



## **EMPOWERING ENVIRONMENTS**

*What Can We Learn from Award Winning Practitioners from the TET 2021/22 Awards About Engaging Children and Young People in the Built Environment?*



## SUMMARY

The research in this review explores the approaches, forms, skills, outcomes, and challenges related to engaging children and young people in the built environment. It analyses the TET Inspire Future Generations Award submissions from the past two years, shedding light on the landscape, practices, and impact of initiatives in this field. The research highlights the importance of involving young people in the design and decision-making processes, promoting their agency and ownership. It identifies various trends, such as co-design, out-of-school learning, and community projects, emphasising the development of skills like creativity, technical/practical abilities, and communication. The outcomes of these engagements include a sense of responsibility, knowledge of architecture, confidence, critical thinking, and collaboration.

However, the research also reveals gaps particularly in regards to funding sources and business models, which hinders knowledge sharing and support within the sector. To address these gaps, it is crucial to encourage transparency, providing resources and support to organisations engaging young people in the built environment.

The research aims to contribute to understanding existing initiatives and identify opportunities for improvement, fostering a more inclusive and impactful engagement of children and young people in shaping the places they inhabit.

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### About Thornton Education Trust

Thornton Education Trust (TET) is a charity created to advance education in architecture and urban design for children and young people.

TET believes that youth engagement should be recognised as a valuable part of creating better neighbourhoods and social impact. TET's aim is to build capacity in the field of engaging children and young people in the built environment through creating a community of practice via research, an awards programme and online TET Dialogues.

TET seeks to close the gap between architecture and education: to embed architecture in young people's education, and to embed young people in architecture.

### TET Goals:

- Promoting the value of youth-led design/children engagement within the built environment sector.
- Encouraging joined-up thinking and sharing of resources
- Embedding youth-led design approaches within architectural and urban design practice
- Encouraging schools to include the theme of architecture into their teaching
- Demonstrating the valuable skills, opportunities and knowledge to children and young people
- Creating a lasting impact on the design process and the communities involved
- Inspiring the creation of a future generation of place makers
- Informing policy

## 1. Introduction

This research builds on the well-established fields of children's participation and university outreach, but shifts the focus to the little-studied dialogue of engaging children and young people in architecture and the built environment in particular. The review analyses TET Inspire Future Generations Award submissions from the past two years, investigating approaches and forms of engaging children and young people. It maps where different organisations and projects are working across the country (and beyond), highlighting the different ways organisations work to engage young people, the number of children and young people they engage through their work, the type of project/organisation, the form their interventions take, as well as investigating the skills they provide to young people. The process of this analysis provides both an understanding of the youth engagement landscape in the built environment sector, whilst providing some insight into the level of intervention the projects/organisations work at, as well as the potential policy domain.

The projects encompass a diverse range of initiatives that successfully engaged typically underrepresented groups in architecture and the built environment. These focused on involving ethnic minority groups, individuals from deprived areas, those with different abilities, and other marginalised demographics. At times, the combined percentages exceed 100% as some initiatives fall within multiple categories simultaneously. To accurately capture their diverse character and goals, we've divided them proportionally among these categories. Looking forward, TET recognises the importance of gathering more specific information about the demographics of the project submissions, through enhancing data collection by adding targeted questions that specifically capture this information.

### 1.1 Audience

The intended audience for this review encompasses various stakeholders within and outside the organisation. Primarily, the review serves as an internal resource for our organisation, allowing us to deepen our understanding of the industry, its key approaches, and diverse forms of engagement in the built environment. It also targets future industry players who may be encouraged to engage in youth and child participation initiatives. Additionally, the review caters to local authorities, architecture and built environment practitioners, as well as the development industry, including housebuilders, to provide them with valuable insights and best practices in youth engagement and participation.

## 1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this research is to use the winning (and shortlisted) applicants from the past two years of TET's Inspiring Future Generations Awards established in 2021, to gain a better understanding of the approaches and forms of engagement already existing in the sector, alongside the skills, outcome and impact of the projects both on the children and young people involved in projects, as well as the practitioners. This information informs the development of questions for our subsequent application processes. Additionally, insights will enable us to establish case studies of good practice, as well as provide the industry with insights which will help them engage in this area and thereby build capacity.

### 1.3 To gain a comprehensive understanding, this review addresses several key questions that will be explored and answered throughout its course:

- **What is the context and landscape of engaging children and young people in the built environment?**
- **What approaches are practitioners using to engage children and young people in the built environment? What forms do these take?**
- **How do these approaches contribute to the development of skills in children and young people? What is the impact of these skills on both the individuals involved and the practitioners collaborating with them? Furthermore, how does this engagement influence the built environment sector as a whole?**
- **What gaps have we identified that require further exploration? What barriers are encountered in effectively engaging children and young people in the built environment?**
- **What insights and learnings can we apply to address the identified gaps and overcome the barriers? How can we use this knowledge to create more effective strategies?**

## 1.2 Why is youth engagement important?

Reasoning for children and youth engagement has evolved over time with dominant themes including children's rights, children as unique users of services, and participation as a learning tool. It is now known that such participation builds soft-skills and other benefits such as increased self-confidence, leadership abilities and a strengthened sense of community. Participation has been described as an "intrinsic and life-changing inner process"<sup>1</sup>.

***“Children have the right to give their opinions in all matters that affect them and to have their voices heard. Children’s views should always be taken seriously, no matter their age.”***

- United Nations, Rights of the Child core principles <sup>2</sup>

## 2. Context

In the United Kingdom, engaging children and young people in architecture and the built environment has gained increasing recognition and importance in recent years. The current landscape is shaped by a combination of global, international, national, and local factors that have influenced the sector's development and priorities.

### 2.1 Global Context

Internationally, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>3</sup> has played a significant role in shaping the discourse around children's participation in decision-making processes. It emphasises the rights of children to be heard and involved in matters that affect them, including the built environment. In particular Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child underscores the rights of children to express their views freely and to have those views taken into account in matters affecting them, including decisions related to the built environment. Article 17 highlights the right of children to access. In fact many Articles collectively emphasise the importance of involving children and young people in decisions related to the built environment, recognising their agency.

Additionally, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals<sup>4</sup> have provided a global framework for addressing social, economic and environmental challenges, including SDG 11 which specifically focuses on sustainable cities and communities, highlighting the importance of involving

children and young people in urban planning and design. and SDG 10 Reducing Inequalities are also considered to be important parts of empowering children and young people.

### 2.3 National Context

At national level, policies such as the Social Value Act (2013)<sup>5</sup> and the Future Generations Act (2015)<sup>6</sup> in Wales recognise the importance of considering the long-term social, economic, and environmental value of their decisions on future generations. These acts emphasise the need to involve children and young people in planning and designing the built environment to ensure their voices are heard and their needs are met. Similarly, Scotland's Children's Play Policy Framework and the Children and Young People Act (2014)<sup>7</sup> reflect a commitment to enhancing children's rights and participation in shaping their surroundings. Particularly, Section 19 of the Children and Young People Act emphasises how local authorities support and involve children and young people in decision making.

### 2.4 Regional & Local Context

At the regional and local levels, the engagement of children and young people in the built environment is influenced by various factors, including demographic characteristics, socioeconomic disparities, and cultural differences. Urban areas face unique challenges, such as limited green spaces. In response, local initiatives and community-driven projects have emerged to create more child-friendly and inclusive environments. However, the level of engagement varies among local authorities due to the setup of the UK's governance system. Councils like Islington<sup>8</sup>, Newcastle<sup>9</sup>, and Redbridge<sup>10</sup> have implemented specific policies and strategies to actively involve children and young people in local placemaking and the built environment. Notably, the Greater London Authority (GLA)<sup>11</sup> received recognition from our 2022 awards for 'Best Local Authority' for its Design Future London initiative, which engaged numerous children and young people across the city to provide valuable insights for placemaking. While some local authorities are moving towards child-friendly policies, their successful implementation requires continual monitoring.

In summary, the engagement of children and young people in architecture and the built environment in the UK is influenced by a combination of global events, intergovernmental interventions, national policies, and local factors. While there is growing recognition of the importance of involving young people in decision making processes, further efforts are required to ensure sustained and meaningful participation in the built environment.

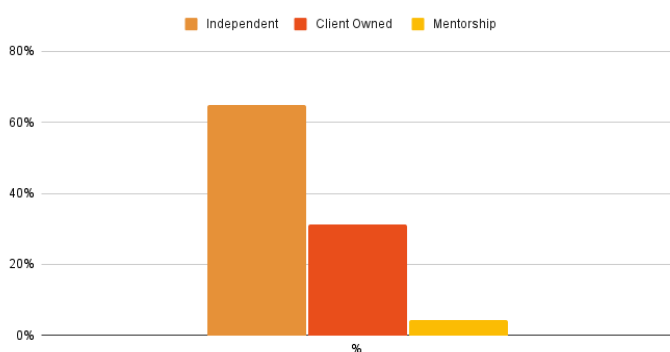
### 3. Mapping Youth Engagement

In this section, we investigate the approaches and forms used to engage children and young people in the built environment. We examine the geographical distribution of projects, analyse diverse methodologies and techniques, explore mention of funding sources and levels of intervention, and identify the policy domains and themes shaping these initiatives. This provides a comprehensive overview of the landscape and strategies employed to involve young individuals in the built environment.

#### 3.1 Trends & Observations

Our research focused on the 45 projects and organisations that received the TET awards in 2021 and 2022. We analysed a diverse range of practitioners, including those from different practices, local councils, and organisations. The projects varied in size, with some involving as few as seven children/young people, while others engaged over a thousand. On average, each project engaged 88 children and young people. However, not all organisations provided specific information on the number of participants. In terms of ownership, 65% of the projects were independent by the organisation or practitioner, 31% were client-owned (developer or local council), and 4% were mentoring initiatives (Figure A).

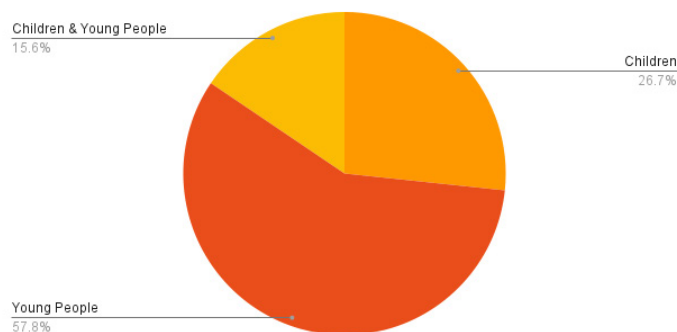
**Figure A**



The research focused on engaging a specific demographic of children and young people in the built environment. The findings revealed that 58% of the projects were specifically targeted towards young people, recognising their unique perspectives and needs. Additionally, just over a quarter of the initiatives (27%) were specifically designed to engage children, acknowledging the importance of considering their developmental stages and experiences. The remaining 16% of the projects aimed to engage both children and young people, recognising the value of inclusivity and bridging the age gap (Figure B). The majority of applications did not provide specific information regarding the targeted age groups. This prompts the

question of whether future application rounds should explicitly request age information, as it could facilitate the identification of potential gaps in engagement. By collecting age-specific data, organisations can gain insights into areas that require further attention and develop strategies to address any underrepresented age groups.

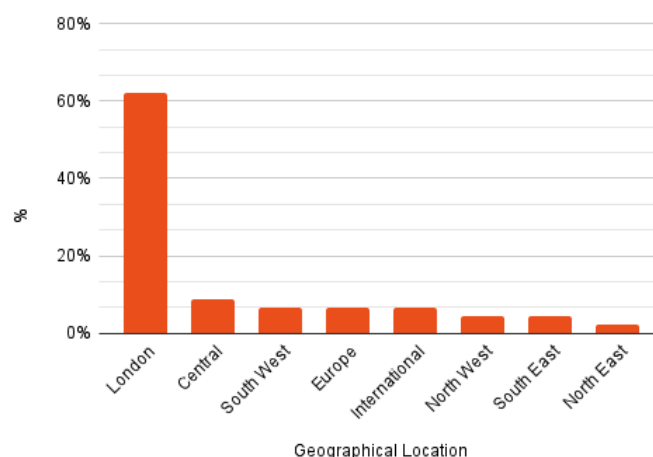
**Figure B**



#### 3.2 Geographical Distribution

The distribution of organisations was widespread across the country, with a few international projects, but the majority (56%) were concentrated in London. 9% of projects/practitioners were based in the central band of the country, which we have defined to encompass Birmingham in the west to Cambridge and Norfolk in the east. South West (Bristol & Bath), Europe and International (projects from practitioners outside of Europe) all make up 7%. The North West, South East and North East all account for between 2-4% of the total. This distribution underscores the necessity of involving practitioners from various regions across the country to engage children and young people in the built environment. It is essential to acknowledge that London does not solely represent the entirety of the UK's built environment. We must explore strategies to support organisations in other parts of the country and even beyond, that actively engage children and young people in the built environment.

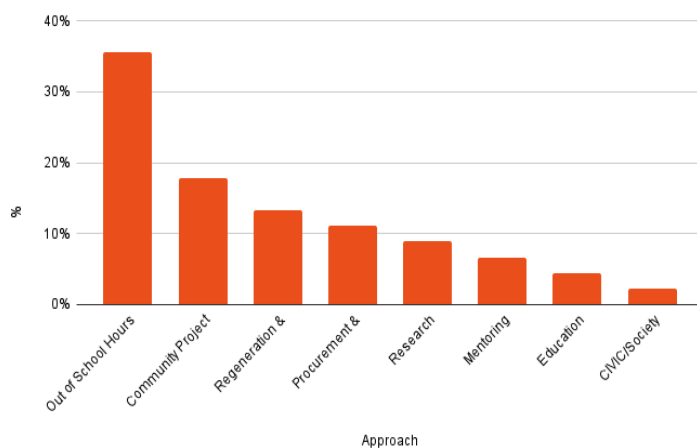
**Figure C**



### 3.3 Approaches

The research identified various approaches to engaging children and young people in the built environment, revealing notable trends in the field. Figure D shows that Out-of-school hours learning emerged as the most prevalent approach, representing 36% of the projects analysed. This emphasises the importance of projects associated with schools as well as independent initiatives. Children and young people can actively participate and broaden their horizons outside of a formal education setting. Community projects constituted 18%, reflecting the value placed on engaging young people within their local communities. Regeneration and master planning efforts were present in 13% of the projects, demonstrating the focus on revitalising and transforming built environments. Procurement and stakeholder engagement closely followed at 11%, highlighting the significance of involving diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes. Other approaches such as research, mentoring, education, and society accounted for less than 10% of the initiatives.

**Figure D**



These emerging approaches illustrate a shift towards more participatory and inclusive practices in engaging children and young people. Such various forms of co-design signifies the recognition of young people's voices and agency in shaping the built environment. It is worth noting here that co-design refers to the involvement of children and young people through the design of the interventions, this includes other approaches, such as procurement, regeneration and community projects.

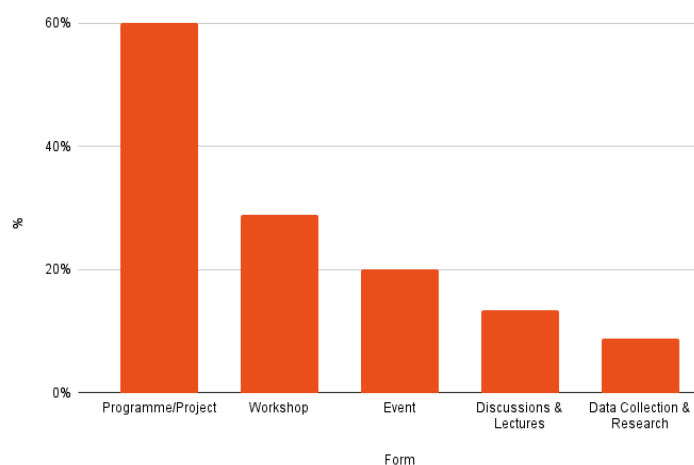
Community projects reflect the importance of creating spaces and opportunities for local youth involvement. Regeneration and master planning approaches highlight the transformative potential of involving young people in the revitalisation of their communities.

This reinforces the effectiveness of approaches that incorporate co-design. Procurement and stakeholder engagement underscore the need for collaboration and shared decision-making among various actors.

### 3.4 Forms

The research identified several trends in the forms of engaging children and young people in the built environment. As shown by Figure E, the majority of projects (60%) took the form of structured programs, which distinguished them from workshops by their recurring nature and the production of specific products or outcomes. Workshops were utilised in 29% of the projects, providing interactive and hands-on experiences for participants. Events were employed by 20% of the initiatives, creating opportunities for larger-scale engagement and public participation. Discussions and lectures were utilised in 13% of the projects, fostering dialogue and knowledge sharing among participants. Data collection and research methods were employed in 9% of the initiatives, emphasising the importance of evidence-based approaches.

**Figure E**



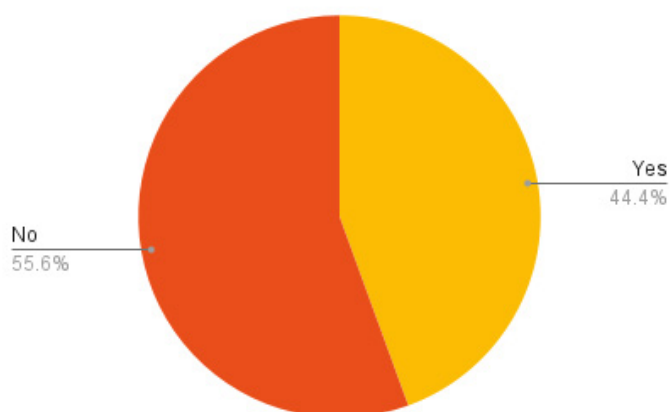
These trends showcase the diversity of approaches and methodologies in engaging children and young people in the built environment. The prevalence of structured programs highlights the value placed on sustained and comprehensive engagement, allowing for deeper exploration and tangible outcomes. Workshops provide interactive learning experiences, fostering creativity and skill development. Events serve as platforms for broader engagement and community involvement. Discussions and lectures facilitate knowledge exchange and critical thinking. Data collection and research methods contribute to evidence-based practices, enhancing the understanding of the needs and perspectives of children and young people.

These various forms of engagement align with the broader context of participatory approaches, community involvement, and evidence-based decision-making in the built environment field. They emphasise the importance of incorporating diverse methods to cater to the different learning styles, interests, and preferences of children and young people. The findings suggest the significance of offering a range of engagement opportunities to ensure inclusivity and accessibility. By considering these trends and diversifying engagement forms, practitioners and organisations can foster more meaningful and impactful engagement with children and young people in the built environment.

### 3.5 Funding

One noticeable research gap revolves around the specificity of funding-related information, including mentions of business models and funding sources utilised by the projects. Surprisingly, the majority of projects (58%) did not provide any mention of their funding sources. Among the remaining projects, only a limited few offered specifics on the entities supporting their activities. This significant gap in research hinders our understanding of the allocation and origin of financial resources in the field. The lack of transparency in this regard impedes the effective sharing of knowledge and capacity-building efforts within the sector. Addressing this gap is crucial for fostering a more informed and collaborative environment by shedding light on who receives funding and where it originates from.

Figure F

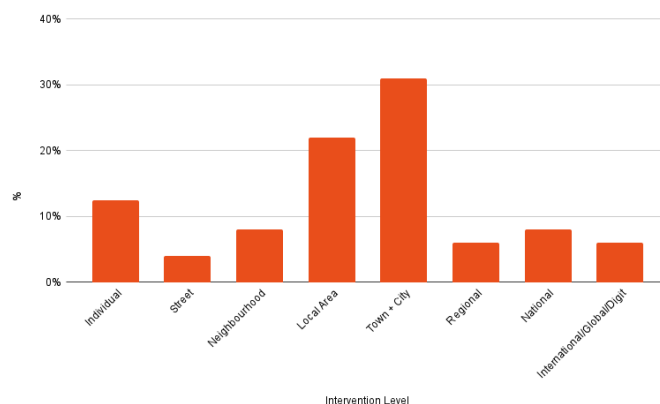


### 3.6 Level of Intervention

The analysis of the level of intervention in the projects examined reveals interesting findings. The majority of projects were focused at the local level (22%), followed closely by the town and city level (31%). Additionally, a significant proportion of projects operated at the individual level (12.5%). Conversely, the remaining levels of intervention, including street, neighbourhood, regional, national, and international/global, constituted

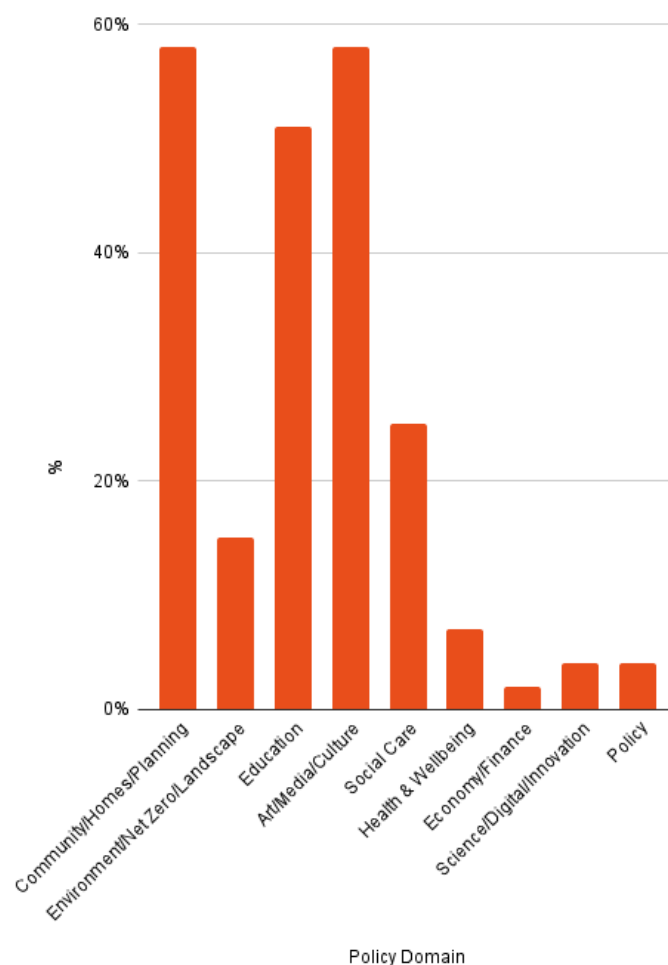
smaller percentages, ranging from 4% to 8%. It is important to note that the level of intervention often extends beyond these specific categories, with interventions occurring at both lower and higher levels.

Figure G



### 3.7 Policy Domain

Figure H



An assessment of potential policy domains reveals significant areas of focus within the projects analysed. The most prominent areas for policy intervention include community/homes/planning and art/media/culture, both accounting for 58% of the projects. Education closely



follows with 51% of the initiatives addressing policy interventions in this field. Other policy areas include social care (25%), environment/net zero/landscape (15%), as well as health/wellbeing, economy/finance, science/digital/innovation, and policy, ranging from 2% to 7%. These findings underscore the importance of policies that prioritise community engagement, arts, culture, and education as key drivers for empowering children and young people in the built environment. Additionally, recognising the intersections between various policy domains can enable a more holistic approach to youth participation and well-rounded policy interventions.

### 3.8 Themes

The analysis of awards submissions reveals a notable emphasis on practical, place-based interventions that empower young individuals within the built environment. Co-design and active involvement of young people throughout the research and design process emerged as prominent and effective approaches. Sustainability, empowerment, and agency were recurring themes, reflecting the imperative to address the climate crisis and grant young voices a place in decision-making processes. Projects spanned from local interventions in gardens and green spaces to broader national and international initiatives. Design interventions empowered young individuals to take an active role in shaping their local environments, fostering a sense of agency and confidence. Notably, representation of local communities and engagement of underrepresented groups were prioritised in the design process. Themes like play, imagination, education on built environment careers, mentoring, and upskilling of young people were also prevalent. These emerging trends underscore the increasing recognition of the significance of engaging young people in the built environment, creating enduring impact, and fostering community-driven change.

### 3.9 Methodology & Technology

The submissions also demonstrate a range of research methodologies for engaging young people in the built environment. Many of the projects take a practice and pedagogy approach to research, conducting research through doing. This includes universities as evidenced by LSE's Make Space<sup>12</sup> campaign which won a commendation from the IGF22 'Further education/ Higher Education' Award.

Our research has also illustrated an increase in use of technology in the built environment sector, and many of the submissions in the TET IFG Awards Winners database reflect this. Tools like 3D modelling and virtual reality are being used to engage young people

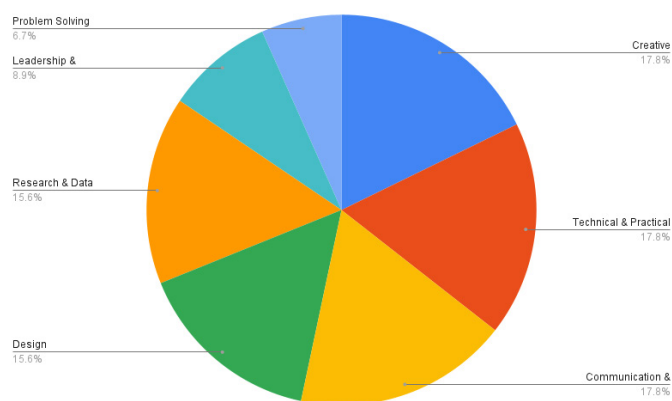
in the design process and to help them visualise the built environment in new ways.

## 4. Skills and Outcomes

The following section delves into the skills and outcomes derived specifically from the participation of children and young people in the diverse projects under examination. In this context, 'skills' refer to the abilities and knowledge that young participants acquire through their engagement in the built environment projects. It is essential to distinguish between 'skills' and 'outcomes,' as the former emphasises the specific developmental aspects gained by the children and young people themselves, while the latter centers on the broader takeaways from their involvement. Outcomes encompass not only the immediate impacts that the skills may have on the participants but also the long-term effects on their overall personal and intellectual growth. By exploring both the acquired skills and their subsequent outcomes, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the potential impact of engaging children and young people in the built environment.

### 4.1 Skills

Figure 1



**Design Skills** - Architectural Skills, Branding & Graphic Design, Design, Design Software, Design Thinking, Materiality

**Research & Data Collection Skills** - Analysis & Evaluation, Interview Skills, Research & Data Collection, Survey Design & Application

**Creative Skills** - Dramatisation, Filmmaking/Editing, Poetry, Storytelling, Photography

**Leadership & Administration Skills** - Leadership, Project Management, Organisation & Admin

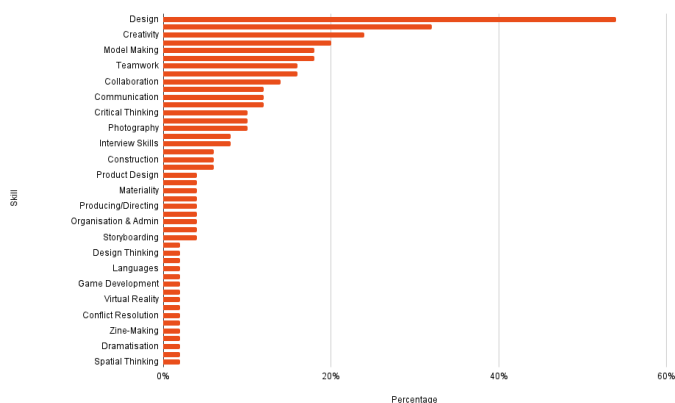
**Technical & Practical Skills** - Construction, Game

Development, GIS, Mapping, Model Making, Spatial Thinking, Systems Thinking, Reality, STEM

**Communication and Collaboration Skills** - Collaboration, Communication, Conflict Resolution, Networking, Presenting/Pitching, Producing/Directing, Public Speaking, Teamwork, Writing

**Problem-Solving Skills** - Critical Thinking, interdisciplinary Thinking/Connection Making, Problem-Solving

Figure J



The industry is witnessing the development of various skills that are crucial for children and young people to make meaningful interventions in the built environment. The TET IFG Awards Winners database highlights the focus on skill development within the submissions. The largest categories of skills emerging are creative skills, technical/practical skills, and communication skills, each encompassing eight specific skills. Additionally, design and research/data collection categories include seven skills each. Leadership & administration is represented by four skills, while problem-solving has the fewest with three skills.

These trends indicate the recognition of the importance of a diverse skill set for children and young people engaging in the built environment. The combination of both soft skills (such as creativity, communication, and leadership) and hard skills (technical, practical, and design) demonstrates the holistic approach to skill development. This approach equips young individuals with the tools to not only navigate the built environment field but also transfer these skills to various contexts. Creative skills foster innovation and out-of-the-box thinking, enabling young people to approach challenges with fresh perspectives. Technical and practical skills provide the necessary knowledge and expertise to actively participate in the practical aspects of the built environment. Communication skills are vital for effectively conveying ideas and collaborating with diverse stakeholders.

The emphasis on research, data collection, and

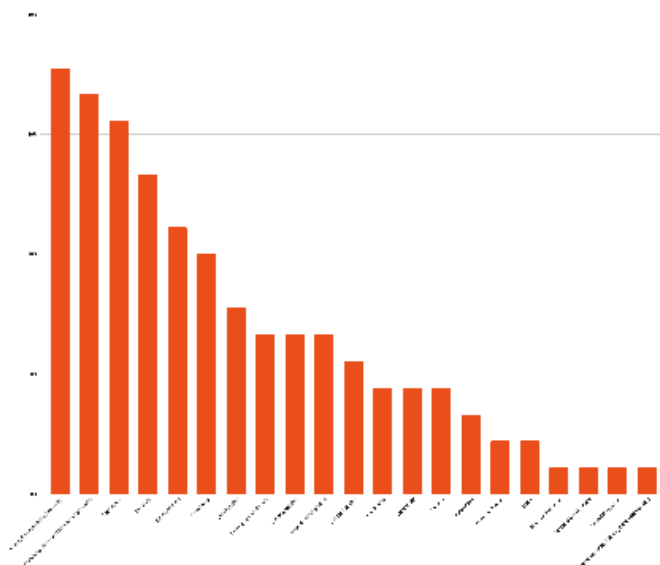
problem-solving skills highlights the importance of evidence-based decision-making and critical thinking. These skills enable young people to analyse complex issues, gather relevant data, and propose informed solutions. Leadership and administration skills further empower young individuals to take initiative, guide projects, and effectively manage resources.

This skill development aligns with the wider context of the built environment industry, which increasingly values multidisciplinary collaboration, sustainability, and community engagement. The combination of soft and hard skills prepares children and young people for the challenges and opportunities within the industry. Moreover, these skills are transferable and can be applied to other contexts, broadening their career prospects beyond the built environment field

#### 4.2 Outcomes

The projects focused on engaging children and young people in the built environment have demonstrated significant outcomes that positively impact their development. The most notable outcomes include a sense of agency, responsibility, and ownership over the built environment, comprising 36% of the results. This indicates that the initiatives have successfully empowered young individuals to recognise their ability to shape and influence the spaces they inhabit. Additionally, 33% of the outcomes highlight the growth of knowledge and interest in architecture and the built environment sector among children and young people, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for the field.

Figure K



Furthermore, the research indicates that engagement in these projects leads to increased confidence,

creativity, and a sense of empowerment among children and young people. This suggests that they feel more capable and inspired to take action, contributing to a positive impact on their overall personal and professional development. Moreover, the findings reveal that participation in these initiatives enhances critical thinking skills, communication abilities, and decision-making capabilities in children and young people. This equips them with valuable skills that are essential for their future engagement in the built environment sector and beyond.

Another important aspect highlighted by the research is the cultivation of teamwork and collaboration among children and young people, fostering a sense of community and building leadership skills. By working together on design projects, group activities, and community-focused initiatives, young individuals develop interpersonal skills, learn to value diverse perspectives and become effective collaborators. This aspect is beneficial for the sector as it promotes a culture of cooperation, collective problem-solving, and inclusivity. It fosters the development of future professionals who are not only technically skilled but also capable of working collaboratively in multidisciplinary teams.

Overall, these positive outcomes contribute to the growth and vitality of the built environment sector. By empowering children and young people with a sense of agency and knowledge, fostering confidence and creativity, enhancing critical thinking and communication skills, and promoting teamwork and collaboration, the sector becomes enriched with a diverse and capable workforce. These outcomes also ensure a more inclusive and sustainable approach to the built environment, as young individuals are equipped to actively engage, contribute, and lead positive change within their communities and beyond. Though the findings here illustrate an overwhelmingly positive outcome, it is worth considering that longer term impacts on the children and young people are difficult to measure, but nonetheless would provide key information about how engaging children and young people in the built environment changes their interaction with it, but also the wider impacts on them across other aspects of their lives.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of engaging children and young people in the built environment, there remains a notable lack of research on the outcomes and impact that such projects have on the practitioners involved and the industry as a whole. While existing studies often focus on the benefits for children and young people, exploring the reflections and learnings of practitioners could be transformative.

Shifting the power dynamic from a traditional model where practitioners hold all the decision-making power, and young participants are merely recipients, to a more reciprocal relationship would be a significant paradigm shift.

## 5. Gaps & Barriers

Understanding the funding sources and business models within the projects and programmes engaging children and young people in the built environment is of crucial importance. The lack of explicit information regarding funding creates a significant gap in knowledge and hinders the ability to effectively support and replicate successful initiatives. By identifying and documenting the funding sources, it becomes possible to recognise patterns, opportunities, and potential areas of improvement.

Applicants highlighted several common barriers to effectively engaging children and young people in architecture and the built environment, including limited resources, time, and staff support, as well as restricted access to technology and other essential tools. Additionally, some applicants acknowledged challenges in reaching and involving underrepresented groups of young people, such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds or with disabilities. Furthermore, the research recognises the existing gap in understanding the comprehensive impact of these projects on both the practitioners who facilitated them and the broader industry. While short-term impacts are more manageable to measure, tracking long-term effects can be challenging. Nonetheless, delving into these outcomes remains a valuable pursuit, as it encourages practitioners to reflect on and acknowledge the transformative power of their work. This understanding can, in turn, motivate them to continue implementing their newfound insights while actively engaging children and young people in shaping the built environment.

To address these gaps and barriers, it is essential to encourage more transparency about funding sources and to provide greater support, resources, and access to technology, so as to build the sector's capacity to better support organisations engaging young people in the built environment. As a result of this research, and in a bid to move towards more transparency, we have added several questions which aim to reduce these gaps, at least in part. This alone is not enough to completely fill these gaps, more research and more activities are needed to continue understanding how we can better engage children and young people, and equipping them for the changing demands of the industry and the planet at large. This can ensure they have the tools they need to make a positive impact, as

well as building the capacity of the sector to facilitate this (acquisition) and assist other organisations in the industry.

### 6. Reflections & Conclusion

Upon reflection, this research has shed light on various aspects of engaging children and young people in the built environment. Through a comprehensive analysis of the award-winning projects, we have gained valuable insights into the approaches, forms, and impacts of these initiatives. The research interrogated the initial questions posed, particularly concerning the approaches, forms, skills and outcomes for children and young people involved in these projects. It has demonstrated that empowering young individuals through co-design and active participation not only enhances their sense of agency, but also equips them with a range of valuable skills that can be applied across a range of contexts. Moreover, the findings underscore the importance of considering the needs of underrepresented groups and striving for equitable access to opportunities.

However, this research also raises new questions that warrant further exploration. One notable area is the long-term impact of these interventions on children and young people, and how these experiences shape their trajectories as they transition into adulthood. Additionally, we must delve deeper into understanding the reciprocal benefits for practitioners and the built environment industry as a whole. Capturing the transformative influence of engaging with young individuals could potentially shift the power dynamic in the sector, making it more inclusive and participatory.

It is also worth considering how we measure the success of engaging young people and children in the built environment. The impact goes beyond the completion of the project and the key measure of success is the extent to which they feel empowered to make a difference in their built environment and beyond. Additionally, success can be measured by the level of diversity and inclusivity that is present in the spaces that young people help to design and create, and by the extent to which these spaces promote sustainability and environmentally friendly practices. Overall, best practices involve prioritising the needs and perspectives of young people and children, and providing them with opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge they need to become active and engaged participants in the built environment.

Throughout this research, several key questions have emerged, each of great significance in advancing our understanding of engaging children and young people in the built environment. Firstly, how can we accurately

measure and reflect on the impact of such initiatives? This includes not only assessing the outcomes for children and young people but also understanding the broader effects on practitioners and the industry as a whole. Secondly, how can we integrate the lessons learned from these projects into our practices and ensure a lasting impact? This entails making engagement more meaningful, effectively measuring success, and encouraging increased involvement of underrepresented groups.

These questions underscore the need to establish a collaborative community of practice focused on engaging young individuals in shaping their surroundings. While challenges remain, this research aims to contribute meaningfully to the collective knowledge within the sector, moving us closer to more inclusive and impactful built environments. By continuing to investigate and address the remaining questions, we can pave the way for more impactful and sustainable practices, ensuring that our built environment truly reflects the needs, aspirations, and values of its most important stakeholders: the next generation.



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### Thornton Education Trust

You can find out more about our Awards Programme here:

<https://www.thorntoneducationtrust.org/inspire-future-generations-awards-2023>

Our publications can be found here:

<https://www.thorntoneducationtrust.org/journal>

## IMAGES

**Photo 1:** Thames Barrier Photo

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## **EMPOWERING ENVIRONMENTS**

**Thornton Education Trust  
Researcher: Lucia Ene-Lesikar  
2023**

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