

Arts Award Impact Study

Summary of findings from year one (October 2012-September 2013)

Introduction

This research is a three-year longitudinal study commissioned by Trinity College London with joint funding from Arts Council England. The study is being conducted by the Institute for Policy Studies in Education (IPSE) and the Working Lives Research Institute (WLRI) at London Metropolitan University. The study started in October 2012 and will be completed in September 2015. It seeks to identify and understand the impact and outcomes of Arts Award for young people aged 11-25. The study will examine the extent to which participation in Arts Awards impacts on a young person's:

- Arts-related and creative skill development
- Personal and social skills
- Leadership, communications and other key skills
- Enjoyment, enthusiasm and participation in arts and cultural activities and opportunities
- Aspirations and motivations for further arts-related study, careers and/or progression towards employment.

Method & Analysis

A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed for this first stage of the research and included:

- A survey of young people either about to start or in the midst of their Arts Award;
- A one-off survey of advisers;
- Analysis of data;
- Qualitative Arts Award centre case studies in a variety of educational settings consisting of:
 - Focus groups with young people,
 - Interviews with Arts Award advisers and Arts Award centre staff and;

- Stakeholder interviews with sector professionals.

The next stage of the research will explore the impact of Arts Award on young people over time and will include a follow-up survey of young people, a longitudinal tracking of young people, involving repeat interviews and a sample of 'alumni' (young people who have completed their Award some years previously).

Summary of year 1 findings

This summary provides an overview of the reach of year one: the delivery; motivations for participation; and a detailed analysis of the key mechanisms of Arts Award's design and implementation. Data is presented on the perceived impacts on young people's futures, but the full impact of Arts Award on young people remains to be researched in the further two years of this study. Here are the key findings from the study so far.

Motivation for Arts Award:

Advisers' motivations for delivering Arts Award are strongly young people-centred. They are motivated by providing new, creative opportunities for young people. The survey of advisers suggests quite instrumental reasons such as employability, but focus group discussions provide a more nuanced picture, where art for art's sake and learning for learning's sake emerge more as motivating factors.

Reach of Arts Award:

Expansion of the qualification saw the numbers of awards reach over 62,000 in 2011/12 (the full year data which was analysed). The vast majority of those completed Bronze Award. More girls than boys complete Arts Awards (particularly pronounced at Gold level) which is not surprising and follows trends in arts education.

Advisers' perceived impacts:

The survey of advisers suggests the highest impacts are perceived to be on young people's personal confidence and access to new experiences. The greatest perceived impact on skills was seen to be in the skills used to complete a project and creative skills. The way in which Arts Award is portfolio-based and requires young people to see a creative project through from start to finish was deemed by advisers in the case studies to be an important part of its success.

Flexibility and variability:

The case study research revealed quite significant variability in delivery and hence young people's experience of Arts Award: including duration; depth of focus; access to arts professionals; access to arts events. The flexibility of Arts Award is reported to be a key success factor, but will no doubt create variability in the impact on young people.

Key mechanisms of Arts Award:

There were a number of what we refer to as 'key mechanisms' which are instrumental in Arts Award's success. These were many and varied but included 'meta-cognitive' (learning-to-learn) strategies, leadership and accreditation. We discuss the ten key mechanisms identified in more detail below.

What makes Arts Award successful?

Arts Award was, on the whole, highly rated by Arts Award advisers, other staff involved and by young people themselves. Arts Award appeared to work well for young people at all different stages in their relationship with the arts, and their own artistic development.

Some advisers reported that Arts Award helped to improve English proficiency with students for whom English was not their first language.

The Sutton Trust report (2013) reviews a range of pedagogic strategies that can be assessed in terms of their utility in teaching and learning. Many of these strategies are fundamental to Arts Award's framework. Informed by this review, though also reflecting other pedagogies, the research outlines the 'key mechanisms' of Arts Award, in order of reported importance:

Meta-cognition or 'learning to learn':

Sometimes known as 'learning to learn' 'meta-cognition' and 'self-regulation' are teaching approaches which encourage students to think about their learning. Aspects of Arts Award which could be seen as encouraging 'meta-cognition' arose across almost all of the case studies, for example in terms of allowing self-reflection or leadership. The meta-cognitive element of Arts Award was perceived as beneficial for young people with less confidence in formal education – for example, young offenders with limited literacy or young people with special needs, who were helped by Arts Award to recognise their own development and achievement. However this support for reflection was equally important with high-achieving young people, where case studies reported that Arts Award often enabled young people to exceed the expectations of professionals working with them.

Leadership and peer tutoring:

The aspect of Arts Award where students teach their artistic skill to other people and/or lead a team of people in an artistic project (the 'skills share' strand of Bronze and the leadership elements of Silver and Gold) was also a highly rated aspect of the award and discussed in over half of the case studies across a range of settings. This element of the award gave students experience of teaching, leading, facilitating and insight into the diverse range of skills needed to do this, including communication, creativity, command, compassion, encouragement and praise. Advisers mentioned this aspect as a very challenging but effective element for students.

Accreditation:

The fact that Arts Award is accredited was discussed as a key benefit across the board, again by schools and non-school settings. This was the third most discussed key mechanism and was valued for three different reasons: First, for instrumental reasons such as to put on their CV, to write on UCAS statements, to discuss at an interview, and to help to find a job. Second, the accreditation was valued because it legitimated young people's artistic practice and rewarded them for it. It was about 'recognising achievements'. The third relates to the perception that Arts Award is 'accessible': it is possible and achievable for young people who might have never achieved before, in the educational sense.

Personalised independent learning:

The benefits of the independent, personalised approach of Arts Award were multiple, and cited across all settings. The fact that students are encouraged to pursue their own interests rather than a prescribed curriculum, enabled students to focus and excel in their own arts practice.

Portfolio evidencing:

The portfolio format of assessment was highlighted as a key strength by staff and students alike. Developing a tangible piece of work that they keep created a 'rounded' experience not often experienced in school education, and furthermore a sense of 'ownership'. Those working with students who previously had quite negative learning experiences were felt to gain extra benefit from this method.

Evidencing through diverse media:

The fact that Arts Award did not involve 'too much writing' was another valued aspect of the Award. Not only was there little requirement for lengthy written pieces, but the creative ways in which young people were legitimised in documenting their Arts Award journey was another mechanism by which students remained engaged in the qualification.

Applied learning:

Arts Award in many instances gave opportunities for applied learning. The most common example from the case studies is learning the different jobs and skills involved in putting on a theatre production and the applied learning that takes place through students' execution of their own research project.

Learning beyond the classroom:

Going to shows or exhibitions was perceived as an important aspect in some settings where young people wouldn't usually get the opportunity (or have the inclination) to visit arts events. It gave an opportunity to expand students' horizons and provide access to art, but also, for some, learning benefits.

Collaborative learning:

While there was plenty of evidence across the case studies of group and team working (theatre productions; storytelling project; peer tutoring; writing a song and producing it; producing a film; putting on a photographic exhibition; youth orchestra), there was less discussion in the interviews of the learning that resulted from such work, beyond the fact that it was generally a 'nice thing' for them to work together.

Access to a range of other arts-related skills:

One adviser referred to this as a 'tool box.' Skills in this 'tool box' were organisation; evidencing learning; self motivation in learning; research skills; organising an event; running a project to completion; social and communication (including English language) skills; negotiation; working to deadlines; planning; goal setting; teaching; people skills; how to follow instructions; how to address different audiences; team working skills.

Conclusion

In years two and three of this study, the research team will further test the 10 'key mechanisms' which appear to underpin Arts Award's success to date, and place them in wider educational context. They will track the impact of doing one or more Arts Awards on individual young people over a period of time, examining Arts Award's leverage in relation to sustained skills development, access to new opportunities, and pathways into further qualifications, FE, HE, training and employment.

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