



## Evaluation Reports 2007 – 2009

### Summary of Findings

### Research Objectives

The Research Centre for Learning and Teaching at Newcastle University were commissioned by the Helen Hamlyn Trust in September 2006 to conduct a formative evaluation of the *Open Futures* project. Since then, under the auspices of Professor David Leat, they have produced five six-monthly Evaluation Reports, which have been instrumental in helping to inform the ongoing development and national dissemination of the project.

The core aims of the research process were to provide an ongoing assessment of:

1. The different forms of impact of *Open Futures* on pupil ability, well-being and development
2. The perceived value and effectiveness of the core deliverables of the programme itself
3. The impact of *Open Futures* on head teachers and their schools, including curriculum development
4. The ability of *Open Futures* to deliver against key national agendas and recommendations

This report seeks to give an overview of the findings from within these five evaluation reports.

### Project Background

*Open Futures* is a skills and enquiry based education initiative for primary schools initiated, directed and funded by the Helen Hamlyn Trust. Its purpose is to encourage children to “learn through doing and making” and so discover and develop practical skills, personal interests and values, which will contribute to their education and stay with them throughout their adult lives.

*Open Futures* began as a pilot project in 10 schools along the south coast in 2005, and is now running in 64 primary schools across the UK. This includes a partnership pilot with Wakefield Local Authority.

The Trust has brought together a number of highly respected organisations and individuals to work in partnership with schools in order to deliver training across four specific strands that enables children to:

- Make choices and effective decisions (*askit*, supported by SAPERE)
- Grow their own fruit and vegetables (*growit*, supported by the Royal Horticultural Society)
- Cook for themselves (*cookit*, supported by Focus on Food)
- Work with new media to produce images and share ideas with others (*filmit* supported by a range of independent advisers)

Following four years of evaluation, the Trust has recently decided to launch the programme nationally.



## Research Methodology

The evaluation team has worked closely with all the schools involved with the programme across. This has been done in a variety of ways, generating both quantitative and qualitative data, including:

- in-school visits: interviewing a range of head teachers, teachers, teaching assistants, governors and volunteers involved in the programme as well as the children themselves
- twilight (after school) evaluation sessions to encourage and inform schools how to generate their own evaluations, particularly for use amongst parents and children, as well as to receive feedback on how *Open Futures* was developing and impacting the curriculum
- stakeholder questionnaires sent to schools for completion by all adults who were some way involved in *Open Futures*
- attendance at a range of *Open Futures* related meetings, training events and conferences
- discussions with *Open Futures* partners and trainers
- Analysis of schools' documentation related to *Open Futures*, including curriculum plans, head teachers' reports to governors and school self evaluations

## Summary of Key Findings

Evaluations by teachers, parents, children and support officers have been consistently very positive, confirming that the programme provides an experiential curriculum with tangible end products that have meaning for pupils and enable the school to explore a skills and enquiry based curriculum. In particular:

1. *Open Futures* activities are seen by adults and children alike as being highly enjoyable, providing a long list of benefits such as improved knowledge, understanding and skills, improved relationships, improved confidence and motivation, and improved behaviour.

Ongoing evaluation of *Open Futures* has found a consistently positive response from pupils are, relating to both “affective” and “practical” outcomes. An analysis of responses shows that adults tend to focus more on the former, whilst children focus more on the latter. The programme has also been seen to provide an excellent foundation for schools to develop home-school and community links, both of which have indirect impact on the pupils.

2. The *Open Futures* ‘package’ of training and resources have proved very effective, with teachers placing great value on both across all the strands, and evaluating them all highly.

The evaluations have shown that the training and resource package has been highly effective and efficient in getting teachers and TAs started. Where staff lack expertise, these training and resources have provided a very structured model of practical activity which helps build teacher confidence. The model also assists the development of whole school implementation plans.

3. *Open Futures* is seen as a flexible curriculum development model that allows for individual interpretation and ownership by each school, meaning that any changes made are likely to last longer and generate a wider range of outcome gains.

This stands in contrast to more prescriptive models, which have been proven not to last even when they generate short term gains in test scores. The evaluation also highlights the potential for *Open Futures* in general and enquiry based learning in particular, built on the foundations of Philosophy for Children, to underpin a social and emotional curriculum and citizenship education.

4. *Open Futures* provides considerable synergy with a wide range of government initiatives, and delivers against the core recommendations of the two recent high profile Primary Reviews – the Rose Review and the Cambridge Primary Review.



*Open Futures* is considered to be a timely initiative that addresses many government policy priorities, particularly those represented by the Every Child Matters agenda. It also delivers against a substantial number of the recommendations made by the two Primary Reviews.

## Evaluation of Core Aims

### I. Assessment of Impact on Children

*Open Futures* sets out to provide a different learning experience compared to mainstream schooling. . The most obvious difference is in content as gardening, cooking, film-making and philosophy, are not necessarily included in the primary curriculum. In addition, many adults involved with *Open Futures* have stressed that the activities also foster a learning experience where children are more personally engaged, pupils work co-operatively and apprenticeship is the dominant mode of learning.

Research has consistently shown that the primary impact of *Open Futures* on pupils is in the affective domain, for example in increased enjoyment, self esteem and motivation levels. The great majority of pupils enjoy *Open Futures* enormously, with the activities generating increased confidence, collaboration and better relationships between pupils, and instigating more productive and exploratory talk. Adult respondents also reveal a general perception that *Open Futures* affects the pupils very positively, with most adults reporting that pupils have responded ‘very well’ to the activities. Their comments also show that they agree that *Open Futures* is developing specific knowledge and skills, particularly social skills. The extraordinarily wide range of positive outcomes detailed by adults indicates that the strands represent a very rich learning experience for pupils.

*‘From sessions come back enthusiastic and talking about what they have been doing. (They are) proud of their work and achievements.’*

*‘The hands on/real life approach ‘hooks’ young children.’*

*‘The children are excited about their learning which impacts positively on attendance and motivation. Children are often seen covered in mud, gardening in the rain and yet still smiling.’*

#### a) Development of Skills and Knowledge

Both the *cookit* and *growit* strands and, to a lesser extent *filmit*, aim to develop specific skills and knowledge. Interviews conducted in 2007 and 2008 show that specific skills are learned through each strand.

Interestingly, the October 2008 evaluation found that within both the skills and knowledge categories, children tend to recognise specific, rather than, general skills and knowledge. This was seen in the children’s comments relating to cooking, gardening and filming. Adults on the other hand tend to refer to general, more education-related, skills and knowledge. The evaluation therefore concluded that children are more inclined than adults to interpret their learning in terms of gaining specific skills and knowledge, and to value *Open Futures* for this opportunity.

The research conducted in 2007 amongst *Open Futures* partners and parents also shows that both groups agree that children are learning about growing vegetables, preparing food and eating healthily. For instance, a gardening co-ordinator at one school commented that:

*‘99% have learnt the vegetable names and try things. They have a list of ingredients and find a recipe on the web.’*

This is mirrored by other evaluations detailed in the October 2008 report, which show that pupils were able to respond appropriately to ‘A healthy diet is one that includes...’ and ‘In the garden we are growing...’. When Y3 pupils were asked to name fruit and vegetables, all of them could name at least four, with most able to name between eight and ten. The report therefore concluded that the *Cook It* and *growit* strands are indeed developing relevant knowledge.



Interestingly, there is also evidence in the same October 2008 report from some schools that science understanding in relation to living organisms has improved through the *growit* strand. Not only have the teachers commented on the children's classroom understanding but school test scores show them doing significantly better on this topic than students in previous years who did not experience *Open Futures* activities. In one of the schools concerned, a teacher made related points about how *growit* was providing an authentic, practical context for the more abstract scientific ideas that she was trying to convey in her lessons. She talked about drawing on practical understanding and experiential knowledge when teaching science, and also mentioned how the more abstract scientific knowledge could enhance the *growit* experience.

### **b) Motivation and Enjoyability**

Children's enjoyment of the *Open Futures* activities has been emphasised consistently by the majority of adults involved with the programme, and direct responses from pupils generally confirm this impression. In all the interviews conducted this is a central feature, with a typical head teacher response to children's experience being: 'The enjoyment. They adore doing it!'

*Open Futures* sessions are described as 'more fun' than ordinary lessons. Generally speaking older pupils experience the difference between *Open Futures* and core subjects most starkly, but in all the interviews conducted there is a strong emphasis on pure enjoyment.

The evaluations do indicate that a small percentage of pupils, predominantly girls, do not enjoy gardening as they do not seem to like getting dirty or doing physical work and can sometimes feel cold. It must be noted, however, that it is this outdoor aspect of *growit* that many children particularly do enjoy. Lots of the comments on the questionnaires mentioned liking the opportunity to get outside and their enjoyment of interacting with the natural world.

### **c) Wellbeing**

Well-being is fast becoming an important concept in the language associated with Every Child Matters (ECM). This is partly due to the fact that it will feature in the Ofsted process and also partly due to the fact that the UK compares very unfavourably to our European neighbours on well-being measures. Evaluation reports have provided consistent evidence from schools of the value of *Open Futures* in addressing various dimensions of wellbeing – such as health, relationships, bullying, behaviour, self esteem and community relationships.

The May 09 evaluation reported that children with low levels of language skills, either with English as a first or a second language are encouraged to learn by *Open Futures* activities, and their achievement enables them to be more positive about school.

*'It helps children access things in a very practical way and rather than looking at reading comprehension and hammering away at those basics ... Cutting an apple and slicing it and learning how to put it into a base, they can look and see and understand with having the vocabulary. A lot of our children have very low levels in terms of language, social skills; it breaks down barriers for them.'*

Cooking and gardening are often described as meeting an important inner need for children:

*'They are desperate to cook, to be outdoors gardening and whatever it is that needs doing outdoors.'*

The May 2009 evaluation concluded that social and emotional benefits are therefore apparent, as well as growth in practical and cognitive skills.

*'Working outdoors can be therapeutic for many children with emotional difficulties and stress in their lives.'*



#### d) Behaviour

Both the questionnaire responses and comments made during meetings by teachers show that many teachers feel that *Open Futures* is affecting how the children involved behave in school.

According to the October 2007 evaluation there are numerous anecdotes about disaffected children, whose motivation and general behaviour has improved by taking part in *Open Futures* activities, especially gardening. Teaching staff also report that *askit* has a positive impact on communication in the classroom, improving speaking and, importantly, listening skills.

This is backed up by the May 09 evaluation, which cited particular benefits for children who, for a range of reasons, have been struggling with school.

*‘Open Futures is something that could be very important in that as it could potentially provide stability for the children who are very troubled.’*

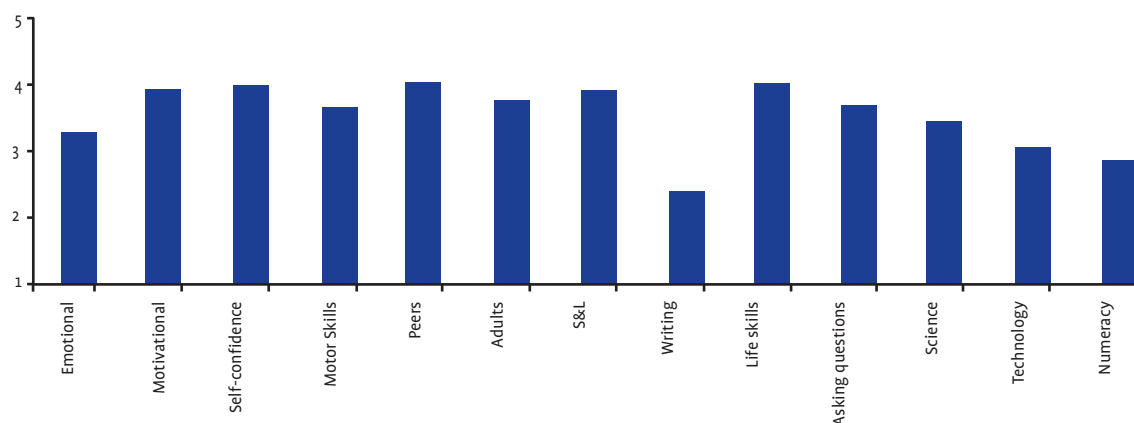
A positive impact on behaviour is also noted by several heads later on in the report:

‘It gives children the chance to be experts in areas that they wouldn’t otherwise do so. We had a challenging group of boys but they would love to dig and cut the grass – they became experts and their self esteem changed considerably and they were recognised as experts by other pupils in the class.’

#### Comparisons of impact

In September 2009 the adult participants in schools were asked to judge the level of impact of *Open Futures* on 13 outcomes, derived mainly from previous analyses. Their judgements were made on a 5 point scale (1=no impact; 2=little impact; 3=moderate impact; 4=strong impact; 5=very strong impact). The chart below shows the mean responses for the 13 headings

In line with previous reports the highest ratings are given to peer relationships, life skills, self confidence and motivation (soft skills) – and to speaking and listening (s & l) which has not been asked about specifically before. Subject learning generally comes out lower – with science highest (between moderate and strong), followed by technology, numeracy and writing (close to little impact). This is a further indication of the way that *Open Futures* appeals to primary teachers’ (and TAs’) concern for the development of the whole child.





## II Assessment of Project Delivery

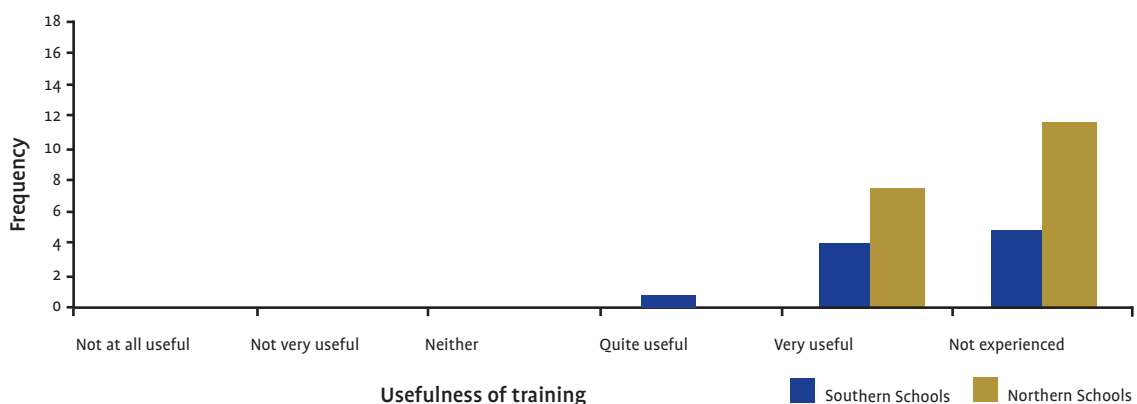
There is a consistent pattern across the evaluation reports of the favourable rating of the training ‘package’ (i.e. initial training, resources, support visits) evidenced from interviews, meetings and questionnaires. Schools have also welcomed the introduction of the *Open Futures* handbook.

In particular, many schools have found the training resources helpfully prescriptive. The evaluations have noted that where teachers lack expertise they want a very structured model of action. This is because many teachers and teaching assistants have lacked confidence in their growing and cooking skills and the ‘package’ has been both effective and efficient in getting them started. Beyond a certain threshold, however, they are comfortable to experiment. In areas that have a stronger similarity to existing classroom practice the need for detailed support is lessened.

### a) Training

The reports on training, which is designed to be ‘front loaded’ after which contact with the partner organisation becomes less frequent, have been very positive across all evaluations.

As can be seen below, all the May 2007 questionnaire respondents who had been to the training from both the north and south rated it as ‘useful’ and all but one rated it as ‘very useful’.



This external support offered to *Open Futures* schools through expert training is particularly applauded in the 2009 head teacher interviews:

*‘The support that we’ve had from the partners has been second to none’ (Wakefield); ‘I would say that we’ve had excellent support from really knowledgeable people, encouragement and advice from them.’*

The trainers themselves are spoken of as extended members of the school, and their expertise is fundamental to both the launch of *Open Futures* and building it to sustainability:

*‘The relationship that they’ve built up with the people who come into school (the experts) is fantastic. There’s a good communication through e-mail and general chat.’*



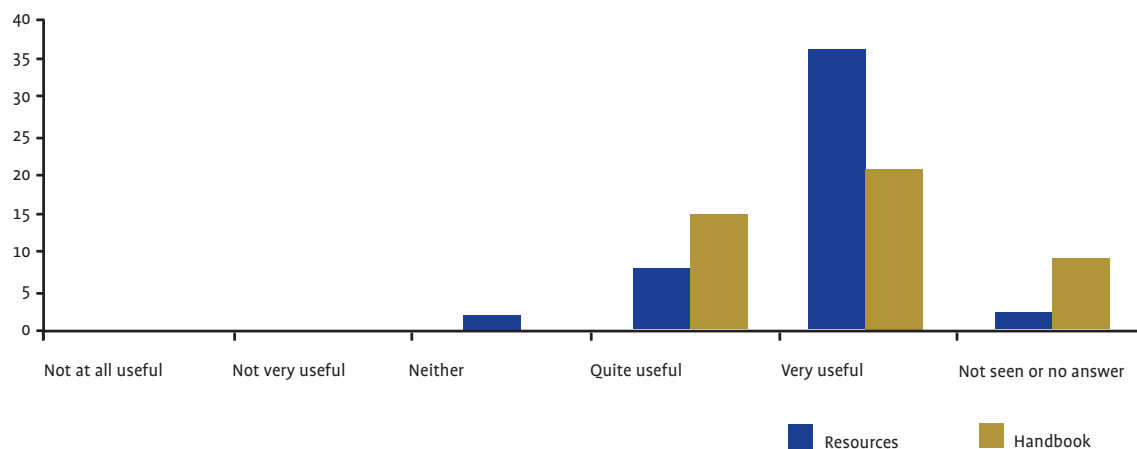
## b) Tools and Resources (there is additional data from the associate schools (south) and partnership schools to round this out)

The resources provided by the partners have been well received in all the schools concerned.

All the partners have provided resources to schools. *growit* has typically offered child-sized tools, Wellington boots and seeds, Cook It has provided the 'Cook Box' (a high quality collection of cooking equipment and tableware), *askit* has provided a box of story books suitable for stimulating questions and Filmit has helped provide digital cameras. Some partners have also facilitated the provision of further resources.

Nearly all respondents to the May 2007 questionnaire had experience of the resources, which indicates their utility. Similarly in May 2008, few adults had not used the resources (3 out of 25), again confirming their utility. Just over 75% of the May 2008 questionnaire respondents (18 out of 25) rated them as very useful, among them all the head teachers who responded. During the school visits in the same year staff were extremely positive about the resources, for example commenting that this is a 'vital' part of the project, with the better quality gardening equipment being an improvement on the 'bits and bobs' they already possessed.

These results were further confirmed by the May 2009 questionnaire, which asked about the usefulness of the *Open Futures* resources and the new *Open Futures* handbook. As the following chart shows, most of the respondents were aware of both the resources and the handbook, generally finding them either 'quite useful' or 'very useful'.



## c) Partner Visits to Schools

Questionnaires from across the evaluation period have consistently shown that the vast majority of those who experienced partner visits rated them as 'very useful'. Most respondents also found the frequency of visits to be 'about right'. In particular, comments concerning the visits from head teachers are very positive, particularly in regard to the Grow It support visits.

It is of note that the October 2007 evaluation concluded that:

*'One of the most intractable issues in dissemination is that of specialist support visits. Schools have been very clear that the model of supportive/training visits has been invaluable. It is very doubtful that more than a handful of schools would have achieved the same level of growing, cooking, philosophy and filming activity if it had not been for the visits. There are a number of reasons for this, which include the highly developed skills of the staff and the nudge that the visits provide to teachers in terms of making practical progress.'*

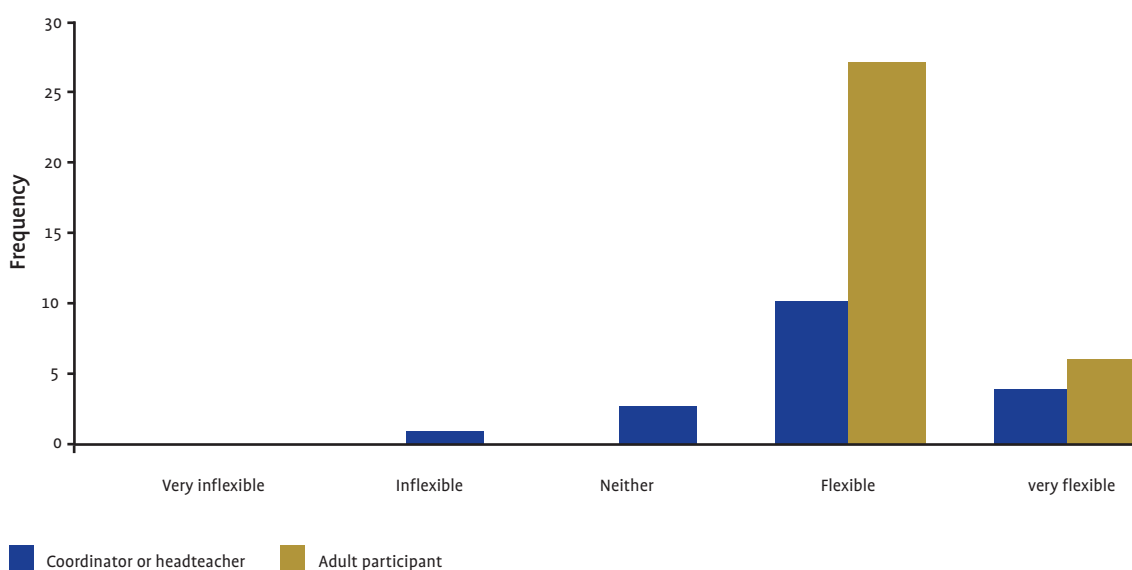




### III Assessment of Impact on In-school Practice

#### a) Flexibility

In autumn 2009 the associate schools in the south and new schools in Wakefield were asked to evaluate the flexibility of Open Futures. The results are important and confirm the previous conclusions that schools adapt the strands to their circumstances and perceived needs, and construct their own version of Open Futures. This is illustrated in the data from the same questionnaire which shows a wide variation in terms of which year groups receive which strands in each school. Open Futures is very flexible.



#### b) Leadership and the Role of the Head teacher

A key factor in the models is the inter-relationship of the roles of head teacher, co-ordinating teacher and teaching assistant (TA). As detailed in the May 09 evaluation, *Open Futures* offers an excellent example of distributed leadership: a head or deputy is likely to have overall responsibility for the project, but the strand leaders may come from any part of the school staff, and their expertise and enthusiasm enables others to accept their leadership.

As noted in the May 08 evaluation, *Open Futures* resonates strongly with the essential values of most head teachers, particularly in a period of decentralization of the curriculum. Many have commented how it helps turn their values into practice, whilst others talk about how *Open Futures* generates pupil responses that coincide with these selfsame values – education of the whole child, social interaction, motivation, relevance and practical outcomes.

The May 2009 evaluation focused in-depth on the issue of leadership, noting that: ‘school leadership is a critical issue in *Open Futures* both in terms of strategic vision, and practical and financial planning. There are a significant number of schools where leadership of *Open Futures* is extremely good and the curriculum is increasingly integrated, creative and focused on high level skills.’ Clearly the qualities of the head teacher and her/his wider team are therefore one of the most important factors in explaining the long-term impact of *Open Futures*.

The May 2009 evaluation thus concluded that *Open Futures* offers senior leaders the possibility of a strategic framework to achieve their vision. In particular it noted that involvement in an externally funded project gives the head teachers ‘permission’ to adopt this strategy and ‘badge it’ as something of significance.





A further consistent picture across all the evaluations is that of the role offered through *Open Futures* to teaching and support assistants, which has more often than not helped to change their status in the school. Below are some quotes from May 2009 research interviews:

*‘Some of my teaching assistants are taking a lead on the OF strands and that’s been very good for their CPD. It has boosted their self esteem as well. That has helped break down barriers between teachers and teaching assistants.’*

*‘Before, they [TAs] were at the periphery of the staff and now right there almost at the heart of it.’*

*‘For the support staff, there’s been a huge boost to their self-esteem. They’ve been leading sessions, not just with the children, but with staff.’*

These comments are backed up by others made during the previous 2007 and 2008 school visits, when heads and teachers at a number of schools talked about the importance of encouraging the appropriate TAs to take on particular *Open Futures* strands. However the May 08 evaluation noted that whilst in some schools the TAs concentrate on the practical tasks, in others they seem to be more involved in planning. Co-ordinated planning between the TAs and class teachers is vital as it ensures coherence between practical activities and curriculum planning.

#### **c) Curriculum Planning and Development**

From the start of the evaluation period it has been clear that whilst each of the strands are well received, there is very considerable variation in the way in which *Open Futures* is interpreted – every school approaches it differently. Each school with its own history, resources, intake, staffing and concerns has constructed its own ‘individual’ version of *Open Futures*. There is therefore no blueprint for what *Open Futures* looks like in any particular school. As such, *Open Futures* is best regarded as a set of very powerful tools and resources for schools.

The May 2008 evaluation confirms that *Open Futures* is undeniably attractive to teachers and head teachers alike, but it also notes that schools are inundated with projects. The report therefore stressed the importance of conveying that *Open Futures* is more substantial than just a ‘project’, and is in fact something that affects the whole curriculum.

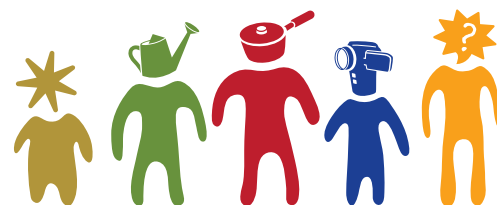
The May 2009 evaluation highlights the fact that schools that engage with *Open Futures* are increasingly seeking ways of developing a skills and enquiry based curriculum. It explains that the four strands of *Open Futures* offer a strong role for enquiry in a skills-based, hands-on curriculum. However schools vary in their capacity to do this effectively and collaborative professional development will be important in strengthening curriculum planning.

#### **d) Embedding the Curriculum**

One particular aspect of sustainability of *Open Futures* is the extent to which it becomes part of the established curriculum within schools. The evaluations stress that if it remains a ‘bolt on’, no matter how enjoyable, it is vulnerable to changes in staffing and school budget crises.

Research has identified a range of models through which *Open Futures* is being linked to the rest of the curriculum. For example:

1. One school has recorded the monthly activities in their raised beds and identified all the links to other subjects in those activities, so that weekly ‘growit’ work leads to many other activities, giving them some anchorage in pupil experience and practical activity.
2. Another school has dedicated ‘growit/cookit’ days for the whole school once every term.
3. At least two schools are seeking to give each year group a plot of ground for growing.
4. Nearly half the schools have expressed an interest in refocusing their curriculum on skills and/or competences and a few have made moves in this direction.



In all the schools visited some or all of the four strands were separately timetabled, although in schools newer to the project, they were available only to some of the year groups. However, for many schools that were four years into the project, the whole-school benefit of *Open Futures* was apparent – the project was at the heart of the curriculum development, underpinning it both in ethos and in practice.

The evaluation highlights the fact that the majority of head teachers state that *Open Futures* has exceeded their expectations. Many have been attracted by the fact that the strands map well onto existing curricular developments and their primary education values. The report states: ‘as the strands unfold and connect and they see the evidence of the pupils’ response so the head teachers begin to appreciate that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.’

#### **IV Assessment against National Agendas**

The evaluations have all stressed how important it is for schools to address their external national agendas through the agency of *Open Futures*. Although it is aimed at closing the gap between values and practice, it must also therefore be shown to work on statutory expectations.

The evaluations detail how the Primary Curriculum Reviews and Every Child Matters (ECM) offer strong encouragement to *Open Futures*. This is particularly marked in the case of the Cambridge Primary Review with its emphasis on oracy, curriculum breadth, enquiry, wellbeing, engagement, empowerment, sustainability, personal development and the importance of values. More broadly the focus on process, local curriculum and a growing concern for the all-round well-being of pupils, rather than a narrow focus on test scores, also plays well for *Open Futures*.

##### **a) Every Child Matters**

Every Child Matters is one of the key drivers for children’s services, which was first announced in September 2003. The Government’s aim is for every child, whatever their background or their circumstances, to have the support they need to:

1. Be healthy – enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle;
2. Stay safe – being protected from harm and neglect;
3. Enjoy and achieve – getting the most out of life and developing the skills for adulthood;
4. Make a positive contribution – being involved with the community and society and not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour;
5. Achieve economic well-being – not being prevented by economic disadvantage from achieving their full potential in life.

Schools are encouraged to support the principle of personalisation by offering a range of extended services that help pupils engage and achieve, building stronger relationships with parents and the wider community and contributing to wider well-being.

The May 2007 evaluation concluded that there was a strong case to show that *Open Futures* can help substantiate bullets (i), (iii) and (iv). Whilst many schools are part of the Healthy Schools initiative, fewer involve their pupils in actually growing vegetables. Research has shown that the Free Fruit scheme does not result in longer term inclusion of more fruit in children’s diets. However, growing fruit and vegetables, and cooking, may well do so. Further, the evaluation commented that the potential contribution of *Open Futures* to mental health should not be missed, as there were also indications of the impact on affect and self-concept. The report also added that the wide range of skills and outcomes that *Open Futures* generates could also help children with the preparation for adulthood, although the activities would need to be sustained through secondary school.



### **b) The Rose Review**

The Rose Review was published in Apr 09 and sought to address two central questions:

Amongst its many recommendations the following relate closely to *Open Futures*:

- a) provide a stronger focus on curriculum progression.
- b) strengthen the teaching and learning of information and communication technology to enable pupils to be independent and confident users of technology by the end of primary education.
- c) provide a greater emphasis on personal development through a more integrated and simpler framework for schools.

Of particular relevance is the section on ‘Understanding physical development, health and wellbeing’ which includes the following text:

Learning in this area should include an appropriate balance of focused subject teaching and well-planned opportunities to use, apply and develop knowledge and skills across the whole curriculum.

#### **Curriculum aims**

This area of learning contributes to the curriculum aims for all young people to become:

1. Successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve
2. Confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives
3. Responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.

The May 2009 evaluation confirms: “Such ambitions map well generally onto the aims of *Open Futures*, but particular strands deliver some aspects very precisely, such as *Cook It* in relation to nutrition, *growit* in relation to enjoyable physical activity and *askit* in relation to responsibilities and understanding of right and wrong”.

### **c) The Cambridge Primary Review**

According to many commentators, the Cambridge Primary Review (CPR) is more independent (it is funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation) and well researched than the Rose Review. It is particularly fierce in its criticisms of the current curriculum and its assessment framework. A number of review groups fed into the main report, and so as such, it has a stronger evidence base than the Rose Review. Whilst its short term political leverage is perhaps not as strong, many believe it will have greater long term impact as it starts to affect policy thinking. The CPR highlights the beginning and end of primary education as key pressure points.

Its criticism is harsh:

- In Reception, the developmentally-focused EYFS (Early Years/Foundation Stage) collides with the national curriculum; in Year 6, breadth competes with the much narrower scope of what is to be tested. As children progress through the primary phase, their statutory entitlement to a broad and balanced primary education is increasingly but needlessly compromised by the ‘standards’ agenda.
- The most conspicuous casualties are the arts, the humanities and those kinds of learning in all subjects which require time for talking, problem-solving and the extended exploration of ideas; memorisation and recall have come to be valued over understanding and enquiry, and transmission of information over the pursuit of knowledge in its fuller sense.
- Fuelling these problems has been a policy-led belief that curriculum breadth is incompatible with the pursuit of standards in ‘the basics’ and that if anything gives way it must be breadth. Evidence going back many decades, including reports from HMI and Ofsted, consistently shows this belief to be unfounded. Standards and breadth are interdependent, and high-performing schools achieve both.



- A curriculum should reflect and enact educational aims and values, but during the past two decades national aims and curriculum have been separately determined, making the aims cosmetic and the true purposes of primary education opaque. In a complex and changing world there is an urgent need for proper debate about what primary education is for. This debate was pre-empted when the national curriculum was introduced in 1988-9, and again when it was reviewed in 1997-8. It must not happen in 2009.

The new primary curriculum proposed by the CPR is conceived as a matrix of 12 educational aims and 8 domains of knowledge, skill, enquiry and disposition. The aims are in 3 groups:

1. **The needs and capacities of the individual:**
  - wellbeing;
  - engagement;
  - empowerment;
  - autonomy.
2. **The individual in relation to others and the wider world:**
  - encouraging respect and reciprocity;
  - promoting interdependence and sustainability;
  - empowering local, national and global citizenship;
  - celebrating culture and community.
3. **Learning, knowing and doing:**
  - knowing, understanding, exploring and making sense.

The May 2009 evaluation concludes that *Open Futures* is in a strong position to deliver against all these proposals, and has in effect pre-empted the Reviews findings.

## Head Teacher Endorsement

The following quote from one head teacher exemplifies the positive impact of *Open Futures*:

*‘(It impacts) in so many ways! The project has brought a real sense of excitement and purpose to the children – they love taking part, particularly in growing and cooking and some high quality written work has been produced. As a ‘Healthy School’ in the process of working at ‘Sustainable Schools’ the project has moved us further along the path of healthy eating – the children are much more prepared to try fruit and vegetables they might not have eaten, and when recipes go home we know the message is spreading there too from parental responses.*

*We are becoming (as a school, as a whole and as individuals) much more aware of recycling through composting and the use of water butts. A great deal of incidental learning is taking place particularly in science (parts of a plant, micro organisms, soil types) maths and speaking and listening.*

*The children are working well as part of a team and learning about co-operation, sharing and taking turns. Hopefully when the ICT element fully kicks in (we have only just received the equipment) this will be further enhanced, and there will be a development in planning and forward thinking skills. I would also like the project to help us to encourage the children to take some degree of control over what they learn. There is a ‘Ripple Effect’ – children are taking ideas from the project home, there are more children cooking at home with parents.’*



## Conclusions

Professor Leat has concluded that *Open Futures* is important for five principal reasons:

1. It is timely in that it addresses many government policy priorities, particularly those represented by Every Child Matters.
2. It appeals strongly to commonly held values of teachers and parents concerning good primary education which are reflected in the important activities of growing, cooking and asking questions.
3. It has strength as a flexible curriculum development model which stands in contrast to more prescriptive models. The evidence is that prescriptive models do not last even when they generate short term gains in test scores. Flexible models, which allow for teacher interpretation, last longer and generate a wider range of outcome gains.
4. The positive evidence relating to Philosophy for Children, which underpins the *askit!* strand, based on ten research studies on P4C. These included control groups, and measuring outcomes by norm-referenced tests of reading, reasoning, cognitive ability, and other curriculum-related abilities, by measures of self-esteem and child behaviour, and by child and teacher questionnaires.
5. It provides an excellent foundation for schools to develop home-school and community links.