Enrichment for All: Benchmarks to build belonging, skills and opportunity
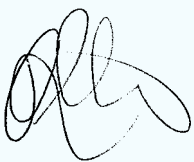
Foreword

We believe that every child and young person, regardless of background or ability, should have equitable access to enriching activities and experiences that help them discover their passion, purpose and place in the world. Key to that is an enriched, multi-dimensional education that supports their social and emotional development and helps them develop essential skills for life and work. Enriching a young person's life, both inside and outside of formal education, with meaningful learning opportunities and experiences is essential.

Through our collective work we see everyday just what children and young people are capable of, with the right support and opportunities. We are delighted to be collaborating as a partnership to publish this report, the latest in a series of contributions exploring how to improve access for all children and young people to high-quality enrichment and non-formal learning opportunities through school.

We make the case for radical improvement to support those who are being failed by our systems. Enrichment activities and opportunities are vital for the wider development of a young person, and can have a greater impact for children and young people whose needs or strengths may not be fully met by the standard educational model. Embedding enrichment within the systems of our academies and communities is crucial for deepening understanding of the true potential offered by high quality, purposeful and inclusive non-formal learning to influence children and young people's lives and shape their futures.

This report brings together the voices of some of those who will be most impacted by the benchmarks and has shown us the importance of working across sectors – with schools, youth and voluntary sectors and other enrichment organisations to create the best possible opportunities for our children and young people. This work has highlighted the need for collaboration beyond the education sector: together we are stronger.

We are very grateful to all the stakeholders – across education, youth work, careers and employability, central and local government and think tanks, and of course young people themselves – who have contributed to the development of this thinking and supported the iteration of these Enrichment Benchmarks. We hope these will prove a useful contribution to realising our shared goal of enrichment for all young people.

Ruth Marvel OBE,
Chief Executive Officer,
Duke of Edinburgh's Award

Liz Robinson,
Chief Executive Officer,
Big Education

Dave Parr,
Group Chief Executive,
Oasis Charitable Trust

Contents

Authors:
Joe Hallgarten, Hannah Stoddart,
Dr Fran Wilby, Samantha Ellis

Executive Summary

Enrichment activities can and should have intrinsic value. If young people enjoy and are positively challenged through enrichment, this improves their lives 'in the moment'. However, enrichment can also significantly shape young people's broader outcomes and life chances. Evidence shows that engaging in enrichment improves young people's wellbeing, mental health and belonging – through reducing stress, enhancing social connection and combating loneliness. Participation also helps to build important skills for work and life – promoting teamwork and collaboration, as well as fostering resilience and perseverance. It can widen horizons and raise aspirations – thereby supporting transitions into further work or study. Given all these positive benefits, it is unsurprising that a growing body of evidence is showing the positive impact of enrichment on school attendance and engagement, which is vital for closing the attainment gap.

Yet access to enrichment is often inconsistent or low quality, and it is more disadvantaged pupils who are missing out the most. Whilst there are growing pockets of best practice, the significant potential of schools to facilitate improved access is not always being realised, and this report identifies a number of 'gaps' that are contributing to this situation. At the systemic level, there is a gap between rhetoric and action – with insufficient priority placed on non-formal learning through either accountability frameworks or funding provision. This skews incentives away from improving enrichment provision at an institutional level, leading to a gap between school leaders' aspirations and the realities of what can be provided. In the absence of structured school enrichment offers, parents seek opportunities for their children independently, with the associated costs meaning many families miss out and the pupil access gap grows. Where schools are able to facilitate an enrichment offer, choice is often limited and opportunities for partnership with external organisations are missed, leading to a quality gap which ultimately reduces the potential for improved outcomes.

Despite these gaps, there are a number of developments that could unlock improved access, quality and outcomes for young people. There is a growing recognition by the government that a broader and more balanced approach to education is needed – with a renewed focus on pupil belonging, a commitment to changes in curriculum and assessment, and reforms to the Ofsted accountability framework. Following growing calls across sectors for a more inclusive education system, in early June the Prime Minister agreed that the government will develop a best practice framework to help schools increase engagement, and promote belonging.

This comes shortly after the Department for Education (DfE) announced in March 2025 its intention to develop an 'Enrichment Framework' to highlight effective practice on enrichment, providing advice for schools on how to plan a high-quality enrichment offer more strategically and intentionally.

These commitments together have the potential to create learning environments that help more children and young people to succeed, and to shift the dial in improving attendance, to shift the dial in improving attendance, building broader life skills, and enhancing pupil wellbeing.

4

It will be important that they are executed in the right way and with the right support, so it is positive that in the development of the Enrichment Framework, DfE has committed to consider whether standardised benchmarks 'form a useful part of that support'. Prior to the government's announcement, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the National Citizen Service (now closed) partnered with Oasis Charitable Trust[1], Big Education Trust and Rethinking Assessment to develop some proposed benchmarks – drawing on consultation and engagement with a diverse range of stakeholders across sectors, as well as young people themselves. The proposed benchmarks are summarised in the table below, offering a contribution that can be further developed, providing a stimulus for deeper work.

FIGURE 1: Summary of proposed benchmarks – full articulation in Section 5 on page 29

	Benchmark	Core elements
1	**Develop a stable enrichment programme**	Structured enrichment offer with leadership backing and dedicated staff capacity. Minimum 80 hours per pupil, per year.
2	**Sustain a broad and balanced programme**	Diverse and comprehensive offer covering: citizenship, arts and culture, skills, sports and physical activity and outdoor learning and adventurous activities. Facilitated by 'trusted adult' and mentors.
3	**Link enrichment with wider school activities**	Embed enrichment within wider school priorities including overall outcomes, career pathways, attendance, behaviour. Measure data.
4	**Respond to interest of pupils and staff**	Embed youth voice and choice, along with insights from parents, teachers, and providers.
5	**Target pupils at risk of missing out**	Ensure provisions in place for those furthest from participation, monitor levels of engagement.
6	**Work in partnership with external providers**	Commission/build partnerships with external providers to build a more comprehensive offer.
7	**Work to clear outcomes**	Establish aspired outcomes based on recognised benchmarks, monitor against them and support self-reflection.
8	**Continuously improve quality and impact**	Support staff skills and training, evaluate regularly, incorporate feedback and promote continuous learning.

1   Oasis Charitable Trust is a family of charities with a shared vision to build strong, inclusive communities. Our work spans across education (Oasis Community Learning), community and youth engagement (Oasis Community partnerships), homelessness support (Oasis Community Housing), and the fight against human trafficking (Stop the Traffik).

It is important to note that a framework and benchmarks alone will not be sufficient to tackle the access gap for pupils. As such a broader set of recommendations are outlined below:

1 **Define broader outcomes for pupils** – placing greater emphasis on broader educational and developmental achievements beyond attainment, including essential skills, inclusion and improved wellbeing, taking a cross-governmental approach that learns the success of models such as the Every Child Matters framework.

2 **Locate enrichment within wider ambitions for inclusion** – emphasising the transformative role of enrichment for pupil wellbeing and inclusion, and ensuring that any government guidance or framework to support engagement and belonging points to enrichment best practice and benchmarks.

3 **Emphasise enrichment through accountability frameworks** – providing more clarity on expectations for enrichment through the Ofsted framework, including through referring to any enrichment framework and benchmarks to help guide teachers and leaders.

4 **Build 'wrap-around' infrastructure to support implementation** – establishing a data 'architecture' to track and monitor progress, as well as some centralised national and local capacity to provide guidance, alongside establishing enrichment leads in all schools and Trusts – harnessing existing systems and institutional capacity where possible.

5 **Pilot, test and learn** – identify priority areas to roll-out the benchmarks where levels of access to enrichment are lower or more unequal, drawing on learning from the Enrichment Partnerships Pilot (EPP) and exploring national and local partnerships that can support implementation.

6 **Grow funding** – mobilise approximately £150 – £180 million annually to support the roll-out of the framework, exploring local and national match-funder partnerships and collaborations to align funding around the shared goals of the benchmarks.

1. Introduction

This report is the latest publication of a partnership initiative on education and enrichment, which was established by The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) and National Citizen Service in 2021. The joint initiative was initially conceived in response to the significant challenges caused by the Covid pandemic – and associated lockdowns – for young people's educational outcomes, as well as their overall wellbeing, confidence and belonging. The partnership's first report – *Enriching Education Recovery: The role of non-formal learning and extra-curricular activities (2021)* – gathered evidence on the relationship between enrichment and improved outcomes for young people, as well as putting forward recommendations on how to embed non-formal learning and enrichment experiences more effectively into education recovery plans.

Through putting forward this evidence, and convening a diverse range of stakeholders across the education, youth and voluntary sectors together with young people and policy-makers across departments and disciplines, it became clear how much appetite there was to improve young people's access to high quality enrichment experiences – and to harness the potential of schools and the education system to help make that happen. Since then, DofE and NCS Trust further developed the evidence base – through commissioning research and publishing reports on how partnerships can improve access to enrichment, and on the positive relationship between enrichment and attendance. In 2024 DofE and NCS Trust were also awarded £2.7 million in Shared Outcomes funding from DCMS and DfE to run the 'Enrichment Partnerships Pilot', which has sought to test the role of convening and coordinating capacity at local levels to improve access to enrichment.

Drawing on this research and our experiences from the EPP (a full evaluation of which will be completed in Summer 2025) a number of policy and practice proposals have been put forward to help advance the enrichment agenda. These include the establishment of an 'Enrichment Guarantee' to provide a minimum number of hours of enrichment to all pupils every year; putting in place an Enrichment Premium as a funding mechanism to improve access especially for more disadvantaged pupils; improving infrastructure to enable better partnership and collaboration across schools and the voluntary sector (including through 'enrichment coordinators'); and developing an Enrichment Framework and associated set of benchmarks to establish quality standards for the provision and facilitation of an enrichment offer through schools (inspired and informed by the Gatsby Benchmarks for careers education and inspiration).

In February 2025 – shortly prior to the closure of NCS – DofE and NCS Trust jointly commissioned Oasis Charitable Trust, Big Education Trust and Rethinking Assessment to conduct some further analysis and consultation on the proposal of an Enrichment Framework and set of benchmarks. This report shares the findings of that work, including a proposed set of benchmarks which are offered as a starting point for further iteration, testing and development. It also makes some broader recommendations on the wider reforms that are needed to give any Enrichment Framework and benchmarks the best chance of success. These proposals come at an important time when the current government is demonstrating leadership and ambition on the enrichment agenda – having announced its intention at the end of March 2025 to develop an Enrichment Framework.

This report's findings and recommendations aim to offer helpful insight to the Department for Education to consider as it develops the Framework, and it is hoped that the proposed benchmarks will be a useful contribution as stakeholders across sectors come together to help improve access to quality enrichment for all.

As NCS has now wound down, this report acknowledges the invaluable contribution the Trust made to the education and enrichment agenda, and how its efforts made this work possible. This report is now published by DofE, Oasis Charitable Trust, Big Education Trust and Rethinking Assessment, who will collectively be taking forward the wider education and enrichment initiative in the future.

2. Why enrichment and why now?

2.1 Defining Enrichment

Enrichment currently lacks a single agreed definition. This report uses a definition that draws on work by the National Youth Agency, articulations by both the DCMS and DfE[2], as well as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award[3] and NCS definition in *Beyond the Classroom*. It states that:

Enrichment refers to a broad range of activities and experiences that support young people's social, personal, and educational development. These can take place in schools, community settings, or beyond, and may be led by volunteers or paid staff.

Enrichment includes positive programmes such as clubs, volunteering, outdoor learning, arts and culture pursuits, sports, trips, social action, and other non-formal learning activities. Central to all enrichment is support from a trusted adult. These experiences help young people:

» Explore their values, beliefs, and the issues that matter to them

» Build confidence, voice, and influence

» Develop essential life skills and talents to reach their potential

Good quality enrichment centres young people's voices, safeguards their wellbeing, and respects their individuality.

---

2   Department for Culture, Media and Sport. (2024) Youth Enrichment: Discovery Phase. London: Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

3   Centre for Young Lives, Leeds Beckett University and YMCA George Williams College (2025). *Beyond the Classroom: The role of enrichment in tackling the school absence crisis.*

2.2 The Prize: Why Enrichment Matters

Enrichment activities can and should have intrinsic value. If young people enjoy and are positively challenged by enrichment activities, this improves their lives 'in the moment'. However, enrichment can also significantly shape young people's outcomes and life chances.[4] [5] The effects span several important areas[6], listed here in order of security of evidence.

» **Wellbeing, mental health, and sense of belonging**

Enrichment demonstrably benefits young people's wellbeing and mental health.[7] It also strengthens their sense of belonging. Engaging in enjoyable activities outside of academic pressures reduces stress. Physical activities, often part of enrichment, improve both physical and mental health in adulthood, especially for young people dealing with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Social interactions in clubs combat loneliness and improve social skills. Inclusive enrichment environments help young people feel comfortable being themselves. Participation in arts and cultural experiences such as music ensembles (choirs, bands, orchestras) can help boost mood, increase confidence and help depression.[8] This is valuable for those who may feel less accepted in classrooms. A stronger sense of belonging, built through positive relationships, is crucial for overall well being.

» **Key life skills**

Enrichment provides a valuable context for developing a range of important life skills.[9] Participation builds self-assurance and self-efficacy as young people explore new interests. Activities involving teamwork improve communication and interpersonal abilities[10]. They also enhance the capacity to collaborate effectively. Overcoming challenges in enrichment fosters resilience and perseverance. Many activities also develop skills such as planning, organisation, problem-solving, creativity, talent development and leadership.

4   Education Policy Institute (2024). *Access to extra-curricular provision and the association with outcomes.*

5   Department for Culture, Media and Sport. (2024). *Youth Provision and Life Outcomes: A Study of Longitudinal Research.* London: Department for Culture, Media and Sport. p39.

6   Centre for Education and Youth and National Citizen Service (2021). *Enriching Education Recovery: The role of non-formal learning and extra-curricular activities.*

7   O'Donnell et al (2024). 'Extracurricular activity participation, school belonging, and depressed mood: a test of the compensation hypothesis during adolescence.' *Applied Developmental Science*, 28:4, 596-611.

8   Music & Mental Health | Young Minds Matter https://ymm.org.uk/about-us/musicandmentalhealth

9   Department for Education. (2021). *Evaluation of the Essential Life Skills Programme.* London: Department for Education.

10   Skills Builder Partnership. 2022. *Essential Skills Tracker 2022.* London: Skills Builder Partnership. p43-45.

» Future pathways

Exposure to diverse activities through enrichment can broaden young people's horizons. It can raise aspirations for further learning or specific careers and provide valuable experiences which can inform future choices.[11] Enrichment, therefore, can enhance employability and contribute to more successful transitions into work or further study.[12]

» Attendance

Access to stimulating enrichment can motivate better school attendance.[13] Students look forward to enjoyable clubs and activities. This increases their presence and improves overall attendance. Positive relationships with teachers and peers in enrichment foster a stronger sense of school belonging. This connection supports more regular attendance.

» Academic outcomes

Enrichment, while separate from the curriculum, can positively affect academic outcomes.[14] Developing organisational and time-management skills, self expression, creative thinking and team work within enrichment can also aid academic study.

Across all of these areas, enrichment has the potential to reduce some disadvantages faced by young people from more marginalised backgrounds. By providing access to experiences and skill-building, enrichment can help narrow inequalities and even protect more vulnerable young people from risk-taking behaviours and other harm. Ensuring equitable access to varied, high-quality enrichment is a crucial way to promote social mobility and break down barriers to opportunity.

11   NCFE, Association of Colleges, and University of Derby. (2023). *Valuing Enrichment: The Role of Enrichment in Further Education – College Voices*. London: Association of Colleges.

12   Careers & Enterprise Company. (2021) *Effective Careers Interventions for Disadvantaged Young People*. London: Careers & Enterprise Company, p21.

13   Centre for Young Lives, Leeds Beckett University, and YMCA George Williams College. (2025) *Beyond the Classroom: The Role of Enrichment in Tackling the School Absence Crisis*. London: Centre for Young Lives.

14   Onward (2022) *Beyond School: The Case for School Enrichment*. London: Onward.

2.3 The Problem: Ten Enrichment Gaps

Despite growing interest from policymakers and national organisations and the best efforts of school leaders and organisations across the enrichment landscape, both evidence and perceptions point to ten significant and possibly growing enrichment gaps.

Gap		Summary
1	**System Level Gap**	There are tensions between the rhetoric of government support for enrichment and the reality of systemic factors such as the accountability framework and funding constraints, which can inadvertently create barriers to equitable provision, particularly in schools facing greater challenges.
2	**School Strategy Gap**	Despite widespread recognition of the value of enrichment among schools, a gap often exists between aspirational goals for provision and the practical reality of what is consistently delivered to all students. Factors such as teacher workload, funding limitations, and a lack of strategic prioritisation can impede the implementation of comprehensive and engaging enrichment programmes.
3	**School Provision Gap**	Significant disparities persist in the range and quality of enrichment provision across different schools and Trusts schools, often correlating with their socio-economic intake. The availability and accessibility of activities can vary significantly depending on location, with geographic inequalities affecting access to enrichment (especially between the North of England and London).
4	**Pupil Access Gap**	There are also significant differences in the amount and quality of enrichment opportunities accessed by pupils from low-income backgrounds and specific groups of young people compared to their more advantaged peers. This situation worsened as a result of austerity cuts since 2010 and since the COVID-19 pandemic. Financial barriers, lack of awareness, perceived exclusivity, and limited provision in their local areas and schools contribute to this unequal access.
5	**Pupil Choice Gap**	A gap exists between the types of enrichment activities young people would ideally like to participate in and the actual provision available to them. Young people value having greater choice in selecting activities that appeal to their interests, but the current offer may not always align with their preferences, potentially affecting engagement.

Gap	Summary
6 Staff Knowledge Gap	While almost all teachers and school staff believe in the positive impact of enrichment, there can be a gap in their understanding of what constitutes enrichment, as well as their knowledge of best practice for developing and delivering effective programmes that cater to diverse student needs and promote engagement. Schools may also lack knowledge of available resources and strategies for improving their enrichment offer.
7 Information and Data Gap	Information gaps hinder the effective matching of young people with available opportunities, as schools may lack awareness of local organisations and struggle to assess the quality and relevance of different offers. A lack of a centralised platform or local coordinated approach contributes to this challenge. Many MIS systems are not currently configured to track enrichment activities effectively and even when data is collected, it is not always analysed or used to inform improvement strategies. Staff may also lack the time or administrative support to consistently log activities.
8 Partnerships Gap	External organisations demonstrate an appetite to support school enrichment, yet a gap often exists in schools' capacity to effectively identify, commission, and manage these partnerships to ensure quality and relevance. Schools may lack the time, expertise, or resources to navigate the wider enrichment landscape and establish fruitful collaborations. The absence of coordinating infrastructure to facilitate collaboration can impede effective partnership working.
9 Quality Gap	A gap exists between well-planned and effectively delivered enrichment activities and those that may be more ad hoc or inconsistent in their implementation. In the absence of consistent quality frameworks, variations in these areas can lead to significant differences in the experiences and benefits for young people.
10 Outcomes Gap	There is a disparity between the widely held perceptions of the positive outcomes that enrichment can achieve for young people and a more robust, evidence-based understanding of its specific effects. While enrichment is believed to foster various skills and improve outcomes like attendance and well-being, better evaluation is needed to establish clear and direct links and to measure the impact of different types of activities.

2.4 The Potential Opportunity: Why Focus on Enrichment Now?

Despite these gaps, several current developments in England give cause for optimism that enrichment opportunities might significantly improve for all, and that some of the gaps outlined above might narrow over the next decade. A new government is taking a broader view of the purpose of schools and what counts as a good quality education, with a particular focus on young people's belonging and engagement. Aligned to this are forthcoming changes to accountability systems (and the role and Framework of Ofsted in particular) and to the national curriculum and assessment systems; as well as recent commitments to launch an Enrichment Framework as well as a framework to promote engagement in schools.

In addition, there is a growing recognition that broader strategies are needed – beyond punitive approaches and improved classroom teaching – to improve the engagement and attendance of many children and young people. In terms of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, it may be that academic 'catch-up' has been happening at a faster rate than catch-up in broader outcomes, in particular social and emotional skills. This has created a realisation of the need for a more sustained, holistic approach to post-covid recovery for young people. None of these changes guarantees improvements in enrichment provision but may create a different, more positive enabling environment.

2.5 The Possible Solution: Why Benchmarks?

Benchmarks – or a larger framework that benchmarks might be nested within – cannot in themselves address all enrichment gaps. In particular, funding and accountability issues remain endemic problems. However, as school systems begins to tilt towards a more enabling environment for enrichment, the creation of a standardised set of benchmarks could support the education sector in the facilitation of a high-quality enrichment and personal development offer.

Well-crafted benchmarks can help education institutions to meaningfully integrate enrichment guidance into their core purpose, and help them to develop a more coherent, strategic approach to enrichment, for the benefit of all their students. Mirroring the success of the Gatsby Benchmarks, the potential is to bolster the education sector's capacity to deliver an accessible and high quality enrichment offer. As part of future development, alongside the benchmarks would sit high quality guidance and case studies that can support, inspire and provoke education institutions towards improved enrichment provision.

Perhaps more important than the 'achievements' of any benchmarks are the discussions that can arise from their interrogation within any education institution or group of institutions. The building of shared language, ambitions and strategic purpose around enrichment, amongst school staff, governors, pupils, parents, external providers or partner organisations and the wider community is a vital foundation for improvement.

In addition, benchmarks can help to bring enrichment front and centre to the national debate, changing public discourse around the value of enrichment to thriving childhoods and transitions to adulthood.

There is much to learn from the Gatsby Benchmarks in terms of its approach to sector engagement, as well as its research processes and content. However, there are four ways in which careers education as a domain is different from enrichment.

» Careers education has a statutory footing, with clear requirements for schools and colleges, and a national organisation (the Careers and Enterprise Company) partly designed to monitor and improve provision.

» Careers education is largely compulsory for young people, whereas almost all enrichment offered in schools is non-mandatory, with a greater element of choice.

» Careers education has a clear set of national indicators (in particular, pupil destinations) that, whilst not capturing the full range of outcomes, gives careers educators a 'North star' to work towards.

Following the model of the Gatsby Benchmarks

The Gatsby Benchmarks offer a valuable model for the development of a set of benchmarks which were widely adopted across the sector, eventually becoming part of government policy. The benchmarks were created by the Gatsby Foundation from academic research which identified international models of best practice in careers education and which aimed to set a 'World Class Standard'. This research was synthesised and the eight benchmarks were published in 2014 to help support high quality careers provision in school and colleges.

A test-and-learn pilot was led by Gatsby between 2015 and 2019 which developed many of the support mechanisms which were later used nationally. An academic partner conducted an evaluation which captured financial implications as well as effectiveness of the framework. The benchmarks were made statutory in schools in 2018, and since then Benchmark achievement has more than tripled, from less than 1.9 benchmarks out of 8 in 2018, to 5.8 in 2024[15].

The success of the Gatsby Benchmarks can be attributed to several factors:

» The benchmarks were developed independent of government and then later adopted as statutory

» Impact data is clear and is captured year-on-year

» Extensive infrastructure has been developed by the Careers and Enterprise Company using careers hubs across the country

» Careers Leads are supported in schools with training from the CEC and funding has been available via the Gatsby Foundation and the CEC.

---

15   The Gatsby Charitable Foundation (2024). *Good Career Guidance: The Next 10 Years. London: The Gatsby Charitable Foundation.*

3. Methodology

3.1 Rapid 'proof of concept'

The Gatsby Benchmarks have taken significant time – around ten years – and resources to arrive at their current status and credibility with secondary schools and colleges, careers providers, Ofsted and DfE. This report – drawing on consultation and analysis conducted over a shorter period is best described as a 'proof of concept' project – a rapid feasibility study designed to build on some draft initial frameworks developed by DofE and NCS and:

» Assess overall appetite for enrichment benchmarks

» Engage teachers, school/community leaders and experts on enrichment in the education and youth sectors to analyse the content, scope and language of the draft benchmarks

» Adapt a revised, more comprehensive set of benchmarks; and

» Access advice about how a set of enrichment benchmarks could best be promoted, and what additional guidance might be required

3.2 Engagement Process

The purpose of the engagement process was to:

1. Review the content of draft enrichment benchmarks produced initially by DofE and NCS, providing constructive feedback to support further development

2. Consult on how the benchmarks could be embedded, and what conditions might be needed for successful implementation

Oasis Charitable Trust (OCT) led an engagement process across 18 days. The engagement was across 3 key groups: Young People, school staff (teachers and school leaders); community leaders; and expert stakeholders across sectors. OCT has a national reach across 54 academies, and 22 community hubs. This allowed for a wider geographical reach – the highest engagement was in London, Southampton, Manchester and Grimsby. The engagement and consultation took place via Oasis Academies, Oasis Community Hubs and Oasis Youth Projects, utilising a mixture of in-person focus groups, one-to-one discussions and digital consultation. A cross-sector virtual roundtable was also held, bringing together expert stakeholders at national, regional and local levels across the education, youth and voluntary sectors – who were also invited to share written feedback after the roundtable.

The young people involved in the engagement through the Oasis Youth Sessions were not solely Oasis students, thus further broadening the consultation. Young people were invited to engage in a discussion around enrichment, if they currently access enrichment opportunities and where. The engagement was designed to get a better understanding of what young people view as enrichment and the ways in which they would access it. For school leaders, wider staff and community leaders the focus of the engagement was on content, implementation and accountability.

The one-to-one discussions focused on the opportunities and challenges, the role of accountability frameworks to enhance implementation, and questions of funding and resource. The roundtable focussed on questions of usefulness and application in the sector, as well as the enabling environment and infrastructure. Written feedback invited from roundtable participants sought reflections and insights on the individual benchmarks.

TABLE: Engagement across stakeholder groups on the benchmarks

Stakeholder Group	Format	Geography
Young people **175 in total**	Focus groups discussions in lunchtimes/after school Mix of young people engaging in Oasis community hubs and from Oasis Academies	North London South London Southampton East Southampton
School and community leaders **39 in total**	Mix of focus groups and one-to-one discussions across primary and secondary leaders and community representatives	London South East
School and community leaders **57 in total**	Survey	National London South West Southampton Midlands North West
Key Expert Stakeholders – education, youth, voluntary sector	Roundtable	National e.g. Ofsted, The Gatsby Foundation, UK Youth, and the Chartered College of Teaching, the Association of Colleges
Key Expert Stakeholders – education, youth, voluntary sector	Written feedback on benchmarks	National

4. Insights and key learning

This section provides a broad summary of the key themes that emerged through the consultation and engagement sessions on a draft version of the benchmarks developed by DofE and NCS Trust. Where useful examples of existing good practice were surfaced through the engagement, these appear as 'snapshots' throughout. These insights have been considered in the updated benchmarks proposed in this report.

Support for benchmarks with appropriate funding – despite some worries around workload and the creation of another layer of 'box-ticking' accountability, participants largely welcomed the proposed concept of benchmarks as a positive step towards enhancing the provision of enrichment opportunities for pupils. There was widespread consensus that funding envelopes would need to increase to ensure the necessary resource and capacity to implement benchmarks effectively.

The importance of accountability and equity – whilst accountability requirements did bring additional pressures, there was a widely-held view that without inclusion in the Ofsted framework or school report card, there was reduced chance of widespread uptake. If enrichment were included in accountability measures – in particular the 'personal development and wellbeing' category – the sense is that this would necessitate a sharper focus, bringing it clearly into governors' and executive teams' line of sight. Equity was also highlighted in this context, with targets for the most marginalised to be an important part of any benchmarks.

Defining a 'broad and balanced' offer – there was consensus that clarity will be important in defining what might count as breadth. For example, this included ensuring a detailed enough articulation of the 'arts' category within enrichment, referencing participation (e.g. in choirs, bands), talent development, display, performance and cultural trips. There was also widespread agreement on the need for precise and readily understandable definitions of key ideas to develop a shared language around enrichment. However there was also recognition of the need for contextual flexibility alongside any guidance.

Snapshot: STAR Academies

STAR enrichment is based around five Leadership Foundations:

» Star Sports
» Star Creatives
» Star Performers
» Star Futures
» Star Citizens

Together, the Foundations combine activities that build a rich range of cultural experiences, allow every child to test themselves in a range of enjoyable activities, connect young people with their community and prepare them for the world of work.

They provide activities that will stretch and challenge and help young people develop the Star leadership virtues and competencies. This framework is used as a guide for schools in ensuring that there is breadth and diversity in their offer, and that pupils engage with a range of activities that support their personal development, wellbeing and engagement at school.

Source: Trust Lead for Enrichment submission to questionnaire.
        See also STAR Handbook for Senior Leaders

Providing a structured offer – whilst there was generally support for the development of a consistent and structured programme, there were mixed views about benchmarks defining minimum hours of engagement (the original draft of the benchmarks proposed 80 hours). There were some concerns that this would be difficult to achieve due to tight school schedules, limited funding, and staffing constraints, and the risk of putting too much pressure on already stretched school leaders and staff. There was a preference among some for improving monitoring to increase understanding of participation, rather than setting targets.

Snapshot: Bournemouth and Poole College

At Bournemouth and Poole College there are three strands of enrichment within the college to ensure a stable programme year-on-year.

» Student-led: Clubs and groups like table tennis and games.

» Cross-college: Trips and activities, including youth social action.

» Curriculum-based: Work-related and employability-focused.

A Youth Social Action Apprentice oversees student-led projects, including, for example, a local baby bank collection and charity fundraising. The college also hosts an annual student conference with workshops, seminars, and networking. Run by the Student Exec team, it ensures a student-led experience. Senior leadership supports enrichment but faces funding challenges. A centralised team collaborates with curriculum staff to group activities efficiently, reducing costs.

Source: https://www.aoc.co.uk/bournemouth-and-poole-college The Association of Colleges was represented at the Roundtable. See also the AoC report *The Valuing Enrichment Project*.

Being responsive to young people – participants widely endorse the fundamental principle of aligning enrichment activities with the individual interests of students. However, there are concerns about the meaning of terms such as 'co-creation', and whether pupil voice should focus on influencing choices around the nature and delivery of activities rather than on influencing whole-school enrichment strategies. There was support for the idea of a 'negotiated canon'[16]; mixing activities which pupils are already interested and involved in, with opportunities that may be unfamiliar and take them out of their comfort zones. This would balance the need for responsiveness to young people's preferences with efforts to broaden their horizons and encourage them to explore new challenges.

Snapshot: Oasis Community Hubs

The Oasis Hub Model ensures that enrichment, mentoring and wider community support is embedded in all Oasis Academies and surrounding communities. In places where the partnership with the local authority is strong this takes place in the closest youth centre, in some cases this is located next door to the academy or within the neighbourhood, as well as the academy itself. Each community hub will develop a team of youth workers, family support workers and community outreach workers and co-develop activities based on the needs of the young people, families and local residents. This is not restricted to term time, activities increase during the holidays and expand to include the whole family. In some areas this model is well established and in others it is still developing.

For example, Oasis Community Hub: Ashburton Park is currently developing their model and are designing and delivering enrichment activities, currently based within a school, operating during the school day and after school. The Hub is developing a range of drop-in activities alongside targeted support (1 to 1 sessions). The drop-in's are informal and focus on building trust and strong relationships through fun and creative activities such as playing video games, table tennis, chatting over a hot chocolate, art activities, and listening to music. Staff then develop (co-produce) more tailored sessions that respond to the young people's needs and interests. They are exploring opportunities to develop more formal skills and even offer accreditation.

Source: Youth Leader submission to questionnaire and follow-up discussion with Oasis Business Development Manager. See also the Relational Model used at the centre, *'Feels Like Home. Young people's experience of Relational Hubs.'*

Recognising the diversity of partnership – there was broad agreement on the value of establishing collaborations with external providers or partner organisations. Feedback highlighted the significance of effective inter-sectoral collaboration and in particular the unique expertise held within the youth sector. Many suggest the designation of a specific individual within schools to take responsibility for managing any partnerships, though concerns regarding potential workload were also surfaced. A more expansive concept of partnership was proposed – recognising that many enrichment activities require more of a transactional commissioning or procurement approach than a genuine partnership. There was also a desire for benchmarks to be as achievable for rural as urban schools and recognise that rural schools have less access to external providers/partner organisations.

Snapshot: **Queen's Park Primary School partnership with St Helens Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP)**

St Helens Local Cultural Education Partnership (LCEP), housed in the local council, enhances arts enrichment in schools. Participating schools pay an annual fee for expert-led enrichment sessions and CPD for teachers. The LCEP leverages the council's procurement power to offer discounted cultural venue visits and subsidised transport.

LCEP has partnered with Queen's Park Primary for five years, led by the school's arts lead and LCEP's Development Officer. Partnerships with local artists improve enrichment quality and inspire students to pursue arts careers.

LCEP provides access to various art forms, including photography and painting. Funded mainly by partner schools' core budgets, it also receives some council support for operations.

Source: Centre for Education and Youth, UK Youth, DofE and NCS Trust (2024). *Education and Enrichment: How partnerships between the education and youth sectors can improve the accessibility, quality and impact of enrichment activities,* p34-35.

Getting the balance right between formal and non-formal learning – whilst the linking of enrichment activities with the formal curriculum and careers education was partly welcomed, there were some concerns that enrichment could become the 'servant' of the subject-based curriculum and its associated attainment goals. There was consensus that the primary focus should be on personal development rather than academic or knowledge-based learning, to avoid disengaging those pupils who might benefit most from enrichment.

Quality and impact – quality assurance mechanisms for enrichment organisations and partners were deemed important to ensure consistent standards. Quality markers should include a varied offer that involves progression as well as the approaches that develop specific skills and talents over time. Measuring the impact of provision against priority outcomes should be a priority – where possible using existing data and assessment systems, and adapting provision in response to findings.

Strategy and leadership – there was widespread support for enrichment being embedded within wider school strategy and priorities, so as to create a culture and environment that embeds enrichment throughout and takes a 'whole school' approach. This involves considering how enrichment can be a shared ambition across all aspects of the school alongside being included in the responsibilities and accountabilities of particular members of staff. This can include among other things a school-wide culture of celebration of enrichment, facilitating access to quality facilities and spaces within the school grounds, as well as staff role-modelling behaviours.

5. The benchmarks

These proposed benchmarks[17] have sought as far as possible to reflect the feedback gathered through engagement and consultation across diverse stakeholders. It is worth noting that there was a wide range of views on the recommended minimum of 80 hours of enrichment provision per year. This proposal has been retained as it serves as a clear and measurable goal to support schools in planning, prioritising, and evidencing their enrichment offer. Setting a quantifiable expectation not only reinforces the importance of enrichment but also provides a constructive lever for accountability, helping to ensure that efforts to widen access lead to meaningful increases in the time pupils spend engaged in high-quality enrichment. Whilst recognising the pressures on curriculum time, an aspirational target can empower school leaders to protect and embed enrichment as a vital component of a well-rounded education.

Benchmark	Summary	Criteria
1 Developing a stable and integrated enrichment programme	Every school should have an embedded programme of enrichment activities that is known and understood by pupils, parents and carers, staff, governors, external providers/ partners and the wider local community.	**1.1** Every school should have a stable, structured enrichment programme that has the explicit backing of governors, the headteacher, and the senior management team, an identified and appropriately trained leader accountable for it, and a staff member responsible for its implementation. **1.2** Every pupil should participate in a minimum of 80 hours of enrichment activities per academic year. **1.3** Pupils, parents and external providers/ partner organisations should have timely and transparent information on the enrichment programme and how to access it, including information on the school's website.

17   These benchmarks have been written for secondary schools as the main audience. However, the overall approach and content could easily be adapted for primary schools, post-16 institutions, special schools or Alternative Provision. Whilst it will be important to tailor the benchmarks to the appropriate age-range, it is anticipated that much of the core content would remain similar. Where the benchmark states 'every school', this can be sometimes done at a school group level (eg a Federation, or a MAT).

Benchmark	Summary	Criteria
2 Sustaining a broad and balanced enrichment programme	Every pupil should have multiple and varied opportunities to engage in purposeful enrichment activities that can support a thriving childhood and successful transition to adulthood.	**2.1** Every school's programme should include activities in all of the following categories » **Citizenship** – including social action, political literacy, and volunteering » **The arts and creativity** – including music, visual and performing arts and design, cultural experiences and trips » **Outdoor experiences and adventurous activities** – including residentials and camps » **Sports** and physical activity – for individuals and teams » **Skills development** – learning a new skill, from cooking, to managing finances, to gardening etc **2.2** These activities should be delivered by a trusted adult who can provide guidance and support to participants, and there should be wider mentoring, coaching and peer support available across the school to support pupils who are least engaged. **2.3** Every school's enrichment programme should be delivered consistently across the year and include a range of timings, durations and access points. **2.4** Some enrichment activities should be designed to connect with the subject-based curriculum, but some activities should also deliberately enable pupils to have experiences and opportunities that are not linked to the national curriculum or post-14 qualification choices.

Benchmark	Summary	Criteria
3 Linking enrichment with wider school priorities	Every school should align its enrichment programme with broader school priorities, for instance around attainment, attendance, behaviour, careers, curriculum, personal development and wellbeing.	**3.1** Every school's enrichment programme should be designed and delivered with a clear purpose, linked to wider school values, curriculum intent and the outcomes schools are seeking for their students. **3.2** Every school's annual development plan should include a separate section on enrichment, as well as demonstrating how its enrichment programme contributes to achieving other development priorities. **3.3** Every school should keep systematic records of the participation of pupils in all aspects of their enrichment programme, where possible connecting this data to its existing Management Information System to explore patterns between, for example, attendance, behaviour and enrichment.
4 Responding to the interests, passions and leadership potential of every pupil, and of staff	Every school's enrichment programme should be created with involvement from the whole school community and the wider locality, with a particular focus on pupil voice and choice.	**4.1** Every school should ensure that the youth voice is at the heart of both the development and delivery of its enrichment programme. Enrichment should act as both a mirror – reflecting the identity, interests, and strengths of the school and community – and a window into new and unfamiliar experiences they would not otherwise encounter. **4.2** Every school's enrichment programme should also involve staff, parents, external providers and partner organisations, and the wider community in shaping activities. **4.3** Every school's programme should also offer opportunities for pupil leadership, driving and delivering enrichment activities with support and guidance from staff.

Benchmark	Summary	Criteria
5 Targeting and meeting the needs of pupils at risk of missing out	Opportunities and access points should be tailored to the needs of every pupil, including vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils, young people with SEND, young carers and care experienced young people and those who are frequently absent.	**5.1** Every school's enrichment programme should be equitable and accessible to all learners. This includes practical adjustments for SEND, and removing barriers for disadvantaged pupils and those with specific social and emotional needs. **5.2** Every school should monitor participation and act to address gaps to ensure fairness and diversity, engaging with peers, parents and carers to improve participation. **5.3** Every school's enrichment programme should embed equity and diversity considerations throughout.
6 Commissioning and working in partnership with enrichment providers or organisations	Every pupil should have opportunities to experience enrichment activities led by high quality external organisations, in addition to opportunities led by school staff.	**6.1** Every school should work in partnership with community and voluntary sector organisations – local, national and virtual – to ensure their programme makes the most of the expertise and infrastructure available beyond their own staff. **6.2** Every school should create clear commissioning processes for working with external providers/partner organisations, with regular communication and feedback to continually improve relationships and delivery. **6.3** Schools and providers/partner organisations should create clear signposting to opportunities that extend beyond the school's own programme (for instance, holiday and weekend activities, or talent pathways).

Benchmark	Summary	Criteria
7 Agreeing and sharing outcomes	Every school should agree a flexible framework to reflect on and assess the key pupil-level outcomes their enrichment programme aims to develop.	**7.1** Every school should consider how enrichment drives outcomes for young people that align with the current (and any revised) Ofsted Framework. Example frameworks which could be used by schools to develop their own outcomes framework to fit their context and learners could include: » **Essential skills** – such as speaking, listening and problem-solving (for example, looking to the Skills Builder Framework) » **Social and emotional skills** – such as emotion management, empathy, feeling of belonging in the school (for example, looking at the work of George Williams College and DofE) » **Mental health and wellbeing** – such as life satisfaction (for example, looking at national wellbeing indicators e.g. Wellby) » **Physical health outcomes** – such as weight and nutrition (for example, looking at national health index metrics) » **Attendance, engagement and behaviour outcomes** – assessing improvements and identifying any patterns linked to enrichment (and comparing to national averages) » **Educational outcomes** – such as reductions in attainment gaps (and comparing to national averages) » **Wider community outcomes** – such as having an impact on the wider community, improved levels of community trust and cohesion, openness to diversity etc. **7.2** Every school should use its framework to generate evidence of the impact of enrichment activities on outcomes, leaving space to celebrate and document unexpected, unintended outcomes. **7.3** All pupils should be supported to reflect on their enrichment and personal development experiences, record their learning and progress, and identify their personal interests, skills and aptitudes.

Benchmark	Summary	Criteria
8 Continuously improving quality and impact	Every school should put consistent mechanisms in place to understand and improve the quality and impact of any enrichment activity they provide.	**8.1** Every school's enrichment programme should be delivered by staff with the necessary skills, training and support. **8.2** All adults and organisations involved in delivery should be supported with clear guidance and expectations and regular feedback. **8.3** Every school's enrichment programme should be regularly evaluated using feedback from pupils, parents and carers, school staff and external providers/partner organisations to understand and increase its impact.

34

6. Next steps and recommendations

These 'draft' benchmarks are put forward in an effort to work collaboratively with the government on this agenda, and to help ensure that a wide range of insights and perspectives are captured, as this is likely to improve ownership and buy-in to the benchmarks among those who will be integral to their implementation. However, it is also important to note that a framework and benchmarks alone will not be sufficient to tackle the access gap for pupils. Any framework will need to come hand-in-hand with a broader set of interventions if it is to achieve the transformative potential of enrichment – much inspiration can be drawn from the Gatsby Benchmarks and the impact on careers education in this regard.

Five interventions are therefore proposed, including:

1. Define broader outcomes for pupils

There is a significant opportunity to set efforts to improve access to enrichment within a wider cross-governmental ambition to define a broader set of educational and developmental outcomes for pupils (learning from the success of the Every Child Matters Framework). Whilst educational success remains more narrowly defined around attainment rather than a wider set of achievements – such as the development of essential skills – it is likely that non-formal learning will remain a lower order of priority for most schools. Government ambition to create belonging in schools could unlock an approach that places greater emphasis on outcomes such as wellbeing, confidence, teamwork and problem-solving. Given the strong evidence-base for the contribution of enrichment to all these outcomes, this would provide a powerful incentive for schools to develop a comprehensive enrichment offer, and fully implement any associated benchmarks.

2. Locate enrichment within wider ambitions for inclusion

The recent commitment by the Prime Minister to develop a best practice framework to promote pupil engagement and belonging is a significant development. Given the positive impact of enrichment on many of the core elements of inclusion – from enhancing the diversity of the educational experience, to fostering belonging, connection and engagement – there is a real opportunity to ensure these two frameworks are mutually reinforcing and point to each other. Given the development of these frameworks will follow similar timeframes, there is an opportunity to engage similar stakeholders across sectors to maximise complementarity and coherence.

3. Set expectations through accountability frameworks

Consultation with school leaders and practitioners has consistently shown that the Ofsted accountability framework is critical in shaping priorities at the school level. The current focus on personal development provides some room for schools to innovate with enrichment, but there is scope for it to be more comprehensive. The current review of the Ofsted Framework and the exploration of a broader 'report card' offers the opportunity to set greater ambition – and thereby drive incentives – for enrichment provision through schools. Learning from the success of the Gatsby model, the Ofsted Framework could point explicitly to any Enrichment Framework and associated benchmarks to help guide teachers and leaders, including through providing clarity on minimum levels of provision (this report proposes an 'enrichment guarantee' of at least 80 hours across the school year as one of the benchmarks).

4. Build infrastructure and 'wrap-around' support to aid implementation

A set of guidance and benchmarks is a helpful foundation to build improved enrichment, but associated infrastructure is needed to enable implementation. Learning from the experience of the Gatsby Benchmarks and the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC), the following areas should be actively explored:

» **Data** – establishing a national baseline against the benchmarks, developing a data collection and monitoring process, and regularly tracking progress. Options should be explored to utilise existing data systems and processes rather than establishing new ones

» **Wrap-around support** – schools will all have different starting points against any new benchmarks, and many will benefit from support and guidance in raising standards for enrichment. The CEC has provided invaluable support for schools in driving improvement in careers education, and similar models should be explored for enrichment

» **Enrichment Leads and Coordinators** – all schools should identify leads and focal points for enrichment. Coordinating capacity should also be established either within schools, MATs, or community-based organisations to build partnerships to advance the benchmarks, with associated funding to support this.

5. Pilot, test and learn

There is an opportunity to 'stagger' implementation of the framework and benchmarks through selecting priority 'pilot, test and learn' sites where additional funding and support would be provided to trial approaches to implementation. Geographies should be selected based on where access to enrichment is lowest and/or there are the largest access gaps for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. These approaches to piloting and testing should build on findings and learning from the Enrichment Partnerships Pilot (EPP), which will provide insight on how coordination, collaboration and partnership can help to unlock greater access. There is an opportunity to explore how local and regional partnerships can be established to help roll out the benchmarks – including with Regional Mayors who are increasingly focussing on young people's health, wellbeing and skills – and through leveraging match-funding and in-kind support from interested funders.

6. Grow funding

There is no avoiding the importance of funding to support implementation of any benchmarks. Placing greater emphasis on enrichment through Ofsted can help to incentivise school leaders to direct more *existing* resources to this area. But achieving a stable, consistent and high quality enrichment offer in schools will require training, dedicated roles, and partnerships with enrichment providers. Further financial modelling is needed to establish the scale of the costs involved – taking into account the potential for parental contributions. Highly indicative and preliminary estimations suggest it could cost in the region of £150-£180 million annually [18] to provide the necessary level of support to all primary and secondary schools. This could be delivered via an 'Enrichment Premium', using a similar mechanism to the pupil premium for distribution (or even being distributed as an 'add-on' to the pupil premium). Given the potential of enrichment to drive improved outcomes across a range of sectors – whether improving health or encouraging greater engagement with arts and culture – there is an opportunity to explore 'match-funder' collaborations that combine public, private and philanthropic funding to advance the shared goals of the benchmarks.

18 This figure is indicative and further financial modelling is needed to reach a figure with greater confidence. The following valuations have been used – £13500 per secondary school based on EPP (£2.7 million across 200 secondary schools). Reducing this number by between 2.5 and 3.5 times for primary schools (as they are on average 3.5 times smaller). Factoring in 10% addition on each end of the range to account for increased admin costs/margins of error. Resulting in a rough range of £150 – £180 million annually.