

Arts Award Gold Pilot

Why?

We identified a lack of opportunities for progression between Arts Award levels across London.

Whilst many London boroughs offer more than one level of Arts Award, due to intermittent funding and the nature of the organisations offering the Award, it is often difficult for young people to find an opportunity to achieve higher levels of Arts Award.

Barriers to progression

Higher levels of Arts Award, such as Gold are often not easy to access as they are:

- often only offered by specific schools to their students
- dependent on young people being local to the borough
- attached to a specific artform, for example a dance programme
- have a specified number of contact hours which can be prohibitive to many young people who are in work

The offer

A flexible programme of support over the course of one year, which offered bi-monthly twilight sessions and remote one to one support. The structure was aimed at giving young people as much flexibility on artforms and working hours as possible, and was available to young people across all boroughs from ages 16 and up.

What is the value of Arts Award Gold to young people?

The participants responded to the most significant change they wanted to achieve with Arts Award Gold:

Qualifications: Wanting to achieve a qualification that enhanced and focussed on extending arts practice. UCAS points were a draw for A Level students and undergraduates.

Arts Practice: Graduates and those who chose not to go to university were drawn more to developing their arts practice and having a chance to focus on their creative development.

Personal Development: Those who had achieved Arts Award before were keen to increase their leadership, arts project management, and organisational skills. Several participants mentioned developing confidence as the most important reason for achieving the award.

Employability and networking: The highest ranking change the young people wanted to gain from pursuing the qualification was to become more employable and better able to evidence their creative skillset to employers, as well as get the chance to meet practitioners and access opportunities.

The group

The 22 young people involved in the pilot were all aged 16-24, came from various backgrounds and referral paths:

- 4 young people were referred from cultural organisations
- 3 were referred from school sixth forms
- 3 got in touch independently
- 2 were referred from a keyworker or parent from home-schooling and alternative provision
- 10 young people were alumni from [Create Jobs](#), A New Direction's creative employment programme
- 4 young people had learning difficulties or were neurodivergent
- 14 young people identified as 'BAME', and 12 as 'White British/Other'
- The group were fairly equally split in terms of gender, and two of the group identified as trans or non-binary

Engagement, participation, and barriers

Throughout the programme the group reported back on a variety of enablers and barriers to participation. Of the 22 that started their Gold Arts Award, 6 went on to submit portfolios for moderation.

A survey at the mid-point of the pilot with 16 participants who had decided not to continue revealed the following reasons for not continuing to pursue the award:

- **Study commitments:** Often clashed with Arts Award workload. This included both A Level and university studies

- **Care commitments:** Several young people outlined personal caring and family commitments as priorities that they were unable to juggle with the workload of an Arts Award Gold
- **Paid work:** Paid work was seen as sometimes difficult to reconcile with the contact hours needed to get advice on Arts Award work
- **Health and accessibility:** Three participants struggled with long term physical and mental health needs. One felt she could not access the programme because she needed a personal support worker to help her to get to the premises, and this support was not available

Enablers and Blockers

All participants were asked to fill in a mid-point evaluation which asked for their views on 'enablers' and 'blockers' for completing the award.

Enablers:

- **A flexible course format** which worked around work and study commitments at twilight hours, and were structured with a drop-in format
- **Remote support** which allowed young people who could not attend sessions to access advice via phone or Skype
- **Support from other teachers, parents and other cultural organisations** acted as a network which enabled participants to get much needed access to workshops, studio space, resources, event space and panellists for events
- **Being connected to an organisation with links to a wide range of cultural offers based in a big city** meant that young people could access a wide range of free activities and support

Blockers:

- **Technology:** Many young people lacked access to a working laptop and experienced problems with theirs crashing
- **Funding for events and activities:** Some group members felt that they needed support to access a budget for Unit 2 which requires leadership of an arts project, as this involved additional time. Knowledge and planning were needed to find free venues, panellists, refreshments and activities. This also extended to some Unit 1 activities which require young people to participate in personal arts development. Some participants could not find free workshops in their chosen art form and found that the money for materials to pursue practice was prohibitive. For example, graffiti workshops and materials were hard to access cheaply for one young creative who was just beginning to develop his interests and skills in this artform

A closer look at the journeys of young creatives

'When I was supposed to go to university I was in and out of hospital, so for me Arts Award Gold has provided me with a valuable opportunity to develop my skills and think academically outside of university'

- Arts Award Gold Participant, 24

Looking at the journey young creatives take through the Award as a holistic way of understanding intersecting opportunities and barriers has been a helpful tool in gathering recommendations for approaches and considerations when delivering the Gold Award. Below are some reflections on the journeys of the young creatives involved in this pilot.

Young Creative 1

Is 17 and lives in a central London borough. He is a consistent high academic achiever, currently undertaking A-Levels and extracurricular sports activities. He is hoping to get into an Oxbridge or Russell Group University and is interested in the UCAS points on offer in the Arts Award, but also the opportunity to develop his Arts practice and CV.

He heard about the programme through his contact with an arts organisation where he had undertaken summer activities. Whilst he found building a portfolio for a Gold easy, and had no difficulties finding cheap or free activities to develop his practice, Young Creative 1 found organising and leading an arts project challenging, as he had little previous experience of events management or employment. He overcame this challenge by engaging with a local school to do a series of workshops to share his arts practice, and also developed an exhibition with students and teachers to showcase the work.

Young Creative 2

Is neurodiverse and has mental health needs. She has been supported by a social worker for a number of years. She finds academic work and public speaking relatively easy but finds staying organised and finishing tasks challenging. Her ongoing work with support organisations means that she struggles to take initiative to problem solve, although achieves impressive results when she is able to overcome this.

Young Creative 2 accessed several arts organisations to create a transposed performance of a song for Unit 1, and gained access to equipment, space and software to do so. She also created a documentary in partnership with a local organisation for Unit 2. However, organisation of an event to present the film was a challenge, as with little experience of self-led organisational activity or paid employment meant that ongoing support with event management and evidence gathering was crucial to her.

Young Creative 3

Is a university graduate who achieved Silver on a Create Jobs employability and skills programme, run by A New Direction. Since then he has undertaken various internships, paid employment and mentoring. He lives in an outer London borough, and before working with A New Direction found it hard to network and find opportunities in the arts and cultural sector.

Young Creative 3 Undertook Unit 1 as a development of his employability skills in arts facilitation and research into the music industry. He is organised and finds communication easy but struggles to ask for help. He collaborated with another participant to undertake a music and fashion industry event for Unit 2. By doing so, he evidenced developing relationships across the cultural sector by gaining support from venue staff. He also developed an impressive network of contacts by attending industry events in arts research and development as part of Unit 1, and invited them to attend as panellists and workshop leaders.

He found that funding for Unit 2 was a challenge, and so applied for local funding with his event partners. Unfortunately, as he had little experience of funding applications, and did not seek out any support, this application was unsuccessful.

Opportunities and recommendations

After reflecting on the evidence gathered from the pilot, opportunities and recommendations for developing a successful future Arts Award Gold offer fall across several key areas:

Structure

A core challenge of the programme was the fact that it was self-lead with minimal compulsory elements or structure. This was intended to combat a lack of flexible Arts Award progression opportunities in London, however, while this meant that a few participants joined and achieved Arts Award Gold in their own time, it also meant that many young people with competing personal priorities could not pursue the programme.

Recommendation: To look at embedding Arts Award Gold opportunities in employment in the creative industries, as a structured tool which works to give young people an income stream, experience and supported development.

Successful examples: London Transport Museum's [Gold Apprenticeship Programme](#) which offers Arts Award Gold within a paid apprenticeship structure.

Funding

Even in London which has a large and connected cultural offer, for many young people many activities, materials and opportunities continue to be prohibitively costly. This is particularly the case when running arts events where it is best practice to pay peers and workshop leaders, as well as hire equipment and refreshments. When applying for funding, many 16-25 year olds do not have the experience or knowledge necessary to submit a successful bid and need additional support. If support can be provided, the process of applying for funding can offer valuable skills and experience.

Recommendation: To think about a possible pot of funding when running Arts Award Gold that can be applied for to support project and individual development work. This provides young people with crucial access to resources for project work and experience in budget generation and funding bid writing.

Successful examples: [Artswork](#) offer an Arts Award project funding pot for participants in their regional Arts Award Gold pilots. The [Brent 2020](#) team are also planning on using this approach as part of embedding Arts Award Gold into London Borough of Culture Young Ambassadors programme.

Arts Award Adviser feedback

The pilot worked with Libby Liburd as the lead Gold Arts Award Adviser. Libby is a Gold trainer and highly experienced adviser with over 12 years of Arts Award delivery. Libby was engaged as a freelance practitioner, running the bi-monthly Gold Support Surgeries and offering one-to-one support via email and meetings as required. Below is Libby's feedback.

This was a valuable pilot and the young people that completed their Gold Award gained a great deal from the process. There were some difficulties with the format and as the year went on Support Surgeries were less well attended, so young people then required more one-to-one time from me which was complex for me to manage. However, the Support Surgery format offered valuable peer-to-peer support and enabled young people to team up for Unit 2 projects and support each other's work.

Gold Arts Award is an exciting and valuable qualification and one that I really believe in. However, as discussed above, some of our cohort found it very difficult to access opportunities due to lack of money and/or outside support, even when highly motivated and independent. I strongly support the recommendation (above) of a funding pot that young people can access. This, I believe, would make a huge difference to young people who are on a low income and remove one of the key barriers to completion of their Gold Arts Award.