

Planning Arts Award for employability

The Lowry

The Lowry is a not-for-profit charitable arts venue housing three theatres and galleries with the aim to enrich, engage and entertain. We embed Arts Award across as many of our learning and engagement programmes as appropriate.

The Lowry and Youth Skills and Employability

The Lowry's Youth Skills and Employability scheme works with young people aged 14-19 who are classed as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) or who are considered at risk in some way. Young people joining the scheme receive one to one mentoring and pastoral support from our Youth Skills and Employability Manager and a work placement within the organisation - anything from a customer care focussed placement with our Front of House team or a design placement with our marketing department to a catering placement with our hospitality team. The placement is designed to meet their needs and interests. They are supported towards achieving a qualification as part of their time with us, for example an NVQ Level 1 in Hospitality or a Bronze Arts Award. Key to the scheme is working with these young people to help them develop the hard and soft skills necessary to either return back into full-time education or move towards employment. Creative learning is embedded into the scheme. We use visual arts to help young people to identify their key skills through 'self-discovery' focussed activity and to work towards creating a CV. Drama is used to help them build their presentation and interview skills through 'self-delivery' focused activity which also helps to build confidence and self-esteem. Young people are also supported to attend exhibitions and productions across our galleries and three theatres.



Daniel sharing his arts skill with another member of the group

Why choose Bronze Arts Award as part of an employability scheme?

We were keen to use Bronze Arts Award as most of the young people joining our scheme have no formal qualifications and a blank CV. Many have negative experiences and attitudes towards the formality of learning in school and struggle with confidence and communication. The achievement of a Bronze Arts Award gives the young people a nationally recognised qualification which has been built around them and which has creativity at its core. The creative learning involved is completely different to their school experience in many cases and is embedded within their tenure with us. We value Arts Award's ability to support and evidence the development of 'soft skills' such as personal reflection, communication, and critical thinking - vital employability skills.

Our steps to delivering our project

1 Mapping Arts Award to employability skills

Our project offered our Youth Skills & Employability Manager his first opportunity to support a group of young people as an adviser. In the lead up to the Arts Award project, he worked with an experienced adviser within the Learning & Engagement team to map the project to the different elements of Bronze, which was a useful CPD opportunity for him. The project was an intensive week of creative learning connected to Dance Touring Partnership's (DTP) presentation of Boy Blue Entertainment's *The Five and the Prophecy of the Prana* as part of the Everybody Dance Now initiative*. *The Five and the Prophecy of Prana* is set in modern Tokyo and uses dazzling visuals to frame a dynamic fusion of hip-hop and martial arts in an explosive tribute to manga - Japan's popular graphic novel form.

2 Identifying with each young person what they want to improve on through the project

For each section of Bronze Arts Award, our Youth Skills & Employability Manager worked with each individual to identify three things they wanted to try or get better at by taking part in the creative activity and how this could support their employability skills. For example, one participant stated they wanted to try to 'learn about the industry of manga' and get better at 'meeting new people with different experiences so I can be more confident...' Another wanted to focus on his concentration because 'I get easily distracted and I want to focus and stay on task' and to learn patience through a manga activity because 'I give up too easily if something takes a long time. I also rush things and think manga is a perfect way to learn patience'

* Everybody Dance Now seeks to find a creative solution to the challenge of delivering sustained audience engagement programmes alongside touring work. The programme aims to deliver grass-roots participatory work around tours and so build strong relationships within communities, with priority given to those where engagement in the arts is low.



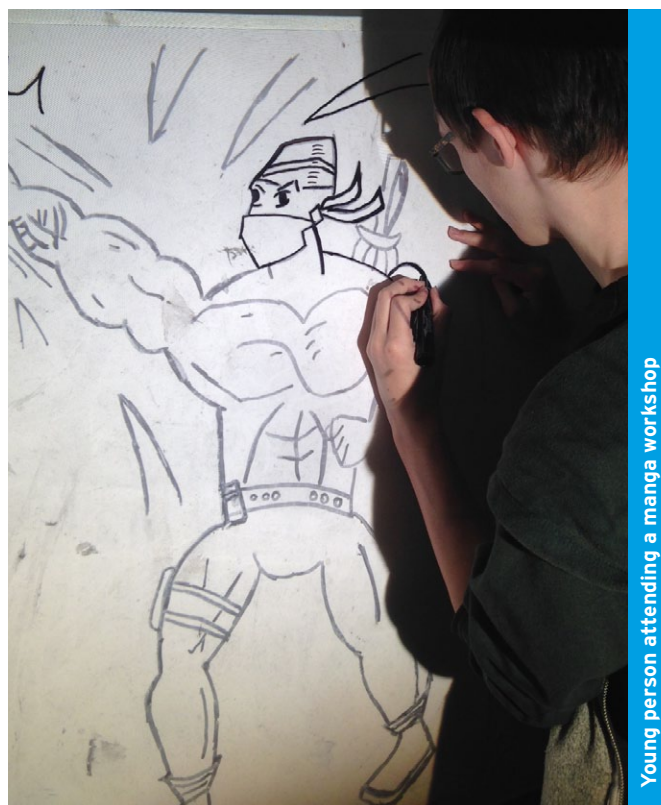
3 Delivering the project and catering to individual needs

The aims of our creative engagement week were to:

- introduce a new audience to The Lowry and to quality dance provision
- develop the young people's experience in and engagement with the arts
- develop their understanding of career opportunities in the creative industries
- introduce the concept of entrepreneurship to participants through Boy Blue Entertainment's example
- developing participants' self-confidence, team working, communication and presentation skills
- support the achievement of a Bronze Arts Award

The schedule for the project included watching the production and attending the post-show Q&A, taking part in daily dance workshops where they learnt some of the choreography and created their own moves inspired by the combination of hip-hop and martial arts. In addition, the group attended a performance of *Desh* by Akram Khan, one of the world's most respected dancer/choreographers as a contrast to *The Five*. They also had a backstage tour including a look at the lighting effects for the show and took part in a manga workshop with a Lowry freelance artist to learn more about the art form that inspired the set. Throughout the week we focused on raising awareness of the different careers involved in putting on a production and used the dance and art activities to support the development of the young people's communication skills, team work and self-confidence.

The young people were able to research and interview cast members about how they turned their passion for hip-hop into a business and investigate the entrepreneurial skills involved. This worked particularly well for John, a keen hip-hop dancer who is now working towards establishing himself as a dance tutor and currently leading a community project in his local area. John chose Boy Blue Entertainment's co-founder Kenrick as his arts inspiration, commenting on his commitment to his job and how inspiring he was. John chose to write a blog reviewing the production as his evidence for Part B (explore the arts as an audience member).



Young person attending a manga workshop

Daniel had no prior dance experience or interest and chose to have a filmed interview as evidence for Part A (explore the arts as a participant) outlining how the activity had allowed him to discover a new skills-set and love for dance. Following on from this project, we are working with Daniel to support him in a dance-focussed placement within The Lowry.

Beth's personal development throughout the project was significant. Beth suffers from panic attacks and struggles to make eye-contact or communicate with people. She was the only young woman in the group and required a lot of support from the female dance tutor and from

our Youth Skills and Employability Manager. Her experience, evidenced within Parts A (exploring the arts as a participant) and D (arts skills share), demonstrates how far she came on during the week. Her body language and communication skills greatly improved, as did her ability to work with other people.

Learnings and findings from the project

We have noticed that using the Arts Award framework as part of this placement has had huge benefits for the young people on our Skills and Employability Programme. Through their creative experience they have developed a number of skills supporting their personal development and employability:

- team work
- communication
- developing an informed view
- listening skills
- concentration
- an understanding of the importance of commitment, punctuality
- aspiration/drive to achieve
- experience of trying something new and moving out of their comfort zone
- doing something they might not initially want to do
- creative thinking
- presentation skills - written, oral and physical
- a sense of achievement
- critical thinking

The flexible nature of Arts Award allows us to structure it to suit individuals, they can have full ownership of their portfolio and be fully creative in its design. The four areas of Bronze Arts Award provides opportunities for young people to develop confidence, communication skills and to gain a sense of achievement and pride. It lets them see their development and success. It helps participants to reflect and talk about their experiences, not just in the arts, and in a very practical way opens their eyes to opportunities and careers they might not have known existed.

Our top tips for anyone else seeking to embed Arts Award within an employability scheme:

- ▶ match the arts activity to soft and hard employability skills in advance
- ▶ be prepared for initial resistance from young people who are not confident at trying something new
- ▶ be creative in how you support the young people to capture their evidence
- ▶ work in partnership wherever possible to widen opportunity for young people to meet professionals and to get a sense of the number of different roles involved in bringing a piece of work (creative or not) to fruition