

CELEBRATE! with Talent 25 Research Programme Study



Welcome and thank you

We extend a warm welcome and ask you to join us as we celebrate the accomplishments of the Talent 25 study so far. As we embark on the exciting journey ahead, we will be hosting an event for all the children and their families from across Leicester city who have become part of Talent 25.

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the parents and their children, including other family members, who are actively involved in the Talent 25 research programme. Their contributions have been invaluable and have greatly enhanced our understanding of engaging children and their families in creative and cultural activities. Furthermore, parents' efforts have played a significant role in encouraging their children's participation in creative and cultural activities.

We would also like to express our deepest appreciation to Arts Council England (ACE) and De Montfort University (DMU) for generously funding the ground-breaking pilot phase of the Talent 25 longitudinal research programme.

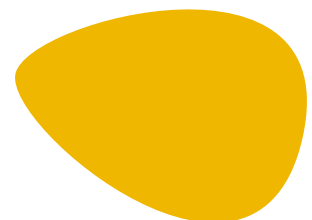
Our sincere thanks also extend to the members of the Talent 25 research programme, the research advisory group, and the programme senior management team.

In its strategy, Let's Create, Arts Council England (ACE) aims to dedicate a significant portion of its development efforts to ensuring that children and young people can realise their creative potential and access the highest-quality cultural experiences in their localities, schools, and leisure time. The Talent 25 research programme provides a unique opportunity to explore the impact of these activities on children as they continue to develop during the next phase of the study.

Talent 25's specific outcome measures are also closely linked to the following key indicators identified by Arts Council England in its strategy, Lets Create:

- Everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life.
- A broader range of people are participating in creative activities, such as playing an instrument, creative writing, etc.
- More children and young people from all backgrounds participate and progress in developing their creativity.
- Communities engage in and shape cultural and creative provision so that it is more relevant to the community.

2000+ surveys completed by our participants



Introduction

Talent 25 is a long-term study that commenced in September 2019 in Leicester city and is designed to span a duration of 25 years. This programme specifically concentrates on early years children (from three months old) and, consequently, their families, to increase engagement in creative and cultural activities among a wider range of demographic groups in Leicester.

Throughout its extended timeline, the study is dedicated to investigating the interventions necessary to enhance cultural opportunities and engagement, commencing from the earliest possible point in a child's life. This comprehensive approach aims to contribute valuable insights into the factors that can positively influence creative and cultural participation for children, young people and their families.

Through working with a cohort of early years children and their families, the study is designed to deliver and measure a replicable and scalable model that could foster and, importantly, enhance opportunities for engagement in the creative industries among young people from currently less engaged demographic groups. This pioneering study represents the first known longitudinal exploration into the impact of participation in creativity and cultural engagement starting from early childhood and spanning a remarkable 25-year period. A distinct advantage of longitudinal studies lies in their capacity to enable researchers to examine developmental and life-span issues, enabling them to track changes in participants over the course of the study, which is a critical aspect for Talent 25. This approach provides an in-depth understanding of the long-term dynamic interplay between cultural engagement and a child's development over an extended timeframe.

The study is granted ethics approval by the Research Ethics Committee of De Montfort University and the NHS-HRA (19/LO/1431).

25 years

1. A culturally, creatively engaged citizen and a life-long participant in creative and cultural activity.
2. Someone who has had the opportunity to achieve their potential and develop their talent as a creative practitioner.

Ambition of Talent 25:

Every young person will, after the first 25 years of their life, be either or both:

1. A culturally, creatively engaged citizen and a lifelong participant in creative and cultural activity.
2. Someone who has had the opportunity to achieve their potential and develop their talent as a creative practitioner.

The initial four-year pilot phase of the Talent 25 study has employed a staggered-entry approach, systematically recruiting multiple cohorts of children along with their parents/carers over a span of three years. The first cohort of children and their parents joined the study in September 2019, and the final cohort became part of the study in October 2023. A total of 440 children and their parents are now participating in the study.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK, coupled with the subsequent national lockdown, marked a challenging period for the Talent 25 study. Leicester city was the first city in the UK to undergo an extended local lockdown, accompanied by stringent social-distancing measures, which necessitated a temporary halt to all Talent 25 creative and research activities for approximately 10 months in 2020. Although activities resumed in November 2020, the prolonged lockdown in Leicester, combined with university policy, posed challenges, preventing the delivery of in-person activities for around 18 months.

Consequently, the programme transitioned to an online format. Despite the inherent limitations of delivering creative and research activities through virtual platforms, the study successfully attracted and recruited over 90 children and their families. During this period, numerous online creative and artistic activities were delivered for parents, their babies and other family members, showcasing the adaptability and resilience of the programme in navigating the unprecedented circumstances posed by the pandemic. The online delivery during COVID-19 was appreciated by parents, especially because other cultural and recreational opportunities were severely restricted, and was a tribute to the ingenuity and commitment of project members.

During the period of lockdown and accompanying social distancing measures, Talent 25 researchers conducted two studies. The first study focused on understanding the challenges and experiences of the Talent 25 parents during the lockdown. The second study examined parents' experiences of engaging in arts and cultural activities via online platforms. The report detailing the findings of the lockdown study was officially launched in February 2021. You can find links to both reports and related seminar events on our website (www.talent25.org.uk) providing comprehensive insights into the unique circumstances and perspectives uncovered during these distinct phases of the study.

The Talent 25 research community

The Talent 25 children and their families represent the rich tapestry of our city's diverse communities. While most of Talent 25 families identify their nationality as British or English, it is a source of pride that we have successfully engaged families from 42 different nationalities. This diversity mirrors the vibrant and multicultural essence of our city. While the majority have identified English as their primary language, they collectively speak an impressive array of 34 additional languages. This linguistic diversity highlights the multicultural fabric of our community, enriching the study with a broad spectrum of cultural perspectives and experiences. The languages include: Amharic, Arabic, Bengali, Bulgarian, Catalan, Dutch, French, Gujarati, Hindi, Hungarian, Igbo, Kutchi, Latvian, Lithuanian, Malay, Malayalam, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Romanian, Spanish, Slovakian, Somalian, Tamil, Tibetan, Turkish, Twi and Urdu. This level of diversity has not been achieved in other long-term studies of child development utilising creative and cultural activities.

The Talent 25 families collectively embrace a spectrum of religious beliefs, reflecting the diverse nature of our community. Among the families, we find individuals adhering to Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, Rastafarianism, and some identifying as non-religious. This diversity of beliefs adds a richness and variety to the experiences within the Talent 25 study.

Furthermore, the parents of children in Talent 25 exhibit a broad range of educational achievements, encompassing those with life experience qualifications to individuals holding degree qualifications. This diversity in educational backgrounds underscores the inclusive nature of the study, capturing the varied perspectives and knowledge within our participant pool.

All Talent 25 families reside in Leicester city, with nearly half having called Leicester home for over a decade, and the longest-standing residents having been a part of the community for an impressive 40 years. This longevity underscores the deep roots and enduring connections that families in Talent 25 have within the Leicester community.

To date, the findings from the Talent 25 families indicate a prevailing belief among parents and families in the significance of arts, cultural, and creative activities for the development of their children. They perceive these activities as instrumental in contributing to their collective identity, fostering positive outcomes in terms of physical and mental health, as well as social wellbeing. The consensus among parents is that engagement in creative and cultural pursuits enriches their children's lives in myriad ways, emphasising the multi-faceted benefits of such experiences. A result of this is that some parents have wanted to remain in the project despite moving to other parts of the UK.

34 languages spoken by our families

Amharic, Arabic, Bengali, Bulgarian, Catalan, Dutch, French, Gujarati, Hindi, Hungarian, Igbo, Kutchi, Latvia, Lithuanian, Malay, Malayalam, Persian, Polish, Portugese, Punjabi, Romanian, Spanish, Slovakian, Somalia, Tamil, Tibetan, Turkish, Twi and Urdu.

An educational foundation is only part of the equation. In order for creativity to flourish and imagination to take hold, we also need to expose our children to the arts from a very young age.

Michelle Obama
(2009)

440 children taking part in Talent 25

Engaging in creative and cultural activities

Over the past four years, we have extended invitations to numerous parents, encouraging them to share their motivations for participating in creative and cultural activities. Additionally, we have sought insights into any challenges they encountered that may have impeded their engagement in these sessions. Here are some reflections from participating parents:

I joined the programme ...to socialise with parents and kids (and to) learn ideas to play with children with basic things and to have creative ideas to play with our children.

Parent, C9-062

To improve my baby's skills.
To explore new things. To meet other children and parents.

Parent, C9-042

For me, I think it was just the fact that (it is a) social life (for) my child [...] because I have a boring social life. And my husband is worse. So I get to utilise this opportunity, so she doesn't end up like us. So I don't want her to be like that, so when I got the call about Talent 25, I'm like, 'I want to start her early'. The other day I was telling my husband we have to look for other things and places to take her, I want her always engaged and (to) see people, see kids, interact, have a social life and be like that.

Parent, C10-060

I realised she really enjoyed it and she loved obviously interacting with other babies, I saw a change in her on the first session which then inspired me to go more and find her things to do.

Parent, C10-005

16: the average number of years families have lived in Leicester



The research into children and their families engaging in creative and cultural activities has already identified some important discoveries over the last four years. These include:

- **Motivation for participation:** Parents' primary motivation for engaging in creative and cultural activities was their strong belief in the essential role these activities play in their baby's development.
- **Socialisation and accessible activities:** Participation in the sessions provided families with the opportunity to socialise with others, access free activities, and served as a valuable daytime destination. The sessions also facilitated quality time between parents and babies, offering a distraction-free environment for interactive play.
- **The need for inclusive, inter-cultural arts:** Families expressed a need for inclusive, inter-cultural arts and creative engagement. There is a call for a stronger focus on inter-cultural exchange and the promotion of creative and cultural programmes for children from early years.
- **Acquisition of parenting skills:** Through participation in Talent 25 activities, parents reported acquiring skills to engage with their babies, enhancing their parenting style and benefiting their other children. These skills contribute to nurturing creativity from early childhood.

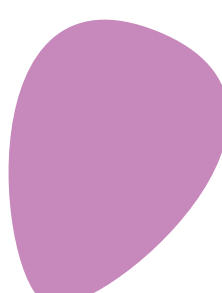
- **Learning opportunities and independence:** Engaging in creative and cultural activities was seen as an opportunity for babies and children to learn new activities while socialising. Creating a space for children to explore with minimal adult guidance was also highlighted as a way to increase independence and support growth in confidence.
- **The role of sibling relationships and multi-generational support:** Sibling relationships played a key role in children's engagement in creative activities at home. Multi-generational households were identified as crucial in providing support and contributing to the wellbeing of the babies.
- **Resourcefulness and replication at home:** Parents expressed motivation to replicate Talent 25 activities within their homes, demonstrating resourcefulness in adapting basic household items for creative play.
- **Interest in child development and long-term tracking:** Some parents were particularly interested in child development and were attracted to the fact that Talent 25 would be tracking their babies for 25 years. This long-term perspective added an intriguing dimension to their participation.

These findings collectively highlight the multi-faceted benefits and impacts of engaging in creative and cultural activities, emphasising the positive outcomes for both parents and children within the Talent 25 study.



42 different nationalities

While most of Talent 25 families identify their nationality as British, it is a source of pride that we have successfully engaged families from 42 different nationalities.



The Talent 25 journey

The Talent 25 study is approaching the conclusion of its first six years, scheduled to be completed on 31 October 2025. In anticipation of this milestone, the programme team and the DMU Research Advisory Group have developed plans for the next phase, set to commence from 1 April 2026. The forthcoming phase involves a continuation of engagement with parents through commissioned sessions, the completion of questionnaires, participation in focus groups, interviews, and other research activities.

The specifics of these activities will be communicated to parents via the Talent 25 'Family' app, ensuring transparency and clarity regarding the research process. This approach reflects the research team's commitment to ongoing collaboration, and the gathering of valuable insights from the participating families.

As we transition into the next phase of the programme, our focus encompasses a range of activities aimed at enhancing our understanding of the impact of engaging in creative and cultural activities from early childhood throughout the child's development. The activities include:

- **Sustaining access to cultural and creative opportunities:** One of our primary objectives is to ensure that families maintain continued access to a variety of cultural and creative opportunities through commissioned sessions and signposting to local creative and cultural activities. This commitment underscores our dedication to fostering an ongoing engagement with the arts.
- **Assessing school readiness and identifying barriers:** As the children participating in the Talent 25 activities reach school age, our plan includes assessing how their school readiness is influenced by their involvement in creative and cultural activities. This evaluation will also help uncover specific barriers that may impact school readiness.
- **Facilitating co-production and enabling family voices in the research programme:** We aim to enable co-production by continuing to create avenues for families' voices to actively contribute to the programme. This collaborative approach ensures that the perspectives and insights of Talent 25 families play a crucial role in shaping the direction and impact of the study.

- **Introducing creative research methodologies to allow for children's perspectives:** To gain a deeper understanding of children's views on engaging in creative and cultural activities, we plan to introduce creative methodologies. This innovative approach will allow us to capture the unique perspectives and preferences of our young participants.
- **Continuing data collection through varied research methods:** The ongoing collection of research data remains a key component of phase two. We will continue utilising questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups to comprehensively assess parents' and children's experiences and outcomes, and, as the children continue to develop, we will further explore the impact of engaging in creative and cultural activities.

Many parents within the Talent 25 programme have expressed how the opportunities provided have served as a catalyst for positive change in their child-rearing practices. Through an exploration of how families define and conceptualise their involvement in creative and cultural activities, our researchers have gained a number of valuable insights. These include:

- How participating in community-based creative and cultural activities fosters inclusivity; and
- How participating in community-based creative and cultural activities empowers families to actively shape arts and cultural initiatives that reflect their interests, cultures, and beliefs.

One parent succinctly captures the perceived benefits for their child, highlighting the transformative impact of creative engagement:

I think a good way to compare this is with her brother, and I can see their two different personalities. She is a lot more independent and also very creative in that she doesn't mind getting messy, she loves getting messy and is outgoing.

Parent, C1-016



For more information please contact:
Professor Bertha Ochieng
Talent 25 Principal Investigator
Faculty of Health & Life Sciences

De Montfort University
Edith Murphy House
The Gateway
Leicester LE1 9BH

☎ 07970 743876

✉ creativetalent25@dmu.ac.uk

🖱 talent25.org.uk

✂ @DMUtalent25

🌐 @Talent25

📷 @talent25DMU

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