15 and secondary school staff.

b. What data will be collected? Please provide details of the type of personal data to be collected
Focus group data.
Demographic data of young people
Is the data anonymised?   Yes ☐ No* ☒
Do you plan to anonymise the data?   Yes* ☒ No ☐
Do you plan to use individual level data?   Yes* ☒ No ☐
Do you plan to pseudonymise the data?   Yes* ☒ No ☐

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

c. **Disclosure –** Who will the results of your project be disclosed to?
The results of the project will be included in a research thesis report.
Disclosure – Will personal data be disclosed as part of your project?
No

d. Data storage – Please provide details on how and where the data will be stored i.e. UCL network, encrypted USB stick**, encrypted laptop** etc. All data (video/audio files from focus groups, anonymised transcripts) will be stored in a password-protected folder on UCL OneDrive. Names of participants will be stored in a separate document and password-protected folder on UCL OneDrive.

*** Advanced Encryption Standard 256 bit encryption which has been made a security standard within the NHS*

e. **Data Safe Haven (Identifiable Data Handling Solution)** – Will the personal identifiable data collected and processed as part of this research be stored in the UCL Data Safe Haven (mainly used by SLMS divisions, institutes and departments)?
Yes ☐ No ☒

f. How long will the data and records be kept for and in what format?
All personal data will be kept secure by the researcher in a password-protected folder for the duration of the study until the data is analysed. Once the data has been transcribed and pseudonymised, video and audio files will be deleted. Anonymised data will be kept for 10 years, in line with UCL policy relating to GDPR. Data will be stored securely on the UCL network from as soon as possible after data collection and only accessed via a password-protected folder. All data will be in digital format.
Will personal data be processed or be sent outside the European Economic Area? (If yes, please confirm that there are adequate levels of protections in compliance with GDPR and state what these arrangements are)
No

Will data be archived for use by other researchers? (If yes, please provide details.)
No

g. If personal data is used as part of your project, describe what measures you have in place to ensure that the data is only used for the research purpose e.g. pseudonymisation and short retention period of data'.
Once the data has been transcribed and pseudonymised, video and audio files will be deleted.

*Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

Section 8 – Ethical Issues

Please state clearly the ethical issues which may arise in the course of this research and how will they be addressed.

All issues that may apply should be addressed. Some examples are given below, further information can be found in the guidelines. *Minimum 150 words required*.

- Methods
- Sampling
- Recruitment
- Gatekeepers
- Informed consent
- Potentially vulnerable participants
- Safeguarding/child protection
- Sensitive topics
- International research
- Risks to participants and/or researchers
- Confidentiality/Anonymity
- Disclosures/limits to confidentiality
- Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection)
- Reporting
- Dissemination and use of findings

The study will recruit young people and adults. To minimise risk, BPS ethical guidelines will be adhered to, including consent to participate. Information sheets will be given to participants who will be given ample opportunity to understand the nature and purpose of the research, and be given the option to withdraw from the study at any point, should they wish. As the research involves young people, informed parental consent will also be sought prior to the young people's involvement in the research.

The researcher will ensure that names within the transcripts are anonymised such that no individual is identifiable through the research. Their names and identity will not be revealed in the data collection, analysis and report of the study findings. Safeguarding procedures of the schools in which the research is conducted will be adhered to and data collection with

young people will take place in an area visible to members of staff. The researcher working with the young people in the study will have obtained an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate.

Please confirm that the processing of the data is not likely to cause substantial damage or distress to an individual

Yes ☒

Section 9 – Attachments.

Please attach your information sheets and consent forms to your ethics application before requesting a Data Protection number from the UCL Data Protection office. Note that they will be unable to issue you the Data Protection number until all such documentation is received

a. Information sheets, consent forms and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research (List attachments below)
   Yes ☒ No ☐
   1) Email to schools
   2) Email to school staff (focus group interest)
   3) Parent information sheet and consent form
   4) School staff information sheet and consent form
   5) Young person information sheet and consent form

b. Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee   Yes ☐
c. The proposal ('case for support') for the project   Yes ☐
d. Full risk assessment Yes ☐

Section 10 – Declaration

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge the information in this form is correct and that this is a full description of the ethical issues that may arise in the course of this project.

I have discussed the ethical issues relating to my research with my supervisor.
Yes ☒ No ☐

I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course.
Yes ☒ No ☐

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge:

The above information is correct and that this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project.

Name   Zeta Meheux

Date   27/09/2024

Please submit your completed ethics forms to your supervisor for review.

Notes and references

Professional code of ethics
You should read and understand relevant ethics guidelines, for example:
British Psychological Society (2018) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*
Or
British Educational Research Association (2018) *Ethical Guidelines*
Or
British Sociological Association (2017) *Statement of Ethical Practice*
Please see the respective websites for these or later versions; direct links to the latest versions are available on the Institute of Education Research Ethics website.

Disclosure and Barring Service checks

If you are planning to carry out research in regulated Education environments such as Schools, or if your research will bring you into contact with children and young people

(under the age of 18), you will need to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) CHECK, before you start. The DBS was previously known as the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). If you do not already hold a current DBS check, and have not registered with the DBS update service, you will need to obtain one through at IOE.

Ensure that you apply for the DBS check in plenty of time as will take around 4 weeks, though can take longer depending on the circumstances.

Further references

Alderson, P. and Morrow, V. (2011) *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook*. London: Sage.
This text has useful suggestions if you are conducting research with children and young people.

Robson, Colin (2011). *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner researchers* (3rd edition). Oxford: Blackwell.
This text has a helpful section on ethical considerations.

Wiles, R. (2013) What are Qualitative Research Ethics? Bloomsbury.
A useful and short text covering areas including informed consent, approaches to research ethics including examples of ethical dilemmas.

Departmental Use

If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, the supervisor must refer the application to the Research Development Administrator via email so that it can be submitted to the IOE Research Ethics Committee for consideration. A departmental research ethics coordinator or representative can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the REC. If unsure please refer to the guidelines explaining when to refer the ethics application to the IOE Research Ethics Committee, posted on the committee's website.

Student name: Zeta Meheux

Student department: Psychology and Human Development

Course: DEdPsy

Project Title: Enrichment activities in secondary schools: What is the potential and value? Can they support the development of young people?

Reviewer 1

Supervisor/first reviewer name: Ed Baines

Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research? NO

Supervisor/first reviewer signature:

Date: 18/11/2024

Reviewer 2

Second reviewer name: Dr Jeremy Monsen

Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research? No

Second reviewer signature:

Date: 14th of November 2024

Decision on behalf of reviewers

Approved ⊠

Approved subject to the following additional measures ☐

Not approved for the reasons given below ☐

Referred to the REC for review ☐

Points to be noted by other reviewers and in report to REC:

Comments from reviewers for the applicant:

Once it is approved by both reviewers, students should submit their ethics application form to the Centre for Doctoral Education team: IOE.CDE@ucl.ac.uk.

Appendix C - Young Person Information Sheet and Consent Form

Institute of Education

血UCL

Young Person Information Sheet and Consent Form

Research project title: What do additional school activities offer to pupils in secondary schools? A research study examining the views of young people and school staff.

Who is doing this research?
My name is Zeta Meheux, and I am training to be an Educational Psychologist. I often work with young people to find out what is working well at school and anything that could help school be even better for them.

About the research:
- This is your opportunity to have your say about the additional school activities offered at your school.
- I'm really interested to find out about your experiences of these activities and how you feel about them.
- I also want to find out about your brilliant ideas for other options that your school could offer. For example, do you want to have a skateboarding club? Would you and your friends like to be involved in more pupil-led campaigns or project-based activities? I'd love to hear all of your ideas!

What the research involves:
- You will take part in a **focus group lasting around 45 minutes with 4-5 other pupils** and I will be **ask some questions and do some activities** with you.
- The focus groups will be **recorded by video and also audio-recorded** by a Dictaphone. I may also take some notes during the focus group.
- I will **type up the recording and then write a report** about what I have found, but I **won't use your real name**. Once the recordings have been typed up, the video and audio **recordings will be deleted**.
- What you tell me is **confidential so is private between me and the rest of the group**, but if you tell me **anything which makes me think you or anybody else are in danger I will need to tell somebody**.

What do you do now?
If you have **any questions, you can email** them to me ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ If you are happy to take part, please provide your consent by reading the following statements and signing below.

- I have read and understood the information given about the project above and confirm that it is my decision to take part and not anybody else's.
- I understand that I can choose the questions that I answer and can pull out at any time up until the point Zeta types up the recordings without giving a reason.
- I understand that the focus group will be recorded by video and by audio recording (using a Dictaphone) and that recordings will be typed up and then deleted.
- I understand that Zeta will use the information I tell her to write presentations and reports which will be shared with others, but that no one will be able to identify me from what I've said.
- I understand that if I tell Zeta anything that makes her think I or anybody else is in danger, she will have to tell somebody.

☐ **By ticking this box you agree with all of the statements above and are happy to take part in the research**

Name: _____   Signature: _____

Date: _____

For more information please visit this website: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/legalservices/privacy/ucl-general-research-participant-privacy-notice

Thank you! 🙂

Appendix D - Parent Information Sheets and Consent Form

Institute of Education

₤UCL

<div style="text-align: center;">

Parent Information Sheet and Consent Form

</div>

Research project title: What do additional school activities offer to pupils in secondary schools? A research study examining the views of young people and school staff.

The researcher
I am Zeta Meheux, a Trainee Educational Psychologist, on the Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology at the Institute of Education, University College London.

Key information about the research:
- The research aims to find out what additional school activities pupils have access to, why they choose to engage in these activities and the perceived benefits of such activities. This will support the development of knowledge and good practice in this area for schools.
- Your child will take part in a focus group with 4-5 other pupils and be asked about their views and experiences around the additional school activities in their school.
- The focus groups will be video and audio recorded and transcribed and recordings will be deleted once the recordings have been transcribed and anonymised.
- Results of the study will be written up as part of a student research project and may also be used in research publications and presentations; your child will not be identifiable from any research produced from the study.

Supervision and ethical approval
This research is supervised by Dr Ed Baines (Senior Lecturer in Psychology of Education at the Institute of Education, University College London) and Dr Jeremy Monsen, (Principal Educational Psychologist and DEdPsy Professional and Academic Tutor at the Institute of Education, University College London). The project has ethical approval from the department of Psychology and Human Development, which means that the committee has carefully considered the risks and benefits of the research.

What should you do now?
If you have further questions, please feel free to contact me by email (███████████████████). If your child would like to take part, please give your consent by reading the following statements and signing below.

- I have read and understood the information above giving details of the project and have had the opportunity to ask Zeta any questions that I have about the project and my child's involvement in it.
- I understand that my child will only take part in the focus group if they have agreed to participate, that they are free to withdraw up until the point that the data transcript is anonymised without giving a reason.
- I understand that if my child discloses any information which suggests he/she or others are at risk of significant harm, Zeta will need to pass this information on to an appropriate adult/professional.
- I understand that the focus group my child will take part in will be video and audio recorded.
- I understand that the information gathered in this project will be used to form the basis of a report, and that the findings may be used in future reports and presentations. I understand that my child's name will not be used in any report, publication or presentation, and that every effort will be made to protect their confidentiality.

- ☐ **By ticking this box you agree with all of the statements above and are happy for your child to be involved in the research.**

Name: _____   Signature: _____

Child's Name: _____   Date: _____

Appendix E - School Staff Information Sheet and Consent Form

Institute of Education

UCL

What do additional school activities offer to pupils in secondary schools? A research study examining the views of young people and school staff.

School Staff Information Sheet and Consent Form

There has been much public interest in the availability and choice of enrichment and extra-curricular activities for young people in school. These can provide important opportunities for young people to engage in exciting activities, that motivate them to engage with school that contribute in positive ways to their personal and social development. However much of the evidence suggests that these are being cut back, are used to introduce more adult led learning, involve little choice and as a result have led to a decline in uptake. This research seeks to re-open the debate and encourage dialogue between students and staff about the nature and potential of these activities within school to inspire and engage students in new ways and to prepare citizens of the future.

I am Zeta Meheux, a Trainee Educational Psychologist based at the UCL Institute of Education, and I'm inviting you to participate in a focus group to talk about the nature and potential of clubs and activities in and after school.

This project: Key information
- The research aims to find out the additional school activities pupils have access to, why they choose to engage with these activities and their perceived value and benefits. Findings will potentially support decision making and good practice in this area for your school.
- I am undertaking focus groups of 3-4 staff members (lasting 30 mins approx.) to consider some questions and undertake activities to explore the above issues in relation to your school.
- Focus groups will be audio/video recorded and transcribed. Once transcribed and anonymised, recordings will be deleted. The researcher may also take notes during the focus groups.
- Results of the study will be written up as part of a research project and will contribute to research presentations and publications; you will not be identifiable in any research reporting connected with the study.

Ethical approval
The project has received approval from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee, which means that the risks and benefits of the research have been carefully considered.

What should you do now?
If you have questions, please feel free to contact me by email (███████████████████). If you are happy to take part, please provide your consent by reading the following statements and signing below.

- I have read and understood the information above giving details of the project and have had the opportunity to ask Zeta questions that I have about the project.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up until the point that the data transcript is anonymised, without giving a reason.
- I understand that the focus groups will be video and audio recorded and transcribed, and that recordings will be kept secure and deleted once transcribed and anonymised. I know that all data will be kept under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- I understand that that the information I share, including direct quotes may be used in reports, but these will be anonymised

☐ **By ticking this box you agree with all of the statements above and are happy to be involved in the research**

Name: _____   Role at School: _____

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.
This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. For more information please visit this website:
https://www.ucl.ac.uk/legalservices/privacy/ucl-general-research-participant-privacy-notice
The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices. The lawful basis that will be used to process any personal details: 'Public task' for personal data and 'Research purposes' for special category data.
If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed please contact UCL at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

Thank you!

Appendix F - School staff poster

Institute of Education

UCL

Secondary School Staff
Share your views!!

Participate in a research study exploring what additional school activities offer to secondary school pupils

About the research:
The research aims to find out the additional school activities pupils have access to, why they choose to engage with these activities and their perceived value and benefits.

What's involved:
- Participating in a focus group of 2-3 staff members (lasting 30 mins approx.) to consider some questions and undertake some activities to explore the above issues in relation to your school.
- An opportunity to share your thoughts and ideas around the types of activities young people want to engage in how schools can offer this.
- Your views will provide a valuable contribution to the debate around these activities along with the views of pupils at your school.

I am Zeta Meheux, a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the UCL Institute of Education.

If you are interested in taking part are or would like more information, please get in touch!
Email: ███████████

Appendix G - Feedback from Student Pilot Focus Groups

	Student Feedback	Trainee EP Feedback	Any Resulting Changes
Definition	• Students felt the definition made sense and was easy to understand	• Suggested change around how payment is specified to include parent/carer. • Could clarify with students if they have another name for what they refer to as additional school activities e.g. extra-curricular, enrichment, clubs	• Student definition amended to reflect that parents/carers could also be paying for activities. • After providing definitions in the focus group, students were asked if they referred to additional school activities in an alternative way.
Questions/ Prompts	N/A	• Questions are clear, good amount of prompts. • May need to prompt students to speak specifically about certain times e.g. what about before school or break time if this has not been mentioned or have we missed anything that takes place at X time?	• Researcher creating a checklist to make sure all times/types of activities referenced in definition are discussed.
Activities	• Felt the icebreaker was good and helped them to get	• The group of Trainee EPs liked the activities and felt	• Pen and paper were provided for students during the

	talking to each other as it was awkward at the start as not all of them knew each other. • Students felt that having access to paper/pens would be helpful during the icebreaker activities to give them the option to draw or create a mindmap of their ideas. • Although there was not time to do the cross-feeding activity, this was explained to the young people who expressed that they would like doing this activity.	there were a good variety of activities that would get young people engaged. • They liked the icebreaker activity and thought it was good to provide paper and pens for young people to write/draw their ideas. • The Trainee EPs felt the cross-feeding activity was a great idea.	icebreaker activities to give them the chance to write or draw ideas.
Practicalities	• Students felt the length of the focus group was sufficient. • It was felt that the group could work better with more (6-7) students as there were a few students who did not say very much.	• There were some mixed views on the length of the focus group – some felt that 45 minutes was too long, some thought an hour would be better and some felt 45 minutes was just right.	• The focus groups were kept at 45 minutes, but there was an hour slot in case they needed to be longer.

		• It was noted that this would be highly dependent on the group and how talkative/quiet they are.	
Facilitating	• Students commented that the researcher got to know them well and kept the conversation going. • They appreciated that the researcher asked them things but not in a direct way.	• Need to be mindful of the dynamics of the group and consider behaviour management	

Appendix H - Feedback from Staff Pilot Focus Groups

	Trainee EP Feedback	**Assistant/Trainee EP Feedback**	**Any Resulting Changes**
Definition	• Clarification whether the formal aspect of the definition includes interventions. Another participant did feel this was covered by including academic activities.	N/A	N/A
Questions/ Prompts	• Being flexible about when to ask questions – researcher may not need to ask questions in specific order. • Consideration that researcher may find that there is a difference in what participants know and can answer depending on their role within the school.	• Prompts may not be needed as participants will most likely touch on most things. • To make sure all times during the day and types of activities are covered, researcher could have a small crib sheet ensuring all have been covered by questions/prompts.	• Researcher creating a checklist to make sure all times/types of activities referenced in definition are discussed.
Activities	• The researcher asked for views	• The researcher asked for views	• Although there was further consideration

	regarding whether an icebreaker activity was needed. There was feedback that the feeding of views could be used as an icebreaker activity at the start.	regarding whether an icebreaker activity was needed. Participants felt that an icebreaker was not necessarily essential. • There were ideas around checking-in with participants to get conversation going but also recognising this could divert the conversation and potentially set a negative tone for the focus group. • Suggestion around asking participants about their own school experiences of additional school activities. • Liked cross-feeding activity but wondered if there was a way of weaving this into the main section where questions are asked?	about an icebreaker, the researcher decided that due to limited time, there would not be an icebreaker activity. • The cross-feeding activity remained as a standalone activity after the main questions were asked.

Practicalities	• Researcher will need to stick strongly to timings.	• Reflection there is a lot to fit into 30 minutes – perhaps reducing numbers to 2 people per focus group.	N/A
Facilitating	• Introductions at start including roles as staff may not necessarily know each other • Importance of setting the tone at the start – not rules necessarily but important key points to hold in mind e.g. confidentiality and wanting focus group to be a safe and non-judgemental space to share views and thoughts. • Consideration of the power dynamics with different staff involved.	• Feedback regarding managing the power dynamics with different staff involved (e.g. hierarchal). Ensuring that everyone feels safe to express their views.	• Researcher ensured that the tone was set at the start in relation to the focus group being a non-judgemental space and participants respecting each other's views.

Appendix I - Student Focus Group Schedule and Prompts

RQ1: Exploring opportunities young people have to access and engage in additional school activities

- Can you tell me about the additional school activities that you take part in?
- Talk me through what these activities look like (e.g. when do these take place, who organises and leads them)?
  - o Prompts:
    - ▪ Who else attends?
    - ▪ Are these activities available for everyone? Do certain students get invited to participate/attend?
    - ▪ What activities are available before school/break time/lunch time/after school?
- Are there any additional school activities that haven't been mentioned so far that you have done in the past?
  - o Prompt: how do you know what activities are available?
- Are there any changes you would like to see to the additional school activities that are currently offered (e.g. when activities take place, type of activities, how they are run)?
  - o Prompts:
    - ▪ What does the school need to do to make this happen?
    - ▪ Are students involved in deciding which activities you can do? (This may be the activities/clubs themselves or within them e.g. can decide what to make in cooking club).
    - ▪ Do you think students could have more of a say on what is offered? If so, how do you think your school can do this?

RQ2: Exploring young people's motivations to participate in additional school activities

- How many of you do additional school activities? (Hands up)
  - Prompt: Are these activities well attended?
- What makes you want to take part in additional school activities?
  - Prompts:
    - Do other people have an impact on if you take part e.g. parents, friends, teachers?
    - If your friend was not there, would you still do the activities?
    - If your parent/teacher didn't want you to go, would you still attend?
    - Is there anything specifically about the activity that makes you want to go?
    - Does the future have any impact on the activities e.g. do you have any thoughts about when you leave school (college/university)?
- Is there anything that would make you want to go to more additional school activities?
  - Prompt: if you don't do any of these activities at the moment, is there anything that would encourage you to go?

RQ3: Exploring the perceived benefits of additional school activities

- What do you feel you get out of going to additional school activities?
- Does it help you in any particular areas inside/outside of school?
- Do you feel that additional school activities are an important part of school and for young people?
- Do you feel that your teachers think that additional school activities are an important part of school?
- Do you feel that your parents think that additional school activities are an important part of school?

- Are there particular areas that you feel are impacted positively by young people engaging in additional school activities (e.g. development, social life, mental health, academic etc)?

Appendix J - Staff Focus Group Schedule and Prompts

RQ1: Exploring opportunities young people have to access and engage in additional school activities

- What additional school activities are offered to young people?
- How are these additional school activities organised?
- How is it decided which activities are offered and which ones you organise/lead?
    - Prompt: rota system, is it done by expertise/subject knowledge/interest etc?
- Which students are able to do these activities and how do students find out about what activities are available?
    - Prompt: e.g. universally offered or invite only
- What do you need to consider as a school when offering additional school activities to young people?
    - Prompt: (e.g. resources, time, staff to organise and run (workload))?
- Is there a way of monitoring which activities young people do?
- Are there any other ways that students spend their social time at school that we haven't mentioned?

RQ2: Exploring young people's motivations to participate in additional school activities

- Why do you think young people engage in additional school activities?
- Is there anything that you feel encourages young people to engage in additional school activities?
- Do you feel there are any barriers to young people engaging in additional school activities?

RQ3: Exploring the perceived benefits of additional school activities

- What do you feel young people get out of engaging in additional school activities?
- Do you feel that additional school activities are an important part of school for young people?
- Are there any school policies that influence additional school activities?
    - Prompt: Do you have any school policies around additional school activities?
- Are there any other areas that we haven't yet discussed that you feel are impacted positively by young people engaging in additional school activities?
    - Prompts: e.g. development, social life, mental health, academic etc)

- Are there any changes you would like to see to the additional school activities that are currently offered for students?
    - Prompts: e.g. when activities take place, type of activities, how they are run

Appendix K - Icebreaker Activity

Dear Students,

We have some exciting news for you!

Your school have put you in charge of additional school activities. They want you to decide what activities students have the chance to do during your free time at school (before school, after school, break/lunch times).

How do you want these activities to look in your school?

Your school have given you funding to use. Discuss/brainstorm 5 key ideas for what additional school activities should look like in your school.

You can use the pens and paper provided if you would like to write or draw your ideas.

Good luck and we look forward to hearing your ideas!

School Activities Research Team

Appendix L – Extract of Coded Student Transcript

<u>Transcript</u>	<u>Code</u>
Speaker 1 (Facilitator) So the activities that you did do or you that's still available to you, I guess who? How do they run? Like who, who can go to them? Can any, can anyone go to them and they?	• Timetabling of clubs shared with students
Speaker 6 – A So normally when they give the timetable for clubs it says what club is what year groups are like, the teacher running it.	• Timetable has year groups available • Timetable has teacher running club
Speaker 5 – H So like Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4.	
Speaker 6 – A Yeah, yeah. And then, like what? And also like if it's before, after school or at lunch.	• Timetable has time of day club takes place
Speaker 5 – H	

Mm-hmm.	
Speaker 5 – H But that I mean personally, like I did a lot more clubs in like year 7 or 8 because we didn't have…	• Students doing more clubs in younger years
Speaker 4 – D Because I feel like I had more time	• More time to do clubs in younger years
Speaker 5 – H Yeah, we had more time. We didn't have as much homework. And like, I feel like the amount of clubs and the amount of people have gone…	• More time when younger = less homework • Less clubs available
Speaker 4 – D Yeah	
Speaker 5 – H …sort of like died down. So say if you're going football club and there's like three people there, you can't really play a game can you.	• Less people going to clubs • Not able to do some clubs with less people
Speaker 6 – A	

A lot of people go to clubs outside of school.	• Students are doing clubs outside of school
Other students: Yeah	
Speaker 3 – L In Year 8 and in Year 9, it was more beginning of Year 9 when we brought back the Maths club, I was one of the people that were helping run it and maintain it and alongside Mr XXX and…but I'd like to bring it back and hopefully get time to extend it throughout the day for just to fit it in because some people might wanna do Maths revision if they have a test within the next 2-3 days. I think that's, Maths is one that people struggle with the most and erm I think it should give people more of an opportunity to go and revise more of it if that gives people an opportunity to…	• Maths club brought back previously • Student helping to run Maths club alongside teacher • Desire to bring back Maths club • Extend clubs during day • Potential benefits of Maths club = revision
Speaker 6 – A Ask for help from the teachers.	• Potential benefits of Maths club = teacher support

Speaker 3 – L Yeah.	
Speaker 4 – D But it's also like the older you get in like school, cause like in year 7 it felt like we had all the time in the world.	• Feeling of more time to do clubs when younger
Other students: Yeah.	
Speaker 4 – D Cause like in year 7, I was doing clubs nearly every single day. But now I have no time to do anything. Because on Monday…	• More participation in Year 7 • No time to do clubs now
Speaker 5 – H Cause, like, the homework piles up	• Increased homework • More time previously
Speaker 4 – D …I I'm not gonna do anything, am I?	

Speaker 6 – A	
Yeah, just lots of revision and homework.	• Revision and homework dominate
Speaker 4 – D	
And then on Tuesday, I'm doing the homework from yesterday, on Wednesday I get new homework. So then it's like I have time for nothing.	• More homework = no time for clubs
Speaker 1 (Facilitator)	
Yeah. There's a lot of pressure.	
Speaker 5 – H	
And and like I feel like like you were saying like Maths club like you play like board games or something. If there's no one to play like say there's like 4 player game, there's not enough people. Yeah, it's like not very fun.	• Maths club = play games • Need students attending to play and have fun
Speaker 6 – A	
Yeah, what's the point?	• Maths club pointless without other students
Speaker 3 – L	

There used to be quite few people.	• Attendance used to be higher in Maths club
Speaker 5 – H Yeah, I mean, I remember in Year 7 a lot of people were…	• Lots of students attended Maths club previously
Speaker 4 – D There were loads of people.	• Lots of students attended Maths club previously
Speaker 3 – L (boy) It used to…on…some of the… like some people who used to revise in there it would benefit them in the long run and…	• Long term potential benefits of revision in Maths club
Speaker 4 – D (girl) And if you didn't need to revise cause in Year 7 the club was really big that we had to use two classrooms, we used Mr XXX's and Mr XXX's, so normally it would be in one, one room you would revise and then in one room you'd play games and whatnot.	• Year 7 = no revision • Popularity of Maths club = more space was needed • Different classrooms = different activities = revision and games
Speaker 5 – H	

But like in year 7, you…like people didn't really think revision was as important [Others agree – Yeah] because like, but now we've got to year 10 it's like… Lots of agreement	• Revision more important in Year 10 compared to Year 7
Speaker 3 – L Oh we need to revise this.	
Speaker 5 – H So it's it's like it's really, it's like this is important now. So people are going, I feel like people going to clubs a lot less because they generally just don't have the time.	• Revision now a priority • Revision means students have less time for clubs
Speaker 6 – A They've realised that it's like you, they really need…to concentrate.	
Speaker 5 – H	

They get stressed out about it. And then like, just focus on revision, but then I feel like if you do something else, like take your mind off it for a bit, it's actually, good.	• Students stressed about revision • Clubs can be good to take mind off revision