

Silver & Gold - An Arts Award Action Research Programme

Introduction

This resource shares the learning from *Silver & Gold*, a nine-month action research programme that supported six cultural organisations to explore new models for delivering Arts Award. The programme was designed, facilitated and funded by A New Direction from September 2013 to June 2014.

A New Direction (AND) connects children, young people and education with the best of arts and culture in London. AND's vision is for London to be the leading city in the world for young people's cultural and creative development. It campaigns for the value of arts and culture, promotes ways for schools to develop cultural opportunities and helps cultural organisations to improve the quality of their work with young people.

Arts Award develops young people (between the ages of 5-25 years) as artists and arts leaders. The programme develops their creativity, leadership and communication skills. Arts Award can be achieved at five levels: an introductory award, Discover, and four, formally accredited qualifications (Explore, Bronze, Silver and Gold). Arts Award is managed by Trinity College London in association with Arts Council England working with 10 regional Bridge Organisations, including AND in London. The Silver and Gold Awards are level 2 and level 3 qualifications respectively¹ and therefore support young people's progress into higher education and employment. (Gold Arts Award is worth 35 UCAS points²).

Cultural organisations and artists can also register as an Arts Award Supporter if they offer activities that young people can use towards achieving their Arts Award. Supporters can promote these activities (participatory workshops, events to review, leadership opportunities etc.) free of charge to young people and Arts Award Centres.

Outline of this resource

There is no shortage of Arts Award case studies that describe projects and approaches taken, celebrate achievements and promote the benefits of Arts Award to young people. Such materials offer valuable insights into successful models of delivery.

¹Silver Arts Award is at the same standard and therefore have the same level of difficulty as GCSEs but are smaller in size. Gold Award is at the same standard as A-levels but is the size of half an AS level.

² UCAS awards points to a range of post-16 qualifications to enable universities and colleges to make broad comparisons between a wide variety of qualifications used for entry to Higher Education.

With this resource, AND aims to complement these case studies with a focus on organisations rather than on the experiences and outcomes for young people. It addresses the question: ***how can Arts Award be integrated into ongoing learning programmes of cultural organisations?***

This resource comprises five sections which can be read individually or as a whole. This section provides an overview of the programme and draws together common challenges encountered and the organisations' reflections on the benefits of Arts Awards to the sector. The key learning is outlined in *Top Tips*. The remainder of the resource comprises three case studies, each of which draws on the experiences of two of the organisations: *Adding Value*, *Borough Partnerships*, and *Young People Take Over*.

Silver & Gold - overview and rationale

The number of young people achieving Bronze Arts Award in London is high (3315 in 2013/14) with projects and support offered by a range of educational, youth and cultural settings. Fewer Arts Award Centres offer Silver Arts Award as some cultural organisations perceive challenges in the delivery of the award. *Silver & Gold* was established, therefore, to support a small number of organisations whilst they trialled new approaches, shared learning and developed solutions to perceived and real challenges.

Programme Aims:

- To increase the numbers of young people achieving Silver and/or Gold Award
- To create and develop new models of Arts Award delivery that can be disseminated to the wider Arts and Cultural sector
- To embed sustainable delivery of Silver and Gold Arts Award in the core business of the organisations selected to take part in the programme.

The Silver and Gold Network

Cultural organisations were invited to apply individually or as the lead partner in a consortium. Six organisations were selected to take part in the programme, varying in scale, cultural form and location. Although organisations undertook individual projects, AND facilitated peer support and learning through the formation of a Silver & Gold Network; project coordinators from each organisation met formally at AND on three occasions but informal discussion, support and sharing of resources continued throughout.

In addition to the delivery of an Arts Award project, the programme comprised:

- Three Project Days (beginning, middle and end) facilitated by Michael Judge, AND's Programme Associate (Culture), and Hannah Wilmot, the external evaluator. These days explored different aspects of the process including partnership working, portfolio documentation, evaluation, Quality Principles³ and organisational values. Importantly, these days also offered time for sharing achievements and challenges.
- Gold Arts Award training.
- Pre-moderation visits from Trinity to support successful completion of Arts Award.
- A shared and supported approach to evaluation.
- Final interviews with each project coordinator. In the case of the three National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), senior managers also attended these interviews.
- Ongoing dissemination of progress through guest blog posts on the AND website.

Each organisation formulated an aim for their work with Silver & Gold. These are listed below.

Table 1: Network partners

Silver & Gold Network partners		Organisational aim	Arts Awards Achieved
Almeida Theatre (NPO) Islington	A producing theatre with a 325-seat auditorium.	To add value and rigour to existing programmes for young people.	8 Silver (Still to be moderated)
Geffrye Museum Hackney	A museum exploring the home over 400 years.	To add value and find a way to embed the delivery of Arts Award within the existing Young People's Programme.	10 Silver
Harrow Arts Centre (Working with Harrow Music Hub) Harrow	A professional, multi-artform venue serving the diverse communities of Harrow.	To improve progression routes for young people working towards their Arts Awards by finding a realistic and sustainable way to deliver Silver Arts Award alongside HAC's existing offer.	10 Silver
Tiger Monkey (Working with the youth service and a range of cultural partners in the borough) Enfield	A cross-artform educational charity that promotes social inclusion through creativity.	To embed Arts Award across the borough of Enfield	9 Bronze 22 Silver (+ 1 Gold still to be moderated)
Tomorrow's Warriors (NPO) Harrow / Southbank	A jazz education and training organisation with a focus on young musicians.	To add value to an established and successful programme.	1 Bronze 7 Silver

³ Arts Council England has been developing a set of Quality Principles for work with, by and for children and young people since 2011. The Principles are currently being tested by a range of cultural organisations.

Centre			
Tricycle Theatre (NPO) Brent	A producing theatre with a 235-seat studio and 300 seat cinema.	To establish a long-term approach to delivering Gold Arts Award through the Young Producers project.	2 Gold

NPO: National Portfolio Organisation of Arts Council England

**Total number of Silver and Gold Arts Awards achieved during the programme
= 60
(Plus 10 Bronze Arts Awards)**

Overcoming common challenges

The organisations and the Arts Award projects they undertook varied widely. The challenges encountered also varied and are outlined in the three case studies. Common to all projects was an exploration of how best to engage young people to achieve an Arts Award; in this regard, certain challenges were cited by the majority of organisations. These are listed below together with the solutions developed by the *Silver & Gold* network partners.

The impact of school exams on attendance

Silver and Gold Arts Awards are targeted at an older age range (14+ and 16+ respectively). *Silver & Gold* set a moderation deadline of 30 June. The majority of organisations ran projects that continued into the summer term and all faced attendance and completion challenges as a result.

Solution: Don't set a completion deadline during or shortly following the exam season. Aim to complete projects by Easter or run projects over a year with time off across the summer term.

Young people's other commitments

It was not only exams that impacted on young people's attendance. Work, family, friends all compete for young people's time. The majority of project coordinators reported spending more time than anticipated 'chasing' participants and scheduling additional catch-up sessions.

Solution: Be prepared to work around young people's availability. Ensure the Arts Award adviser and any other staff or freelancers working on the project have sufficient flexibility in their hours to accommodate necessary changes or additions to the original plan.

An eagerness to 'do'; a reluctance to write!

All project coordinators reported a tendency for young people to put off 'the paperwork'. Not only did this create pressure for the young people but in some

cases, opportunities for evidence gathering had been lost. It also created capacity issues for advisers if they received all the portfolios at the same time.

Solutions: Ensure young people understand the need for ongoing evidencing and what format it should take.

Provide young people with clear deadlines for completion of each section and monitor progress.

Encourage young people to use various methods of documentation including audio, film, scrapbooks, blogs and other online documentation including *Artsbox*⁴.

Incorporate sessions throughout the project that focus exclusively on documentation. Ensure adequate adult support and access to IT in these sessions.

Balancing support, guidance and independence

The less experienced advisers sometimes found it hard to determine when and how much to guide young people. Advisers working with Gold were uncertain about chasing young people who were supposed to be working independently.

Responsibility and leadership may need to be scaffolded for young people; finding the right balance takes experience.

Solutions: Allow as much time and flexibility as possible for young people to define and develop their work (for their arts challenge and leadership projects). Provide structure, templates and deadlines to support young people to reflect, collect evidence and document.

Listen to young people.

Finally, the majority of organisations stressed how important it is not to underestimate the time required to plan and deliver an Arts Award project. Integrating Arts Award with youth projects will make additional demands on both project coordinators and young people as it introduces a new level of rigour to activities, reflection and evaluation. It is these very qualities that make Arts Award attractive however and the *Silver & Gold* network partners concluded that the effort was worthwhile.

The value of Arts Award

At the end of the programme, project coordinators and senior leaders reflected on their experiences and articulated their perceptions of the benefits of Arts Award.

⁴ Developed by Arts Award, *Artsbox* is a social media space where young people can record and share their Arts Award experiences.

Silver and Gold Arts Award offer cultural organisations:

- the kudos of offering a nationally recognised, accredited qualification
- a way of articulating the value and impact of existing learning programmes that is readily understood by young people, parents and funders
- a structured yet flexible format that is accessible to all young people (e.g. documentation can include audio and film; portfolios can be hard copy or online).
- a means of adding structure and rigour to learning programmes whilst developing confidence, agency and leadership through participant-led projects
- a way of challenging young people to move beyond their comfort zone
- a mechanism to attract young people into your building (including the notoriously hard to attract 16-25 age group⁵) as audience, volunteers, participants and peer leaders; these young people develop loyalty for the organisation and engage at a deep level with the work of the organisation
- a vehicle for young people to help shape your programme.

Silver and Gold Arts Award offer young people:

- an insight into the cultural industries (working creatively and possible career paths)
- validation for their work (including UCAS points for Gold)
- access to the resources of high quality cultural organisations
- the opportunity to meet like-minded young people
- the capacity to determine their own goals
- leadership and communication skills; creativity; confidence and resilience
- the opportunity to reflect on their practice as artists and think about what they want to do in the future
- personal and artistic progression (within and between Awards).

Silver and Gold Arts Award offer the following benefits to the cultural industries:

- a mechanism to diversify the workforce by offering alternative routes into education and employment for young people with few formal qualifications
- a cultural equivalent to the long-established and well-respected Duke of Edinburgh Award and Awards in Sports Leadership
- a way of retaining creative and cultural learning for young people at a time when their formal education may become more restricted (at GCSE and A Level)
- through its young person-centred approach, provides a model of good practice that can inform and accredit internships and apprenticeships.

⁵ See Catherine Bunting's 2013 survey for AND: <http://www.anewdirection.org.uk/cultural-engagement-by-young-londoners>

Evaluation of the AND programme

On the final Project Day, project coordinators undertook group and individual evaluation exercises to reflect on the value of the *Silver & Gold* programme. This is not an evaluation report but it may be useful to share participants' feedback on the respective value of various elements of the programme to inform similar initiatives.

Table 2: Programme evaluation

Programme element	Average rating (5=very valuable and 1=no value)	Additional comments
<i>Shared and supported approach to evaluation</i>	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting aside time, having a structure and deadlines External support for evaluation The methodology of evaluation and reflection as a group Strategic thinking on improvements and sustainability Having a report at the end; useful for external advocacy
<i>Funding</i>	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitated innovation and enabled a larger scale project Kudos of AND enabled match funding The inclusion of Gold Adviser training was useful
<i>Pre-moderation visits</i>	5 *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gave an in-depth understanding of the criteria An opportunity to review evidence and make changes
<i>Project Days - shared learning and reflection</i>	4.67	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning new techniques and insights Group support: decreases stress; shared problem solving Time to think through delivery
<i>Networking outside Project Days</i>	4.17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Valuable when undertaken but could have made more of the opportunities
<i>Designing and managing an Arts Award project</i>	4.17	
<i>Ongoing support from Trinity</i>	4	

* Rating from those that took up this offer. The 2 experienced advisers did not use pre-moderation visits.

Conclusions

The six participating organisations had varying degrees of prior experience with Arts Award; for two at least, experience was minimal and others had found it hard in the past to integrate the Award into ongoing learning programmes. *Silver & Gold* enabled all the organisations to move into new territory and by the end, all six were enthusiastic proponents of Arts Award and determined to continue and develop the approaches they piloted. As Tricycle Theatre's Creative Learning Director concluded,

'I began the project feeling really sceptical about the place of Arts Award in the organisation ... but have finished feeling really convinced about the value for us and young people.'

The individual aims of the organisations (see table 1 above) reflected AND's research question and contained words such as 'embed', 'realistic' and 'sustainable'. Some of the projects evolved and adapted to unexpected circumstances, some amended objectives and targets to reflect this new reality. All, however, achieved their overall aim and found ways to embed Arts Award within core learning programmes. There was an agreement that the benefits of Arts Award outweigh the initial challenges and could be embraced by a wide range of cultural organisations.

'If you've got a good youth programme, which you're committed to, and understand the inspirational ways young people can engage with cultural organisations, then Arts Award is really not difficult to do. You just need to think about what you do and how it matches the criteria.'

Young People's Programme Manager, Geffrye Museum.

A final endorsement of *Silver & Gold* came from the Arts Award moderator who worked with three of the groups. She praised the quality of the young people's portfolios and speculated about the impact of the *Silver & Gold* network on the advisers' ability to facilitate such exciting and relevant projects with young people,

'It was a real joy to see such creative, individual and exciting work, where clearly a great deal had been gained by participants. The richness of the opportunities provided and the advisers' careful and insightful guidance and support resulted in experiences throughout that were highly relevant to the young people's individual development. The models employed to foster relationships between young people and the cultural sector were inspiring.'

Arts Award moderator