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## How can museums work effectively with special schools to support students with special educational needs and disabilities in creative learning and life chances?

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‘Accessing the local community, experiencing cultural institutions and meeting new people has enhanced students’ learning, developed their self-confidence and provided them with a professional platform to showcase their artwork.’ Tom Procter-Legg, Assistant Head, The Iffley Academy

### The context

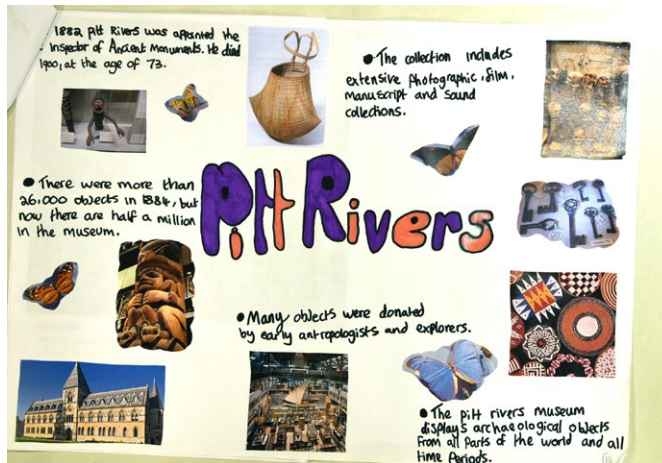
During 2016/17 the majority of Key Stage 4<sup>2</sup> pupils at The Iffley Academy School worked towards and achieved their Explore Arts Award. The Arts Award is delivered by the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, working in partnership with the students and staff at The Iffley Academy.

The Pitt Rivers Museum was founded in 1884, and is one of the four Oxford University Museums. Situated in central Oxford, it displays archaeological and ethnographic objects from all parts of the world and all time periods. Between 2012 and 2018 the Oxford University Museums have been part-funded by Arts Council England (ACE) as one of their Major Partner Museums (MPM).

The Iffley Academy is an Outstanding Community Special Academy for young people who have complex special educational needs. It is situated within Oxford City and has approximately 135 students on roll up to age 18. It is Oxfordshire’s largest special school.

The project was initiated by Pitt Rivers Museum, but key to the success of the partnership has been the relationship built with key staff early on. Assistant Head Tom Procter-Legg believes in the value of creativity and culture within the curriculum. Together with Tom and his team of dedicated teaching staff, we were able to work together effectively to identify key shared aims for the project and forge a true partnership.

Arts Award, if delivered appropriately, is highly inclusive by its design and nature: we knew that every Key Stage 4 pupil, no matter what their needs, had the potential to pass.



Activity Sheet – Activity Sheet recording information about the Pitt Rivers Museum

### Arts Award and museums

Arts Award is a suite of arts-based qualifications for young people aged between five and 25 years, launched by Arts Council England (ACE) and Trinity College London in 2005. Originally there were three higher-level qualifications: Bronze, Silver and Gold, which map onto the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) and are equivalent to formal mainstream qualifications such as GCSE and A Level.<sup>3</sup> In 2012, two more awards were added: Discover, an entry-level qualification, and Explore, which maps to the RQF as an Entry Level 3 qualification.

Since 2013 the Oxford University Museums have developed expertise in delivering Arts Award at multiple levels to a variety of groups of young people who are often outside mainstream education settings. Examples include young parents and carers,

young people at risk – such as inpatients at the Highfield Adolescent Mental Health Unit, school refusers and other vulnerable young people with a range of additional needs. This work fits into the Arts Council's Goal 5 as stipulated in our ACE funding: 'Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts, museums and libraries'.<sup>4</sup>

The Oxford University Museums' approach to the strategic development and delivery of Arts Award has been described in feedback from Arts Council England and Trinity College as sector-leading. This varied delivery practice builds on the unique contribution museums can make to Arts Award even when collections are not primarily artwork based. By integrating Arts Award into delivery via the existing offer or into special project work or collaborations with outside agencies such as RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) staff have been able to use areas of the collection to stimulate a range of creative and evidence based enquiry that fit with Arts Award's assessment criteria. This approach often allows an existing project to be enriched by Arts Award – justifying the additional work Arts Award entails – rather than needing to 'dream up' or 'invent' Arts Award based projects.

Museum staff assess which groups of young people will potentially benefit most from Arts Award. Arts Award in museums can be a harder and less obvious fit than within a conventional arts setting e.g. a theatre. Our approach often involves groups of



Pupil from the Iffley Academy drawing on a visit to the Pitt Rivers Museum

young people who have additional access needs. By looking closely at the needs of groups of learners the Arts Award criteria can be broken down to enable the most logical and beneficial methods of evidence collection as well as allowing careful consideration of which artefacts and areas of the collection are the most inspirational and relevant to work with.

We have developed additional strategies for research and evidence gathering such as considering ideas around atmosphere, curation, lighting, interpretation and display of artefacts as part of the recording of a museum visit. These strategies are particularly useful for Bronze Arts Award, Part B – explore the arts as an audience member, where young people need guidance on how to reflect on their experiences as audience members.<sup>5</sup> Digital engagement has also been a key to successful delivery for groups with additional needs such as using *Talking Tins* and talking photo albums in a recent Discover Arts Award project with blind and partially sighted children. An *Explore* project in 2014 working with Northfield School, Oxford (a residential school for boys with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs) was inspired by the Ashmolean Museum. This Arts Award and was evidenced completely on iPads allowing a safe and ‘eyes down’ way of working for the young people involved which also harnessed their enjoyment of digital learning and enabled the boys to meaningfully engage with the museum collection.

These creative and flexible methods of delivery give a wealth of approaches to develop and share with the sector. A number of staff have shared their Arts Award experiences at conferences, often being very honest about what has worked well and what has not. Our collaborations with external partners such as schools or charities has also raised the wider awareness of Arts Award with groups outside the arts sector that work with young people. The Arts

Award team at Trinity College are keen to hear of our progress, share our work more widely and put museums in touch with us for advice.

Our Family Arts Award,<sup>6</sup> which enhances the existing family programming, has attracted wide attention from the sector and we often offer support to other museums hoping to establish a similar programme. We have worked with other sector advocacy organisations such as Kids In Museums to promote this integration of Arts Award into family learning. This strategic approach of looking at our programming to find areas of ‘best fit’ for Arts Award as well as looking more widely at who we can work with and at the wider sector has been hugely beneficial in growing our Arts Award programme.

It has been necessary to refine the language of Arts Award to accommodate museums, for example ‘artworks’ and ‘artists’, to accommodate museum collections, which often do not regard themselves as primarily arts venues. In the case of the Pitt Rivers Museum, many items in the collection were not created by named artists, and Oxford University Museums have been keen to be at the forefront of this reshaping of Arts Award.

### **Building a partnership**

At the core of this successful partnership has been a shared vision, and crucially, shared key project drivers. Arts Award offers a flexible evidence-based portfolio approach to assessment that can be tailored to the learners’ needs, which is essential

when working with young people who have multiple and complex additional needs. The Arts Award assessment criteria provided a clear structure for project planning and collaboration. The Explore Award was chosen for this project because of its RQF equivalence to an Entry Level 3 qualification, which is an aspirational level of attainment for Key Stage 4 pupils at the school. The Explore Award comprises four key sections, which determined what activities we were doing where, and when, and who was leading on them:

#### Part A

Inspire: Young people should take part in a range of arts activities and identify what inspires them.

#### Part B

Explore: Explore the work of artists and arts organisations through active experience and collect evidence of what they have found out.

#### Part C

Create: Participate in arts activity and create a piece of artwork that demonstrates art skill. Create a record of the artwork and how it was achieved.

#### Part D

Present: Communicate through chosen media identifying areas of achievement and enjoyment. Record what was presented and whom it was presented to.<sup>7</sup>



Artist Ellen Love working with pupil from The Iffley Academy

A key driver for The Iffley Academy was that achieving an Arts Award Explore qualification enables the pupils who are progressing to Key Stage 5 or leaving school to move on with an arts-based qualification in addition to qualifications in functional English and Maths. The school also identified the communication element as a big asset for pupils in accessing the next steps towards training and work.

The pooled expertise of the professionals involved has also been key to success. The museum staff brought knowledge of Arts Award and the Pitt Rivers collection and the teaching staff brought knowledge of their pupils, appropriate pedagogy and experience of working with evidence-based assessment. This not only enabled shared project design and planning, but ensured successful delivery of the collaborative project.



Students learnt to use the printing press independently

Explore was also a good choice from the Pitt River's point of view, as Part B of the award requires evidence of actively finding out about the museum as an arts venue. For the practical task (Part C) we wanted the young people to work with an artist to enable them to develop their skills with an experienced practitioner. This would, alongside finding out about the museum, promote aspiration around potential careers and further study in the arts.

Very early on it was agreed that the finance of the project would be shared equitably with the museum, using its budget to fund the art materials and the artist, and the school's budget to fund the Arts Award assessment and moderation costs. This financial model demonstrates the level and quality of collaboration.



*Print and Press* – A collograph emerging from the printing press

### **Adapting Arts Award to the needs of The Iffley Academy pupils**

The Iffley Academy is an ideal school to work with because teaching is structured around a termly theme, with one class teacher responsible for all teaching throughout the day. This topic-based approach enables the school to meet the additional and multiple needs of pupils. There were



Pupil showing her successful collograph print

approximately 10 pupils in each class and we worked with one class and its teacher each term.

Museum and teaching staff jointly planned a ten-week project to accommodate all the elements of project delivery and evidence collection for the Arts Award portfolios. Arts Award is an evidence-based assessment format and planning must identify

opportunities for evidence gathering, such as photographs of each pupil undertaking tasks. The opportunity for including non-written evidence is crucial for those pupils with additional needs as it can unlock academic potential.

Teaching and museum staff thought carefully about the practical art tasks for Part A and Part C. We knew the young people would benefit from being hands on in any task. Including drawing, photography on the iPad and collograph printing allowed a balance of skills to be evidenced. Pupils worked with artist Ellen Love, who helped pupils engage with every stage of the collograph printing process – a tactile method that allows simple designs to be printed to great effect and then to be filled with texture and detail. This method of printing was new to staff, who learnt about the print process alongside the pupils in a co-constructed learning environment.

To link with the collection, we chose the broad theme of *Aboriginal Art* to enable pupils to fully engage, which is rich in narrative, colour and pattern. It also suited bold graphic translation to the collograph process. The teaching staff skilfully wove the museum-based themes into the wider topic-based teaching for the term, incorporating learning about Australia, its geography, animals and culture, with further enrichment for the pupils.

### **Using a mixture of approaches to delivery**

The project begins with a 'Skype hello' warm-up: Pitt Rivers Secondary Education Officer Katherine Rose

meets the group via Skype, speaking to them from the Education Office at the museum. Pupils situated in the safe space of their classroom prepare questions to ask Katherine about the museum and her job, and this prepares for Part B (exploring the work of an arts organisation).

The next stage is an outreach visit to the school, when Katherine takes in a selection of objects from the handling collection. Pupils handle and have tactile contact with a variety of objects. The objects act as inspiration for Part A of the award (Inspire) and pupils attempt two practical artforms: drawing with any materials they feel comfortable with, and photography on the iPad using a range of apps to manipulate their photographs.

A visit to the museum comes next and tackles Part B of the award: *Explore the work of artists and arts organisations*. An additional quiet room is essential and booked for the duration of the visit to act as a base camp and lunchroom for all pupils, as well as a quiet space for retreating should the visit become overwhelming for any one pupil. This is incredibly important for these young people coming out of their safe school environment. The theme of Aboriginal Art was also chosen as this display has space around which the group can gather for close looking and discussion, in a relatively quiet part of the museum.

On the visit pupils find out about the museum as an organisation (Part B). They visit the education office



to meet staff and ask questions, meet a curator and also visit the conservation studio. In this instance students spent time drawing objects and artefacts in the main museum, which forms part of their research for ideas for their printmaking (Part C – Create). Back at school, students complete structured activity sheets reflecting on and recording their learning from the museum visit.

In school pupils create several designs for their print, ready for Ellen’s workshop session. In this session students transfer their designs to thick card using an ‘i-slice’ and use collage to create textured surfaces. Simple materials are used, such as sticker dots, to allow for graphic patterns inspired by Aboriginal art to be transferred quickly and easily.

All students undertake each stage of the print process and produce at least three prints for their portfolio; a very busy session of practical work, rounded off by time for reflection, led by Ellen. The facilitating adults wondered if we were asking too much of the students to attempt so many new tasks in one session, but each time we were surprised by their focus and appetite for learning new skills and how to use new equipment. During each stage, an adult documents each pupil at work for the crucial portfolio evidence. The experience was an exciting one for Ellen:

*‘I loved watching the pupils peel their print away from their plates after rolling it through the press and seeing their amazement at the result – until that*

*point it is hard to fully understand the delicacy a print can achieve and they can see each line they cut into their plate. The outcome of each print is a surprise! ...*

*I could see students who didn’t enjoy sitting and drawing who were able to really engage with this more active way of creating ... The versatile nature of the process allowed for all students to find a way of working which best appealed to them and suited their skill set.’*

Part D (Present) can be the greatest challenge to students with additional needs and must be tailored to the individual pupil. Some students were confident enough to present and share their work with the whole class, others shared their presentation one-to-one with an adult who supported them to pick out the highlights of their work. Class teacher Dee Taylor suggested using the *Explain Everything* app to help structure this element for students with communication difficulties. In addition to photographing the presentations, some were also audio recorded for moderation evidence.

In short this project used a ‘bite-sized’ approach to managing project delivery, pupils’ learning and Arts Award evidence collection.

### **A rich relationship**

This type of collaboration can present a risk for young people with additional needs – the risk of leaving the safe space of school and working with



Collograph plate and Print – A collograph plate and resulting print

new adults cannot be underestimated. Careful planning mitigates this risk as does building a relationship with a trusted adult at the museum, in this case Katherine Rose.

The project has been intense in many ways but rewarding for all involved. It has the double benefit of a qualification-based outcome and supporting pupils to develop crucial life skills (communication, travelling to a venue out of school, meeting adults who are new to them, reflecting on learning and skill development). More able and confident students (along with an adult) caught the bus to visit the museum – reading timetables, counting change and finding the bus stop are core skills delivered within a context of access. A further desired outcome is that at least one young person (a female student with communication and interaction difficulties) has



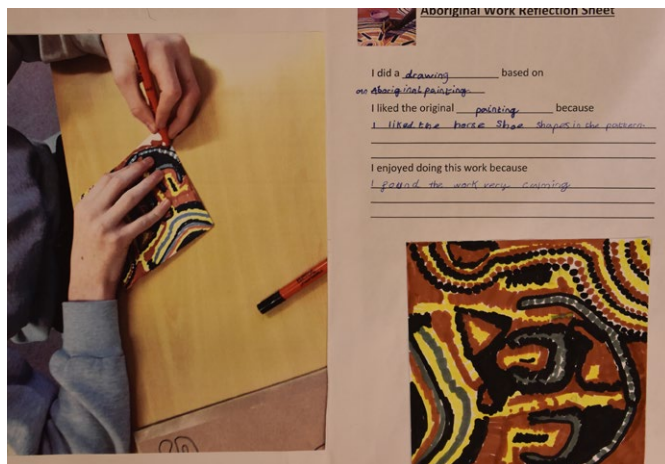
Collograph plate and Print – A collograph plate and resulting print

expressed the desire to study art at FE level and the Explore portfolio has given her the means to demonstrate and articulate this desire.

We have had some positive and helpful feedback from Arts Award moderators:

*'The young people have been well supported to achieve their Arts Awards and have had creative experiences which have clearly developed their skills for the future ... Despite their many challenges and barriers the young people experienced the wonders of the Pitt Rivers Museum and gained insights into other cultures through their art. Portfolios are well laid out and clear and I enjoyed hearing the voices of the young people for Part D.'*

Arts Award moderator feedback



Activity Sheet – Activity Sheet recording information about the Pitt Rivers Museum

The project was celebrated across the school community. The school immediately put a link to the Pitt Rivers' blogpost<sup>8</sup> about the project to share it with parents, staff and governors. The project has allowed the Pitt Rivers to become more accessible and to develop experience of careful planning for the access needs of vulnerable learners. Arts Award also provides a clear nationally recognised measure and benchmark of young people's deeper engagement with museums and their collections. This is not only useful to us as museum educators but a valuable measure for funders.

*'The collaboration between the Pitt Rivers and The Iffley Academy was fantastic! The experience was rich, but always geared towards our learners, which is extremely important. The education team were enthusiastic and warm. Highlights included visiting*

*the Pitt Rivers, handling the amazing objects at school and our favourite part – the talented artist, Ellen Love, teaching us how to use her printing press to make bold Aboriginal prints. Who would know that the only other way of getting such good results is driving a car over the print to get enough pressure?'*  
Dee Taylor, teacher, The Iffley Academy

In this project we have all been learners. The project plan has been revised slightly for each cohort to improve delivery and evidence collection. We have fine-tuned the portfolios to ensure evidence is clearly labelled and presented. Feedback from moderation has been complimentary and constructive. The bulk of the Arts Award checking, organisation and administration has fallen to the museum educators, which we accept. The school and museum need to develop robust protocols around sharing images of the pupils – vital to their portfolios – that enable quick transfer of evidence whilst adhering to strict safeguarding policies.

Teaching staff have needed clear guidance and support with successful evidence gathering. As our relationship develops the school will hopefully become more confident in active evidence gathering for the Arts Award portfolios, in addition to the topic and key skills work they do around the project to maximise its impact.

### **The future – looking forwards**

We hope to be able to develop our partnership. Tom Procter-Legg responds, 'Having the opportunity to

engage with The Pitt Rivers and the Arts Award has been hugely beneficial for the academic development of our students and has provided critical professional development for our staff. Hopefully we can continue to work in collaboration for the benefit of more young people'. Current plans include the possibility of some young people who have their Explore Award and are now in the Sixth Form graduating to do their Bronze Award. We would also like to look at the possibility of all Key Stage 3 pupils working towards their Discover Award, so all pupils at the academy will have achieved one, two or even three levels of Arts Award by the time they leave compulsory education.

The academy is opening a second site in the north of Oxfordshire – North Iffley Academy – which opens the potential for the museum to work with more young people who are geographically further away from Oxford.

Key tips for museums, galleries or schools wishing to embark on an Arts Award collaboration would be:

- establish the shared goal (Arts Award) and the mutual benefits of achieving this goal (in our case ACE objectives and supporting students' to achieve a qualification respectively)
- plan together (it does not work if the museum does all the planning, or the school does all the planning) and create a shared project plan document that you can refer back to at each stage

- reference the assessment criteria thoroughly at the planning stage and ensure each box is ticked
- think through the challenges of evidence gathering (i.e. photography and safeguarding) and come up with practical solutions
- structure each session in detail so both partners know who is responsible for what, expectations are clear and resources are available, but also be willing to be flexible should you need to adapt to particular circumstances (e.g. challenging behaviour) or opportunities (e.g. particular pupil interest in an area of the project or skill)
- have two main link people in each partner organisation who meet and review how the project is progressing; be prepared to adapt and improve
- explore how digital technology can enable young people with diverse learning needs and help create a fully accessible project
- enjoy working with a partner who brings different expertise and learning to the experience!

### Notes

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1. H.Charman, K.Rose & G.Wilson (2006), *The Art Gallery Handbook: A Resource for Teachers*. London: Tate Publishing
2. Key Stage 4 is one of the four fixed stages into which the National Curriculum in the UK is divided. Key Stage 4 covers pupils aged 14-16 years.
3. GCSE (General Certificates of Secondary Education) are the subject-based qualifications

most pupils study for in the UK (except Scotland) aged between 14 and 16 years. A Levels (Advanced Levels) are the subject-based qualifications many young people study between ages 16 and 18 in the UK (except Scotland).

4. *Arts Council England: Our mission and Strategy*. Accessed: 12 October 2017. <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/about-us/our-mission-and-strategy>
5. Trinity College (2014), *Arts Award adviser toolkit – Bronze, Silver & Gold*. p.21
6. University of Oxford, *Museums & Collections: Family Logbook*. Accessed: 1 November 2017. <http://www.museums.ox.ac.uk/arts-award>
7. Trinity College (2012), *Arts Award adviser toolkit – Discover & Explore*. pp.32-39
8. Rose, K. (2017), *Awesome Aboriginal Arts Award project at The Iffley Academy*. Pitt
9. Rivers Museum website. Accessed: 22 February 2017. <http://pittrivers-education.blogspot.co.uk/2017/02/iffley-academy-students-complete-their.html>