

This summary report reflects the findings from seven case study schools from the 2011-2013 Curriculum Partnership cohort, as well as findings from a further two schools that received initial training from 2008-2010 to investigate sustainability and trajectories of change within those schools.

The research team have engaged in collaborative research with the Curriculum Partnership schools over an 18 month period and, in addition, made visits to two schools from the earlier wave. Evidence contributing to the evaluation included a combination of school collected evidence and researcher collected evidence.

### Impacts of Open Futures

#### ...Initiates school change and development

*Open Futures has been a significant changer for the school and the way it's moved forward. (Head teacher)*

Open Futures acts as a catalyst for immediate tangible changes in curriculum content, development of physical space, enterprise and community links. Open Futures' commitment to whole staff training is important, possibly essential, to achieve this school wide change in a relatively short time:

*It is what I always envisaged this school to be but it only happened because of the training available with Open Futures ... Open Futures was that key that unlocked the opportunity to make that come true. (Head teacher)*

School staff were very impressed with the initial training they received: virtually all questionnaire respondents found the training either 'quite' or 'very' useful and appropriate.

#### ...Engages and motivates staff

*Grow it guy from RHS was inspirational and has been a great encouragement all the way through. (Teacher)*

The initial training is important in terms of enabling staff to deliver the strands and also in supporting teachers to begin to embed Open Futures in the school curriculum. The appreciation of the training and support by staff with a range of school roles emerges clearly from questionnaire responses; a consistent finding supported by meetings and interviews:

*I don't think any member of staff has felt like it's an extra. (Deputy Head)*

Senior leaders report that key to this success is the applicability of strands across the curriculum. This together with a strong belief from staff that Open Futures is of fundamental benefit to pupils is central to the successes evidenced.



## ...Engages pupils and is enjoyed

*The children absolutely love it I mean let's face it it's active, which children tend to love and it's outside, which children tend to love.*  
(Deputy Head)



Most pupils experience the Open Futures strands as immediately engaging and enjoyable. The 'Smiley Faces' rating scale, administered towards the end of the first year of Open Futures in a case study school (summer 2012, 214 respondents from Year 2 to Year 6) revealed that these pupils had a statistically significant preference for Open Futures strands over other lessons (paired sample t-test,  $t=2.057$ ,  $p=0.041$ ); the majority of the children rating all the strands very positively, with between 64% and 93% choosing either 4 or 5 from the five point scale.

Corroborating the pupil view, staff reported that the strands engage pupils, with nearly 90% (82 out of the 92 who responded to the questionnaire) stating that pupils have responded 'well' or 'very well' to Open Futures. Interview comments included:

*It's giving them ... a real context for the learning* (Head teacher)

## ...Enhances pupil attitudes to learning

*I have noticed confidence in a lot of pupils when doing filmit, growit and cookit* (TA)

A primary focus for the schools was pupils' attitudes to learning: pupil confidence, an enquiring mind-set and independent and collaborative learning skills. Schools recognise that such change takes time to achieve on a large scale, but they report witnessing steps towards that change:

*We're seeing the seeds of the independent thinking and the independent learning.* (Head teacher)



Staff report observing many pupils' increased confidence, initially across the strands, but subsequently in their reaction to the wider school curriculum. Open Futures provides experiences that pupils might not otherwise have and this 'wider base of learning and discovery' is valued. For pupils who have previously struggled within the education system, Open Futures is seen to provide an opportunity to re-engage.

## ...Improves pupil speaking and listening

*Children have really started to explain their reasons behind an answer* (Teacher)

Schools have consistently identified the impact of Open Futures on pupils' speaking and listening; this has been particularly in relation to *askit* but also supported by the other strands in providing a context



and purpose for developing skills. Teachers report increased skills in pupils listening, responding appropriately, asking more questions and reasoning:

*Every child has the chance to speak, listen and gain confidence in talking to others, listen to others and take turns (TA)*

### **...Contributes to pupil achievement**

*Askit will help you in the future because you need to ask intelligent questions. It will help you think about the world easier. It will also help you with your job interview. (Pupil)*



Staff believe Open Futures impacts on both social and academic skills. Asked to rate the level of impact (from 1= 'no impact', through 3='moderate impact' to 5='very strong impact') on a wide range of outcomes, median responses were 3 or 4 and mean responses were similarly high. The three areas where staff perceive most impact were 'asking questions', 'speaking and listening' and 'practical life skills' with between 75% and 80% of staff stating that Open Futures has *strong* or *very strong* impact.

Staff comments in the questionnaire report that Open Futures is contributing to learning and, during interviews, teachers and school leaders have discussed the possibility of Open Futures enhancing pupils' academic attainment. For example, the head teacher at School 6, where higher than usual outcomes were expected in the KS2 writing SAT, explained:

*It's about that engagement in the activities, it's about purpose for writing and reading ... a combination of the context for which they are writing and the philosophy ... that deeper thinking (Head teacher, School 6)*

School 7 proposed that improvements in reasoning through participation in *askit* could be expected to result in attainment gains in the inference and deduction sections of standardised national reading tests. The tests taken towards the end of 2012 were used as a baseline and compared with results in summer 2013, revealing a statistically significant difference between 2012 and 2013 results for Year 3 pupils.

In School 4 there has been an explicit attempt to link Open Futures content to maths, particularly using cooking contexts for certain troublesome areas and concepts (e.g. ratios). Improvements in the mathematical understanding of these children may be contributing to the change in distribution of scores on the KS2 SAT in maths, with less of a 'trailing edge' in 2012 after the introduction of Open Futures.

*Cookit has helped me to understand fractions, ratio, proportion and percentages. It has also helped me to understand cooking more and to use different cooking skills such as the bridge, the claw, folding, kneading, identification of different herbs and other cooking skills (Pupil)*



## ...Supports school performance and progress

*It allows us to say, 'well you know there is this upward trend and Open Futures is part of that'. (Deputy Head)*



Head teachers and other staff report steady iterative improvements in teaching and learning in Open Futures schools. The structural changes to support the programme at the school and staff levels facilitate change in classroom practices. These are encouraged by the children's engagement, creating sustained change in expectations and some outcomes.

Attendance is reasonably high and has generally held steady, or increased very slightly, since the introduction of Open Futures. Some school staff see a causal link between Open Futures activities and attendance for some pupils:

*We know anecdotally that parents say 'he won't be off because he tells me it's cooking' or 'he won't be off because it's gardening'. (Head teacher)*

Ofsted assessments, school level attainment, and exclusion figures also suggest school quality holding steady through the introduction of Open Futures, which is reassuring for any school looking to initiate Open Futures. Although there is no overall impact on KS2 figures, there has been some positive change for some of the schools, and interviews with senior leaders revealed that some of them do connect the improvements with Open Futures.

## ...Catalyses whole school change and school to community links

*It gave us a structure and a plan really to really work towards in an and be involved in a really exciting project that we knew was right for us. (Head teacher)*

Over the two year period, initial physical alterations and organisational changes have become established, sometimes further developed, and are helping to embed Open Futures activities. There is less sense of individual strands and more talk of an Open Futures way of doing things. Open Futures may be less explicitly referenced in school planning, because it is now so accepted, but is firmly rooted in protected budgets and staffing.



Staff professional development through Open Futures enables teachers to make the strands and activities their own. Open Futures tends to embed collaborative practices between staff members, enhancing curriculum coherence and pastoral care across the school. Once Open Futures is established, there is on-going, mutually dependent development of curriculum, organisation and space.

All the schools intended that Open Futures should impact upon parental (and in some cases the wider community) engagement. Substantial successes were seen in five of the seven schools by summer 2013, making parental and community engagement one of the most interesting prospects for Open Futures. Schools, parents and pupils also report impacts outside of school with increased participation in gardening, cooking, film making and philosophy at home in some families:

*As a family we all include philosophy in our daily conversations. We discuss different answers and questions. (Parent)*

### Long term sustainability



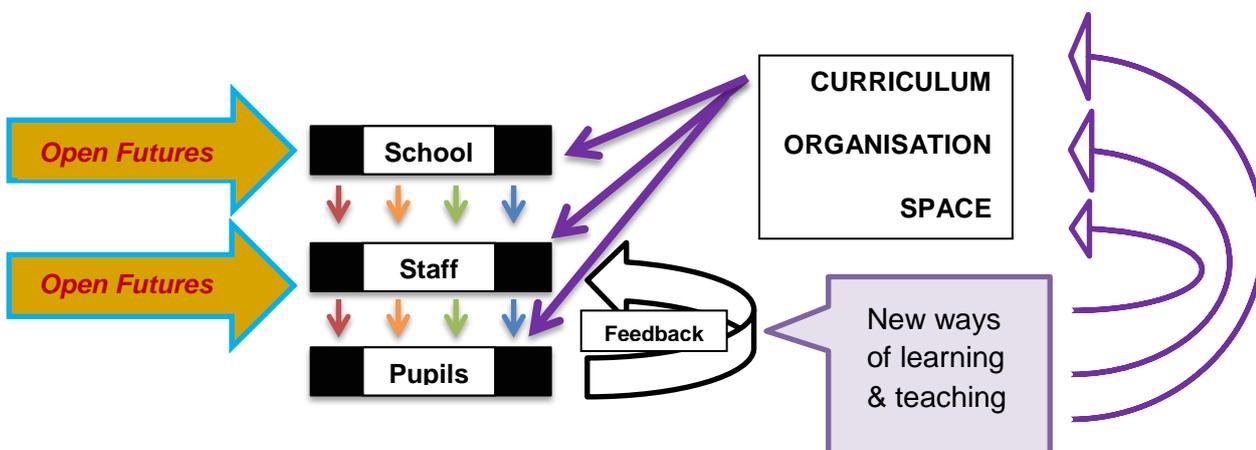
*We wouldn't work without it - we just wouldn't - and [for] the children it's part of our school for them. (Head teacher)*

Return visits to two schools from the 2008-2010 cohort highlighted and confirmed aspects of the sustainability of the programme. In both schools, staff are clear that they are still Open Futures schools: facilities for the programme have been developed and the results of strand activity are evident. A significant time after these schools completed their Open Futures training, the programme constitutes an important part of school life and continues to contribute to school development. Staff were clear that Open Futures has impacted on the engagement and learning of individual children, and, as part of this, has changed school life and learning:

*It is additional alternative opportunities, opportunities for the children to work in so many different ways. It's everything, it's teamwork, it's collaboration, it's excitement, it's sense of worth (Head teacher)*

Overall, it seems clear that Open Futures was part of an important transformation of practice in both schools.

The cyclical nature of the development found in Open Futures schools is shown in the following diagram:



**Model of Open Futures impact**

## *Conclusions: what is it about Open Futures that is different?*



The impact of Open Futures should be understood in the context of contemporary school teaching and management. There are many and varied projects and initiatives emanating from the Department for Education, Local Authorities, charities and organisations; all are competing for attention within a tightly packed curriculum, alongside requirements for explicit tracking of pupil progress against national norms, and an inspection regime that is experienced as stressful and adversarial. Other projects and enthusiasms come and go, but Open Futures tends to be sustained: changes are evident in schools years after initial training, with the effects on the curriculum underpinned by changes to school planning, budgeting and physical space.

We conclude that this success depends on four key aspects of the programme:

1. Tangible changes embed the programme: changes made to school organisation, space and curriculum are interlinked, becoming increasingly coherent and mutually dependent.
2. The diversity of the elements of Open Futures enables the programme to appeal immediately to different staff for different reasons and get established in a number of ways. This translates into a wide variety of impacts and effects for individual children, demonstrating different ways to be a successful learner, boosting confidence and, eventually, performance.
3. Open Futures has a developing complexity: strand activities are immediately appealing to staff and children, but the integration of the four strands with each other and with the wider school curriculum enables them to be much more powerful. From the immediate appeal of 'hands-on' learning develops new contexts and purposes for learning and changes in the quality of interaction, supporting enhanced achievement.
4. Open Futures offers a particularly productive balance of structure and flexibility. There is plenty of support, which is especially useful to schools at the beginning of their involvement, together with clear requirements and obligations in terms of getting staff to training and implementing the strands. Yet, there is plenty of opportunity for staff and schools to 'make it their own'. This enhances ownership, is appreciated by schools and, we propose, contributes to the success and sustainability of Open Futures

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