

The Arts Award from Bronze to Gold as an extra-curricular activity

Offering Arts Award as an extra-curricular activity brings satisfaction for students with the knowledge that they achieved the award in their own time. Here are Blessed Robert Johnson Catholic College's top tips for delivering a successful extra-curricular Arts Award programme - including how to overcome common challenges.

1 Launch Arts Award in assembly



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Assembly time is an ideal time to launch the award, with a follow up session as soon as possible afterwards for those who are interested. We launch Bronze Arts Award in Year 7 and from then on there is a natural progression through the three levels for those who remain motivated and interested.

In the initial session it is essential that students are aware of the commitment they are making. They are made aware of what is required, including the completion of the portfolio, and are shown examples of Bronze portfolios completed

by previous participants. They are then given one week to make a decision about whether or not they wish to continue with the award, at which time we meet again and begin to make decisions about what options there are for each individual for the Taking Part section. Generally, the majority of students are already attending extra-curricular clubs in dance, drama or music and the rehearsal and performance opportunities these provide are ideal for evidencing.

2 Schedule weekly adviser sessions during school time

It is important that there is a weekly group session where students have access to the adviser and to a computer, either for research (eg for their arts inspiration), or for writing up parts of their portfolio. Bronze and Silver students meet together on separate mornings during morning registration for 30 minutes. Other mornings are used for individual tutorials as needed. This arrangement needs to be supported by management; students must be released from registration sessions in order to attend tutorials and the member of staff holding the tutorials needs to be released from having a full time tutor group.

Gold candidates meet together for one hour a week after school in order to plan and research. They also attend individual tutorials during morning sessions. Because of the nature of the award and what it entails, sessions can be quite intense and time has to be used productively, with the students accepting responsibility for independent work as well as adviser led activity.

3 Schedule in points to check portfolios throughout the journey

If offering the award in an extra-curricular context, do insist that portfolio work is ongoing; encourage students to write up and hand in sections as they are completed, so that they can be marked and either added to or amended. Keep checking the evidence, for example tickets, programs and reviews of performances they may have seen. In my experience, as students complete tasks in a different order and at different times, insisting on checking ongoing portfolio avoids drop out by those who, despite having completed all practical tasks, have neglected the portfolio and cannot cope with completing it all at once at the end. Due to the way we work, we have found this a more useful structure than setting deadlines for each section.



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4 Be flexible around students' other commitments

Be prepared to be flexible; planned moderation dates work best as targets rather than as fixed dates, although of course ensure that you book your moderation in the required timescale as specified by the Arts Award team. Students who are taking the award as an additional subject, particularly Gold candidates, also have pressure of deadlines from other subjects and may be taking GCSEs or A Levels. It is essential to be sensitive towards this in order to encourage continued participation. This year for example, I had originally planned to hold a moderation for the end of the summer term but ended up delaying it until December in order to accommodate thorough completion of Gold portfolios. This resulted in high quality, well presented work. If you have booked a moderation but some students are not ready, then it is possible to confirm the names of those who are ready and others can then be entered at a later date.

5 Map leadership units in Silver/Gold to help deliver Bronze to younger students

Use the leadership aspect of the award to encourage older students to lead and mentor younger ones. Not only does this build up a bond between various year groups, but students can also complete their leadership units by taking other younger students through the Taking Part aspect of their award. This in turn is a great support for the adviser. A student here who has just passed the Gold award is currently holding a photography club for a small group of Year 7 students who are taking Bronze.

6 Use Arts Week to showcase work

We use our Arts Week to showcase the performance work completed for Arts Award. There is a dance production, an evening of music, dramatic productions, photography and art displays. In addition, this year the Gold students produced a musical for their leadership project and several of those who performed did so as part of their award.

7 Arrange opportunities to experience arts events

Even though our delivery is during extra-curricular time and students need to accept greater responsibility for their work, not all of them are able to find opportunities to attend arts events. In order to fulfil this aspect, I organise one or two theatre trips each year and also invite parents, which gives them an opportunity to appreciate their child's involvement in the award.

8 Celebrate success!

Celebrating success in assemblies by making the handing out of certificates into a real event is the best promotion for the award and often triggers off further interest from other students.



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