

# Accessible Co-Curricular Programmes Reduce Inequality: A Review of the Literature

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## Introduction + Methods

**ECAs boost multiple outcomes**, including academic success, soft skills, school engagement and mental health, but links between **socioeconomic status, extracurricular activities, & educational inequality** are under-researched.

This study assesses ECAs' impact on inequality through:

A **Literature Review** of core pedagogy & 30yrs of peer-reviewed studies with search terms "UK," "extracurricular," & "inequality."

2 semi-structured **Interviews** with UK extracurricular providers focusing on underserved youth.



## Interviews

**Confidence** drives academic/social gains  
**Safe spaces** allow for reinvention

### Literacy Programme

+5 months reading in 3 months; confidence through fun & low-pressure spaces

### Debate Programme

Greater class engagement & higher education aspirations; confidence from networking & mentorship



## Literature Review

### Theoretical Frameworks

Supports group, creative, & student-led ECAs

**Freire:** Dialogue and student agency for equality

**Biesta:** Student freedom & moral responsibility

**Scruton:** ECAs are less essential

### Soft Skills

ECAs build soft skills like leadership, resilience, and adaptability, boosting academic performance and employability



### Academic Impacts

- ECAs are positively associated with academic outcomes
- The benefits of different types of ECAs vary
- ECAs may amplify academic inequality, and research on their potential to reduce it is limited

### International Models

**Scandinavia:** free, in-school ECAs equalize access & build civic engagement

**US & Australia:** ECAs boost mental health, belonging, & aspirations in underserved youth

## Discussion

ECAs consistently **improve** academic and social outcomes, but **access gaps persist**

Confidence boosts engagement, aspirations, relationships

Programmes **must:**

- Target marginalized youth
- Remove cost & transport barriers
- Offer safe, collaborative, confidence-building spaces



## Conclusion

**Findings:** ECAs benefit all social classes but access is limited for the poorest students

**Recommendations:** Equity-focused design to narrow opportunity gaps by building soft skills and academic ability

**Contribution:** Highlights ECAs' potential to support vulnerable youth and the urgency of equitable expansion

