

Flying the flag for the arts

An essential guide to getting recognition for your arts offer in school



Committed arts teachers across the UK pour hundreds of hours each term into developing their offer and nurturing students. However, many feel that their efforts - and even more unfortunately also their students' achievements - don't command the same level of attention as non-arts subjects.

The evidence is clear that Music, Art & Design, Drama and Dance bring tangible, valuable and long-lasting benefits. So what practical steps can you take to bolster the prominence of the arts at your school?

Why the arts are important in schools



There is a huge amount of research demonstrating that it is important for young people to experience the arts; ranging from sustaining the substantial contribution made by the creative industries to the UK economy, to building the audiences of the future, and increasing cultural capital for young people. There is also a wealth of evidence that taking part in the arts can help to develop what are often called 'soft' skills, but which are actually essential for success in the modern world: resilience, teamwork, communication, confidence, empathy, creativity and entrepreneurship.

And yet, unfortunately, not everyone agrees; from school colleagues to some in positions of national influence.

The [Cultural Learning Alliance](#) frequently publish research into the current state of play, and their excellent [Imagination](#) highlighting the value of cultural learning is a must-read for anyone needing to advocate for their subject.

With [Ofsted's increasing focus on a broad and balanced curriculum](#) it seems that the discourse is starting to develop. Progress 8 and

the EBacc will remain important, but schools are increasingly expected to demonstrate how their curriculum is serving the needs of their students, and if Ofsted's new inspection framework develops as they are currently indicating, this will start to be assessed in inspections.

In the meantime [we know that arts subjects are being chosen less at GCSE and A Level](#), there are [fewer arts teaching hours and fewer specialist teachers in schools](#). Within so many schools, arts teachers are the lone voice for their subject or feel undervalued or even threatened by the priority often granted to 'core' subjects.

But let's not dwell too much on the doom and gloom - every day examples of amazing achievements are produced by young people in all art forms, ably supported by expert, passionate and highly skilled teachers, educators and artists. What we want to do is support you to celebrate the great things you and your students achieve - and hopefully raise the profile of your department at the same time!

Set the scene for drama



'I regard the theatre as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being.'

Oscar Wilde

Being a drama specialist is a wonderful thing – you see young people come out of their shell and develop a confidence they didn't know they had! It's also an exhausting role to fill. All teaching is performative, but the role of a Drama teacher is to be actor, director, producer and often script writer and project manager all at the same time!

Drama students are often wonderful at advocating for their subject – so let them! Check out [Voice Mag](#) for young creatives for some ideas on how they can promote the importance of Drama. Is there a debating society they could pose a topic for, or could they lead an assembly on the importance of Drama to them? Some schools have had success with reaching out to famous actors on social media and asking them to say something to support Drama which could be shared.

Public performances and school showcases are an obvious way to raise the profile of your department. Another might be to offer graded exams in Drama for those who don't want to take the subject at GCSE or A Level, or may want to develop their skills further. This could end up being a great selling point for the school as a whole, and can help you to stand out from other local schools.

Often Drama is a wonderfully safe space for young people to explore complicated issues and become more comfortable with themselves. Aside from academic success, ensure that you make the case for the important role that Drama has for wellbeing and resilience. Not everything in education can or should be measured, but for many young people Drama, and especially extra-curricular opportunities, is their saving grace in school. And this is absolutely something to celebrate.

Art for art's sake



The visual arts talent of our young people is something to be celebrated. Lobby to have students' work displayed in the halls, in classrooms, in reception and the head's office - not just in the art room. Increasing visibility of the huge range of styles and talents of young people will only increase the visibility of your department. And often this is something which visitors will pick up on instantly when they step foot into the school, setting the tone for their whole visit.

An annual exhibition of work - perhaps with staff 'previews' is not only a great way to develop curatorial skills with students, but to showcase some of the work created in each year. Encouraging staff to view the work also helps to remind non Arts and Design specialists of what happens in the art room.

Have students take over a school Twitter account, or set up an art department Instagram feed to share their work - this is a great way to engage parents in the department as well as raising the profile of what you do beyond the school community. You could also consider putting young people forward for art prizes, either locally or nationally - or start your own art competition or prize in school (this doesn't have to be based on being 'the best' but could incorporate a range of categories).

Dare to design



We are going to need many more designers and engineers than we are currently producing. The role of Design in schools is often overlooked, but by linking to a careers strategy you can help to embed the vital importance of design into the support and guidance students will receive for their subject and career choices. Young people with an aptitude for maths or science can often also thrive with Design, and many love seeing their ideas become reality.

Engaging in design competitions such as those offered by the [Design Museum](#), [UK Space Design Competition](#) or the [McLaren Manufacturing Challenge](#) gives students the chance to sink their teeth into real-world, authentic projects as well as demonstrating how broad a design career or education could be. You need the technical skills to make designs reality, but these would be nothing without the creative vision and artistic visualisation which comes first. And by entering competitions such as these you have an exciting talking point for staff meetings, assemblies and school newsletters - and show how your subject can link in to the EBacc.

Another great way to raise the profile of Design in schools is to engage with topics which will get your students excited. Production and character design is a huge part of the film, TV and theatre industries, and many young people don't realise that those incredible creatures and sets from productions like Harry Potter, Game of Thrones and even Riverdale were first imagined by a design artist. Students could do the concept for school productions, or invite in industry professionals to showcase how vital design is to so many different elements of everyday life.

Embrace the sewing bee



Sewing and traditional crafts are having something of a 'moment'. Not every school has a textiles department, but if you are a textiles specialist there are so many exciting things you can do to raise the profile of your department - both with colleagues but also other young people.

Yarn bombing (with SLT approval) could be a great way to demonstrate the creativity and sense of fun you can get from knitting or crochet. It can add a splash of colour to the school and create a talking point. It can also be a great way in to talking about peaceful activism and social engagement as yarn bombing has been used to highlight societal issues - from reproductive rights to loneliness in old age.

There could also be ways of connecting textiles to other subjects, such as exploring e-textiles linked to Computing or focussing on ethical fashion with the Geography department. Textiles students could of course get involved with the school production - either creating costumes from scratch or altering shop-bought items. And what about involving textiles students in any proposed redesign of the school uniform?

Make the case for music



Music education is struggling. Recent reports have shown how the take up of Music GCSE is declining rapidly, and we know that fewer young people are studying music outside of school or taking graded music exams.

However, for many young people school will be their only formal education in music – and with music being such a powerful tool for young people this is a real issue.

Creating bands, orchestras, choirs and other performance groups is a great way to engage lots of students, and the combined voice of so much music making will raise the profile of your department without trying. Can students do live music for a school production? Is there the opportunity for a music concert or prom? Can students have access to the music room in lunchtimes or after school to develop their own music which might not fit into the curriculum?

Encouraging students to enter for a [Music for Youth regional festival](#) will not only give them an end point to work towards, but will give them professional feedback. By performing, the group will also achieve a certificate which can be displayed to demonstrate that music happens beyond the curriculum, with your name on it which you can take to SLT!

Music tech is a great feature of the curriculum which can ensure that your subject has more profile and is recognised for the huge benefits it can bring. Link your [music teaching to tech](#) through musical projects with the [BBC Microbit](#) or by trying out an iPad orchestra which not only will help young people develop real-world tech skills, but can also be a really exciting thing to have on show for an open evening.

Even if students aren't looking to take graded music exams or music at GCSE, there is evidence that engaging in music making – especially singing – can have positive benefits for mental health. Is there a way you could use music to contribute to an overarching wellbeing strategy in the school, perhaps with open access signing groups at lunch time or before school? Why not open this up to staff and create a wonderful whole-school culture of singing and using music for wellbeing for staff and students?

Could there be an opportunity for a music take-over day, where students can make music in lots of different spaces, from the lunch hall, to reception, to the halls? Giving students safe spaces to perform will boost their confidence that they can achieve a music GCSE or BTEC – hopefully driving numbers up and raising your profile at the same time.

Dance like everyone is watching



All too often dance forms a small part of a PE offer. Seconded to a secondary artform in many schools, so many young people miss out on the opportunity to find the joy of dance through their education. However, there are many ways to advocate for the role of dance in your school.

Dance as an artform in its own right should be celebrated. It is expressive, emotive and is a form of creative expression which many young people identify with - just look at the incredible performances and range of styles seen on the BBC Young Dancer of the Year!

Is there a way you can link your dance offer to the school production? Could there be specific roles which are dance-only, and have a real spotlight shone on these young people as a distinct part of any dramatic production? Or consider having a showcase where students can perform in the style they love. Introducing events like this as early as possible means that you are more likely to have young people opting to study dance at GCSE or BTEC, which will add value to the subject and raise the profile of your department.

While advocating for Dance as its own subject is important, dance has so many more benefits than the academic study of the artform. Moving more will help with young people's fitness levels, increasing a sense of wellbeing and potentially being a positive way for young people to work out nervous energy. Some schools run short movement sessions before exams to help young people get into the right headspace, and it is clear to those who teach dance the huge range of positive impacts the subject can have.

Outside of school, if you have talented dancers why not signpost them to CAT (Centre for Advanced Training) schools or suggest that they audition for the National Youth Dance Company? Taking part in activities like these outside of school will increase their skills, but also raise the profile of the subject within school as they could be profiled in an assembly or school newsletter. Young people love to dance, and while it is a subject at risk in many schools there are ways to advocate and retain it as the valuable and wide-reaching subject it is.

Performances with punch



It feels wonderful to share your enthusiasm for your performing by getting students on stage, but end of term extravaganzas can start to feel like a chore when faced with all the organisation and planning on top of an already heavy workload.

But performances and concerts really do matter. Not only to give students a taste of treading the boards, but also in playing a big part in demonstrating the worth of your department and what you can support students to achieve. Performances in larger groups or full casts can also help to prepare students for their GCSE, BTEC or A Level exams, where they will be expected to perform under pressure. And for those of us in performing arts, who can forget that first heady rush after coming off stage from your first performance - often the spark that generates a life-long love of all things performative.

To help minimise the stress and maximise the impact, try out Trinity's

[essential production checklist](#) which offers a step by step countdown, all the way from casting to the opening night. There are suggestions of tasks to delegate to students and other staff members along the way.

Once it's time to launch your performance, don't forget to give some careful thought to who to invite - from both inside and outside of the school - and also the seating plan, creating a 'VIP row' if possible.

If your subject doesn't normally work towards a performance, consider creating some sort of showcase, exhibition or competition to help shine a light on the important work of your department - or get students involved in a production by contributing towards the sets, backdrops, props, marketing materials or costumes. You could consider recognising the combined contribution of the cast and production team with an 'in production' assessment.

Amplify your promotion

As soon as your performance or sharing event is in the diary, start thinking about how you can promote it. A packed out hall and enthusiastic audience is a vote of confidence for your department and an important marketing tool for the school, which will always sit well with your SLT! It is also an excellent way to engage parents in a positive way with the school community, and engaged parents can have a huge impact on the attainment and attitudes of their children – a clear win-win.

What type of promotion would work best for your school? Posters, social media, school website or a combination? How about the local press or student newspapers and blogs? Get students involved and make the most of freely available resources online; from images to templates.

Make sure you oversee the overall look of all materials produced and the message they carry,

to ensure your vision for the production shines through. Consider organising a photoshoot with the help of media students to generate a set 'hero' images that will be front and centre within your publicity. Or shoot clips of your production on a smartphone and release 'trailers' via your school's social media channels to build anticipation.

One of the biggest drivers for a full house is that often you will be expected to recoup any costs involved in the production through ticket sales. Budgeting for productions is a big responsibility, so you may want to also consider sponsorship from local businesses for programme mentions – and some home stores may be able to donate paint or materials for sets, props and costumes. If you don't ask, you don't get!

There may be ways of budgeting creatively or applying for funding for your arts programmes, but every school will be different with a range of challenges. Ensure that your production is manageable budget-wise from the outset, and make sure you stick to it!

'Many a small thing has been made large by the right kind of advertising.'

Mark Twain

Link up, within and beyond the arts



You may be the only subject specialist in your school, and if you do have subject colleagues there may only be one, or you may be working with colleagues contracted for a small number of hours. None of this makes creating an exciting departmental offer easy, but there are ways to help spread the load.

Linking with other arts departments within the school is a great way to share ideas, get support and jointly advocate for the value of the arts in your school. You will all have your own areas of expertise, and by working together not only can great ideas be generated, but use this as an opportunity for informal CPD. Are there skills you can share with each other, or have certain approaches worked for you in the past you can share?

Using your combined skill and enthusiasm can lead to a real splash being made - whether this is taking the lead for a reading week (yes, let the arts lead this!), arts week, school production, careers event or celebration activity at the end of the year working together will help to keep your own workload manageable, and role-model team work for your students.

For example, work with your colleagues in the English department for a week focussing on the power of words: In English, students create pieces of creative writing; in Drama students bring this to life through devised pieces using the stories as a spring board (or in English they could write texts which are put onto their feet in Drama). The Art department designs the book covers or sets, Design helps with props, Textiles work on costumes, Dance can help with movement pieces and in Music the soundscape or score could be developed. At the end of the week there could be a sharing in Form Time to celebrate the hard work.

And don't forget that this brings in STEM subjects too - students could learn about how to create circuits for the lights used, there is maths in design and scaling of model boxes, and you could even link this in to the History department and themes like Black History Month as inspiration for the texts created in English. And over the course of a week students can see how the arts are all around us, develop their English and arts skills and learn how to work together as a team to achieve something remarkable. We dare you to give it a try!

Connect with the professional arts world



Your subject is bigger than your influence at school. Leverage the power of your art form by ensuring opportunities to connect with the arts and culture in real life are built into your curriculum or enrichment offer.

This could mean arranging trips, inviting artists into school, reaching out to local arts organisations and launching partnership projects. Anything you can do that connects your department with the wider professional arts sphere will emphasise its real-world value and prestige. These don't always need to be high profile or expensive interactions - some arts organisations might be happy to have a member of staff come to talk to your students or provide free or cheap tours or sessions in their venue, or you might have a parent or member of the wider school community who is a skilled musician or artist.

This is increasingly important considering the new government careers strategy. Ensuring that arts careers of all forms are included in your schools' approach means that not only will you be helping to ensure that your students have the right information to make informed decisions about their subject

choices, but will inherently raise the profile of your department by increasing engagement and excitement about the potential of the arts beyond school.

Invite students to document these experiences through articles for your school newsletter or website, or arrange a special assembly. Critically reviewing concerts, visits to galleries, museums, theatre productions and other arts events helps to develop essential arts vocabulary required for success in exams, as well as helping to encourage students to think about their own likes and dislikes. For those students who would otherwise not have the opportunity to engage in the arts, this may be the only way they can experience them - and creating a personal review ensures that young people retain agency over their own arts education. We believe that young people should be allowed to dislike something - as long as they can articulate why!

Your local Arts Council England Bridge organisation can introduce you to local arts and cultural organisations, or use [Arts Award's Supporter map](#) to find places near you that have a specific offer for young people.

Demonstrate progress



However you look at it, you can't get away from the reality that you will need to be able to demonstrate your students' progress. This could be through great exam results, but there are other ways you can demonstrate progression and achievement such as benchmarking the level of your provision.

Graded music or drama exams are an obvious route. By working through grades, students are not only honing their skills in a structured and pedagogically sound way, but they have the qualification to demonstrate this, which could be useful for college or university applications. This is also a measurable statistic to have to hand for meetings with your manager or SLT. However, we appreciate that not all schools can offer this, and not every student can afford it, although your local Music Education Hub may be able to provide support with music lessons.

If you think that graded music or drama exams could work in your school, give some thought to your specific requirements before

embarking on some research into what the various exams boards provide.

Do you just want to measure the performance of individuals, for instance or would an assessment that accommodates pairs, groups or even whole productions be more suitable? Would it be helpful if particular needs or interests could be accommodated? Do traditional-style exams or portfolio-based assessments best suit your requirements? Are there particular styles or genres that should be catered for? And at what stage would it be best for students to be assessed? Are you looking for a way to introduce GCSE study and support students to gain a Level 1 or 2 qualification before students sit Key Stage 4 exams, for example?

Seeking the answers to these questions and anything else that's relevant to the set-up of your department will help you to feel confident that you've chosen an assessment that will work well at your school.

Let students do the talking



Students who are enjoying your teaching and your subject are the perfect advocates for your department. If given the opportunity, they will speak passionately about the changes your art form has made to their school experience and wider life.

How can you give them a platform to air their views: at assembly, a school open day, as part of a showcase event or performance, even at a staff or governors meeting? Would you like them to highlight particular differences your subject has made; to their achievement in other subjects, for instance or to skills that can transfer to life outside of school like concentration or teamwork? A little practice and preparation never hurts!

Or if you're looking for more qualitative evidence of the impact on students, consider running a 'before and after' survey with your enrichment group each term for a year, or use simpler impact measures like smiley face post-it 'voting' as students exit your room.

Some schools have a school arts council, who come together to advocate for the arts and what they want to see their school supporting. This gives real agency to students and can help to boost the argument for funding for particular initiatives. It is also a great way to identify able and responsible students who may be able to help you with some extracurricular activities, or taking the lead in managing an area of a school production.

One obvious way to support this is through performance or showcase opportunities. Not only can public facing events be a great experience for young people, but this can also be where they have their voices heard. Song writing, performance poetry, drama, dance and other forms of creative expression are a great way to let students know that their passions are valued, and this will reflect strongly on your department. The arts have the advantage of being able to be high-profile and visible by their very nature, so ensure you capitalise on this.

Contribute to whole school outcomes



The arts can't work in isolation. Often the strategies and programmes that have the most support are those which can speak directly to a schools' broader improvement plan. This also helps to ensure that governors have more awareness of what you are achieving, which can in turn ensure that more funding is diverted to your department.

Ensure that you are familiar with your school's improvement plan (SIP) and see how you can link in to core targets. Every school will have its own focus depending on their structure and point in their improvement journey. For some it may be that attendance is a key part of the SIP - could engaging in your subject be the thing which encourages a student to turn up? Would extra-curricular activities in lunchtimes help ensure that students stay on site?

Closing the attainment gap will almost certainly be a key focus of any school's SIP. How could your department contribute to this? If there are any Pupil Premium funds you can bid to use, ensure that you know how you will evaluate the success of these interventions and can monitor progress. Remember that you don't have to specifically identify Pupil Premium students to focus interventions on. It may be that you bid for a whole-school arts week using Pupil Premium funds, with the expected outcome that all students improve in the subjects this encompasses through having a focus for their energies. It may be that you use Arts Award as a measurable outcome to help demonstrate this.

You will know your school's particular challenges best, so ensure that you have an eye on the bigger strategic plan, and that you are able to feed in to this and demonstrate how your department is working to achieve broad strategic aims.

The difference is you



Little things matter. With a few small changes you may be able to throw a little more light on yourself, your role and your department. Would any of these suggestions help to build your profile at school?

Live your artform

Remember that you are the best champion of your subject area. What do you do outside of school that can help build the profile of your artform as fun and valuable?

If you're a member of a band or drama group, flyer your next gig or performance in the staffroom. Are you a compulsive knitter or maker? Model your own creations with pride and respond to admiring comments with tales of how much fulfilment you get from your craft. Or if music or drama is your thing, why not set up a staff choir or theatre club?

Think about how you could enthuse colleagues and share your passion for your subject. Your enthusiasm will often rub off on your students as well. If they can see that you are passionate about what you are teaching they will become more excited to develop their skills as well.

Rome wasn't built in a day

It may sound trite, but you need to be prepared to 'say it'; then 'say it' again... and again! Demonstrating your department's value needs to be an ongoing task, not an easily ticked off activity. There may be some quick wins along the way, but be prepared for a long haul, especially if you feel you may encounter some resistance.

Something that could help along the way, aside from perseverance and a positive outlook, is considering what makes people tick and getting strategic with your messaging. Perhaps governors will be swayed by testimonials from your students on how your subject has helped them, whereas your business manager may be more persuaded by more quantitative evidence.



Keep it real

You love your artform and want young people to benefit from all the positives it brings. At its best, it can be life changing. That's why you started teaching in the first place, right?

Think of ways that you can remind yourself of this and keep your motivating levels up when the going gets tough. Does that mean making a bid for CPD opportunities that keep you up to date with changes in your field, connecting with colleagues working in your subject area in other local schools or organisations or surrounding yourself with like-minded people involved in a range of artistic disciplines. Or is it simply a regular bit of creative self-care; taking time out for a theatre trip, attending a local musical performance, or making sure you don't miss that exhibition.

Anything that re-connects you with the wider arts world and helps you remember why your subject is valuable will help. And after all, engaging in the arts is one way to help improve your mental health. It can be hard to remember to take care of yourself when you have a busy job and are trying to make a difference above and beyond your role (as many teachers do!). So take the night off, see the show you have been dying to see, get the concert tickets, spend a leisurely day in your favourite gallery and remind yourself why you do it all!

Photos: Bishop Ramsey CE Academy, Brooksby Melton College, Glenthorne High School, Old Palace School, Penketh High School, Peterborough Museum, Uckfield Community Technology College

A blue-tinted background image showing a teacher with glasses leaning over a desk, interacting with two students. One student is looking down at a book or paper, while the other is looking up towards the teacher.

Raising the profile of the arts at your school

Use our impact comparison checker to work out which tactics will best demonstrate your subject's value.



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