

# POSITIVE: THE IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION IN SUMMER UNIVERSITIES

## Author's Executive Summary

The report author believes that this study has clearly demonstrated that the types of Summer Education offered by the organizations in this study offer immediate positive personal and social benefits to those young people who take part.

They are offered opportunities to engage in quality informal education on topics determined by them, learning in styles that motivate and encourage study amongst young people who otherwise state that they do not enjoy learning. They are also offered a range of opportunities to learn more about themselves, mix with others from different cultural backgrounds and address wider issues concerning their communities. Summer Universities also offer a range of opportunities for greater community participation by young people.

### This directly leads to:

#### i. Increased enjoyment of learning

#### ii. Increased confidence and self-esteem

#### iii. Improved social skills including mixing with young people from different backgrounds, which expands their horizons and encourages them to engage with their community.

#### iv. Involvement with the wider community on different levels (Progression)

1. Young people who are quite shy and **lacking in confidence** report that Summer University helps them out with their confidence and that they form and keep new friendships
2. **A chance to develop interpersonal skills** was highlighted as a key incentive for attending Summer University in individual interviews and focus group discussions. Young people also felt that they would gain more confidence from the experience overall and particularly in mixing with new young people from diverse backgrounds.
3. **Opportunities for getting involved more in the community** is another key feature of Summer Universities. Not just during that summer through the different courses on offer; but through the community and year-round networks that summer universities have. Young people reported not knowing or not being interested in 'community opportunities' before participating at Summer University. Students reported that attending Summer University had increased their sense of being involved with the community and that this had increased their opportunities to mix with young people from different backgrounds.
4. **Peer involvement** helps to make Summer Universities run successful programmes and enable young people to take on roles of responsibility they might not otherwise get. **Progression** onto other opportunities often comes from the good range of local or regional networks Summer Universities operate in.

5. The vast majority fear that there will be **negative consequences** if there is no provision like Summer University, including a rise in anti-social and illegal behaviour. **(37%)** think they would have stayed at home watching TV and **(24%)** doing nothing. The young people we spoke to were quite clear in their minds that the impact locally would be adverse on young people and the wider community. Although there is no hard evidence to support this and as long as funding is made available for summer projects through Connexions partnerships, PAYP, youth justice boards etc it is likely that if summer university provision disappeared, a similar alternative would fill the gap. Although most young people said they feared a rise in anti-social behaviour, there was no evidence to suggest that this cohort of students would be directly involved in anti-social behaviour. The closest correlation we could make would be that **24%** of the respondents felt that they would do nothing or be on the street and therefore might be susceptible to low levels of anti-social behaviour. This could be offset by the **40%** who said they would find something different to do. Students accessing summer university are on the whole motivated and determined to 'do something'
  
6. Summer Education is not engaging **NEET** young people and those who are most likely to be involved in anti-social behaviour. **83% of the students reported that they were doing well or very well at school.** HSU has to date not received any funding through the PAYP funding stream; although there is some partnership working with local YOT teams this is not as concerted as you might expect if a service is aiming to engage NEET students. Although Summer Universities appear to be recruiting the majority of their students from those already doing well and feeling confident there is some evidence from the research to suggest that classes do work with mixed ability students, recruiting a smaller amount from those who have low confidence and skills, see **Appendix 12**
  
7. The young people that were interviewed think very highly of the summer provision they attended. They valued the fact that it **was free, fun (77%), informative (86%), had peer involvement, 'was not like school'**, opened up new possibilities and opportunities leading to self-development **(67%)** helped them mix with young people from different backgrounds **(69%)** and the independent learning helped them improve academically **(48%)**
  
8. Some young people see Summer University as a chance to get away from what they perceive as a ghetto locally, which is shaped by poverty, poor housing, but mainly **'stupid boys in gangs'** who are dragging their area down. These young people see attending as one way to temporarily remove themselves from this to **strive to achieve something different.** Both HSU and THSU draw young people from different neighbourhoods into 'central locations'. These young people may only travel one mile, but it gets them out of 'their manor' mixing with young people from a different 'manor'. Previous evaluation from HSU (2000) showed that students preferred one main 'campus' and rejected ideas to place 'courses' out on their own estates (as pushed for by youth workers)
  
9. The impact attending Summer University has on a young person's **attitude to and attainment in learning** has been harder to determine.

# Recommendations

1. Fund-holders should continue to support Summer Universities where they exist because of the positive personal and social impacts described above. Where they do not exist, those responsible for Extended Schools and informal community education should learn from the methods which produce these benefits
2. Summer Universities are not reaching out to the most disengaged or NEET. They need to consider two options:
  - i. Work more closely and strategically with local YOT, PAYP, DAT and detached youth-work teams and make some amendments to programme content and consider utilizing their peer teams to identify and reach out to the hardest to reach.
  - ii. Stop claiming this as one of their central goals and focus on 'mainstream' provision of informal education highlighting their successes around peer involvement (including progression), community involvement, addressing community cohesion, offering taster-courses and developing citizens and adults that communities can be proud of.
3. SEuk should secure funding to commission further research on the impact participating in summer education has on attitude to and attainment in formal learning.

## Young Peoples' supporting statements

*“It's very good at building confidence... a chance to mix with new people”*

*“HSU ain't really helped me do better at school. The only thing it has really done is helped boost my confidence in my inner self”*

(HSU)

*“Taking part in courses helps [you] with career choices and improve on [your] subject areas”*

(HSU)

*“They can become more confident individuals”*

*“More determined”*

*“Will be able to mix with older people.....a range of different people”*

*“They will be able to teach other things they have learnt”*

(THSU)

*“It will broaden their horizons and allow them to explore”*

(LSU)

*“Perhaps more likely to attend school”*

*“Doing a subject you haven't done before, then you may be interested in continuing the subject”*

*“It gives young people [an] incentive to take on [that] subject”*

(WSU)

***“Young people are the ones running HSU”***

(HSU)

***“Summer University makes disabled people, in our opinion, feel more confident and independent”***

(THSU)

***“Since attending HSU I have gained more confidence and communication with other people, the reason why is because it was a friendly atmosphere and I was surrounded by my peers”***

(HSU)

***“If you mix with people of different cultures you make friends”***

(LSU)

***“You are influenced to interact with other young people on the courses you take part in”***

(HSU)

***“Independence, more control over themselves and they have better self esteem”***

(THSU)