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# **Evaluation of the Children's University First report**

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**November 2008**

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to express thanks to the Trustees of the Children's University for their contribution and critical reflection on this work, and to their chair, Kevin Jones for his incisive comments and leadership.

This report has been developed from a series of case studies collected by a team of Researchers comprised of Gary Holden, Joanne Mylles, Jackie Ranger and Carole Waugh. We are indebted to their effort and hard work.

The Chief Executive Ger Graus and his Personal Assistant Andrea Wood have been a constant source of information, inspiration and practical support.

And finally to Katie O'Donovan for seeing the final draft through to completion.

## Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3-5</b>
<b>The Report:</b>	
<b>1. Introduction: origins and rebirth</b>	<b>6-9</b>
<b>2. The evaluation: purposes and processes</b>	<b>10-12</b>
<b>3. The why: a window onto another world</b>	<b>13-14</b>
<b>4. The where: location, location, location</b>	<b>15-16</b>
<b>5. The what: supply and demand?</b>	<b>17-20</b>
<b>6. The who: the most deserving or most in need?</b>	<b>21-23</b>
<b>7. The when: and now for something completely different</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>8. The how: time, space and pace of learning</b>	<b>25-26</b>
<b>9. Impact: more fun than PlayStation</b>	<b>27-30</b>
<b>10. The parent equation</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>11. Ensuring and assuring quality</b>	<b>32-33</b>
<b>12. Funding and Sustainability</b>	<b>34-36</b>
<b>13. CU: A National Identity</b>	<b>37-38</b>
<b>14. In conclusion</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>15. References</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>16a. Appendix: Liverpool</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>16b. Appendix: York</b>	<b>42</b>

# **The Children's University: Creative Partnerships**

## **Executive Summary**

The Children's University (CU) - reborn with funding from the DCSF and the Sutton Trust - is a growing national movement, currently with 26 active CU centres in England and a further 10 in the embryonic stage. All are anticipating working with young people in the current school year. A further 10 possible CUs have been identified for development during 2009-10. In all it is estimated that 25,849 children aged 7 to 14 have taken part in over 250,000 hours of learning activities in the first year of its rebirth.

The need for an organisation such as the CU rests largely on evidence of the continuing gap between the highest and lowest achieving schools and between the highest and lowest achieving pupils. As four decades of school effectiveness have shown (Rutter et al., 1979, Mortimore et al., 1988 and Gray et al., 1999), the school effect is considerably less than the family, community and out-of-school effect, all pointing in one direction – the need to build better, more substantial bridges between multiple sites for learning. It is widely acknowledged that the issues have to be addressed more ambitiously and creatively if the achievement gap is to be reduced. The Government's policy of Extended Schools allied to the Every Child Matters agenda is a response to the growing evidence that schools in their present form cannot do it alone, particularly in highly challenging social and economic circumstances.

The need for a national body 'to model, champion and support quality out of hours educational provision' and to dovetail with Children's Services and the Extended Schools agenda is set out in the Children's University Business Plan presented to the DCSF (then DfES) in 2007. Such a national body with a strategic purpose would, it was argued, be able to provide a more coherent and strategic approach to the many disparate initiatives currently existing as 'study support' and out-of-school-hours learning.

## **The evaluation**

The evaluation being carried out at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge approached the task, building on earlier studies of study support which had shown that where there was high quality provision it improved achievement, attitudes and school attendance (MacBeath et al., 2001). For the evaluation to be useful it was believed it had to be independent but also formative, feeding back findings and raising questions on an ongoing basis so that centres would be able review their practice in the short and medium term, rather than waiting for a final report a few years down the line.

The following questions, set out in the initial tender to the CU Trust (and in the business plan presented to the DCSF in 2007), will assume priority as the evaluation moves into its second year.

- To measure the success of CU against its own aspirations and objectives
- To report on the viability of the initiative as a whole and of individual centres
- To identify good, promising and breakthrough practice
- To identify areas for improvement
- To offer explanations for successes and failures

- To identify the most promising strategies for systemic improvement

In this interim report the evidence of promising, breakthrough practice and the underpinning elements of successful practice are the primary focus. We identify the critical nature of the five Ws: ‘why’, ‘where’, ‘what,’ ‘who’ and ‘when’ and the H: ‘how’, in shaping provision. The ‘where’ assumes centre stage because unlike the taken-for-granted classroom setting as the seat of learning, the CU explores the inherent potential of other contexts for exploring knowledge and instilling confidence in children as independent learners. The nature of provision typically reflects the particular needs of the locality and the community. The ‘where’ is intimately tied to the ‘what’ as one of the most striking aspects of the CU is the breadth of learning that it encompasses. The possibilities for learning appear limitless, the creativity of its architects stretching the imagination of what may be achieved.

The fourth W, the ‘who’, addresses whom to involve, whose needs are greatest, who are the most ‘deserving’, or who are most in need. This has remained a contested question and becomes most relevant and acute where resources are limited and capacity of the system is stretched. The under-representation of minority ethnic groups is a concern while creative ways of involving girls and using local venues is in some places showing that there are solutions. The ‘when’ is limited by the need to build programmes around the school day, week and year. While this creates limitations, it touches on the ‘how’ of learning as the freedom offered by extended time, without the urgency of bells and interruptions, allows sustained focus on activities in depth.

### **Questions of impact**

A variety of approaches has been employed within CU centres to evaluate impact, with some centres using attitudinal surveys for children and parents, and others inviting more regular feedback from pupils. As the CU grows and flourishes more rigorous approaches to evidence will be employed and systematic use of the Code of Practice, together with embedded self-evaluation, will assume high priority for all centres.

The report identifies progress and achievements in the ten centres followed over the first phase of the evaluation and highlights three key issues that will be the test of the CU’s future.

**Achievements and progress** of the CU to date may be summarised as

- The ability to engage and sustain young people’s interest in voluntary learning activities out of school hours
- The breadth of learning encompassed, complementing and enhancing the mainstream curricular provision
- The responsiveness of centre managers and tutors to children and young people’s needs and their creativity in devising imaginative ways of meeting those needs
- The imagination and industry in exploiting potential sites for learning in the local community, nationally and even internationally
- The collaboration with partners in the community, with statutory agencies, with business partners and with higher education

- The value of the university partnership in celebrating achievement and raising aspirations of children for whom ‘university’ was never within their conceptual compass
- The enthusiasm reported by children for activities which led to new interests and new friends

### **Future challenges**

The **key issues** for the future are:

Ensuring and assuring quality. The broad range of activities on offer within the many sites, and supported by a multitude of teachers, tutors, helpers, students, business people and parents inevitably raises issues of quality and consistency. The challenge for the coming years, a matter of prime concern in the national CU Business Plan, is to embed a robust, convincing quality assurance base. Integral to this has been the review, adaptation and trialling of the Quality in Study Support (QISS) Code of Practice, which, in the second phase of the evaluation will allow us to test both the use of the approach by centres and its validity in ascertaining quality of provision.

Funding and Sustainability. Funding as laid out in the national Business Plan identified a threefold purpose:

- To sustain and develop existing CU centres
- To provide ‘wake up’ funding for dormant centres
- To provide ‘start up’ funding for new centres

As each Children’s University setting is ‘nested’ within a complex system of relationships, management and as funding for sites varies widely, financial arrangements need to take into consideration: engagement of Local Authorities: support and co-funding of local co-ordinator roles; potential local partnership arrangements, including higher education institutions, independent schools and businesses; potential access to Extended Schools funding and sources of sponsorship and strategy for local fundraising. The complex funding equation also has to take into account real costs per child per hour of existing and/or proposed provision; teaching, mentoring and training of staff; facilities, resources and materials; local management arrangements, administration, validation of course modules, accreditation, award ceremonies, record-keeping and provision of information to the national CU.

The challenge for leadership at each of these levels is to develop business plans with a primary focus on sustainability. CU centre managers, however adept as to the needs and potential scope of their particular settings, are often, by necessity the sole full time worker with whom knowledge and expertise resides. The work of the National Executive is key to forging strong alliances within and between centres so that they have a built-in resilience, with lateral support from one another and from the centre.

The parent equation. The link between home and schools is a persisting issue for schools, typically trying to encourage the invisible parents and discouraging those who are too visible in the demands they make. Just as the CU offers a different environment for children, so too can it offer parents a more informal and accessible way to become involved in their children’s learning. The efforts made within football clubs to engage ‘dads’ with their children’s learning in study centres through incentives such as free

match tickets is one example of imaginative approaches to making those links. In some areas family learning events bring children and their parents together with support from tutors or other volunteers.

## **1. Introduction: origins and rebirth**

The first Children's University was established in Birmingham in 1993 as part of a wave of initiatives in the city's education sector led by Tim Brighouse. The idea inspired similar developments throughout the United Kingdom and work has continued in differing forms and to varying extents at a number of sites. In recent years there has been a move to harness the initiatives to a National Executive, responsible for co-ordination and development. The Children's University (CU) is funded by grants from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), the Sutton Trust and JP Morgan. It is managed by a Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Ger Graus and overseen by a group of Trustees who meet three or four times annually to monitor progress. The Chair of Trustees, Kevin Jones (headteacher of St. John's College School in Cambridge) keeps in close regular contact with the CEO, receiving feedback and offering support and guidance.

Currently funding is divided into core and project funding. Core cost funding has been provided by the DCSF, the Sutton Trust and JP Morgan. Project funding (for the development of centres in areas of 'disadvantage') has been provided by the DCSF and the Sutton Trust. As funding is guaranteed only until March 2009 a priority for the sustainability of the national executive and of the projected 30 centres is to ensure continuity of finance and resourcing.

As each of the CU sites is unique in its origins and development, sources of funding will continue to take diverse forms. Each site, for example, has a different form of relationship with its local authority, with schools, with local businesses and with local universities. While all survive and owe their continued growth to creative partnerships and funding streams, it is typically the result of energetic, inspirational and passionate leadership by CU managers. The priority for the Trustees and the Chief Executive is to secure a solid enduring financial base for the future.

### **Who needs it?**

The need for an organisation such as the CU rests largely on evidence of the continuing gap between the highest and lowest achieving schools and between the highest and lowest achieving pupils. The gap is particularly acute in many of England's cities and was first conceived of by Tim Brighouse in Birmingham as a city where these issues proved an intractable challenge for local authority policy and school practice. Successive PISA reports emanating from the OECD illustrate the persistent nature of the problem in virtually every country where schools exist. The policy response in many countries has been to put more pressure on schools and on teachers, an intensification process which has proved counter-productive to the learning and growth of many children and young people (Tymms, 2004, Galton and MacBeath, 2008).

Four decades of school effectiveness research (Rutter et al., 1979, Mortimore et al., 1988 and Gray et al., 1999) reached a very similar conclusion – that the school effect is considerably less than the family, community and out-of-school effect, all pointing in one direction – the need to build better, more substantial bridges between multiple sites for learning. It is widely acknowledged that the issues have to be addressed more ambitiously and creatively if the achievement gap is to be reduced. As Einstein is

credited with saying, *'problems cannot be solved by thinking within the framework in which they were created'*.

The underachievement of many children and young people arises because the weight of adversity enjoys no counterbalance of equally influential sources of support and challenge within the neighbourhood. It is this that explains the following question posed by the Vice Chancellor of Bradford University, quoting from empirical research:

*Why is it that the bright six year old from a working class family performs less well in school than the less bright six year old from a middle class family?*

(Speech to the Children's University, 25th April, 2008)

We know the answer. It may be described in terms of social capital, who it is that touches the lives of young people, with what effect and in what social context. Researchers have identified key factors that differentiate between those who succeed and those who fail to thrive in school, the primary cause being the powerful influences that lie outside the classroom within the family and community. These can provide strong social capital when there are adults who provide resources, opportunities, models of activity and social norms, and who provide helpful networks and exert social control over deviant behaviour. By the same token neighbourhood and peer group effects may trump strong family social capital and the most tireless efforts of teachers and school leaders. Without opportunities for learning (or 'valued' learning) beyond the school, the classroom experience is a contest of wills in which learning dissipates on exit from the school yard, so the gap between low and high achievers continues and actually widens as pupils progress through school (DCSF, 2007).

In even the most disadvantaged of neighbourhoods provision of 'out of school hours learning' or 'study support' has been shown to raise achievement, motivation and attendance (MacBeath et. al., 2001). As that three-year study showed, for children without the social capital of a rich and stimulating home and community life, the scope for pursuing interests and developing talents in contexts less constrained in time and space than the conventional classroom opened up a host of possibilities. One of the signal contributions of study support was in removing obstacles to learning. Well constructed support could be re-invigorating and fun.

### **Extending schools**

The development of extending schooling is aimed at meeting the challenge of the learning gap. The notion of the 'gap' has two foci – the gap between high and low achievement, and the gap between in-school and out-of-school learning. As both are integrally related the aim of the extended school is not to replicate what has failed in the past but to extend opportunities for learning in new and imaginative ways, encompassing a number of different dimensions.

- Time: schools opening for longer hours
- Curriculum: broadening the range of activities available beyond the curriculum
- Place: making available a wider range of sites and contexts for learning
- Clientele: catering to a wider range of children, young people and adults
- Agencies: extending the role of educators to others social and community agencies

- Conceptual: changing mindsets about purposes and nature of learning and welfare

The conception of the extended school owes its origins to work in the United States by Joy Dryfoos et al. (2005) on full-service schools, premised on the need for a one door entry to the range of social services which some families require if children are to gain meaningful access to what the school had to offer. While many schools in England were already providing a range of extended services the idea was given more formal status and impetus by the DfES School Plus initiatives in 1999, followed by the 2002 Education Act which required schools to consult with pupils, staff, parents and carers, local communities and the local authority to ensure that the services they provided were shaped around the needs of children and young people.

The subsequent publication of the *Every Child Matters* (ECM) policy and its five outcomes, (be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, achieve economic well-being) provided the framework for placing achievement in a larger frame, the five outcomes considered as essentially unachievable without effective agency collaboration. The three key benefits were couched by the DCSF (2007) as

- tackling the underlying causes of under-achievement by some pupils
- improving children's resilience
- enriching the learning experience of children and families

### **A national organisation**

The three key benefits identified by the DCSF are central to the mission of the Children's University (CU). As a national organisation its aim is to provide 7 to 14 year olds with 'exciting and innovative learning activities and experiences outside the normal school curriculum and outside normal school hours' building provision locally in tune with the needs of children, their parents and their schools. As described on the CU website:

*The national CU celebrates achievement and rewards taking part. Raising children's aspirations is important to us and we aim to develop the understanding that learning can be the satellite navigation to better places in life! How will that be done? The answer is after school, at weekends and in the holidays through an ever increasing family of local Children's Universities across the UK. Our different centres offer high quality learning in many forms, some of it more traditional and some of it perhaps unexpected: learning activities range from science, maths and the arts to horrible history, nature safari and space travel. Locally, our partners include universities, sports and dance clubs, museums, theatres and businesses. The national Children's University supports whichever approach will work best locally to bring benefits to children.*

In April 2007, when the National Executive began its operations there were 12 active CUs in England. There were also 18 active CUs in Wales and 1 in Scotland. At the time of writing, there are now 26 active CUs in England and a further 10 in the embryonic stage. All are anticipating working with young people in the current school year. This represents a 200% increase. A further 10 possible CUs have been identified for development during 2009-10. With regard to young people's involvement, attendance and participation statistics for the period April 2007 to March 2008 in England reveal

that 25,849 children aged 7 to 14 had taken part in over 250,000 hours of learning activities.

Between April 2007 and October 2008 funding totalling £637,607 was awarded in grants by the Trustees to a total of 23 CUs in England and Scotland. By April 2009 a further 13 proposals for funding are anticipated, 3 for expansion and 10 for start-up funding. This represents a possible total of £410,000.

(<http://www.thechildrensuniversity.com/>)

## **2. The evaluation: Purposes and Processes**

In April 2007, the Trustees commissioned an evaluation of the work of the CU to be carried out by John MacBeath and Joanne Waterhouse with researchers Jackie Ranger, Jo Myles and Carole Waugh. The evaluation, which began in Autumn 2007 was designed to serve a number of key purposes. The questions, set out in the initial tender to the CU Trust (and in the business plan presented to the DCSF in 2007) were to provide evidence over a two to three year period of the following objectives:

- To measure the success of CU against its own aspirations and objectives
- To report on the viability of the initiative as a whole and of individual centres
- To identify good, promising and breakthrough practice
- To identify areas for improvement
- To offer explanations for successes and failures
- To identify the most promising strategies for systemic improvement

In this interim report the evidence of promising, breakthrough practice and the underpinning elements of successful practice are the primary focus, responding to discussion and negotiation held with all centre managers and the Chief Executive at the first meeting of the newly constituted CU. At that meeting ten centres were selected for in-depth study and later reconfigured after discussions with the Chief Executive. The final ten chosen were adjusted to give a more representative sample both geographically and in terms of their stage of development. Through a focus on these ten centres and their key players we hoped to document how the vision and aspirations for the CU were conceived, shared and realised by those with responsibility for making it happen. The first year of the evaluation focused on the following:

1. Illuminative case studies of centres' work and progress
2. Examples of innovative work with young people and indicators of success
3. The nature of partnerships with other agencies
4. Issues of quality, sustainability and leadership
5. Progress towards the embedding of quality assurance mechanisms
6. Criteria for validation of associated sites

Our intention to begin gathering cross-centre data on achievement, attitudes and attendance took longer than anticipated within the time frame as some centres were not yet in a position to carry out surveys but as of June 2008 these attitudinal data were being collected from 16 centres while strategies for collection of attendance and achievement data are also underway at the time of writing. Given the dispersed nature of centres and the large numbers of schools from which children are drawn, together with issues of over ownership of such data, this is of necessity work in progress. The access to, and analysis of, such data will be a priority for the second year of the evaluation. Building on the first exploratory year, the broadening and deepening of the evaluation will include:

- Patterns of provision and relative effectiveness
- Nature of partnerships with schools and other agencies
- Costs and cost-benefit analyses
- Data (and uses of data) on CU attainment, attendance, and any other pupil relevant data held by centres

- Exemplars of progression in quality of students' activity and work produced
- In-depth 'life story' data from young people
- Pupils' views and the value they place on certification and other forms of learning
- Observations of pupils in different contexts, responding to tasks, dealing with challenges, with follow up discussion
- Profiles of tutors'/mentors' experience and expertise
- Tutor attitudinal data – aspiration, satisfaction and challenges
- Views of local authorities, DCSF/HMI/Ofsted where relevant on effectiveness of CU provision and impact

This evaluation mirrors in many respects the National Evaluation of Study Support (MacBeath et al., 2001) which gathered a similar body of data together with case studies of individual centres allowing researchers to pinpoint the range, variations and viability of 'centres' and the nature of provision most likely to vouchsafe success.

### **Progress to date**

To date, the team has visited ten sites, four times on average and conducted interviews with a range of people including CU managers, headteachers, teachers, tutors, children and parents although this has varied considerably depending on the nature of the site or sites. Visits have included observation of, and occasionally participation in, activities.

Documentation has been collected on visits to sites, at the management meetings and through web access. It sets out both the aspirations and achievements of different centres and provides a framework for the visits at which what happens on the ground may be tested against aims and objectives.

Members of the Cambridge team have met on five occasions with CU managers at one day meetings at which progress has been reviewed, presentations have been made by individual site representatives and discussion of the QISS process of kite marking has occurred, with time at each meeting given over to data gathering by the evaluation team. As all of the sites bring something different to the table, the cross-site dialogue has been extremely fruitful in helping to tease out common themes while sharing widely differing approaches to the task.

Individual meetings with Ger Graus, in Cambridge, Manchester, Birmingham, Stratford and Glasgow have been a vital centrepiece in maintaining the dialogue, gaining a view from the centre, and making a joint contribution to the shaping of elements such as the validation document and *'Passport to Learning'*.

A meeting with the Board of Trustees in March was helpful in furthering the dialogue, reviewing progress up to that point and establishing priorities for the way ahead. Successive meetings with Kevin Jones have highlighted continuing issues, challenges and achievements.

As our evaluation has unfolded numerous themes have arisen. These include:

- Implicit and explicit purposes and priorities of differing CU sites
- Modes of communication and sharing of purposes and vision
- Differing structures, protocols and modus operandi of individual approaches

- The locus of control and nature of decision making
- The range, development and customisation of provision
- The power and impact of contexts for learning
- The importance of history and the legacy of prior development
- The range and contribution of key players, key informants and partners
- Funding issues
- The knowledge of, and use of, the Study Support Code of Practice
- The nature of learning: student, professional, organisational and systematic
- The extent of pupil participation and leadership in shaping learning and the nature of provision
- Community involvement

The interplay among these themes begins to tell a story about quality, effectiveness and sustainability of individual sites and of the Children's University as a coherent entity.

We have attempted to capture the nature and quality of provision by the 5Ws and the H- the why, where, who, what, when and how in that order to foreground the rationale, and to follow not with the 'what' but the 'where' as the context for learning is a critical component in Children's University as compared to the school classroom which is generally taken as a given with its own constraining limits. The 'who is it for?' question comes next because again unlike mainstream school provision the question of criteria, selection and targeting have to be considered in deciding on the 'what' and the 'when'. The 'how' which addresses pedagogy comes last not in terms of order of importance but as the essential key that unlocks all other considerations. Through the focus on the nine case study sites the wider issues of provision, quality, effectiveness and impact rise to the surface.

### 3. The why: a window onto another world

All CU sites sit within the seminal priorities and the mission of the Children's University as an entity. There are, however, widely different local interpretations of how those broad aims may be realised. The diversity of provision and the underpinning rationale are explained by the varying origins of centres, their developmental histories and the key individuals shaping their structures and cultures. These may take the form of weekday out-of-school-hours sessions before and after school; Saturday sessions; holiday activities and projects. Some of these activities take place in classrooms, some in community facilities, some in leisure centre or sporting clubs and some in visits to sites such as airports, theatres, museums and universities.

In addition to the variety in locus and nature of provision there are differing assumptions and explicit kinds of rationale for what is on offer:

- Pragmatic: engaging children in safe and fulfilling activities which keep them out of trouble
- Instrumental: extending curriculum in order to raise standards of attainment
- Strategic: raising standards as a whole school, cluster of schools or as a local authority
- Life enhancing: offering activities with no short term instrumental motive but to help children and young people develop self confidence, excitement in learning and a desire to go on learning

We may see these, rather than as singular or discrete motives, as existing in some kind of balance of priority so that in any one site all may play a part in different combination and emphasis. Achieving the balance is expressed variously in the ten case study sites. The essential purpose, held in common, is to find ways of building and rebuilding children's confidence in themselves as learners, in many cases undermined by their school experience, their peer group and/or parents. All share a sharp awareness of the policy context within which their interventions take place.

In Sefton, for example, provision *'seeks to extend and enhance the curriculum away from the performance culture'* while in Doncaster a deputy headteacher described it as *'an opportunity for children to experience learning in an environment not bound and driven by data but where companionship and community are important'*. His headteacher echoed this point of view, explaining that CU could *'break down barriers for learning'*, while another head pointed out that in an area without high educational aspiration children need to be supported and encouraged to see where unseen possibilities might lie. *'Showing children and parents what lies beyond school'* was a key motive echoed by another deputy head.

However, in a climate of policy pressure, targets and an impatient regime of curriculum and testing, offering children *'a window into another world'* needs to be supplemented by *'giving them a green light which says it's ok to learn. It's alright to give up time to do positive stuff'* (Linda Ward, CU manager, Doncaster).

Since taking up the post in Bicester one of the manager's (Naomi Hillman) strategic aims has been to draw in community partners to CU through initiating and commissioning modules with other providers to *'broaden and deepen the programme for children'*. She

sees the importance of anchoring young people in their community by providing opportunities for them to take part in events they might not have previously considered so that by drawing in partners such as The Courtyard Arts Centre, children will be encouraged to take up other opportunities themselves independently and of their own individual or joint initiative.

A driving motive for all, as expressed in Bradford is the belief *‘that all young people are entitled to a motivating, interesting education that equips them with the skills, knowledge, attitude and aptitude to enter the job market, but more importantly that they develop a mindset which prepares them for their role as active citizens’*. In Hull it is to *‘create opportunities for independent learning that gave the children interest, purpose and enjoyment’*, and as John Buttrick, the CU manager puts it, it is all about *‘creating a thirst for learning’* and children *‘learning without knowing they’re learning’*. The intention to *‘support the excellent practice of mainstream teachers’* adds a further layer of purpose, so that CU activities are not seen as an alternative to classroom learning but as an extension and enrichment.

#### **4. The where: Location, Location, Location**

The impetus for the establishment of a Children's University came from the recognition of the inadequacy of schools for many children as the only site for learning, and an understanding that what and how we learn is significantly influenced by the place in which learning occurs (for example Weiss and Fine, 2000). Research into 'behaviour settings' (Schoggen, 1989) reveals the extent to which differing sites both allow and constrain certain types of activity and certain kinds of learning, shaped to a large extent by three key dimensions – the physical, the social and the 'expectational'. The latter is determined in large part by the first two but also contains implicit or explicit demands, rewards and sanctions. These may be so deeply embedded within the physical and social environment that they need no explicit sanction yet can be immensely powerful in determining behaviour, shaping attitudes and creating, or diminishing, intelligence.

The Children's University as it exists currently in each location has developed in response to the particular influences wrought by peculiarities of governance, locality, national initiatives, school involvement and the creative force of the CU manager. Each site is, in its own way, unique. Many of the modules for tuition, for example, are structured and organised in accordance with the understanding of the leading adults at that site. Alignment with higher education institutions, businesses and local authorities all vary in degree and help to shape provision accordingly. The nature of provision leads to formulations that reflect the particular needs of the locality and the community. Many sites have branding and an identity that reflects pride in their community, town or city. The CU manager at Hull (John Buttrick) consciously pursues connections with local businesses and is excited by the involvement of the University of Hull. He has experience of working with the local Member of Parliament while current arrangements for management of Hull Children's University include a Board of Trustees comprised of local people such as a primary school headteacher, a businessman and a PA from a nearby company. This contributes to the creation of a distinctly local feel to the enterprise.

It is widely agreed that knowledge and understanding of the local area and the existing networks is invaluable in high quality provision. In Portsmouth, for example, much is made of exploiting opportunities for children, young people and families to use what is on their doorsteps, so that, for instance, the Historic Dockyard, the Outdoor Centre and the Aquarium are all turned to advantage. The use of the local vicinity is closely aligned with the ethos of civic pride, consciousness of one's roots and an awareness of what one's home town can offer if you care to look.

The pride in one's local football club on a national stage is turned to advantage in Doncaster, Portsmouth, Ipswich and Norwich. Football clubs are imbued with an ethos that could hardly be more different from school. The press room, the players' changing room, the stands, the pitch all provoke occasions for questioning, stories to be told, connections to be made. In Ipswich FC one of the many football related themes takes the form of a role play by primary school children in the press room with pupils up on the dais playing the part of the owner, the coach and the new player while others adopt the role of the journalists and television reporters. Embedded within the activity are complex and dynamic skills to be practised. The rich opportunities are often deeply embedded and their potential as learning sites is only recognised by those who have eyes to discern their inherent opportunities for learning.

Doncaster airport is a site for a ten week CU module. A visit to the airport was a new experience for many children who had rarely left Doncaster let alone visited the airport itself. Children compiled questions to interview members of staff at the airport, exploring ways in which an airport opens windows on the world, into the world of work and the wide range of job opportunities that an airport can offer.

The most ambitious of contexts beyond the school is Bradford's collaboration with the Victoria Space Centre in Melbourne, Australia, on a mission to send bees into space to pollinate Mars in 2030. A visit to Russia for children, some of whom had rarely ventured beyond Bradford itself offered a life changing experience including a question and answer session with cosmonauts.

Even close to home, even within the school itself, teaching and learning can be transformed by the context of the more relaxed relationships, the absence of tension over attainment and the gift of time to take things at the pace that learning requires. In Portsmouth a teacher running a cookery course after school commented that *'You'd never get this much interest and passion in food tech classes in my school, this is lovely and that's why I do it'*.

#### *The Big Pompey Day Out*

In Portsmouth children took part in a walk around the city and took their own photographs of memorable landmarks. The photos were then downloaded to a memory stick and pasted onto a poster-sized map of the Portsmouth area. The children then pasted the photos on to the poster, using a software package which allowed them to label and personalise in order to tell the story of their 'day out'. As children describe to one another, their teachers and visitors what they have learned and the ways in which they had learned it, the development of metacognitive, or learning how to learn, skills comes to the fore.

## 5. The what: supply and demand?

One of the most striking aspects of the Children’s University is the breadth of learning that it encompasses. The possibilities for learning appear limitless, the creativity of its architects stretching the imagination. Who could have invented First Aid for Baby Sitters? - an idea so practical and potentially life saving but like so many other CU activities, conveying a sense of empowerment and confidence.

The following is a small collection of some of the topics covered in CU centres. It is far from an exhaustive list but it begins to give a flavour of the breadth and creativity of what is on offer. Many activities sit uncomfortably under the somewhat arbitrary headings.

**Table 1. Some of the topics covered in the CU centres**

Culture and language	Athletics	Technology	Arts and crafts	Environment and space
Chinese culture Spanish General knowledge The Mirpur Connection Leisure and tourism	Athletics Keep Fit Running Basketball Speed stacking Staying healthy Dance and movement Fencing Kayaking	Robotics Telecommunication Electronics Technology Camp, Tenerife Digital photography	Water colouring Watercolour Art Creative Clay Pottery Ceramics Card making, Cookery Fun Drama Theatre make-up Cartoon Capers	Environment Eco Camp Space and Enterprise (Bees in Space and Space Camp) Gardening Creating a miniature garden

What is on offer comes from a variety of sources:

- Special interests and expertise of tutors
- Topics and activities suggested, or offered, by students
- Extensions of school curriculum
- Sites for learning in the locality

In Sefton, the CU manager (also the Extended School Coordinator) consults children and staff on the modules they would like to see offered, matching modules to possible tutors. They then submit a module registration form to the CU co-ordinator who then accredits it if it matches the aims and ethos of the CU. The nature of CU ‘services’ and courses in Portsmouth is also based largely on a supply and demand model. If there is a demand for courses the CU team will strive to match that demand. The courses offer a varied menu of activities derived from ideas from the children, parents, CU managers, tutors and the CU team. What is finally given shape is aligned with the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes in terms of enjoying and achieving, economic wellbeing, staying safe, being healthy and making a positive contribution, although not all courses fit neatly into those five outcomes.

Portsmouth's Big Breakfast Business Challenge is clearly designed with economic well being in mind. In collaboration with local business partners, over the two days children worked in teams firstly to design a cereal to market to children and parents. They made a cereal box and then worked on a presentation selling it to the business volunteers with a clear focus on concepts such as supply and demand, marketing and target audience. The session ended with a presentation from the volunteers to the winning team.

Economic well being was also the leading motive for development of modules in Bradford. The agreed strategy was to develop provision with a focus on future skills for future employment needs underpinned by a curriculum which focuses on Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM). However, these 'subjects' are defined very broadly, encouraging schools and other learning providers to be creative in their design of learning modules, making explicit links to enterprise.

Themed courses in Kent are offered specifically around three of the key ECM outcomes – Enjoying and Achieving, Staying Safe and Being Healthy. Courses include cookery and sport and fitness and are aimed at staying healthy in a safe environment in which enjoyment and celebration of achievement is to the fore. All courses run in a *safe* environment. All adult staff are enhanced CRB checked and the premises have an up to date risk assessment. KCU ensures that each venue has a non-teaching adult on site to monitor safety and security and insists upon a fire drill being carried out at each event. The Every Child Matters outcomes also provide the framework for modules developed in Hull with the pedagogic approach grounded in children taking charge of their learning and developing their ideas through dialogue and discussion with each other and other adults. A premium is based on offering different learning sites across the town to open children's eyes to what is on their doorstep.

#### **Techno Moves (Doncaster)**

This module, devised and led by college staff, centres on dance and movement and is held at the Hub to enable the use of the specialist equipment. The children work together to create pictures of their movements using interactive software. In one pupil's words 'we learnt to make shapes with our body'. Children are able to freeze images of their poses and movement on a huge screen and then move them around to make a tableau. The children's evaluation forms indicate a high level of engagement and enjoyment. Catherine, writes that 'working together as a team to make a picture was fun'. Others enjoyed the opportunity to be creative: 'we made a rock garden with a bowl of fruit and we played musical statues'. A teaching assistant speaks of her pleasure in seeing children express themselves without being self conscious and cited one child who is very shy and introverted being encouraged by one of the student mentors to contribute: 'she really blossomed...coming onto an empty stage by herself'. A teacher comments that the same girl seems to have brought some of the self-confidence she discovered into the classroom and doesn't 'clam up as much' when asked a question in class.

In Hull, there are six modules inspired by the manager's awareness of environmental concerns, local business and environmental opportunities and personal development issues. Their titles reflect a passion for optimistic, life-affirming content:

- My Space
- Life Fitness
- Fuel and Energy
- Aspirations and Ambitions
- There's More To Life Than Me
- You Can Change The World

Each programme has explicit content and comprises a series of sessions to be delivered by a tutor with the support of mentors. Business connections are utilised wherever possible and visits to spaces other than schools are encouraged. For example, one module involves a visit to the local docks and is led by a senior manager from the Port Authority.

### **Origins and extensions**

The approach in Bradford CU illustrates different ways in which courses come to be defined, developed and delivered.

1. School/Organisation initiated. Schools, or other organisations, complete an application form outlining details of proposed activities, resources and support required. Modules are taken from the CU's resource bank and are used as a basis to develop a module to meet specific needs. The CU may work collaboratively with the proposing body to develop a new personalised module. Modules are mainly delivered on school sites and led by business employees, school staff and mentors.
2. CU Core Module Development. Modules are developed in collaboration with business organisations which take a lead in running the module in a community venue, a school or at Bradford University.
3. Residential Module development. This involves approximately 20 teachers/staff from schools including Pupil Referral Units and Special Schools. College lecturers and specialists working collaboratively to plan a 10 hour module which they take back into school to trial. The level of support required by the school is tailored to their needs. Support for delivering the module includes monitoring, evaluating, and resourcing.

In some cases, the Children's University has grown out of existing provision, through study support, extra-curricular activities and Playing for Success (PFS). In Ipswich and Norwich, learning centres within football clubs have provided the impetus for learning adventures in other venues, in tennis clubs, stock car racing and Newmarket racecourse. Both football club venues, their out-of-hours learning initiated and developed as part of the national PFS strategy, have become aligned with the CU and their co-ordinators attend centre managers meetings. Developing close links with Playing for Success is an important thrust for the future as CU and PFS pursue very similar objectives and have much to gain from sharing of experiences, resources and expertise.

The Pompey Study Centre was established as a Playing for Success centre as a three way partnership between Portsmouth Football Club, the DCSF and the local authority. Within the compass of the CU the Study Centre now offers a variety of 'learning through football' opportunities including Leisure and Tourism Tours and resource pack, a GCSE writing, speaking and listening module, writing experiences at the Portsmouth Stadium for KS1 SATs, Kick Start Health Resources and a continuously widening range of provision.

## 6. The who: the most deserving or most in need?

Whom to involve, whose needs are greatest, who are the most 'deserving', or who are most in need, has remained a contested question in all provision of OHSL (out of school hours learning) as the question of 'needs' is not easily resolved by identification of broad social or ethnic groups. The national business plan is clear in its target audience, a desire for 'every child, irrespective of parental means [to have] access to high quality learning outside school hours' but with a clear priority 'to offer quality provision in areas of deprivation' with a target of the 86 most deprived districts (NRUs) in England.

In Hull the thrust of CU initiatives is deliberately on supporting '*under-achieving, under-noticed children who have not been the focus of attention or extra funding.*' These are the children who may not enter willingly into educational activities as their previous experience of school has tended to be demotivating. They need, therefore, to be 'hooked into learning'. A similar approach is taken in Sefton where the CU manager (Adele Blakeborough) targets 'vulnerable children' (defined by Government criteria as at risk of under achieving). A family key worker is based at the school and, working on information supplied from the teachers, she provides the link between school and home. She regularly talks to specific parents about the benefits for their children of participating in courses, going beyond simply academic study support.

This question becomes most relevant and acute where resources are limited and the capacity of the system is stretched. Capacity issues vary widely among sites depending on funding and human resource considerations but where 'need' begins and ends is a vexed question as enrichment and self-determination may be seen as a right for all. The approach in Portsmouth in its early days was to target different groups of children with master classes for the Gifted and Talented, and swimming coaching for the children with an interest in, and penchant for, swimming. In general, courses now do not target specific groups (although some schools do continue to target provision at the gifted and talented) but strive to be inclusive and are offered to all children as a means of experiencing new and exciting activities which they may never have dreamed of trying. Participation in CU courses is aimed at encouraging young people to go to different schools across the city to broaden their horizons and break down the artificial barriers which have been reported as a factor in the development of local gangs.

Family learning events have proved hugely popular in Kent and courses, or events, are usually over subscribed, with waiting lists in operation. It is an article of faith in KCU that learning is optimised through reciprocal relationships between children and adults in families, schools and communities. Family Learning courses help parents to be less 'afraid' of education and to understand that learning and achievement is a way of helping to achieve economic well-being, better jobs and a route out of poverty. Workshops on arts and crafts and ICT have been offered to children and parents at Key Stage 2. A Cookery master class at North West Kent College demonstrates different techniques to parents and children, followed by a session on the importance of eating a balanced diet and healthy living.

It is mothers who tend to be enlisted in such schemes while bringing in fathers has traditionally been a challenge too far. Football clubs do, however, offer an irresistible magnet for fathers and Norwich FC has been particularly successful in offering match day tickets for father and son/daughter, contingent on the father attending with his child

on the previous match day week when the Canaries are playing away. Father and son/daughter visit the stadium, are given a guided tour (perhaps by the young person him/herself), invited into the trophy room and other holy places and father then spends some time with his child in the learning zone.

A concern was expressed in some of the sites that minority ethnic groups were under represented and that this was in part related to domestic demands in the home and to parental concerns, particularly regarding girls. Forms of girls only provision can go some way to resolving the issues together with closer monitoring of uptake and sensitive targeting of under represented groups.

### **Who supports the learning?**

Who can centres call on to give time, energy and expertise to support children's and young people's learning activity? The constituency is wide and inventive and each site is in some way unique in its invention and persuasive ability. In Sefton, helpers are drawn from a wide range of backgrounds comprising teachers, head teachers, teaching assistants, parents, school caretakers, year 6 pupils (in one case) and a vicar. A significant number of tutors deliver the modules voluntarily, receiving no payment. Where modules need specialist tutors such as street dance, Judo and Fencing, external tutors are employed and funded by the school. In one primary school, every teacher offers at least one module while the majority of pupils participate in at least one.

In Hull, tutors include specialist staff from the college and in many of the modules students from the college work alongside the children in small groups. In Bicester, a university ceramics teacher led a course in a purpose built pottery room in a primary school. The learning was mediated by dialogue between the tutor and the children on a one-to-one basis and by the tutor drawing together a couple of the children to demonstrate a technique. Other partnerships have been developed with Oxford Inspires, an arts agency, Bicester Community Churches and the Courtyard Youth Arts Centre, all forms of partnerships which are already bearing fruit. There has been a 'Carnival Costumes' module linked to the Advent pageant in the town in November 2007 and a 'Fire Sculpture' module which culminated in a procession in Bicester, also in November 2007. The current modules 'Samba Dancing for the Carnival' and 'Samba Drumming for the Carnival' are directly linked to a key event in the town's calendar. 'DJ Skills' is led by a parent in a primary school, demonstrating techniques such as 'scratching' which the children then tried themselves with guidance from the parent tutor, although waiting your turn could be a bit '*boring*' and one pupil suggested doing '*other things like composing while we wait*'.

The range of possibilities is exemplified in Bradford where the CU has built access to a diverse bank of tutors, including teachers and staff who work in schools (90% of all tutors), lecturers from the university (the University of Bradford employs over 4,000 staff who are all potentially available to support CU activities), specialist business and freelance tutors. The CU employs University of Bradford mentors who are fully trained and CRB checked if they are to be part of the Learning Team on programmes such as Summer Schools and Enterprise Days. Mentors are paid and they receive training and opportunities to broaden their horizons by working in the local community. Some of the schools also use in-house peer tutors/mentors to support activities. The threefold ambition is:

- To be a brokerage service for every school and voluntary group in Bradford and District which will develop quality out of schools hours learning
- To provide 15 children from each one of our 200 schools, with at least one 10 hour learning module of out of school hours learning
- To work collaboratively with a minimum of five existing networks within out of school hours learning

## 7. The when: And now for something completely different

The Children's University builds its programmes around the school day, the school week and the school year. This creates limitations on when it is possible to reach young people whose primary commitment and perceived seat of learning (in both symbolic and literal sense) is the school. In some places, the CU is an extension of study support with modules and other informal learning opportunities offered during lunchtimes or in the form of after school clubs. In Sefton a wide menu of activities takes place '*in the safety of the school environment*', embedded within the school day. These are complemented by modules run in blocks of two consecutive Saturdays between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. throughout the year. There are also courses offered during half term and summer holidays.

The CU has to work within the compass offered by out of school hours (OSHL). These are the spaces where young people can be helped to reframe their perspectives on learning and re-assess their responses to authority and relationships for learning.

### **Jodie: Golden time all day**

Jodie is 10 and in year 5 at school. She had attended many CU courses and particularly enjoyed a Silent Movies course because she had learnt so much: Laurel and Hardy, 'improvisation' and the use of comedy in 'olden days movies'. She explains how silent movies are a 'bit like ballet'; they tell a story but through movement and signs. Jodie describes the CU as being like 'another day of school, but like golden time all day, learning in a new and different way.' She is a bright, very articulate girl and fully immersed in the group and its performance.

Jodie's mum says that Jodie 'lacks social skills'. She is considered as 'troublesome' by her teachers and has had 'a terrible time' at school largely because she has been unable to form friendships. She has been suspended on two occasions. The CU offers Jodie a chance to learn in a different environment where she is realising that she can get along with people and enjoy learning.

## 8. The how: time, space and pace of learning

The 'how' of learning may ultimately be the most significant contribution of the Children's University. The hallmark of virtually all modules and informal activity is active engagement, making, talking, doing. The 80/20 'rule' of teacher talk/pupil talk is reversed, with teaching or tutoring retaining an important role but more supportive than directive. Bradford CU draws on Glaser's Control Theory to take account of five basic needs - love, independence, fun, security and power. While the importance of independent learning is a tenet shared with in-classroom activity and while good teachers also strive for fun within a safe environment, the CU can capitalise on the lack of constraining factors which often frustrate teachers' best intentions. A pupil in Bicester, commenting on Science for Fun, says that '*at school the teacher shows us science but at CU we find out ourselves*'. A head teacher described modules as '*liberating for pupils and tutors*', relishing the opportunity for children to explore something in depth without having to '*grind out results within the shackles of the National Curriculum*'. Many children commented on the exploratory and creative nature of their learning, with a premium on doing rather than listening and writing.

Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences has been widely embraced as offering a wider scope for the design and implementation of activities, and has been used to inform planning, delivery and assessment of learning (Gardner, 1983). 'Interpersonal', 'Kinaesthetic' and 'Musical' intelligences were, it was claimed, able to flourish in the space and stimulus provided by carefully crafted contexts and scaffolding for learning.

The freedom offered by extended time, without the urgency of bells and interruptions, allowed sustained interest, a feature commented on by tutors and pupils alike. David, in Bicester, said he appreciated the freedom and space CU offered to be creative and to '*really explore something*'. He likes the fact that the modules are six weeks long because it gives time to '*experiment and be creative*'. A number of the children echoed his words, saying they really appreciated being able to work on something for a long time and think about it as they go. They saw a real contrast with school, saying that at school '*we never get to finish things*' and '*we never work on things for a long time*'. A pupil comments '*at CU you work as a group all the time but at school you do your own thing and just sometimes you work as a group*'. A tutor adds that by focusing on an activity like pottery in depth for six weeks '*you would be amazed at what they are capable of*'.

Specialists and experts in their own fields employ direct instruction and demonstration but without prior conceptions of 'ability' and 'potential' so that the ethos is one in which everyone is seen as equally capable of creative achievement. A university ceramics teacher led this course in a purpose built pottery room in a primary school. The learning was mediated by dialogue between the tutor and the children on a one to one basis or by the tutor drawing together a couple of the children to demonstrate a technique. Pupils were able to explain the decisions they had made regarding the construction of their pots and relate it back to the techniques the tutor had demonstrated at the beginning of the module. The tutor, commenting on some astonishing clay models that the children had made, explained that this was due to the extended time they could spend on this as opposed to the 'start-stop' approach in schools. The time afforded to this module with the support of a specialist tutor seemed to enable the children to be highly creative and imaginative.

Demonstration by experts is also a feature in Kent where, in Cartoon Capers sessions, the tutor uses examples of his own drawings to illustrate the importance of size and proportion in cartoons. He then encourages children to use this strategy in their own work, offering assistance up to the point they need it, then withdrawing and allowing each child to progress at his or her own pace. A similar technique is a feature of the Watercolours art class where specific guidance and help is offered at an early stage and then is gradually withdrawn allowing the child to take complete control and ownership of her work. A tutor described it as a pedagogy that seeks to transform learning capacity, based on co-agency and trust. It aims to extend provision beyond participation to engage each child individually in their own learning.

### **The script factory**

This module was developed by one of the drama team at the college and held at the drama campus on the outskirts of Doncaster. Children are taken by bus accompanied by their deputy headteacher. One session is focused on creating plot lines and dialogue, preceded by a session on developing characters. The children are skilfully guided through activities such as listening to a dialogue and recreating it, using speech and thinking bubbles and creating plot lines with key words to support them such as ‘villain’ ‘hero’ ‘problem’. Four students work with small groups, coaxing the children along. The tutor’s approach is to value the children’s contributions and give them control, reminding everyone at one point with comments such as ‘Lennox is in control of the story’. The tutor’s approach is grounded in her experience of working as a script writer and director with children and the foundation of her approach was ‘giving power to the children to create’.

In Portsmouth, the contribution of local business partners through working with children on design and marketing brings with it another form of specialist knowledge, extending horizons and career aspirations. Mentoring from local industry volunteers is a significant element in Hull’s CU approach. Referring to programmes such as My Space, Life Fitness, Fuel and Energy, Aspirations and Ambitions, There’s More To Life Than Me and You Can Change The World, this is made explicit in a Membership Information Booklet:

*All these programmes are delivered in an enjoyable and awe-inspiring manner by the Hull Children’s University staff and tutors and with the aid of mentors from local industry, voluntary organisations, leisure organisations, statutory services and others who can give the children the benefit of their life skills and experiences.*

‘Broadening the children’s horizons’ occurs both through the creative nature of the activities and through the social aspect of contact with a range of adults from different walks of life and vocational backgrounds, described by a CU tutor in Hull as ‘*real people*’. Visiting places in which people are seen in the context of their working lives and where children encounter different perspectives is seen as the primary benefit of creative and innovative provision, a ‘*responsive, bespoke service*’, serving not only to inspire children but to re-invigorate teachers.

## 9. Impact: More fun than PlayStation

Impact may be judged in a number of ways, by numbers participating to measures of achievement. There are individual stories to be told as well as accounts of success at school or system level. Policy makers tend to want big numbers while teachers derive great satisfaction from witnessing the transformation of the individual child, the disengaged one who becomes engaged, the disaffected and the disruptive one who begins to perceive a purpose in learning for the first time.

### **John can be John (Doncaster)**

In the ‘Script Writing’ module at the drama campus outside Doncaster, John can be John. The deputy headteacher accompanying the children says that at school he is passive, below age-related expectations and in need of extra support. She explains that John is the youngest of four brothers, the older siblings being more able and confident at school. She remarks that John ‘always seems left behind...switched off in lessons. ....not engaged’. During the script reading session John is engaged at every stage, offering suggestions about plot lines and characters. At one stage during the short break he stayed in character and walked around the room as a troll, making up dialogue. Later he was lying on the floor making notes on a story line and gazing up at the ceiling taking time to think. The different environment seems to be liberating for him. He has taken up every opportunity to do all the modules available and has recently completed the ‘Airport Experience’ and the ‘Shakespeare without Tears’.

A matrix such as the following (Table 2.) proposes a continuum from participation to achievement and aspiration on the horizontal axis and, on the vertical axis, evidence from individual accounts to group, school and system wide accounts of impact. While achievement may be regarded as the optimum measure of impact, for the Children’s University aspiration may outlive achievement – the desire to go on learning beyond the achievements within the CU site and beyond the outcomes measures of tests and exams in school.

**Table 2: Measures of impact**

	participation	engagement	achievement	aspiration
Individual				
Group				
School				
Systemic				

Measures of participation are an essential baseline. Provision of CU modules in Sefton has grown annually. Figures for 2008 show that 50% of the children in the 35 participating schools took part in CU modules. Growth continues at a rate of three or four schools per year although pressures of workload mean that subsequent growth will need to be limited as the CU staff are working at full capacity. This is without efforts at marketing of CU to new schools.

Measures of participation are a necessary but not sufficient index of impact. They may, however also be seen as opportunity costs, that is, replacing other forms of activity such as hanging out, inventing mischief or simply watching TV. For example, in Portsmouth children asked by teachers what they would be doing if they weren't attending the CU, all said (with the exception of one) that they would be at home, bored and watching television. A head teacher described how simply by virtue of participation the CU played a pivotal role in helping to break down community barriers in the locality. For example, a damaging gang culture has been overcome by children from different schools mixing together for CU courses. He argued that one of the most significant impacts on children who participated was through enjoyable and engaging activities which changed the way they felt about learning. The CU, he said, '*provides children with the opportunity to try new experiences, promoting a 'can-do' rather than 'can't do' attitude*'. Children frequently mentioned the importance of choice at CU. Gary in Bicester says '*you get to choose what you do, you are not told what to do*'.

Children themselves described the impact of the activities as developing social skills, building confidence, improving their relationships with their families and with their peers. Designing and creating a miniature garden from turf, plants and craft materials was described by young people as the best course they had ever attended. Their enthusiasm and engagement with the task, the products of their work, had inspired a number of those participating to talk positively about possible careers and going to university.

Certification and graduation are symbolic milestones, marking progress and achievement. In July 2007, one hundred primary school pupils donned cap and gown to graduate from Bradford's Children's University, the Vice Chancellor himself welcoming them and promising them that they could, and should, aspire to maintain their engagement with learning and aspire to attend this or another university. Graduation ceremonies play a pivotal role in the CU calendar and are viewed as integral to the aim of raising aspirations. For most children, and their parents, this is the first time they have attended a university and the experience can contribute to sowing the seed of desire/aspiration in their minds. It is construed as a first major step towards a life choice of opting into learning.

The co-ordinator in a Doncaster school enumerated tangible benefits for the children at her school following their involvement in CU. In year 6 she spoke of the Asian boys in the class being a '*bit of a gang*' but following the 'A Better Me' module which enabled children to look at themselves through other characters such as Forrest Gump, some of the barriers between these boys and others were broken down. She talked of one boy Aroon in year 6 who, following the same module, started to ask for help in lessons rather than say '*I can't do it*' and seemed to avoid getting into low level disruption and arguments on the playground. An important aspect of the learning process Julie identified in this module was the adult conversation and role models. The boys had a freedom to talk to other adults without feeling that '*it will go back to Mum*'.

### **A lifeline for Jonathan**

Jonathan is in year 6 and has four other siblings who are with foster parents. He is teetering on the brink of permanent exclusion, says his headteacher, adding that 'he is hanging on by his fingertips at school'. He sees CU as a 'lifeline' for Jonathan, explaining that he can spend an extended period of time engaged in creative and challenging activities away from a difficult home environment. Jonathan attends two CU sessions every week.

At school he needs one to one support and can be aggressive. At CU, where he engages with others and is absorbed by his learning, his headteacher says 'the tutors wouldn't notice him.' The tutor mentions that he had been warned to 'watch out' for Jonathan but that he had not experienced any difficulties at all. His headteacher cites three reasons for his engagement at CU. Firstly, the learning is hands on and experiential. Secondly, the bulk of time is given over to the children to explore their ideas rather than being predominantly teacher-led. Thirdly and perhaps most importantly the tutors have no preconceptions about children at CU. The children are not 'pigeon-holed' and therefore Jonathan has been able to create a different identity for himself as a learner.

The headteacher is keenly committed to the model remaining affordable to children such as Jonathan as they offer such children the opportunity to do things they would never dream of due to financial issues or low aspirations within their families.

Equally, visits to the stadium and the airport in two of the modules were a new experience for many who rarely leave Doncaster itself. The visit itself was the source of great excitement for the children but Julie believes the potential transformation of aspirations is perhaps most powerful. The children compiled questions to interview members of staff at the airport and gained a window into the world of work by asking questions such as '*What qualifications do you need for this job?*' '*What do you like best about the job?*' For one of the boys, Jamie in year 6, the modules have offered him an opportunity to participate in purposeful out of school activities. He had been in trouble at school and was known to the police out of school. Julie said she was '*amazed*' he wanted to take part in CU as he attended school sporadically but following the sessions he had a more positive attitude in school and said after a visit to the Hub that '*I'm going to be there*'.

These individual ad hoc reports by children and teachers are extremely important but, for more hard nosed policy makers and funding bodies more systemic evidence is required. A variety of approaches has been employed within CU centres to evaluate impact, with some using attitudinal surveys for children and parents with good effect and substantial returns. However, systematic use of the Code of Practice and embedded self evaluation is a priority for all centres in the future.

As the CU grows and flourishes, more of the empty cells in the Measures of Impact grid will become filled with stories and data. By the very nature of the exercise the data leans towards qualitative rather than quantitative data. Many of the accounts are subjective but

no less powerful for that, particularly when there is strong evidence of changes in disposition and mindset - a new found sense of determination and self belief.

The impact measures in Table 2 are all related to what children achieve or aspire to but these children move on and other cohorts follow. So, more fundamental measures may refer to those who stay behind – the teachers, tutors and others who play the vital role in supporting learning. A teacher in Bradford commented on *‘refreshing and revitalising my passion for teaching. This is what I came into teaching for’*. This was affirmed by her headteacher who said that *‘the whole experience enabled teachers to work in a more creative, dynamic way underpinned by a pedagogy of student centred brain-based learning’*. Similarly in Hull, a tutor reflecting on the experience of working with children said he had *‘been bitten by the bug for learning’*. It had raised his self-esteem and developed his own life skills. He described the experience of mentoring a group in detail, remembering the form of contact and the empowering sense of giving guidance, having fun and making a difference. He likened his role in supporting learning as *‘a chameleon, fitting into the background’*.

## 10. The parent equation

The link between home and schools is a persisting issue for schools, trying to encourage the invisible parents and discouraging those who are too visible in the demands they make. Just as the CU offers a different environment for children so it can offer parents a more informal and accessible way to become involved in their children's learning. A number of parents across different sites mentioned the importance of the CU courses in encouraging confidence building outside of the school and home. Data from the parental evaluation sheets also provides evidence that parents are happy with provision and with what their children are learning.

### **Amy**

Amy is in year 6 and is a seasoned CU attendee. One of the modules she had enjoyed was 'Fun Fashion' because she made a few items such as a bag which she then took home, showing her Mum what she had done and they made some other things on the sewing machine together. Amy thinks that CU is good for making new friends and building confidence although this can be rather intimidating- 'Before you go you are nervous and when you get there you are still nervous but then you get on with people and then you feel confident'. Her brother attended a cookery module and now makes tea at home every Friday. The tutors' approach was central to Amy's enjoyment of the sessions as she found them all 'kind and helpful and they didn't shout'. She speaks with excitement about 'going home after school, getting changed and thinking 'great - I'm going to do something fun'.

The involvement of parents in the graduation ceremony at the Hub in Bradford provides the occasion for parents to see and to celebrate their children's achievements and to raise their aspirations for them. Cakes and drinks are provided and other college staff are present to talk with the mums and dads. The Vice Principal welcomed all of the children and parents, sending an important signal '*You are all welcome*'. Two of the mothers who had been following an EAL course at the Children's Centre are now undertaking a course at the Hub following the direct contacts they made with staff that afternoon. In Doncaster it is claimed by the co-ordinator that although the CU is in its infancy, it has already made a powerful contribution to the lives of children and parents who participate.

## 11. Ensuring and assuring quality

The broad range of activities on offer within the many sites, and supported by a multitude of teachers, tutors, helpers, students, business people and parents, inevitably raises issues of quality and consistency. Traditionally, extra-curricular activities have tended to be seen simply as 'a good thing' and, given their voluntary nature, rarely subject to systematic evaluation. In a similar vein, after school study support has been provided typically without accompanying evaluation of its worth and impact. The Children's University as an organisation with a mission to improve learning and to build children's confidence and self efficacy through the activities it offers, has to be able to provide evidence of achievement and 'value added' that goes beyond intrinsic worth and is convincing for those who may be asked to finance its continued existence and growth.

The quality of provision is of paramount concern not only for extrinsic and 'political' reasons but because accountability is first and foremost to children themselves and to their parents and teachers. Quality is to some extent ensured, on the one hand at the stage of module design and in the selection of key personnel, clearly a matter of concern to all CU sites and to the Centre Executive. Decisions about who supports and leads activities are, however, often made locally, and are often offered on a voluntary and goodwill basis so that quality assurance requires sensitivity and appropriate systems of control. Nonetheless, there are useful precedents such as in Bradford where ensuring quality at the point of selection is achieved by formulating a list of core skills, qualities and experiences required by CU tutors, distributing this along with the CU Pack. Elsewhere, efforts are being made to identify the interests of potential tutors, what they can offer and in what form, and then to try to match those interests to identified student needs. One of the issues that has to be tackled more rigorously, however, is to underline the learning gains and outcomes of any proposed module. In Bicester, for example, a briefing meeting is held for tutors before the modules commence and they submit an outline of their proposed module. Describing the activities to be offered, it is recognised, has to be complemented by a clear statement of learning intentions and delineation of outcomes.

While quality is to some extent vouchsafed at the point of enlisting tutors it can only be assured in the longer term by systematic ongoing evaluation. All CU managers are aware of the need for this and there are various forms of current practice. In Sefton, for example, quality assurance is devolved to the school domain and not the CU. School based evaluations are organised by the school CU coordinator including pupil evaluations through questionnaires and parental feedback at the end of the key stage. A headteacher refers to these data regularly as part of reviewing each child's overall educational progress, and refers to this in her Self Evaluation Form (SEF) and as integral to School Development Planning.

In Bicester evaluation forms are issued to and filled in by parents and children for each of the modules. They provide very useful data to monitor the quality of provision for children, including what children feel they have learnt, giving feedback on how the provision can be improved and feedback to the specific tutors on the support given to children and the quality of the sessions. The parental evaluations ask parents to focus on their child's learning and also offer an opportunity to provide feedback on the CU more generally in Bicester. There is evidence that the feedback is used informally to track participation and uptake. For example, Naomi (the centre manager) targeted secondary

schools as a result of the low take up from this age group. Data is used to track participation from different schools and from children receiving free school meals.

Quality assurance in some places lies directly with the CU centres themselves but what counts as quality in children's learning is considerably more powerful when it can be shown to complement and enhance what children learn in school, what they take away with them and how their enhanced self confidence as learners feeds into school effort and achievements. How this links in turn with national priorities is exemplified in Portsmouth where the strategic foci for partnership working are through the five geographically-based community improvement partnerships (CIPs) which are local multi-agency teams designed to help deliver the 'core offer' and respond to key national priorities including; extended schools, education improvement partnerships, community cohesion and Every Child Matters. All schools and educational establishments within the borough are members of a local CIP. Each CIP employs a project manager who liaises with schools and external organisations to identify good practice and to initiate new opportunities for their local community. The CIP provides an important vehicle for encouraging effective partnership working and plays an important role in marketing and extending CU provision across the city. Each site has one or two CU managers who maintain a link to the school, either as a teacher/assistant or as administrative/site staff. The importance of having a strong working relationship with the CU team is emphasised by CU managers as crucial to its strategic development.

The QA issue becomes particularly acute, however, as demand for courses grows and begins to outstrip supply. With the approval and funding recently granted for a new CU at Havant and Waterlooville (outside the Portsmouth CIPs) there is some concern as to the relationship between the Portsmouth site and any potential new ones, raising questions such as 'Who has ownership of the documents and policies and how is good practice shared?' 'How can we preserve the unique local identity and high quality of an established CU site while expanding and networking practices?'

Other concerns expressed by CU managers were in relation to the volume of data that is collected for evaluation purposes. These data include tutor, parental and pupil evaluation forms plus other forms of documentation and QISS Code of Practice. One of the achievements of the national organisation in the last year has been the adaptation and customisation of the QISS Code of Practice. Originally created to validate study support centres, as emerging, established or advanced, the Code of Practice has been subject to discussion and trialling so as to fit within a CU context. Guidance at CU meetings and at individual sites has been intended to ensure that it will be seen not as an extra imposition but as a validation source and as a formative document, a valued and ongoing reference point for CU managers, tutors, students and for schools.

If quality assurance is to be economical but powerful, formative and fit for purpose one of the key tasks of the Centre Executive is to ensure that the data collected is of the quality and quantity that tells a coherent story at both individual site level and at national level, informing future practice and demonstrating to a wider audience what the CU stands for and how it meets its aims.

## 12. Sustainability and funding

Each Children's University setting is 'nested' within a complex system of relationships. Management and funding for sites varies widely, sometimes strengthened by the connection with past employees who have moved to other, related occupations and continue to encourage, support and provide inspiration. Some CU managers work for the local authority, some are employed solely to work for the Children's University and one is in the process of becoming the chief executive of a limited company, governed by a Board of Trustees. As part of their commitment, CU managers have stories to recount of entrepreneurial activities that have seen them forging useful alliances with business leaders and politicians. Their depiction of networking with themselves at the centre of the web illustrates the hugely complex nature of their task and the challenge in keeping contact and sustaining initiatives (Appendix 16a and 16b pages 41-42).

Ad hoc incremental growth of CU centres needs to be allied with self-conscious strategic development so as to maximise the potential for realising the ECM agenda across communities. As one senior official remarked '*It remains one of a few local initiatives to span the entire authority which provides a certain level of security to its sustainability and mainstreaming potential*'. There is a tangible passion for the job and its sustainability for the future among CU managers. It finds expression in creative forms of structuring for the service provision for young people and a great deal of resourcefulness in recruiting and managing human resources as well as material resources. There are examples of successful bids for various, ever-changing sources of funding and entrepreneurial outreach work to local businesses, councillors and politicians all on behalf of the young people. These leaders are innovative, thoughtful and sometimes evangelical about the work. They can articulate a vision and explain the connectedness between the different services that their site provides. CU managers who operate well strategically are informed about national and local policy initiatives and approach development with a responsive and flexible attitude. However, this does not always serve the purpose of sustainability.

The challenge for leadership is to be strategic in developing systems for sustainability, in building support networks and distribution of responsibility and ownership. Some CU managers are very experienced and knowledgeable about their particular setting. They have been associated with its development over time and have been instrumental in shaping the structures and culture. They have recruited the tutors, mentors and administrative support. They are often, by necessity, the sole full time worker, and, by definition, the most informed individual. Many of them are acutely aware that much hinges on their initiative and goodwill and that, were they to leave, there would be no guarantee of continuity. In Sefton CU, for example, if the current CU manager leaves it is questionable whether there is sufficient capacity for a successful transitional period. Observations suggest that much of the operational knowledge is focused on one person and that her departure would create a void impacting on the endurance of the scheme. In such circumstances, it is important that strategies can be developed to ensure that the work will endure in the event of key people moving on.

To this end Portsmouth CU has recently instigated a scheme for CU champions as a way of maintaining momentum, encouraging consultation with the children and establishing links between the grassroots users, CU managers and schools. Perhaps more importantly, they provide a support network operated by the children themselves. The CU champions

play an important and emerging role in the overall structure as they become key players at the interface of the school and the CU. They help to prepare the marketing materials, maintain the notice boards, write reports of activities and at some schools they have attended the governors' meetings to talk about CU activities. To become a CU champion the children must have attended some of the Saturday courses: they can either put themselves forward for selection or can be nominated by the CU manager/head teacher as a suitable candidate.

The work of the National Executive is key to sustainability, in building capacity and social capital, forging strong alliances within and between centres so that they have a built-in resilience, with lateral support from one another and from the centre. Sustaining and expanding existing centres and developing new ones is ultimately dependent on a secure and continuing funding stream and the ability of the National Executive to continue to attract project funding for CU centres. How it structures its relationship with CU centres individually and collectively, how it manages to balance freedom and accountability, creativity and quality control will all have a bearing on its ability to sustain financial security.

The aim of the Children's University, as specified in the national business plan is to use its resources in this initial phase of planned development, to:

- make a significant impact in key areas
- establish a clear reputation for high quality provision
- develop the national 'brand' of the CU

It is through evidence of impact, by widespread recognition of quality provision that a national brand becomes a reality and funding follows naturally in its wake. This is a longer term project, perhaps requiring two or three years to establish that reputation and provide the requisite evidence. En route to that goal the funding issue looms large. Core and project funding was guaranteed in the short term but with the expectation that the CU would become self sustaining in time. Thought is currently being given to income generation from local authorities, from sponsors and private providers. Other forms of potential fund raising are from selling and franchising services and products such as the 'Passport to Learning'.

Sustainability of funding likewise concerns the CU centres. In Bradford CU Modules consist of 10 out-of-school- learning-hours and are funded by a partnership of a university/college department and private companies with up to ten companies all contributing to financing one module. The level of support required by the school is tailored to its needs with £500 per site allocated for staff development, transport and resources. Consideration is also being given to contributions from the users themselves. For example, in Portsmouth, voluntary contributions of £5 per child are invited, with 86% of parents/carers paying the fee. CU managers will need to consider the implications of charging for courses. There was a fear expressed by headteachers that if modules were to be charged it would narrow down opportunities for children and that *'if it came to the crunch we would try to maintain it but perhaps not all the modules'*. This project manager is aware of tension but feels that schools should make a contribution so committing themselves to a programme which they value. The paradox is that by asking for payment it may act as a deterrent for some and a source of value for others. The greater the evidence that CU activities improve community relations, re-engage young

people on the brink of criminality, and support schools' work with families, the greater the likelihood that funding will follow the child.

### **Sustainability of Learning**

Sustainability of CU centres is closely allied to the sustainability of learning that endures and travels across boundaries of centres, schools and learning in the community. In the choice of activities and outcomes, one of the unique contributions of the CU is the emphasis given to time and place. Opportunities to venture beyond the constraining environment of the classroom, in airports, docks, museums, football clubs, leisure and community centres, can, with foresight and a keen grasp on the nature of learning, address issues of learning transfer which have proved a perennial challenge to school-based learning. As research has consistently shown, 'knowledge to go' as Harvard's David Perkins terms it, assumes three key abilities and dispositions – the ability to spot a problem (when not given to you by the teacher), the motivation to want to solve the problem (when not required by the external pressures), access to, and knowledge of, the appropriate tools with which to address the problem (when not provided by the teacher). 'Knowledge to go' is at the heart of the CU endeavour. It has greater space and latitude than schools to take account of approaches to learning 'styles' and preferences, without the pressure to 'cover' the curriculum, so that attention can be given to sustaining learning across boundaries. However, many parents are inclined to worry about their children doing 'serious' work, meeting targets and getting through tests and exams while children themselves have to make choices as to the best investment of their time and priorities. There is a job to done in providing demonstrable evidence that 'time out' from focused curricular work pays back with interest.

Monitoring activities, seeking the evidence, pursuing systematic self evaluation, keeping open the dialogue with parents and pupils, are tasks for schools and for CU providers, but most fruitfully in concerted activity. Decisions as to how learning can be made to travel across boundaries of classroom and out-of-hours-learning are of fundamental concern to extended schools, as indeed to any school that understands what 'transfer of learning' means and how vulnerable it is. This is both in the fundamental interest of schools rising standards and of intimate concern to CU tutors, mentors, centre managers and the strategic planning of the Chief Executive.

The Every Child Matters agenda (ECM) is, in one sense, a gift to CU activities as it provides a confirmation of what centres have long seen as important priorities. As it has been left largely to schools themselves to identify how the five ECM outcomes may be achieved, activities within the CU ambit provide an invaluable exemplification of sustainable learning beyond schooling. ECM has provided a framework against which schools and centres may categorise their activities but the challenge remains of adducing strong qualitative evidence and, more challenging still, quantitative measures that are seen as having substance and reliability.

### 13. CU: A National Identity

The impetus for a national organisation and common identity for the Children's University has been a major commitment over the last year. The Chief Executive (CE) appointed by the trustees to take this forward has led a series of initiatives to promote collaboration and development and to support networking among centres, building capacity across the Children's University nationally. He is passionate about finding creative pathways for inclusive practice that take advantage of the diverse and unique locations such as those offered by the CU. With the support of his personal assistant, he has created a database of centres and holds regular meetings with centre managers. They administer the allocation of funding as approved by the trustees and promote the development of a national website.

A major role for the CE has been to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and resources. There are examples of long-established CU managers visiting newer establishments and inducting colleagues into successful practices. There is a focus on expansion and the CE visits people and organisations who express an interest in the CU, either with a view to partnership or membership. He has instigated liaisons between existing centres and those preparing to join so as to create, build and share knowledge and experience on a mutual basis. New colleagues are encouraged to draw on the experience of better-established colleagues so that tentative ideas and enquiries can be translated into concrete plans.

Plans for partnership with major institutions such as The Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and the Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow will be an important thrust of the coming year. These are potentially significant developments in building capacity as all of them may be seen as powerful allies.

At a recent meeting of the CU managers, they were asked to consider the benefits and challenges of developing working practices within a national organisation. Their comments are both an endorsement of the value of a national identity and a recognition of some of the challenges that remain. Of the benefits, they wrote about raising the profile of their work and publicising their commitment and achievements. This recognition is important and may be perceived as a tangible element in the individual managers' relationship with the CE. National recognition was associated with issues such as credibility, influence, prestige, resourcing and the overall ethos that the CE is trying to create and sustain. One manager commented that as a strong national identity develops it will provide her with a '*link that would enable centres locally to see that the CU is nationally acceptable and therefore something of value*'. A major benefit to many was the opportunity through regular meetings, workshops and support from the centre to network, make friends, support colleagues and be inspired. A colleague new to the CU wrote

*I have found the support from attending CU manager's meetings invaluable in terms of determining a direction to work towards. The diversity of each CU enables me to visualise the potential scope there is to develop a meaningful and quality product for prospective partners to want to be engaged in, in turn producing dynamic activities for children to participate in. It also provides me with a database of challenges that I can navigate round thereby avoiding pitfalls encountered by long-standing CUs. Peer support from neighbouring CUs is invaluable.*

One colleague produced a list of benefits of national development that reflected the thoughts of many:

- Networking
- Leadership: influence/funding/advocacy
- Like-minded people
- Resource-sharing
- Problem solving
- Joining up partners
- Access to researchers
- Raised profile
- Shared website

For some there was an expression of the value of coming together from an everyday position of isolation. Many CU managers work alone or in small groups. Often their working practices entail organising colleagues from afar. They typically have strong values and an unerring commitment but struggle at times to be heard or to have collegiate experiences. The opportunity to network with like-minded colleagues is invaluable. One expressed this as *'Being an active member of a community of interest'*. There was a sense from the comments made that they were often inspired and encouraged during managers meetings where opportunities were created to learn from one another and to address key concerns in a climate of collaboration and trust. This was captured in testimony that referred to the value of entrepreneurialism, judged to be *'very important for young people to form their minds'*. There is in this comment a suggestion of the way in which inspiring adults with responsibility for the leadership of children's learning can in itself directly influence that learning.

The challenges centred around the twin issues of dilution and bureaucracy. We have recognised elsewhere the value of location and uniqueness that is frequently a key feature of individual CUs and which the national CU wishes to foster and accommodate. CU managers are typically creative, impassioned, committed individuals whose work in this field has persisted in the face of uncertainty and lack of funds. They are accustomed to struggling for resources and recognition. They have often thrived as isolated champions of a bespoke opportunity crafted by them. This does not make them natural group participants and many expressed concerns that a national identity, for all its benefits, could challenge their local, individual profiles or agendas. This was encapsulated in a heartfelt comment from one CU manager who wrote *'My dream is for a 'national concept' rather than 'national prescription'*. Another took this to another level, stating that the challenge was *'translating national agendas to local situations'*. It seems clear that the national executive will need to continue to support managers to lead positively on just such an agenda. A few cited concerns about the possibility of increased bureaucracy, although there were no details and there was a sense of perceived concern rather than realised.

Many of the comments provided for this enquiry were annotated with diagrams showing children busy working and smiley faces emphasising interest and engagement. There was a palpable expression of involvement that provided a strong endorsement of the efforts made by the CE to coordinate and lead the national initiative. This was reinforced by spoken commentary and discussion.

## **14. In conclusion**

At meetings with the CU centre managers, collectively and individually, the sense of collaboration and common commitment is tangible. The diversity of practice is wide but within a framework of shared values so that, although at different speeds and in different ways, the direction is the same. Children's and adults' testimony to achievements are impressive, often inspiring and sometimes moving. The challenge for the coming years is to embed a robust, convincing quality assurance base, one that provides evidence of the value of the Children's University as a national movement, indispensable to the lives of children as a lifeline of support for schools, for teachers and parents. The development of a quality framework through the adaptation of QiSS, the innovation of a learning passport, strengthening certification, and the development of a validation framework are important elements to that end. Sources of finance nationally, locally and individually through membership charges for example, will all be foremost on the agenda in the coming year. Forging a strong recognisable CU identity which stands for a unique approach to quality will mark the second year of the CU's life. The challenges ahead set the bar high but it is, however, a propitious and encouraging beginning.

### **Next steps**

Pupil surveys scheduled for the first year have taken longer than expected to be discussed, revised and agreed with all centre managers but 50 copies for each of 16 sites have now been issued and will be returned and analysed before Christmas.

In conjunction with this, tracking achievement of pupils across 20 centres will be used to provide evidence of the extent to which the CU 'adds value'. This will involve the targeting of about 5 selected pupils (or more subject to discussion with centre managers) in each of 20 centres, giving a total of around 100 children. This data will be complemented by attendance data (at CU and school), interviews with these young people to help explain the link between attitudinal and achievement data, as well as interviews with their CU tutors and classroom teachers. We also anticipate working with two or more centres which already have existing cohort data to complement the continuing in-depth study of the ten already being followed. Data, documentation and interviews with local authorities will also be important in gauging the CU effect. In addition to following the ten centres of the first stage, progress across all centres and the use of the QISS will be evaluated. We hope this will provide greater richness and depth to the evaluation as well as greater breadth of coverage.

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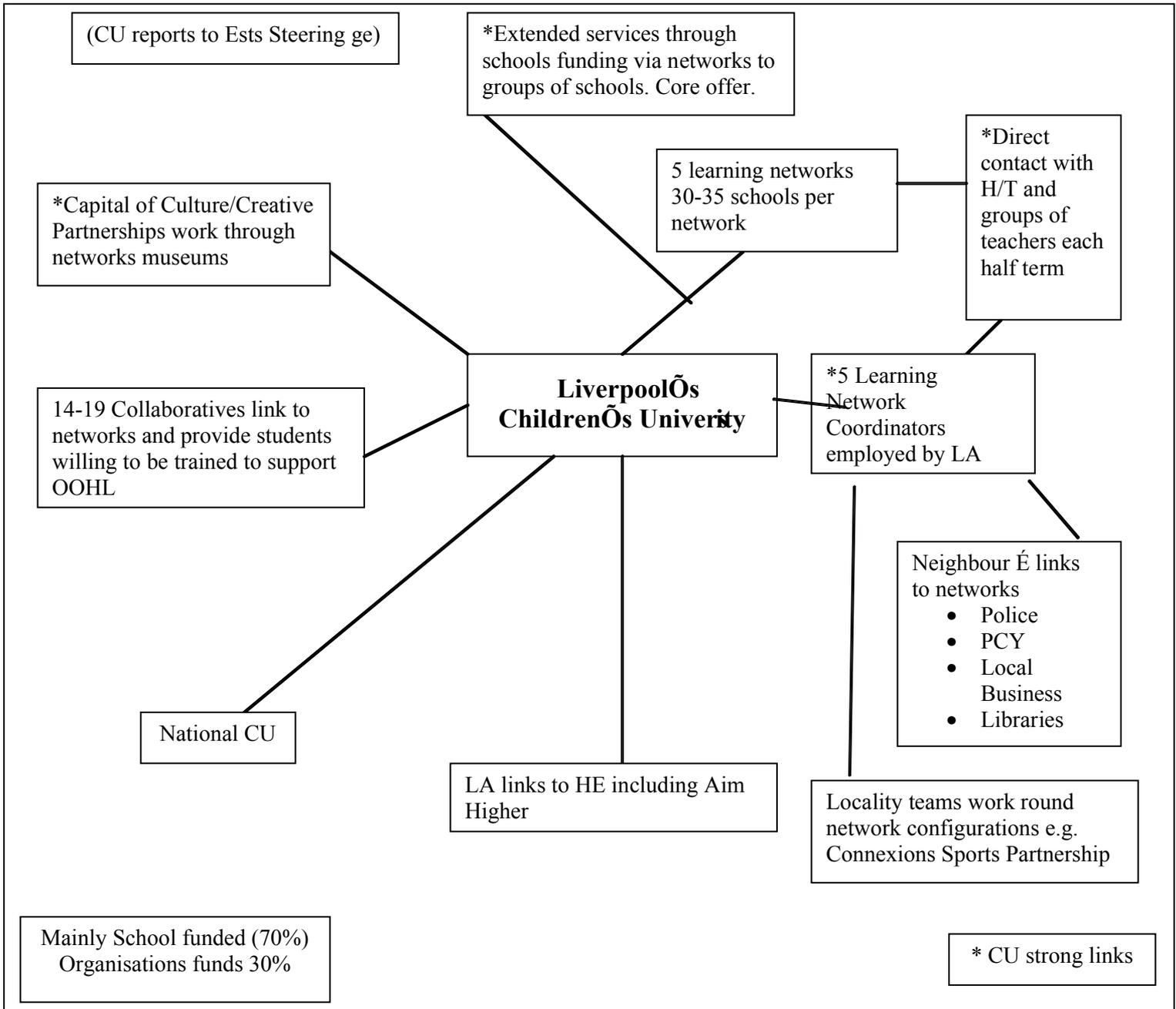
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## 16a. Appendix: Liverpool



## 16b. Appendix: York

