



Reach and Impact

Children's University in Australia and New Zealand

December 2023



Children's University in Australia and New Zealand: Reach and impact

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In the spirit of reconciliation ACER acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations peoples today. ACER acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who continue to contribute to our work to improve learning, education, and research.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACARA	The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
Australian regions	ACT - Australian Capital Territory, NSW - New South Wales, NT - Northern Territory, QLD - Queensland, SA - South Australia, TAS - Tasmania, VIC - Victoria, WA - Western Australia
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease that emerged in December 2019, causing a global pandemic
CU	Children's University
CUAA	Children's University Australasia and Africa
EQI	Equity Index, as used in New Zealand. Scores range from 344-569. Schools above EQI 456 have students facing more socio-economic barriers, and those at or below 456, are more advantaged.
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage, as used in Australia. Schools above ICSEA 1000 have students from more socio-economically advantaged communities, and those at or below 1000 are more disadvantaged.
IO	Indian Ocean, in relation to Mauritius (out-of-scope in this report)
Māori or First Nations	These include students who identify as Māori, First Nations, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
NAPLAN	The National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy
NZ	New Zealand, also distinguished by North and South islands
SES	Socio-economic status

KEY MESSAGES

Purpose

- This report presents a comprehensive overview of the reach and impact of Children's University (CU) in Australia and New Zealand. Commissioned independently by CU, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) compiled available evidence to consolidate the outreach program's extent and influence on a cross-national scale.
- While there is anecdotal information available in testimonials and positive publicity, and various partners have undertaken localised evaluations, there has not been an overarching report that consolidates the evidence of CU across the Australasian partnership.
- The independent evaluation synthesises information from existing research, reports, operational data, social media, and other documentation to provide a current snapshot of CU's reach and impact, guided by the following research questions.
 1. **Foundations:** How is the CU program underpinned by evidence-based best practice?
 2. **Reach:** What is the reach of the CU program in Australia?
 3. **Impact:** What does the available evidence indicate about the impact or potential impact of the CU program on student outcomes?

About the CU program

- Children's University (CU) is a program designed to engage children and young people (aged 5 - 18) in out-of-school learning enrichment activities, with the goal of fostering a love for learning and encouraging aspirations for university study. While open to children from various communities, CU specifically targets those who may lack access to enriching out-of-school educational experiences or have limited aspirations for university study. This includes young people from First Nations/Māori, regional, remote, and less-advantaged communities.
- Positioned as an equity intervention, CU aligns with the Australian tertiary sector's definition of initiatives that enhance access, participation, success, retention, and outcomes for students from equity groups and those under-represented in higher education. The Passport to Learning program, a well-established initiative of CU, has demonstrated positive impacts on children.

Foundations underpinning CU

- Evidence that CU is underpinned by best-practice was found through analysing systematic reviews related to the effects of extra-curricular participation on students. Although each review had a distinct focus, the overarching finding was that engaging in extra-curricular opportunities has the potential to benefit academic outcomes, school attendance, and affective domains. This is the key principle upon which CU is founded – that offering opportunities for extra-curricular participation will provide benefits for children, especially those children who experience one or more types of disadvantage.
- A review of other CU evaluations reflected similar evidence. It is important to highlight the different effects found in different contexts – most notably the difference between evaluations carried out in the UK (positive impact on academic achievement and school-attendance) and in Australia and New Zealand (positive impact in the affective domain, e.g., confidence, motivation, self-efficacy and agency). These differences reflect the data available for evaluation purposes: attendance and attainment data may be more obtainable in the UK, while the Australia-New Zealand evaluations have relied on self-report survey and interview data.
- Moving forward, this highlights opportunities for future evaluations in terms of the data that could potentially be collected and used to assess program impact.

Reach of CU in Australia and New Zealand

- Overall, 518 schools have engaged with CU since 2013, with 380 currently active. This includes 327 schools across most parts of Australia and 53 schools in New Zealand.
- In Australia, half the CU schools are located in South Australia, reaching 1-in-5 schools, with similar school-reach achieved in Tasmania. In New Zealand, most CU schools (89%) are located in the South Island, reaching 7% of NZ schools.
- CU appears to be achieving its aim to reduce educational inequity in Australia by reaching young people from First Nations backgrounds and those in regional or disadvantaged communities.
- Since 2013, the CU partnership has been expanding at a rate of around 40 schools annually.
- For most CU partners, the number of Learning Destinations increased from year to year. A clear feature of the profile, however, is the dip in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact on student outcomes

Six student outcomes were identified in the development of a program logic model and theory of change for the CU program. Where there was alignment with the outcomes, the existing data and research was reviewed and analysed to demonstrate evidence of impact of the CU program.

Adaptability to learn in different environments

- Parents report that their main hope for their child in commencing CU is to 'discover new interests, try new experiences, and visit new places' (Appendix A, 172 parents from Western Australia).
- 93% of parents across Australia and New Zealand agree that their child has experienced new and exciting things through CU – an indicator of promoting students' adaptability to different learning environments (Figure 8).

It has broadened my child's world by introducing her to new places and ideas. It has increased her sense of wonder and led her to explore new things. (SA parent)

Attitudes towards learning

- Parents across a range of surveys have consistently reported that the CU program and specific CU Holiday programs have improved students' attitudes to learning, nurtured students' passion for learning, and supported students to think in different ways (Appendix A).
- In the most comprehensive survey, conducted in 2023, 72% of parents across Australasia agree that their child is more motivated to learn since joining CU (Figure 9).

Wants to try everything!! (SA parent)

Self-assurance, confidence and wellbeing

- Increasing student self-confidence is the second most desired outcome for parents with children entering the CU program (Appendix A).
- Across surveys, 75% of parents reported observed increases in their children's self-confidence (Appendix A) and agreed that their child has become a more confident learner since joining CU (Figure 10).

She has become more confident and eager to learn more about her world. (WA parent)

Sense of self-empowerment and agency

- Of the parents surveyed in 2023, 60% believed their child had become more independent since joining CU (Figure 11).

My child has the confidence to learn and do study by himself. (NT parent)
Yes, they have actively sought out activities to do and become very independent and active learners. (SA parent)

Aspiration to further education and career pathways

- Around 80% of students and parents reported that participation in CU had increased the student's intent to attend university (Appendix A).
- The 2023 survey of parents across Australasia found 63% of parents believed their child was more likely to pursue further education at university, TAFE/VET or other post-secondary education institutions because of their time with CU (Figure 12).

*Her passion for learning has increased. Keen for uni now.
(NSW parent)*

Academic Achievement

- Parents surveyed in 2023 overwhelmingly agreed (95% agreed) that their child had learned new things while participating in CU activities.
- It is difficult to assert any change in general academic achievement associated with participation in CU without further data. However, it is apparent that participants are clearly accessing valued and enriching learning opportunities through the program.

*[My child is] Ambitious to achieve.
(New Zealand parent)*

Overall views about CU

- Of parents surveyed in 2023 about their willingness to recommend CU to other families, 93% rated their willingness at 7 or higher on the scale from 0 (not at all likely) to 10 (extremely likely).
- Parents rated CU with a Net Promoter Score of 53, placing it in the 'Excellent' range.

The changes in my child are remarkable. (SA parent)

Well done. Such a fantastic project. (NT parent)



INTRODUCTION

This report compiles available evidence to offer a comprehensive overview of the extent and influence of Children's University in Australia and New Zealand. While there is a wealth of anecdotal information available and various partners have undertaken localised evaluations, it was considered timely to produce an overarching report that consolidates the reach and impact of Children's University (CU) on a cross-national scale.

Accordingly, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) was independently commissioned by CU to consolidate the evidence-base underpinning the outreach program and provide a current snapshot of reach and impact. Specifically, ACER worked closely with CU to undertake an independent evaluation of existing research, reports, operational data, social media, and other documentation. It draws on evidence from the last three years, from early 2021 to November 2023.



Showing the Passports at CU Club, CU Swinburne University, Victoria 2023

ABOUT CHILDREN'S UNIVERSITY

Background

Children's University (CU) is a program designed to facilitate children's and young people's (aged 5 - 18) engagement in out-of-school learning enrichment activities. The program aims to expose students to educational experiences that may foster a love of learning and encourage them to aspire to university study. Their long-established Passport to Learning program has been proven to have a positive impact on children (CU, 2023b).

While open to children across communities, a particular aim is to include children who may not otherwise have access to rich out-of-school educational experiences or aspire to university study, due to their economic circumstances, geographic isolation, and/or absence of university-educated role-models. In this way, CU was conceived as an equity intervention, which is defined in the Australian tertiary sector as "a specific program or initiative within higher education institutions that seeks to enhance the access, participation, success, retention and outcomes of students from equity groups and people who are under-represented in Australian higher education" (Bennett et al., 2015, p.14).

The first CU was founded in 1993 in Birmingham England by Tim Brighouse, with the main focus on addressing the gap between educational opportunities offered to students in the highest- and lowest-attaining schools (MacBeath & Waterhouse, 2008; Overton, 2010).

While CU does not have a single universal mission, as it can vary among countries, the general mission of CU is dedicated to instilling a passion for learning in children through collaborations between schools and universities, and involving teachers. It aims to enhance extracurricular activities, and provide high-quality, stimulating, and innovative experiences for disadvantaged students beyond regular school hours (Aral et al., 2022).

Children's University (CU, 2023a) is designed around wanting students to feel:

- That learning can be fun, aspirational, and lifelong
- They have enjoyed a range of new learning experiences and are motivated to keep learning in different ways
- They have grown in confidence and self-belief
- They have a broader range of essential skills in line with the Skills Builder Framework
- They are empowered to make positive choices about their future
- They can better cope with the challenges that life throws at them
- They are celebrated for their commitment to learning by their family, school, and community.

A growing success

CU has expanded its reach globally, with the model now operating across the UK, New Zealand, Africa, Asia, and Australia, through 'social franchise' licence agreements with Children's University Trust in the UK (Shelley et al., 2019). CU operates through region-based consortiums of local delivery partners. These partners or member organisations are typically universities, further education institutions, or Local Authorities. All are not-for-profit and all are committed to equality of opportunity for the children in their area and for encouraging "*limitless learning beyond the classroom - creating exciting opportunities for every child*" (CUAA, 2023). Partnerships are facilitated through respective digital platforms and websites:

- Children's University UK: <https://www.childrensuniversity.co.uk/>
- Children's University Australasia & Africa: <https://cuaustralasia.com/>
- Children's University Asia: <https://childrensuniversityasia.com/>
- CandyLand Children's Uni. in Taiwan: <https://www.facebook.com/candylandchildrensuni/>

CU Australasia & Africa (Indian Ocean)

The CU Australasia program was established in Australia in 2013 when the [University of Adelaide](#) (SA) became the Australasian license holder - the first outside of the UK. CU in Australia expanded to the [University of Tasmania](#) (TAS) in 2015 (Shelley et al., 2020) and in 2016, to [Edith Cowan University](#) (WA), the [University of Western Australia](#) (WA), [Charles Darwin University](#) (NT), [University of Newcastle](#) (NSW), and [Swinburne University of Technology](#) (VIC). In 2018, CU expanded to New Zealand and now includes programs through the [University of Canterbury](#), [Lincoln University](#), and [Massey University](#). CU launched in [Mauritius](#) in 2022 (CUA, 2022). The Adelaide-based program now operates as Children's University Australasia and Africa (IO), shown in Figure 1. Each university has their own website and is supported by the overarching [CUAA website](#).

Figure 1. The Universities associated with Children's University Australasia and Africa



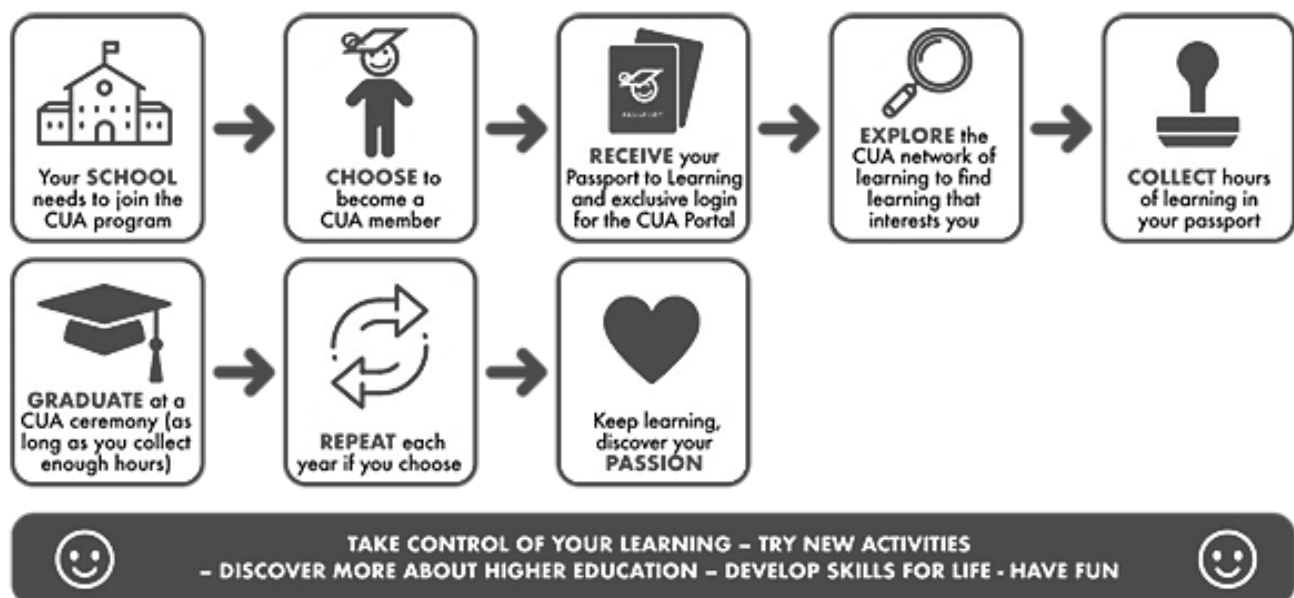
How it works

CU Australasia and Africa reports that since its inception, the program has included more than 47,000 children from over 500 participating schools. The CU program offers access to a curated selection of local, out-of-school activities that children aged 5 to 14 years can choose from to gain credit in their 'Passport to Learning' (see Figure 2). Children use their passport to record the hours spent in each activity, and this record is validated with a stamp at participating learning destinations. Children accrue learning hours over time and progress towards 'graduating' from the program. The graduation process entails a ceremony held on a university campus or prestigious venues in regional areas, mirroring the structure of a university graduation, where a certificate is presented.

CU reports that more than 32,300 students have graduated from the program to date. Young people aged 15 to 18 years can continue to participate in CU through the Passport to Volunteering, where students can act as volunteers within community projects and as leaders of CU learning experiences for younger children.

CU is administered through a designated School Coordinator at each participating school, who undertakes training with CU, coordinates school-led clubs and activities and monitors students' participation in the program. Out-of-school learning experiences are organised by CU in partnership with Learning Destinations, which include organisations such as universities, museums, galleries, conservation parks, libraries, and sporting clubs. There is a focus on offering local activities, especially for children in regional and remote areas, and experiences with evident links to courses of tertiary study. CU reports that over 5,500 organisations have provided validated CU learning experiences.

Figure 2. Stages in the processes of engaging with and implementing Children's University



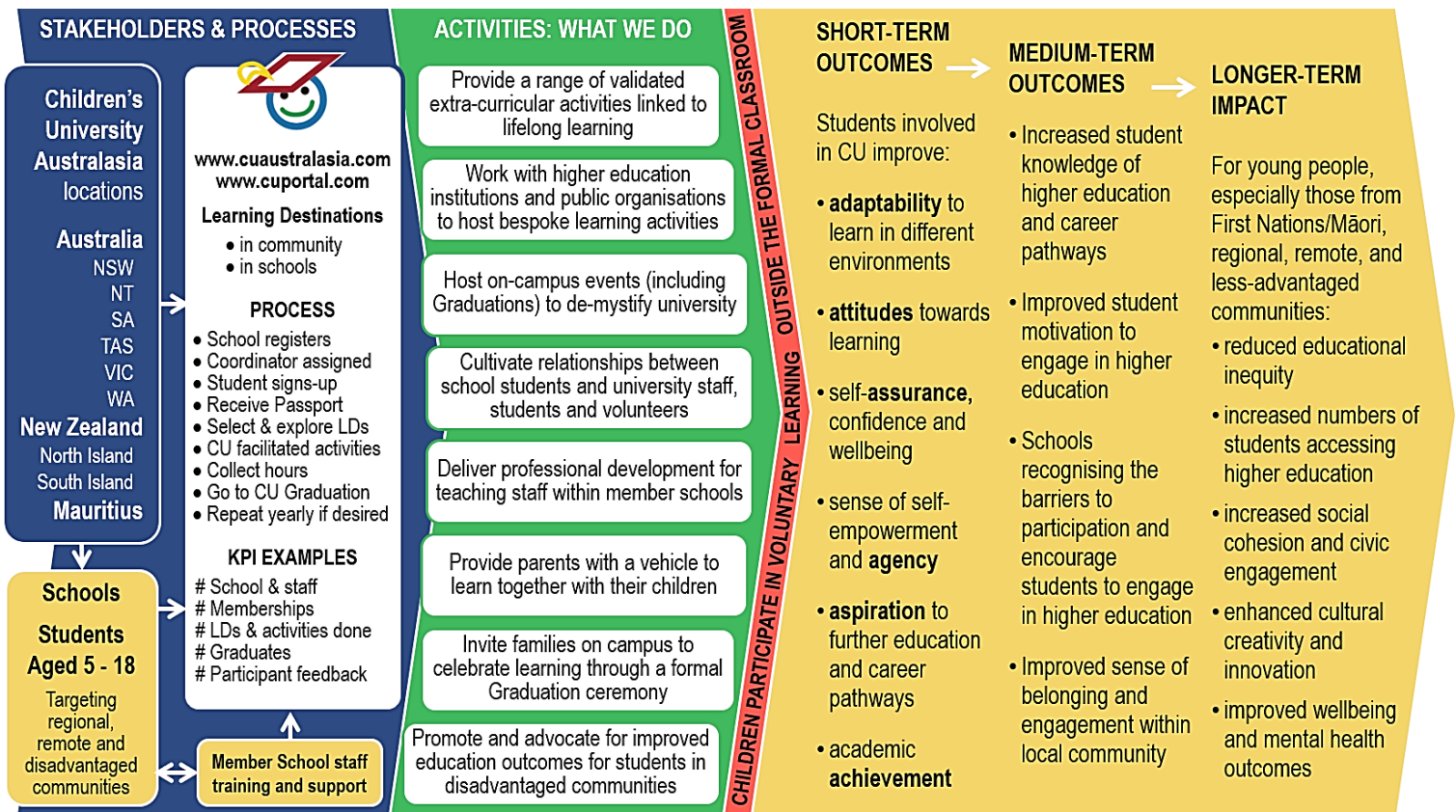
Theory of change

Figure 3 summarises the CU program — including its inputs, processes, activities, and outcomes — in a theory of change. The key stakeholders include CU Partners, member schools, and students aged 5 to 18 years. The steps in the process from Figure 2 are represented along with indication of the website, portal, and learning destinations that comprise the key inputs.

Importantly, the inputs, activities and short-term outcomes from the theory of change have been used to underpin the evaluation framework and inform the evidence of impact presented in this report.

Accordingly, the existing evidence (reports, documents, data, photos) submitted from the partners across Australia and New Zealand have been mapped and thematically coded for interpretation and analysis based on the key elements in the theory of change (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Children's University program logic and theory of change



ABOUT THE EVALUATION

This evaluation was guided by the following research questions, addressed in the following sections.

1. **Foundations:** How is the CU program underpinned by evidence-based best practice?
2. **Reach:** What is the reach of the CU program in Australia?
3. **Impact:** What does the available evidence indicate about the impact or potential impact of the CU program on student outcomes?

The ACER team worked closely with CU to draw on existing resources and synthesise existing and new evidence. The main objective was to produce a foundational report from which subsequent evaluations and continuous quality monitoring could be established. Specific research activities were agreed with CU staff as part of the co-design process during the evaluation, and included:



Ethical approaches to evaluation: The project was formally submitted for approval to the ACER Human Research Ethics Committee, noting that identifiable student data was not used in the independent evaluation. Any data collected through quality monitoring instruments co-designed with ACER but administered by CU as an embedded part of the CU program were treated as analysis of secondary data along with other existing datasets.



Review of literature and previous CU evaluations: A review of relevant research literature has drawn upon existing published systematic reviews to synthesise and summarise quality research evidence that aligns with the methods and approaches used in the CU program. Previous CU evaluations have also been reviewed and add to the evidence base that underpins the CU program.



A program logic and theory of change model was developed to inform the evaluation framework underpinning the review of documents,



Review of CU evaluation reports and documentation to synthesize findings: A document review was designed to elicit and synthesise the main findings from individual state-level evidence (e.g. reports, strategic plans, photos, feedback data) provided by CU partners into a clear set of overall findings for the CU Australasia program (Mauritius was out-of-scope).



Piloting a centralised survey as proof of concept for CU partners around the benefits of collaboratively designing shared tools to reduce duplication of effort and standardise approaches to monitoring processes and outcomes, program wide. This survey informs the impact section of this independent evaluation with the most recent evidence of impact.

FOUNDATIONS

How is the CU program underpinned by evidence-based best practice?

To address this question, the ACER team reviewed current research literature to determine the extent to which the CU program is underpinned by evidence-based best practice. The team also reviewed previous evaluations, from both the Australasian and international contexts, to see the extent to which the program has implemented this practice.

Findings from a rapid review of systematic reviews

Children's University (CU) is a program designed to facilitate children's and young people's engagement in out-of-school learning enrichment activities. The program aims to expose students to educational experiences that may foster a love of learning and encourage them to aspire to university study. While open to children across communities, a primary aim is to include children who may not otherwise have access to rich out-of-school educational experiences or aspire to university study, due to their economic circumstances, geographic isolation, and/or absence of university-educated role-models.

A photograph showing three children, two boys and one girl, wearing white lab coats and safety goggles, working at a laboratory bench. They are using pipettes to transfer liquid into small containers. The background shows laboratory equipment and a red and white striped structure.

CU Te Mātāpuna Mātātahi Canterbury, New Zealand, 2023

Given these aims of the CU program, we conducted a rapid review of the literature to investigate whether out-of-school learning enrichment activities could effectively promote learning engagement, motivation, and further aspirations, especially for children facing one or more forms of disadvantage. To gain a rapid understanding of the field, we drew upon published systematic reviews that have already synthesised and summarised quality research evidence related to extra-curricular activity provision. Database search terms included 'systematic review extracurricular activities' as a base term, with variations including 'effects', 'importance', 'effects on students', 'impact', and 'benefits'. Any research that was not a systematic or rapid review of research on extra-curricular activities was excluded. Other exclusions included studies on 'extra-curricular' activities that were compulsory or delivered as part of the school curriculum (thus not matching the CU definition of extra-curricular as being voluntary and additional to the classroom curriculum). As systematic reviews are less frequent than individual research papers, any review within the last 20 years was considered, though most reviews identified were less than 10 years old.

Nine systematic reviews met the selection criteria and are summarised below, grouped by the effects of participation in:

- general extra-curricular activities,
- extra-curricular sport or physical activity, and
- extra-curricular arts.



The benefits of extra-curricular activities in general

Four systematic reviews related to the effects of students participating in extra-curricular activities in general. Metsäpelto and Pulkkinen (2014) found that primary school students' participation in before- and after-school activities was **related to higher academic attainments, lower social anxiety and depressive symptoms**; longer participation (two to three years) was associated with more positive outcomes.

In Shulruf's (2010) review, it was found that **most effect sizes on academic achievement were small**: although there were associations between participation in extra-curricular activities, causality could not be shown. Shulruf also notes methodological limitations in the reviewed research that may have impacted the meta-analysis.

Lewis (2004) reviewed six extra-curricular categories (sports, vocational, performing arts, pro-social, community-based, and general activities), and found that **different activities had different impact for school-age children**. For example, "General activities and pro-social activities had the most impact on academic achievement, while performing arts and pro-social activities... [had] the largest effect on identity and self-esteem related outcomes... [while] student workers had more negative outcomes than any other activity participants" (Lewis, 2004, pp. iii-iv).

The most recent review by Rahayu and Dong (2023) found that participation in extra-curricular activities has a **positive association with student character education** and that these two elements can be mutually reinforcing.

The benefits of extra-curricular sport or physical activity

Stalsberg and Pedersen (2010) sought to clarify whether there is indeed a relationship between socio-economic status and physical activity. They found that there is an association, and that adolescents with a higher SES are generally more physically active than those with a lower SES. However, findings were inconsistent, with 42% of studies reporting either the opposite or no effect. This review is important in that it **cautions against a single possible explanation for trends, given the complexity of the educational environment**. It does however, lend support to the CU intention in focusing its offerings toward children with lower SES backgrounds.

Eime et al. (2013) found that **participation in extra-curricular sport resulted in a variety of psychological and social benefits**, including improved self-esteem and social interaction, as well as fewer depressive symptoms. Bird and colleagues (2013) found that **participation in extra-curricular sport may lead to improved educational outcomes** for children and adolescents, particularly improvements in numeracy, and improvements across a range of learning outcomes for underachieving students.

The benefits of extra-curricular arts

Bungay and Vella-Burrows (2013) are careful to indicate the heterogeneity of the research reviewed and the consequent difficulty of synthesising the results. However, they state that there is some evidence that **participation in creative activities can have a positive effect on the health and wellbeing of children and young people**. This includes positive effects on behaviour, self-esteem, self-confidence, and physical activity.

Jindal-Snape and colleagues (Jindal-Snape et al., 2018) also note the significant variation in methodologies within the various papers reviewed but emphasise that there are clear academic benefits to participating in extra-curricular arts activities, including students having a more positive attitude towards their studies.

Key learnings from the rapid review

The conclusions drawn from nine systematic reviews indicate that the rationale and orientation of CU are firmly grounded in and substantiated by the existing broader research literature.

To summarise, studies on the effects of participation in extra-curricular activities in general found a range of benefits, including higher academic achievements, positive effects in the affective domain, including lower rates of negative social-emotional symptoms (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2014; Rahayu & Dong, 2023), even when effect sizes were small (Shulruf, 2010), and noting that particular types of activity may have greater effects than others (Lewis, 2004). Studies on sport-specific extra-curricular activities found that there may indeed be a gap between lower- and higher-SES students (Stalsberg & Pedersen, 2010) that needs addressing, and that sport-specific extra-curricular activities resulted in various social-emotional and learning benefits (Bird et al., 2013; Eime et al., 2013). Finally, studies on arts-specific extra-curricular activities also showed beneficial impacts in both the social-emotional and academic domains (Bungay & Vella-Burrows, 2013; Jindal-Snape et al., 2018).

The nature and design of Children's University is particularly tailored to providing opportunities for students to access extra-curricular activities, **with the aim that not only will the activity itself be enjoyable and educational, but also that some of these flow-on effects may eventuate**. CU activities are especially curated to be low- or no-cost, and locally situated, to be inclusive of children from low-SES backgrounds. Importantly, CU activities are voluntary so that students can select activities that match their interests and curiosities, and many of the activities are inclusive of CU participants' families, which **extends learning and sharing opportunities into a participant's immediate community**. For these reasons, it appears that CU program opportunities are clearly designed to replicate and build upon the benefits found in the extant research literature.



Findings from previous CU evaluations

Building upon the rapid review, a document review was also undertaken to synthesise and consolidate the main findings from previous evaluations of CU, drawing on international and local published and unpublished reports. From these evaluations, we investigated whether there was evidence that benefits from participating in extra-curricular activities was being replicated, as per that found in the systematic reviews.

A total of 15 documents were reviewed and findings extracted. Ten reports focused on CU outside Australasia and five were from within Australasia. The following summarises the main findings.

CU outside of Australasia

The earliest evaluations of CU were conducted by Professor Emeritus John MacBeath at the University of Cambridge. ACER had access to the last two evaluation reports (third and fourth reports: MacBeath, 2011; 2013); noting that these reports were cumulative and also considered data and findings from the first and second reports. These evaluation reports sought to determine the impact, if any, on students who participated in the Children's University program. The evaluations accessed school-attendance data and attainment data for 7-, 11-, and 14-year-olds between 2007 and 2011.

Questionnaire data and follow-up interview data were also collected in order to gauge impact in the affective domains.

Key findings include that **participation in CU significantly improves school attendance and achievement; in addition, attendance and achievement are correlated with the extent to which children engage with CU** (MacBeath, 2011). Positive outcomes were also found in the affective domain, including increased confidence, self-efficacy, and aspirations for the future (MacBeath, 2011). Findings from the third report were developed into the “10 ‘A’s” that were presented in the fourth report, which neatly summarised domains and mechanisms of CU impact, namely: Attendance, Attainment, Achievement, Attitudes, Adventure, Awards, Agency, Aspiration, Adaptability, and Advocacy.

Evaluations of CU participation and performance in Sheffield (UK) found **similar positive impacts on attendance and performance in maths, reading and writing assessments** (Hamshaw, 2015; 2019). These evaluations used school attendance and attainment data from 11- and 16-year-olds. Data was also analysed by indicators of disadvantage or income deprivation, as well as by special educational needs, and demonstrated the positive impact of Children's University participation across multiple demographics.

The University of the First Age (UFA) Young Researchers and Evaluators (YRE) group conducted a small-scale research project to evaluate the impact and efficacy of Children's University activities (UFA, 2017). This was done through administration of surveys by four separate YRE sub-groups. Survey question items addressed the affective and academic domains (asking CU participants how they feel about certain aspects of the program, and whether they have noticed a difference in their attitude or performance at school) and also asked how the program could be improved or extend its reach. Feedback received from the surveys was highly positive, indicating that **Children's University is achieving its intended goals**, particularly showing that CU is “...helping children to communicate, appreciate learning, and find new confidence” (UFA, 2017, p.14), as well as providing plenty of **constructive feedback related to current and future activities**.

An evaluation team from Durham University conducted a randomised-control efficacy trial between 2014 - 2016; intervention students came from schools who participated in CU. The impact of CU was evaluated via Key Stage 2 tests after one- or two-years' participation in CU (depending on whether the child began in Year 5 or Year 6). This evaluation found that **children in the CU schools made two additional months' progress in reading and maths** compared to children in control schools, **with some small additional gains in teamwork and responsibility**. However, these gains were not consistent when data was disaggregated by socio-economic status (Gorard et al., 2017).

One evaluation from outside the UK context investigated the reach and insights of participants in the Ankara Children's University program (Aral et al., 2022). This evaluation surveyed 1218 students and nine educators and had a particular focus on whether participation in CU had an effect on attitudes towards the science curriculum. **This evaluation found a close link between CU extra-curricular activities and children's attitudes towards science.** There were many suggestions for improving the CU offerings to align more closely with national science curriculum, differentiate for the range of needs and interests of CU participants, and to acknowledge that CU activities need to be different from the formal science classroom setting.

Finally, there are three annual reports commissioned by the Children's University Trust (Nolan & Howard, 2020; Nolan et al., 2021; Nolan et al., 2022) that provide evidence of impact and reach of Children's University within the broader context of extra-curricular activity provision and accessibility in the UK. **These reports concur that Children's University is achieving its intended goals** of providing easier access to a range of free or low-cost activities, and motivation for children to participate in activities. In addition, each report finds that **participation in CU has a positive impact** on attainment, skills development and affective attributes such as confidence and preparedness for new challenges.



CU within Australasia

A document review was undertaken to synthesise and consolidate the main findings from evaluations of CU in Australia and New Zealand. A total of five documents were reviewed and findings extracted. These included four formal evaluations and one case study, as detailed below.

The earliest evaluation in the Australasian context was the small-scale study of the pilot CU program at Mark Oliphant College in South Australia, conducted in late 2013 and early 2014. Main findings included positive outcomes for the participating primary-school students, **including increased attendance and punctuality, and a reduction in reported behavioural incidents** (CUA, 2014).

An evaluation of the Adelaide University CU program in SA schools was undertaken by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) commencing in 2015 (Harrison & Skujins, 2015; 2016). The focus of this evaluation was to assess the impact of the program in terms of student perceptions of education, aspirations, and attendance, and to understand program impact across different contexts to inform improvements. Data were collected through student, parent and teacher surveys, and analysis of system data. This evaluation found positive impact on students participating in the program, **including liking being at school more, higher-than-expected university aspirations and greater sense of self-efficacy in learning**. Parents and teachers involved in the program also agreed that Children's University was a positive and inclusive addition to their school. Potential challenges identified included the need to manage the rapid expansion of the program well.

A later evaluation of Children's University SA focused on the extent to which the program had achieved intended growth in the regional Upper Spencer Gulf, Murraylands and Riverland areas, and documented considerable growth in geographic reach and numbers of participating schools and students. Survey data suggested that a high proportion of participating regional students **found program activities enjoyable, tried new experiences, and intended to study at university. Participants also reported a positive impact on their willingness to try new things and the amount of study they engaged in at home** (Lovat & Darmawan, 2021).

An evaluation of the CU program at the University of Newcastle offered qualitative insights into the impact of the program via a series of stakeholder forums (Bourke et al., 2021). This evaluation focused on the role of CU in promoting social equity. It discussed how the program was valued in school communities and encouraged participants to expand their view of possible future pathways. Key learnings from this evaluation included the acknowledgement of the value of the program in **opening additional pathways for knowledge sharing and lifelong learning, and positioning relationships as a key component of learning**, while acknowledging the challenges of inclusionary and exclusionary learning contexts, as well as the realities of equity and privilege within a CU community (Bourke et al., 2021).

While not a direct evaluation of CU, a case study of schools implementing CU in Tasmania has also provided generic examples of the program achieving its goals, within the context of **enabling local children's access to Tasmanian tourist sites and facilities** (Ooi & Shelley, 2019). Findings from the case study describe how **resources created for tourism can also be deployed to support educational goals**, for example, "...rich and interesting learning content at tourism attractions can also be harnessed to create online learning opportunities. This is particularly relevant for regionally dispersed communities. Tourism assets can be crafted into mobile 'destinations' ..." (Ooi & Shelley, 2019, p.228).

In summary, the previous Australian and New Zealand evaluations indicate that CU benefits include:

- increased attendance and punctuality, and a reduction in reported behavioural incidents (CUA, 2014).
- students liking school more, higher-than-expected university aspirations and greater sense of self-efficacy in learning (Harrison & Skujins, 2015; 2016).
- increased willingness to try new experiences and to engage more in the amount of study students do at home (Lovat & Darmawan, 2021).
- opening additional pathways for knowledge sharing and lifelong learning, and positioning relationships as a key component of learning (Bourke et al., 2021).

A photograph of four children, three girls and one boy, dressed in black graduation gowns and caps with yellow stoles. They are all smiling and holding black passports that say 'children's university' and 'PASSPORT TO LEARNING'. The background shows a modern building with large windows and some green outdoor furniture.

University of Tasmania CU Graduation (Photo credit: Katri Strooband, *The Advocate*, 21 Nov 2023)

Summary of the review of literature

Within the existing evaluation reports, there is evidence that the CU program builds upon and replicates the findings from the systematic reviews. Namely, the extra-curricular learning and participation opportunities provide additional flow-on effects in the academic, school-attendance and affective domains. It is important to highlight the different effects found in different contexts - most notably the difference between evaluations carried out in the UK (positive impact on academic achievement and school-attendance) and in Australia and New Zealand (positive impact in the affective domain, e.g., confidence, motivation, self-efficacy and agency). These differences are a result of the data available for evaluation purposes: attendance and attainment data can be more easily tracked in the UK context, while the Australia-New Zealand evaluations have relied on self-report survey and interview data.

Moving forward, this highlights opportunities for future evaluations in terms of the data that could potentially be collected and used to assess program impact. Children's University also needs to consider, however, the potential impact of data collection itself. For example, the observer effect on any children being monitored, the complexity of a child's environment, and subsequent difficulty of relating any school-based outcomes to non-school-based activities. While any further evaluation or assessment will need to be carefully formulated in collaboration with CU, these are important elements to consider.



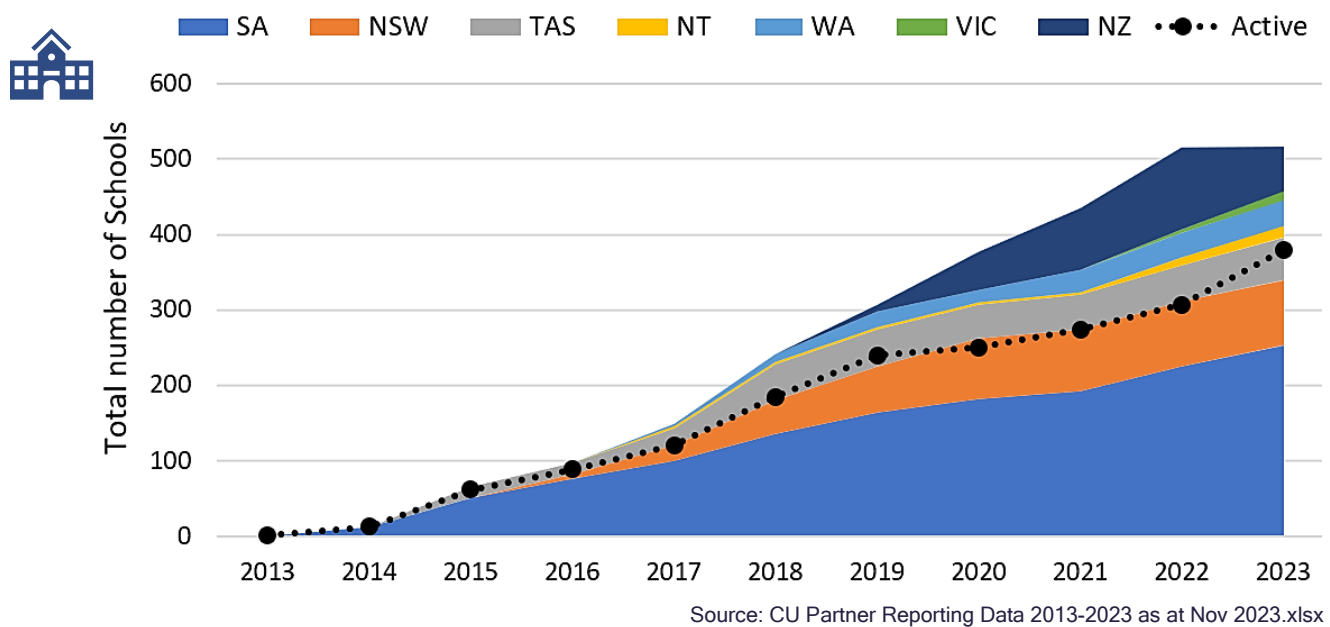
CU Graduation, Charles Darwin University, NT 2021

REACH

What is the reach of the CU program in Australia?

To understand the reach of CU across Australia and New Zealand we have drawn on multiple sources of evidence. The most definitive source is based on the list of schools on the CU Portal, managed and summarised each year since the first school in 2013 (see Figure 4). Amongst the 517 schools that have engaged at some point in time, 380 schools are current actively engaged with CU.

Figure 4. The growing number of all schools reached and active CU schools each year



In Australia, half the active CU schools are located in South Australia, reaching 1-in-5 schools, with similar school-reach achieved in Tasmania. In New Zealand, most CU schools are located in the South Island, reaching 7% of NZ schools (see Table 1).

Table 1. Reaching schools across Australia and New Zealand


CU schools	Australia: 327 schools						New Zealand: 53 schools	
	NSW	NT	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	North Island	South Island
	44	16	163	56	12	36	6	47
	13%	5%	50%	17%	4%	11%	11%	89%
% of Sector*	1%	8%	21%	20%	0.4%	3%	0.3%	7%

* Sector estimates based on ACARA [Australian School List 2023](#) and the Ministry's [NZ Directory 2023](#)

Reducing educational inequality

A longer-term impact of CU is to reduce educational inequity for young people, especially those from First Nations or Māori backgrounds, and those in regional or disadvantaged communities. In Australia, CU appears to be achieving this aim (see Table 2).

Table 2. Reaching students in vulnerable communities

	High proportions of (20% or more students)		Non-metro schools (Regional or Remote)		Socio-economic Disadvantage	
	AUS: First Nations	NZ Māori	AUS	NZ	AUS: below ICSEA 1000	NZ: above EQI 456
CU schools	56	26	150	8	145	25
Proportion of Members	17%	48%	46%	15%	56%	47%
Sector bias	4% ▲	-5% ▼	4% ▲	-12% ▼	11% ▲	-1%
% of Sector	5%	2%	9%	1%	4%	2%

Estimates based on [ACARA School Profiles 2022](#) and [NZ Equity Index Data 2023](#)

Compared to schools nationally, CU in Australia is reaching 4% more schools with high proportions of First Nations students or in regional or remote locations, and 11% more students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

In New Zealand, CU is equally reaching disadvantaged schools (defined as the EQI range mid-point above 456) and advantaged schools but tends to reach schools with lower proportions of Māori students located in metropolitan areas.



CU Holiday Program, Swinburne University, Victoria, 2023

When broadly asked in the 2023 Parent Survey about changes observed in students, a clear theme emerged that suggested CU was addressing inequity. As reflected in the following examples, parents of participating students explained the value of CU for their child who may experience challenges in accessing educational opportunities.



My child has a disability and this has provided a catalyst for him to engage with others and to engage in other activities in an attempt to broaden his interests. (SA parent)

CU offers my child a chance to see he can do anything he puts his mind to. No matter where he comes from or what his disability is. He knows he can achieve anything he wants with a little support and a lot of opportunity. (SA parent)

CU program is a very positive initiative since my children are participating they are getting more and more confidence. It gives a good engagement and more importantly coming from CALD community CU give my children sense of belonging. Because of participating in CU my children want to learn good things. Overall CU is positive point in my children new learning. (SA parent)

Has changed both my kids aged 12 & 8 confidence being from a remote community. (NSW parent)


Being new to the country we learnt a lot as a family including my four years old daughter. (SA parent)

She was able to be acknowledged for something related to learning endeavour which was a huge achievement for a child with additional learning needs. (SA parent)

Reaching students through the CU Portal

While not all CU partners use the Portal (<https://cuaportal.com>) to the same extent, there is clear evidence that students are logging onto their dashboard and submitting their CU activities. Since 2021, over 100,000 CU activities were submitted, with an average of 323 activities per school. The most active locations were schools in the South Island of New Zealand and schools in South Australia (see Table 3).
















Table 3. Volume of Activity submissions in the Portal (2021 - Nov.2023)

	Australia: 327 schools						New Zealand: 53 schools		Overall: 380 schools
	NSW	NT	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	North Island	South Island	
 Counts	2,634	2,011	55,618	4,453	2,004	6,425	1,146	37,122	111,413
School average	71	144	359	97	167	201	287	825	323

Source: 2021-2023 Submission export.xlsx

According to Portal analytics, the main landing pages (e.g. Activities, Search, Login, Profile, Learning Destinations) are accessed by the greatest number of users and have received almost 2 million views (as at November 2023). Once in the Portal, students select activities from the CU Online and Learning Destinations menus, with the option of key-word searching or filtering by: Topic, Near Me, Favorites, Categories or by Region. As examples, the top-10 Activities or Destinations viewed in the Portal are presented in Figure 5. Most of these are not location specific and touch on a broad range of topics (e.g. sport, cooking, science, music). Some, like the Adelaide Zoo, are tied to a physical destination or associated with a specific partner.

Figure 5. Top CU Online Activities and Learning Destinations visited in the Portal in 2023

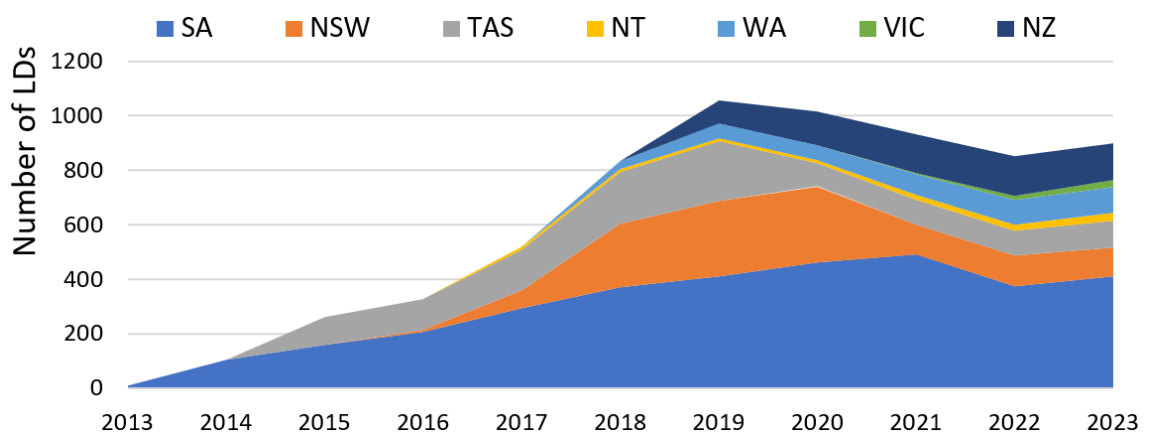
<div> <div>Search </div> <div>Near Me </div> <div>Favourites </div> <div>All Categories </div> <div>SA </div> </div>							
Visits	Users	Activity		Visits	Users	Activity	
	16198	5159	2023 Sport Reflection @Children's University		5304	2505	The Solar System @ CU Newcastle
	8074	1650	CU Australasia Visit Diary		4690	2138	What are you sniffing about @CUAA
	6653	2604	Cooking with Brett: Chocolate Chip Cookies		4529	1796	2023 Instrument Reflection @Children's University
	6582	2741	2023 Swimming Reflection @Children's University		4514	2118	Adelaide Zoo (Destination)
	5989	2254	Winter Activity Booklet - Glass Jar Science		4451	1797	2023 Generic Reflection @Children's University

Growth in Learning Destinations

Using administrative data from the partners and collated by CU, Figure 6 shows the growth in the number of learning destinations, from nine in 2013 to 900 in 2023, along with the joining of each new partner university. For most CU partners, the number of Learning Destinations increased from year to year. However, a clear feature of the profile is the dip in 2020-2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 6. Growth of CU Learning Destinations across Australia and New Zealand over time

LD's	SA	NSW	TAS	NT	WA	VIC	NZ	Total
In 2023	412	106	96	31	95	24	136	900



Source: CU Partner Reporting Data 2013-2023 as at Nov 2023.xlsx

TOP LEARNING DESTINATIONS IN EACH REGION



South
Australia

South
Australian
Museum



New
South
Wales

Activities
@
Blackbutt
Reserve



Tasmania

Queen
Victoria
Museum
and Art
Gallery



Northern
Territory

Territory
Wildlife
Park



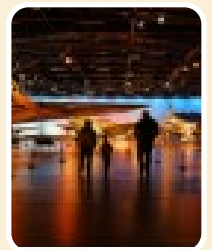
Western
Australia

AQWA -
The
Aquarium
of Western
Australia



Victoria

Sea Life
Melbourne
Aquarium



New
Zealand

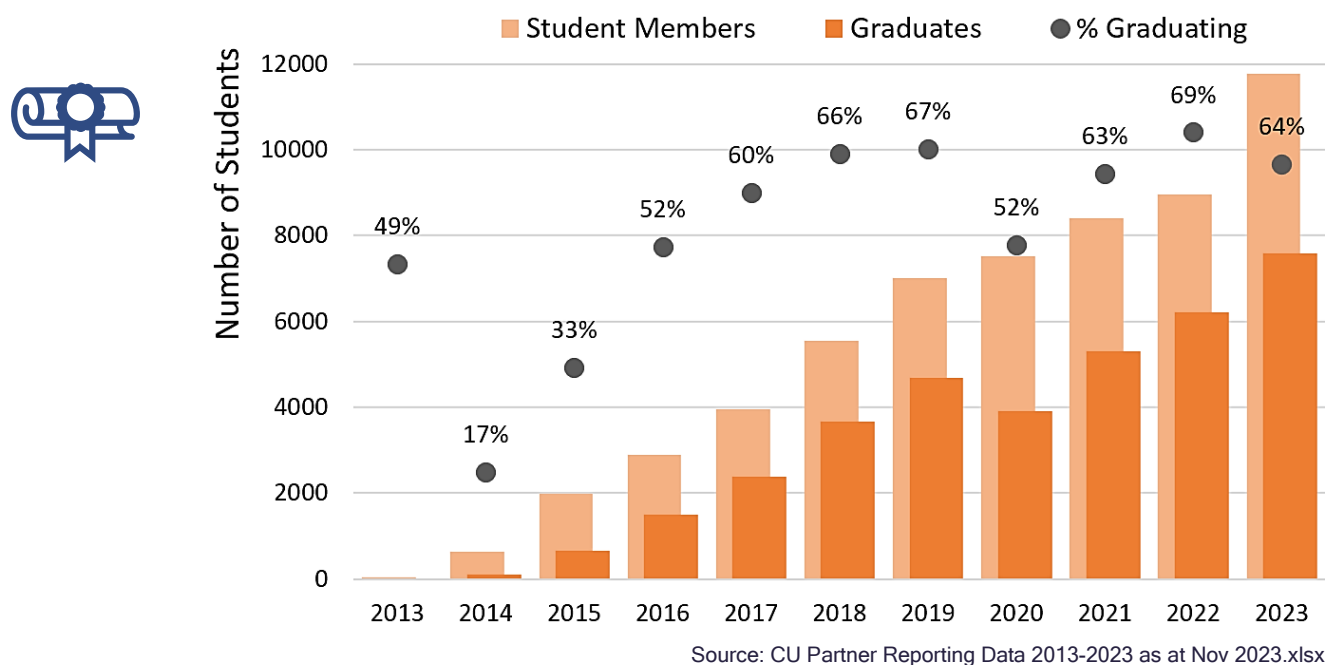
Air Force
Museum

Source data 2021: Full List - LD tab in Portal FULL month by month ONGOING_as at 30 November.xlsx

More students and more graduates

In lock-step with the increasing activities on offer, is growth in the number of members and graduating students (see Figure 7). Typically, around two-thirds of students participating in CU each year, graduate. For example, in 2023 approximately 11,770 students participated in CU across Australasia and of those, 8235 students graduated.

Figure 7. Growth of CU members in Australia and New Zealand over time



KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR CU

CUAA (2023) partners are guided by and regularly report to their board on six key performance indicators. Examples of how the key outcomes have been or are being achieved were summarised from the 2023 report, showing common and varied approaches across the partnerships.



Reaching into more communities

- Regional growth in all CU regional areas (SA)
- Develop partnerships to increase opportunity in under-represented areas (TAS, VIC, others)
- Increase the learning destination pool (NSW and others)
- Permanent staff appointments made to grow Children's University (NZ)
- Co-design at least one cultural activity experience this year (WA)



Including more children facing barriers to participation

- Continue increasing the total number of low SES/regional graduates (WA and others)
- Develop two learning activities that are specifically designed to support students with lower levels of literacy (NZ)
- Work with schools to identify particular cohorts (low ICSEA) who might be struggling to engage and creating opportunities for them (NT)
- Understand English is not the first language of all CU community members (NSW)
- Working with each school to target students most in need (VIC and others)



Financially sustainable into the future

- Ensure sustainable purchases are prioritised across all procurement spending (NSW)
- Identify priority funding opportunities e.g. through industry, government corporate and donors, and develop a robust funding and key stakeholder strategy to ensure proposal success (SA)
- Apply for funding (e.g. HEPP) to increase access to extra-curricular activities (TAS, NT, VIC)
- Approach a potential patron to enhance the profile of, and advocate for the program (NZ)



Child-centered and relevant in the international/political context

- Develop CU Coordinator survey to seek feedback from school stakeholders (SA)
- Adhere to university and national Data Privacy Policies (WA, others)
- Engage local councils and provide evidence of impact and alignment with council plans (NZ)
- Map CU outcomes to Federal and State Government strategy on extra-curricular education and skills training (SA, VIC)
- Radio interviews, media releases, CDU events (NT)
- Increase representation of diverse communities within the program (NSW)



Evidencing continued positive results

- Collect data sufficient to evidence that we are engaging and delivering outcomes for our priority cohorts, especially as needed for funding requirements (WA)
- Provide a representative to actively participate and support CUAA efforts to commission research to demonstrate program impact (NZ)
- Parent and Teacher surveys at end of each year and Student pre/post surveys (VIC, others)
- Understanding and identifying the various 'success markers' for a program like CU (NSW)



Greater awareness of our impact and potential

- Meet with University Marketing department and Alumni Office to discuss strategies to boost public awareness of the program (SA, WA)
- Continuation of longitudinal evaluation: Effects of Extra-Curricular Learning on Education, Aspirations and Attainment (TAS)
- Raising CU profile within the University by partnering with different areas for school holiday programs (VIC)
- Continue to invite prominent politicians and community members to attend our events (NT)
- Establish a Facebook presence for Children's University at Te Kunenga, and service this for kura, community and whānau (NZ)
- Promote volunteering opportunities to undergraduate students through attendance at events and improved communications (WA)



CU Te Mātāpuna Mātātahi | Canterbury 2023 event: students investigating eruptions

IMPACT

What does the available evidence indicate about the impact or potential impact of the CU program on student outcomes?

Our focus considers the evidence of impact on short-term student outcomes, as presented in the Theory of Change (see Figure 3). We reviewed and synthesised the array of available documents (e.g. reports, strategic plans, photos, feedback data) provided by CU partners. As part of this evidence were parent comments about how CU has changed anything for their child (e.g. changes in confidence, desire to learn, engagement at school, wanting to try new things). Using the available evidence, triangulated with parent comments, the key findings that are broadly applicable to CU in Australia and New Zealand are presented here. Findings are organised according to the intended short-term student outcomes.

- Adaptability to learn in different environments
- Attitudes towards learning
- Self-assurance, confidence and wellbeing
- Sense of self-empowerment and agency
- Aspiration to further education and career pathways
- Academic achievement



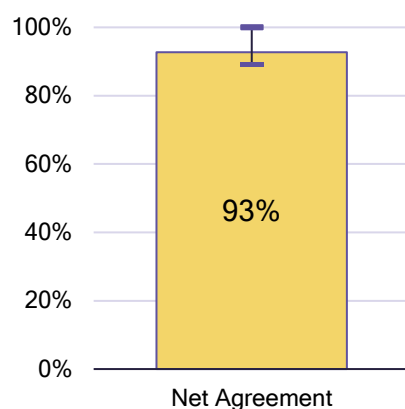
CU Adelaide Community event, University of Adelaide, SA 2023

Adaptability to learn in different environments

Previous Survey Evidence: Based on survey responses from parents whose children were commencing with CU at University of Western Australia (Appendix A), discovering new interests, trying new experiences and visiting new places was the outcome parents most hoped their children would obtain through participation in CU.

The 2023 Parent Survey conducted across Children's University partner universities found that on average, 93% of parents believed that CU had allowed their child to experience new and exciting things. Figure 8 also shows the range across partner locations, with further details in Appendix B.

Figure 8. Parents (n=782) who agree or strongly agree that *My child has experienced new and exciting things through CU* (including an indication of the range across partners)



Has being in CU changed anything for your child?



It has broadened my child's world by introducing her to new places and ideas. It has increased her sense of wonder and led her to explore new things.
(SA parent)

The variety offered through CU means that my child is now very open to learning and experiencing new learning activities. (VIC Parent)

My children are fairly academic anyway but certainly the activities broadened their horizons from just reading to doing. (WA Parent)

A better understanding of learning opportunities outside of structured institutions.
(SA parent)

He's more open to trying something even if he initially might not be interested in it. (NT parent)

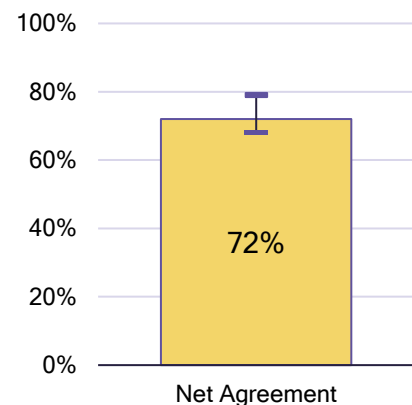
CU has given my child an opportunity to learn about subjects that may not be available in a formal school setting and at a level and pace that they are comfortable with. (WA parent)

Attitudes towards learning

Previous Survey Evidence: Students' attitudes to learning were strongly improved through participation in Children's University according to parents and students surveyed. Most parents surveyed at the point of graduation across many Children's University programs across Australasia felt their child's attitude to learning had changed for the better since joining Children's University (n=131) (Appendix A). A survey conducted by Edith Cowan University Children's University found 81% of parents (n=32) and all School Coordinators (n=10) believed the students' attitudes to learning had improved since starting Children's University (Appendix A). Children participating in school holiday programs through University of Western Australia and Edith Cowan University reported the activities had shown them how fun learning can be (82-96% across holiday programs, n=215 Appendix A). Parents mostly agreed that the school holiday programs had nurtured their child's passion for learning (87-88%) and supported them to think about things in different ways (89-90%) (n=120 Appendix A).

The 2023 Parent Survey conducted across Children's University partner universities found that 72% of parents, on average, believed their child had been more motivated to learn since joining CU. Figure 9 also shows the range across partner locations, with further details in Appendix B.

Figure 9. Parents (n=600) who agree or strongly agree that
My child is more motivated to learn since joining CU
(including an indication of the range across partners)



Has being in CU changed anything for your child?



Greater desire to learn and engage. (SA parent)

Eager to learn new things and try new experience. (SA parent)

My son is typically happy to cruise and do the bare minimum requirements for tasks at school. With CU he set himself a goal and was motivated to reach it. He did the tasks with enthusiasm and mostly tried his best. (New Zealand parent)

He has been inspired to follow his passion for science and technology. (VIC parent)

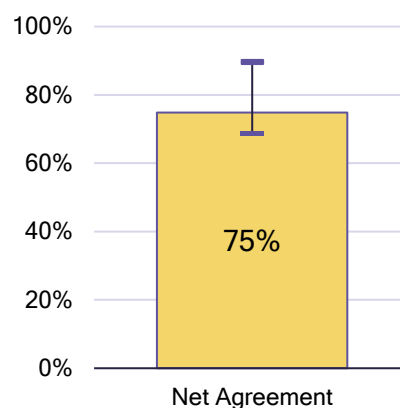
Wants to try everything!! (SA parent)

Self-assurance, confidence and wellbeing

Previous Survey Evidence: Across Australasian partners, parents reported that Children's University had increased their child's self-confidence (70-84%, surveys A & H in Appendix A: n=163).

The 2023 Parent Survey conducted across Children's University partner universities found that three-quarters of parents, on average, believed their child had become a more confident learner since joining CU. Figure 10 also shows the range across locations, with further details in Appendix B.

Figure 10. Parents (n=641) who agree or strongly agree that *My child has become a more confident learner since joining CU* (including an indication of the range across partners)



Has being in CU changed anything for your child?



She has become more confident and eager to learn more about her world. (WA parent)

More confidence and self-belief. (New Zealand parent)

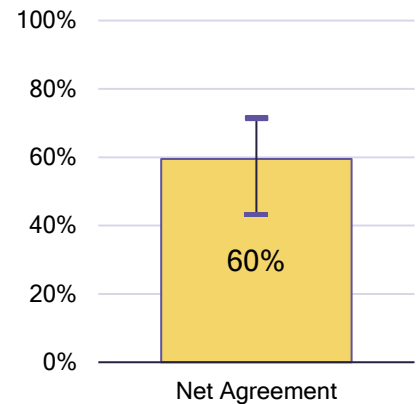
She has wanted to try new things and has gained confidence within herself. (SA parent)

CU offers my child a chance to see he can do anything he puts his mind to. No matter where he comes from or what his disability is. He knows he can achieve anything he wants with a little support and a lot of opportunity. (SA parent)

Sense of self-empowerment and agency

The 2023 Parent Survey conducted across Children's University partner universities found that 60% of parents across locations believed their child had become more independent since joining CU. Figure 11 shows a wider variation across partner locations (also see Appendix B).

Figure 11. Parents (n=501) who agree or strongly agree that
My child has become more independent since joining CU
(including an indication of the range across partners)



Has being in CU changed anything for your child?



Yes, they have actively sought out activities to do and become very independent and active learners. (SA parent)

Eager to learn willing to stick to a task and complete. (NSW parent)

Motivated to self-direct their learning. (SA parent)

My child has the confidence to learn and do study by himself. (NT parent)

More independence and initiative. (SA parent)

It has taught my child how to set learning goals and achieve them. Giving a great sense of pride and confidence. (SA parent)

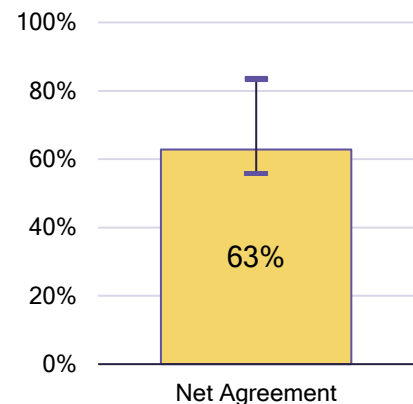
Aspiration to further education and career pathways

Inspires students to achieve more and gives them a sense of what they might achieve in later life. David Sadler, Deputy Vice Chancellor, UWA (Sadler, 2021)

Previous Survey Evidence: Across surveys collected by University of Western Australia and Edith Cowan University, 67-94% of students reported being more eager to go to university due to Children's University (n=215), with 75-89% of parents believing the program/activity had encouraged their child to attend university (n=175) (Appendix A).

The 2023 Parent Survey conducted across Children's University partner universities found that two-thirds of parents across locations believed their child is more likely to pursue further education at university, TAFE/VET or other post-secondary education institutions because of their time with CU. Figure 12 shows a wider variation across partner locations (also see Appendix B).

Figure 12. Parents (n=524) who agree or strongly agree that *My child is more likely to pursue further education at university, TAFE/VET or other post-secondary education institution because of their time with CU* (including an indication of the range across partners)



Has being in CU changed anything for your child?



Awareness of academic world and opportunities. (New Zealand parent)

Her passion for learning has increased. Keen for uni now. (NSW parent)

Increased desire for further education beyond high school. (SA parent)

Sparked a conversation about adult university and what kinds of careers need a degree. (NT parent)

Now interested in potentially uni after being exposed to the buildings and grounds. A real hands-on experience was beneficial, opposed to hearing a story about uni. (WA parent)

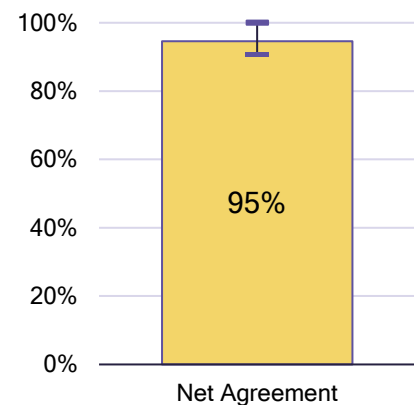
Academic achievement

One of the least-evidenced outcomes was indication of impact on student academic achievement. This needs to be considered, however, in the context that CU Australasia does not currently collect school-based student achievement or attendance data for its participants. Tangential and anecdotal evidence indicates that CU is supporting student learning outcomes in the following ways.

- According to Dr Shelley at the University of Tasmania, "We're starting to see its influence on NAPLAN on reading and numeracy outcomes. The more extracurricular experiences a child is having, we see those benefits flow back into the classroom" (Shelley, quoted in Flint, 2023).
- Evaluation reports from CU in England (Gorard et al., 2017; Hamshaw, 2015, 2019; MacBeath, 2011, 2013) indicate that participation in CU has a positive effect on both academic outcomes and school attendance. These findings are a quality indicator for the CU program in general.

The 2023 Parent Survey conducted across Children's University partner universities found that almost all parents believed their child had learned new things while participating in CU activities. Figure 13 also shows the range across partner locations, with further details in Appendix B.

Figure 13. Parents (n=792) who agree or strongly agree that *My child has learned new things while participating in CU activities* (including an indication of the range across partners)



Has being in CU changed anything for your child?



Ambitious to achieve. (New Zealand parent)

My child since doing CU has excelled in her learning at school in every subject. She had gotten straight A's throughout each term and I am a very proud father. (SA parent)

My son is starting to engage more at his school and becoming more confident with what he wants to pursue after school has finished. (SA parent)

OVERALL VIEWS ABOUT CU

Previous Survey Evidence: Surveyed parents and children were very positive in rating their experiences with Children's University activities and overall experiences. More than 3 in 4 parents described the University of Western Australia's 2022 School Holiday program as "Outstanding" (n=62) and all but one of the 71 students surveyed said they hoped to attend future CU holiday workshops (Appendix A). Swinburne University got similarly positive feedback regarding their Holiday programs, with all students giving 4 or 5 out of 5 stars when asked whether they'd had fun (n=78) (Appendix A).

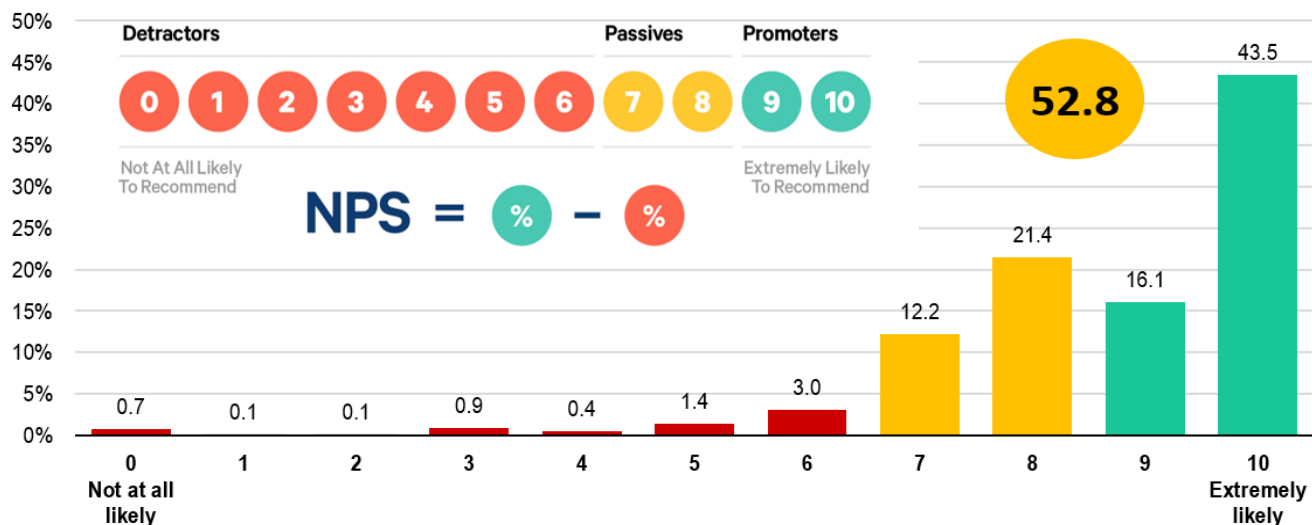
Parents (n=32) and children (n=21) engaged with CU through Edith Cowan University were asked which aspects of CU make it a unique and valuable education program (Appendix A). Parents and children both reported "Offering my child a wide range of learning activities" as the most valuable aspect (Appendix A). Children also highly valued visiting community learning destinations and getting to choose their learning activities (Appendix A). Parents similarly valued visiting learning destinations and their child's ability to choose their learning activities, but also valued the opportunity for families to learn together (Appendix A).

When asked in 2022 whether they would recommend CU to others, at least 70% of parents across multiple partner universities would do so (n=131, Appendix A). University of Western Australia and Edith Cowan University holiday programs were all strongly recommended, with more than 90% of children and parents intending to recommend the CU experiences to others (n=359, Appendix A).



The 2023 Parent Survey conducted across CU partner universities had 695 parents respond to the question “How likely are you to recommend the CU program to other families?” (Figure 14, Appendix B for further details). Responses provided on an 11-point scale were used to calculate a Net Promoter Score (NPS). Overall, parents provided a NPS of 52.8, which consisted of 93% of parents rating 7 or above for their likelihood to recommend the CU program to other families. Scores above 50 are considered excellent (Perceptiv, 2022).

Figure 14. Parents' rating on the question *How likely are you to recommend the Children's University program to other families?* and corresponding Net Promoter Score



Has being in CU changed anything for your child?



The changes in my child are remarkable. Due to peer pressure it was not “cool” to achieve. Since joining the children’s university program he has learned to be proud of his achievements hold his head up high and strive for more. He now aims to do his best in every area of life from academic achievements to sporting prowess and even money management at this young age. I definitely think CU has set his feet on the path towards future academic success at the highest possible level. Thank you for this program and long may it be funded. A proud and appreciative parent. (SA parent)

My child has been learning so many new things and this opportunity has been developed my child to grow into a new person. I am so grateful that the children university exist and it’s one of the best things ever happened in Darwin NT. I congratulated everyone that participated and involved in this program. Well done. Such a fantastic project. (NT parent)

My child has gained a love of online researching and self-driven learning. At age 6 this is an excellent quality to have and further develop throughout her schooling. Her confidence and willingness to venture into new place and try new experiences has grown enormously through the CU experience. I greatly appreciate having access to a massive library of activities to share with her. (SA parent)

And finally, there was also evidence that for some students, their engagement with CU continued long past graduating and into young adulthood, captured in the following photos and comments provided by CU Adelaide.



'Without CU, I wouldn't have had the confidence to put myself out there and apply.' **Dua Anees, second year Nursing student**



As a kid, I had no idea about university. I had no idea what it was. I'd never really been into Adelaide because I lived so far north that coming into town was a once in a year thing to do shopping.... Coming to Adelaide Uni felt like coming home".
Sarah Meyer, majoring in Microbiology

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY DATA PROVIDED BY AUSTRALASIAN CU PARTNERS

Seeking feedback is a commonplace practice across the CU partners, with various surveys being independently run in recent years. As part of the review of existing evidence, ACER reviewed feedback data from 13 surveys provided by individual CU partners. See Table 4 for the list of surveys (and ID). While relevant findings have been included in the main body of the independent evaluation, this section provides a summary of the review and other selected findings.

Table 4. Surveys reviewed and included in this evaluation

Region	Form ID and Survey name	Year	Respondents
SA, WA, VIC, NZ North, NT	A. Children's University Australasian Graduation Quiz 2022	2022	131 Parents attending graduation
VIC	B. School Holiday program	2023	78 Children
WA (UWA)	C. 2021 Parent Pre-Survey	2021	75 Parents with children about to commence
	D. 2022 Parent Pre-Survey	2022	98 Parents with children about to commence
	E. Albany Holiday Program Survey	2023	31 Children and 10 Parents
	F. Crawley Holiday Program Survey	2023	45 Children and 23 Parents
WA (ECU)	G. School Holiday Program Survey	2022	62 Parents and 71 Children
	H. ECU Survey 2022	2022	32 Parents, 10 Educators and 21 Children
	I. ECU April School Holiday Program Survey	2023	33 Parents and 40 Children
	J. ECU July School Holiday Program Survey	2023	25 Parents and 28 Children
NZ South	K. Children's University Tamariki Campus Event Feedback	2021	135 Children
	L. Campus Experience Children's Survey	2023	255 Children
	M. Campus Experience Teacher Feedback	2023	13 Teachers

The reviewed surveys

- **Children's University Australasian Graduation Quiz 2022 (A):** A survey collected across partners in 2022, with most responses from South Australia provides useful information across partners. A total of 131 parents responded to this survey.
- **Surveys from VIC** included children's feedback about the School Holiday Program 2023 (B).
- **Surveys from WA** include the UWA Albany Holiday Program Survey (E), UWA Crawley Holiday Program Survey (F), ECU School Holiday Program Survey 2022 (G), ECU Survey 2022 (H), ECU April School Holiday Program Survey 2023 (I), ECU July School Holiday Program Survey 2023 (J), 2021 Parent Pre-Survey (C), and the 2022 Parent Pre-Survey (D). The Western Australian Children's University program has collected the most data across children and parents that was able to be analysed. This includes surveys prior to participating in Children's University, surveys seeking feedback on specific programs offered (e.g., school holiday programs), and surveys reflecting broadly on Children's University.
- **Surveys from NZ** include the Campus Experience Children's Survey 2023 (L), the Campus Experience Teacher Feedback 2023 (M), and the Children's University Tamariki Campus Event Feedback 2021 (K). The New Zealand South Island Children's University program collected surveys that provide rich data regarding program outcomes. However, the questions are particularly tailored to contextual features (e.g., feedback on specific activities). Responses were also typically collected as free text rather than selected responses, which are more labour intensive to analyse and require strong contextual understanding to meaningfully interpret. As such, these surveys evidence high quality monitoring practices that would inform program delivery but are less suitable for evaluation analysis.

Selected findings

- **Parents' hopes from the program:** University of Western Australia conducted surveys with parents before they commenced in the CU program in 2021 and 2022 (C & D: n=172 parents). When asked what parents most hoped their child would get out of CU, the top answer was "Discover new interests, try new experiences and visit new places". Gaining more self-confidence in learning and learning about future possibilities including university and careers were also commonly endorsed. Improving student grades and connection to school were low priorities for parents.

- **Overall ratings and recommending the program:** Surveyed parents and children were very positive in rating their experiences with CU activities and overall. More than 3 in 4 parents described the University of Western Australia's 2022 School Holiday program (G) as "Outstanding" and all but one of the 71 students surveyed said they hoped to attend future CU holiday workshops. Swinburne University received similarly positive feedback regarding their Holiday programs (B), with all students giving 4 or 5 out of 5 stars when asked whether they'd had fun (n=78).

Parents (n=32) and children (n=21) engaged with CU through Edith Cowan University (H) were asked which aspects of CU make it a unique and valuable education program. Parents and children both reported, "Offering my child a wide range of learning activities" as the most valuable aspect. Children also highly valued visiting community learning destinations and getting to choose their learning activities. Parents similarly valued visiting learning destinations and their child's ability to choose their learning activities, but also valued the opportunity for families to learn together.

When asked whether they would recommend CU to others, at least 70% of parents across multiple partner universities would do so (A: n=131). University of Western Australia and Edith Cowan University holiday programs were all strongly recommended, with more than 90% of children and parents intending to recommend the experiences to others (E,F,G,I,J: n=359).

- **Evidence supporting the theory of change:** Students' attitudes to learning were strongly improved through participation in CU according to parents and students surveyed. Most parents surveyed at the point of graduation for many CU programs across Australasia felt their child's **attitude to learning** had changed for the better since joining CU (A: n=131). A survey conducted by Edith Cowan University found 81% of parents (H: n=32) and all School Coordinators (H: n=10) believed the students' attitudes to learning had improved since starting CU. Children participating in school holiday programs in Western Australia reported the activities had shown them how fun learning can be (82-96%, E,F,G,I,J: n=215).

Parents mostly agreed that the school holiday programs had nurtured their child's **passion for learning** (87-88%) and supported them to think about things in different ways (89-90%) (n=120). Parents reported that Children's University had increased their **child's self-confidence** (70-84%, A & H: n=163).

Across surveys collected in Western Australia, 67-94% of students reported being more eager **to go to university** due to CU (n=215), with 75-89% of parents believing the program/activity had encouraged their child to **attend university** (E,F,G,I,J: n=175).

APPENDIX B: ACER-SUPPORTED CHILDREN'S UNIVERSITY PARENT SURVEY 2023

About the survey

As part of the responsive and flexible approach to the project, CU Head Office (Adelaide) and ACER led the co-design of a new feedback survey for parents and caregivers to be administered by CU partners and completed at or just after the end-of-year graduation ceremonies. It was used to inform this independent evaluation but to also pilot the centralisation and standardisation of quality monitoring across the partnership. Partner organisations were invited to contribute additional items; and most partners contributed (see Table 5). Each partner was provided with secure, live access to a summary report of the core and optional items, filtered and locked to partner-specific data.

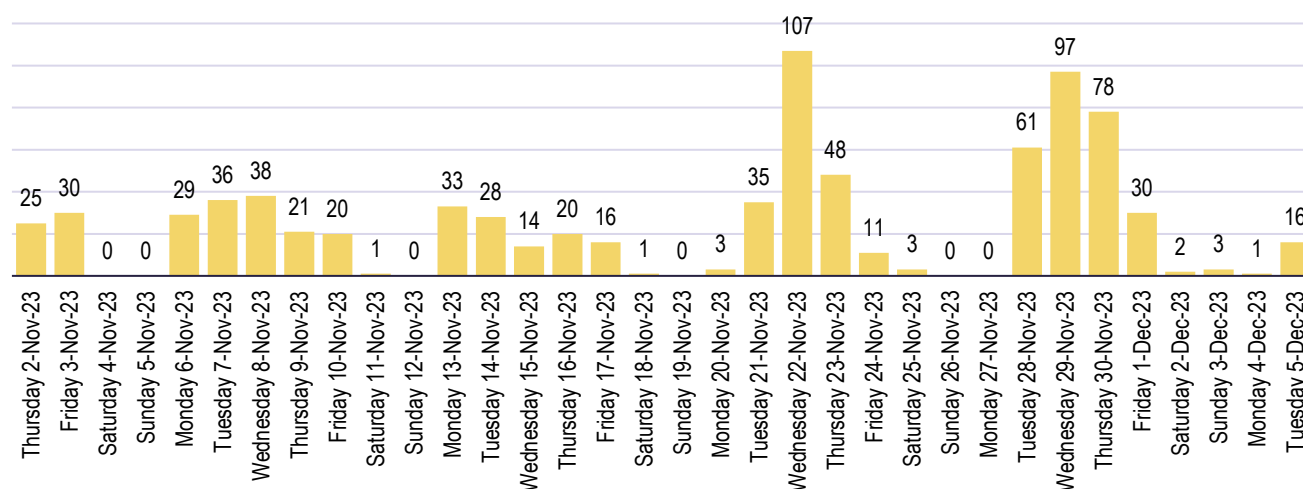
Table 5. Customisation of the Parent Survey and reporting for each partner

Parent Survey items (core items shaded)	NZ North	NZ South	NSW	VIC	Others Core
Where did your child participate in Childrens University (CU)?	Hide/show logic and Filter question				
How long has your child been participating in CU?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Do you plan on enrolling your child for CU next year?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Which kinds of learning experiences did your child participate in this year?		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
What have been the greatest barriers to learning hours?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Are the hours awarded suitable for the Learning Destination or activity?		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
What areas or topics do you think are missing from the CU program?		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
My child has become a more confident learner since joining CU	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
My child is more motivated to learn since joining CU	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
My child has experienced new and exciting things through CU	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
My child has become more independent since joining CU	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
My child has learned new things while participating in CU activities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
My child is more likely to pursue further education at university, TAFE/VET or other post-secondary education institution because of their time with CU	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
When at home, my child talks about CU				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
How likely are you to recommend the Children's University program to other families?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Has being in CU changed anything for your child (e.g. changes in confidence, desire to learn, engagement at school, wanting to try new things)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
As a family, how was your experience with CU this year?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
What does the graduation day and the on-campus experience days mean for your family?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
How can we improve the Children's University program to better support your child's learning?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

The Pilot

The survey was piloted on the morning of the 2 November 2023 in time for the first graduation ceremonies. Figure 15 shows the number of responses received each day, clearly reflecting that ceremonies occurred each weekday.

Figure 15. Responses to the Parent Survey administered at the end of each Graduation Ceremony



Apart from the University of Tasmania, all partners used the survey, reflected in the number of responses received from parents attending the graduation events shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Where did your child participate in Children's University?

Region	Parents	% of Total	CU partner graduation calendar
South Australia	317	36.9 %	CU Adelaide: 2 to 16 November
New Zealand (South)	254	29.6 %	CU Canterbury/Lincoln: 21 to 30 November, 1 December
New South Wales	147	17.1 %	CU Newcastle: 20 to 30 November (not Fridays)
Western Australia	49	5.7 %	CU Edith Cowan: 28 & 29 November; CU Western Australia: 23 & 28 November, 4 & 5 December
Victoria	48	5.6 %	CU Swinburne: 29 & 30 November
Northern Territory	37	4.3 %	CU Charles Dawin: 1, 13 & 14 of November
New Zealand (North)	6	0.7 %	CU Massey: 23 November
Tasmania	0	0%	CU Tasmania: 14, 15, 21, 22 & 30 November

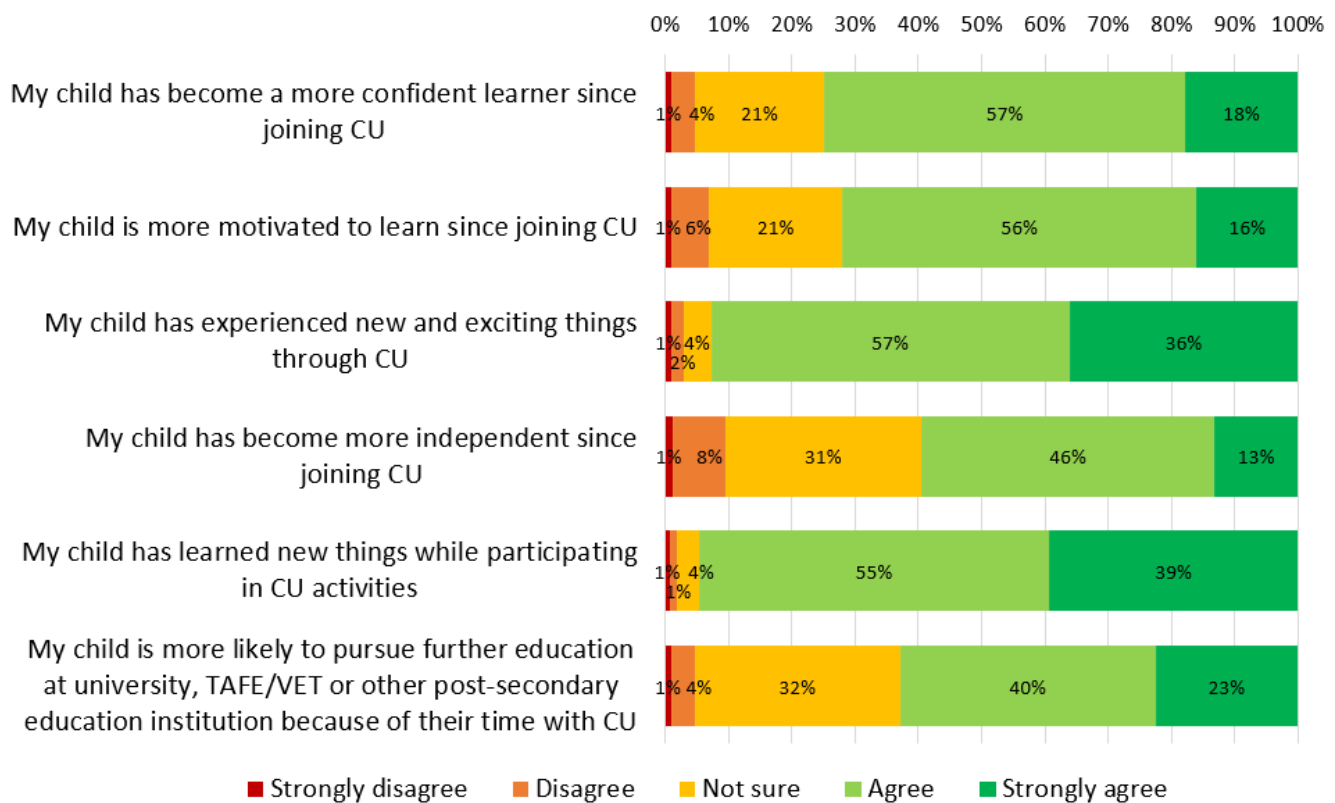
Results

The following section presents additional results from the parent survey core items.

Table 7. How long has your child been participating in CU? (n = 846 parents)

Levels	Counts	% of Total
One year	517	61.1 %
Two years	213	25.2 %
Three years	69	8.2 %
Four or more years	47	5.6 %

Figure 16. Parent feedback following a 2023 graduation ceremony in Australia or New Zealand (n = 858 parents)



Interpreting the Net promoter Score (NPS)

Net promoter score (NPS) is a widely used market research metric that is based on a single survey question asking respondents to rate the likelihood that they would recommend a product to a colleague (Reichheld, 2003). The NPS is typically used as an indicator of customer loyalty.

In this independent evaluation, NPS-type items were used, typically rated on a scale of Not at all likely (0) to Extremely likely (10). Scores were calculated in Excel SPSS or Jamovi, according to:

NPS = Promoters (9,10) - Detractors (0 to 6); where Passives (7,8) are not used in the calculation.

The NPS result for CU in each region, reported by parents in response to the question, “How likely are you to recommend the Children's University program to other families?”, are presented Table 8.

Table 8. Net Promoter Score for each participating region

Region (n)	NPS	Interpretation
New South Wales (80)	65.0	Excellent
Northern Territory (31)	48.4	Great
South Australia (286)	45.1	Great
Victoria (45)	48.9	Great
Western Australia (43)	58.1	Excellent
New Zealand (241)	57.7	Excellent
Overall (695)	52.8	Excellent

There are various guidelines for interpreting an NPS. Raileanu (2023) suggests interpreting NPS cut points above 30 as “great”, and above 50 as “excellent”. Another general interpretation attributed to the creators of the NPS (Bains & Co) by Perceptive (2022) and Qualtrics (2023), has been adopted for this independent evaluation and indicates that:

- Above 0 is good,
- Above 20 is favourable or great,
- Above 50 is excellent, and
- Above 80 is world-class and users are likely generating a lot of positive word-of-mouth.



For comparison, Australian industry benchmarks in 2022 Perceptive's report (Perceptive, 2022) reported a NPS of:

- 21 for the education sector
- 43 for the Not-For-Profit sector

