

**Tenders sought for research project**

**Beyond the academic: The impact of extracurricular activities,**

**soft skills, and networks on social mobility**

**Overview**

The [Social Mobility Commission](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/social-mobility-commission) is inviting proposals for research to understand how inequalities in extracurricular participation, networks, and support for building soft skills impact on social mobility. By soft skills, we mean skills such as persistence or self-control as well as employability skills, such as teamwork or interview skills. This research forms part of the Social Mobility Commission’s role to produce relevant research that provides new data and insights on social mobility in the UK.

There is clear evidence that soft skills, social networks, and aspirations all play a large role in academic achievement and employment outcomes.[[1]](#footnote-1) There is also evidence that disadvantaged young people tend to have fewer professional connections than better-off peers and lower levels of some soft skills (though higher levels of self-awareness and resilience, according to some studies).[[2]](#footnote-2) Part of the reason for smaller networks and lower skills (in some areas) may be limited access to extracurricular support that can help build soft skills and social networks, including youth clubs, private tuition and work experience.

Various studies show that disadvantaged young people participate in far fewer extracurricular activities than better-off peers.[[3]](#footnote-3) However, there is little evidence about the impact of these participation gaps. Equally, there is too little evidence on what young people from disadvantaged backgrounds want or need in terms of extracurricular support, and too little evidence about which types of activities are effective at building soft skills or networks.

The Social Mobility Commission wants better to understand the relationship between out-of-school support, soft skills, and social mobility to inform policy by commissioning a research project that aims to answer the following high-level research questions (more detail below):

1. How does participation in extracurricular activities vary by socioeconomic background? How does it vary across independent versus state schools?
2. How (if at all) has this changed over time, and why? How (if at all) has school funding influenced this?
3. How do extracurricular activities, networks, soft skills, and aspirations influence academic attainment and employment outcomes for young people from advantaged and less advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds?
4. What types of soft skills do employers look for in new hires and how do levels of those skills vary by socioeconomic background?
5. What types of extracurricular activities are available for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and how well do they match emerging needs?

**Please note that we do not expect the researchers to answer every question in equal depth.** We request that bidders indicate which questions and issues they will focus on primarily (using our suggestions from the ‘research considerations’ section below).

We envisage that this project will include two main strands:

* A substantial literature review
* Quantitative analysis of several existing data sets, e.g., birth cohort studies, Taking Part, Understanding Society, Taking Part, Living Costs and Food Survey, etc.

This project could also include a new survey or case study to fill any critical knowledge gaps uncovered during the research.

This research is intended to allow the Commission to publish several short reports on the topic in addition to the full final report – for example short briefings on a) extracurricular participation gaps, b) aspirations. (Please see more on this in the Report Drafting section).

**Research considerations and detail**

* Definition of soft skills: The paper will need to define soft skills clearly and make decisions on which skill types to focus on primarily.
* Age range: We recommend that the researchers look at all secondary school age people (and their long-term employment outcomes), but the exact age range is for the researchers to decide. We would be interested in how out-of-school participation changes across the course of secondary school for people from various backgrounds.
* Types of extracurricular activities in scope: We recommend including both individual and group activities. It would be interesting to understand which types of activities have the best impact on outcomes, but it is up to the researchers how granular to go.
* Literature review: The first part of this project will be to scope out all the datasets available on this topic (see below for a starter list), and to summarise the key findings from a social mobility perspective. Both UCL and the Early Intervention Foundation have recently done extensive literature reviews on soft skills and extracurricular activities, which should speed up this part of the project.
* Data analysis: This will form the bulk of the research. We will probably only need descriptive data to understand levels of participation, social capital, and soft skills by socioeconomic backgrounds. However, we will need more sophisticated analyses (e.g., regressions) to understand the impact of participation on education/employment outcomes, and to explore relationships between participation, social capital, and soft skills.
* Outcomes: We are ultimately interested in social mobility (i.e., the link between an individual’s eventual occupation or earnings and the occupation or earnings of their parents), but may need to rely on interim outcomes – such as academic attainment or early employment outcomes – where we do not have sufficient longitudinal data.
* Regions: Where possible, please cut the data by broad region and area deprivation.
* Controls: Appropriate controls will need to be in place to allow conclusions to be drawn about the impact of extracurricular activities on individuals’ academic attainment and employment outcomes.
* Measures of socioeconomic background: These could include any of, or a combination of, the common measures used by government. These include: eligibility for Free School Meals, parental education, parental occupation (measured by the NS-SEC), parental income, type of school attended, name of school attended, home postcode.
* Recommended data sources:
* [Birth Cohort Studies](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/departments-centres/centres/centre-for-longitudinal-studies/layout-components/accordion/birth-cohort-studies) – these studies will be particularly useful for understanding the long-term outcomes of extracurricular participation. The surveys also include new time-series data that have not yet been fully explored.
* [Next Steps](https://nextstepsstudy.org.uk/home/surveys/previous-surveys/) – this has good data on socio-emotional skills, motivations, and outcomes.
* [Understanding Society](https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/) – this survey has data on parents’ socioeconomic background and their children’s pastimes and educational outcomes.
* [Living Costs and Food Survey](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/methodologies/livingcostsandfoodsurvey) – this ONS survey has data on parents’ spend on their children’s hobbies and private tuition by socioeconomic background (analysed previously by the [Sutton Trust (2014)](https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/enrichment-brief-private-tuition-extracurricular-activities/)).
* [Taking Part](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-part-survey-data-analysis-tools#taking-part-most-frequent-responses-tool-2) – this DCMS survey has recent data on participation in extracurricular activities by background. It may also include data on the reasons why people do / do not participate.
* [Sutton Trust's Private Tuition Polling (2018)](https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/private-tuition-polling-2018/) – Ipsos MORI conducts research on parental spend on private tuition by socioeconomic background each year.
* [Employer Skills Survey](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/746493/ESS_2017_UK_Report_Controlled_v06.00.pdf) – this Department for Education survey has data on skill gaps in both technical and interpersonal (or ‘soft’) skill (see page 49).
* [upReach](https://getemployable.org/) has survey data on young people’s employability skills that be broken down by socioeconomic background. They could be contacted to share this data.
* Large charitable programmes (e.g., Sport England) are likely to have their own survey data on why people from various backgrounds do/don’t participate and may be happy to share this.
* PISA, NPD, and LEO data could also help, but would probably take too long to access.
* New research (e.g., a survey, case study, focus group(s), or interviews): The successful bidder may choose to conduct (or sub-contract an agency to conduct) some new research to fill in knowledge gaps that emerge across the course of the project. In particular, we believe new research could be useful on the following two issues:

1. Availability of extracurricular activities by area. It could be interesting to compare two areas – a social mobility hotspot and a social mobility coldspot – in terms of what is on offer.
2. What young people/youth workers would like to see more of in terms of extracurricular support. A survey of young people/youth workers could help gauge what is needed as could a few interviews.

* Bidders are welcome to contract out this part of the project, but should provide estimates of likely participation numbers and should indicate how they will ensure that participants represent a mix of regions and socioeconomic backgrounds. Please note that the successful bidder will partner with the Commission on the design of all surveys.

**Research questions and proposed methods**

We recommend the following approaches to answering our research questions, but we ask bidders to indicate how they propose to answer each of the four questions:

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| **Research Questions** | **Proposed Research Methods and Notes** |
| **How does participation in extracurricular activities vary by socioeconomic background?**   * How large are the gaps in uptake between disadvantaged young people & peers in terms of extracurricular activities. Activities could include tuition and work experience as well as sports clubs/debating clubs/NCS/music lessons etc. * How does this vary by independent versus state schools? * How (if at all) have these gaps changed over time – and why? How (if at all) has school funding influenced this? * How large are any gaps in network sizes and aspirations? * How do the above gaps vary by region ethnicity, gender, disability, including Special Educational Needs? * What is driving any socio-economic gap? E.g., Availability, cost, motivation, not fitting in and dropping out as a result? *(Note: Taking Part may have this information)* | This is a critical part of the report and should be substantial.   * Literature review * Data analysis * Potentially a new survey/ focus groups/ interviews |
| **What is the impact of out-of-school activity / soft skills on attainment/ employment/ social mobility?**   * How are soft skills and out-of-school activities defined in this study? *(Note: Please consider definitions used in previous literature)* * What is the relationship between soft skills & networks on a) academic attainment, b) employment outcomes? *(Note: existing literature can largely answer this question)* * How does the above vary by background? * What is the relationship between extracurricular activities and soft skills/networks? * Is there a cumulative impact from participating in multiple extracurricular activities? | This is a critical section of the report and should involve a concise, but thorough literature review.   * Summary of existing literature / survey data * Data analysis |
| **What soft skills do employers want and what are the socioeconomic gaps here?**   * What soft skills do employers want? What soft skills help young people get a job in the first place? * Of the soft skills employers look for, which are most lacking and how does that vary by socioeconomic background? | This section should be brief.   * Literature review using sources such as:   -[Employer Skills Survey](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/746493/ESS_2017_UK_Report_Controlled_v06.00.pdf)  -[CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey 2017](http://www.cbi.org.uk/index.cfm/_api/render/file/?method=inline&fileID=DB1A9FE5-5459-4AA2-8B44798DD5B15E77)  -[DofE survey](http://www.dofe.org/uk-employers-regard-soft-skills-as-important)  -upReach has employability data that be broken down by socioeconomic background <https://getemployable.org/> |
| **Availability of out-of-school activity and match with needs/wants**   * What out-of-school activities are available for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds? (i.e., which are both affordable and available in deprived areas, for example) * What out-of-school activities do young people from disadvantaged backgrounds want/enjoy? * What out-of-school activities are needed and/or lacking for disadvantaged young people? (E.g., what problems are not being addressed, for example gang issues) | It is up to the researchers how much to dig into this area, as there is less data available here.   * Literature review * Potentially a new survey / case study |

**Methodological requirements**

The Commission seeks ambitious and robust proposals. Bids will be judged on the proposed approach, expertise of team, and value for money.

This research will influence future policy recommendations as well as actions by charities, schools, and local government. It should offer insight into problems to be addressed, the importance of extracurricular support for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and what more is needed.

Bidders are asked to set out the proposed methodology for answering the research questions. **We do not expect every bid to answer each research question in a similar depth of detail.** We are seeking out ambitious proposals and suggest that the following methodological approaches are the minimum that a bidder should consider:

**Report drafting**

The audience for this research will be UK policy makers, local government, educators, charities, other stakeholders addressing social mobility issues, and the general public.

In addition to the final report, we would ideally publish a few short briefings on specific issues – including a separate report on any primary research conducted and/or a briefing on extracurricular participation gaps or aspirations – as well as the full final report. We hope this will generate extra media coverage of key issues and increase the public’s understanding of social mobility.

The final report should include a literature review, a concise and newsworthy summary of findings, plus the full details of the methodology, data and analysis, and (if possible) case studies of what works. It is essential that proposed solutions to address any socio-economic gaps identified are included in the report – for policy makers, other stakeholders, and the Social Mobility Commission – about out-of-school support.

All reports will be published on the Social Mobility Commission gov.uk website. This research will support the work of the Social Mobility Commission in developing our analysis and policy recommendations.

**Acceptable bidders**

The successful bidder will have a track record of working in the subject area of social mobility, wider diversity and/or soft skills and extracurricular activities. Experience in producing well-evidenced, newsworthy, conclusions is essential. You will need to show evidence of how you can manipulate data effectively. You will also need to show evidence of how you can manage surveys and/or focus groups to produce helpful findings.

**Commissioning process**

This research will be commissioned via a single procurement phase, for which succinct proposals are invited. Assessment of tenders will be on the basis of the criteria at the end of this document. The contract between the Commission and the successful bidder will run from the date of issue until no later than the second week of March 2019. Research will be published on the Commission’s website and should be drafted with Social Mobility Commission branding and format.

Tenders should be submitted to [contact@socialmobilitycommission.gov.uk](mailto:contact@socialmobilitycommission.gov.uk) no later than 5pm on 16 November 2018. They should be in Word or PDF format and include:

* Your proposed approach to the research (3-4 sides max). You may wish to set out in this section:
  + Overview of method, for each research question;
  + Details of the proposed approach;
  + Methodological constraints and possible solutions;
  + How you can add value and why you should be selected;
  + How the findings would be presented;
  + Timeline and risks.
* Examples of key relevant experience and individual/staff expertise and qualifications. Proposed distribution of duties should be clearly stated if the bid involves sub-contracting or collaboration between different providers. (1-2 sides max);
* Summary of costs (1 side max).

Communication of complex information in a straightforward way is necessary to this project. Therefore **tenders that exceed 7 sides of A4 will be not be considered**.

**Acceptable standards of bidders**

The following sets out the acceptable standards of bidders for this research and how these should be evidenced:

* Experience of working flexibly with clients in developing complex research and analysis;
* Clarity in communicating progress of work to clients and explaining issues that arise in a timely manner;
* Risk management expertise including track record in escalating risks to clients for discussion;
* If necessary, experience in working with other organisations as part of larger research programmes;
* A track record of research drawing on quantitative data resulting in news-worthy conclusions;
* If necessary, a track record of managing surveys and/or focus groups/interviews and/or case studies to produce reliable and newsworthy conclusions.

**Evaluation criteria**

Tenders will be evaluated against the criteria below. A primary weighting means the criteria will be given greater consideration in assessment of bids.

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| **Criteria** | **Potential examples** | **Weighting** |
| A robust and ambitious method | * Clear articulation of a method to answer as many of our research questions as possible * Articulation of proposed data collection and analytical techniques to be used in the project | Primary |
| Team and organisational experience in conducting and presenting research | * Experience of staff in relevant research techniques * Experience of specific research in this area and familiarity with subject area * Experience of presenting findings in eye-catching and clear ways | Primary |
| Cost and value for money | * Estimation of cost * Value add to the project | Primary |
| Presentation of data, findings and recommendations | * Clear articulation of plans for presenting the findings in clear and eye-catching ways | Secondary |

**Delivery Requirements**

Based on selection of a provider for this research in November 2018 the deadline for final products will be the second week of March 2019. Final products should be in electronic format, using a style guide as supplied by the Social Mobility Commission.

We estimate the research should cost up to £35,000 in total (excluding VAT) and that surveys will consume the bulk of those costs.

All costs should be quoted exclusive of VAT but please indicate if the project will attract VAT.

If your proposal includes costs for sub-contractors these costs must be shown inclusive of any VAT element (e.g. sub-contractor’s costs to you are £5,000 plus VAT, your proposal should show sub-contractors costs as £6,000 inclusive of VAT @ 20%).

1. Schoon, I. and Gutman, L. (2013) The impact of non-cognitive skills on outcomes for young people; Literature review, <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Publications/EEF_Lit_Review_Non-CognitiveSkills.pdf>; Goodman, A., et al (2015) Social and emotional skills in childhood and their long-term effects on adult life, <http://www.eif.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/EIF-Strand-1-Report-FINAL1.pdf>; Goodman, A. and Glegg, P. (2010) Poorer children’s educational attainment: how important are attitudes and behaviour?

   <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poorer-children%E2%80%99s-educational-attainment-how-important-are-attitudes-and-behaviour> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Blanden, J., Gregg, P. and Macmillan, L. (2007) Accounting for intergenerational Income Persistence: Non-cognitive Skills, Ability and Education, The Economic Journal Vol. 117 (519) pp. C43-C60

   <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1468-0297.2007.02034.x>;

   upReach [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sutton Trust (2014) Extracurricular Inequalities, <https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/enrichment-brief-private-tuition-extracurricular-activities/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)