

8 considerations when evaluating impact ... some notes for Artsmark Schools

Artsmark Case Study

What do we mean by Case Study? In the context of Artsmark, which is both unique to your school but also a nationwide scheme with common processes and shared principles, we use the term case study to mean *the reflection on and documentation of impacts and effects of Artsmark activities in your school*. It is a simple way for you to reflect back on your planning and draw on evidence to illustrate the kinds of outcomes you achieved. These might be the outcomes you aimed for, but they might also include some unexpected surprises.

Arts Council England is not in a position to prescribe what might count as evidence. We acknowledge that schools are far more expert in the business of assessing learning and reflecting back progress made to a range of stakeholders. So we are simply looking for you to draw on your existing skills in telling your stories of impact, but to relate that specifically to the arts. We believe that the key to this is ensuring your case study relates back directly to your Statement of Commitment and any associated planning.

We imagine we will see a wide range of evidence and examples of pedagogical reflection through these case studies. However, we are providing a common template for every school to use and we ask that you use only this template and stay within word limits. This should allow for a variety of experiences to be reflected back to Arts Council England in a consistent way. This is vital if we are to show what the aggregate affects of Artsmark are nationally.

Below are a few key points to keep in mind when you consider your approach to your case study.

1: Remember the Artsmark Case Study is primarily for you.

While the case study needs to follow a set format to help create overall cohesion for the programme and to make organising learning from Artsmark nationally a plausible task for Arts Council England, its primary value should be for you and your school.

The Case Study is both a summative account of your distance travelled but it should also be seen as the first step towards the next set of plans for the arts in your school. It should be written up in that spirit, as a genuine reflective account that will help your school decide what to prioritise next for arts teaching and learning. It is not about writing up what you think Arts Council England want to hear; it is all about writing up what you learnt as a school and where it sends you next with the arts.

2: Create school-wide (or year-group, or community-wide) investment in improvement.

From the outset try to ensure the stakeholders (which could include some or all of the following: Senior leadership, governors, pupils, parents, artists...) agree that the case study should be a candid and constructive examination of what worked and what needed improvement. If you try to fuse evaluation and celebration in a single case study important learning can be lost, so find additional ways to celebrate successes outside of your reflection process. This will make your write up a more objective, analytical account, rather than a descriptive, celebratory one.

3: Design evaluation and reflection activity so it enhances the capacity of all participants.

Ensure all staff members participating help to collect and analyse the data (remember data doesn't have to mean statistics; perceptions and quotes are important, too). Use any data gathered as the basis for a shared discussion about your own perceptions of impact and effect. Talking as a group about what your observations, notes, examples of student's work etc are telling you about impacts can enrich the overall discourse about the arts and demystify the act of writing about their effects in school and on pupil's learning.

4: Try to stay reflective throughout the entire Artsmark experience.

Part way into the Artsmark process, it is not uncommon to realise you could be looking for effects in the wrong places. Eureka moments like this are not uncommon! This can require a re-working, or some minor adjustment of the plan for the arts in school, the tools, the predicted effects, and how you might reflect on that. But such changes model the habit of learning from mistakes, which is intrinsic to the arts themselves. If this turns out to be part of your experience allow that 'messy reality' to feature in your case study write up.

5: Grapple with uneven findings.

Sometimes data shows that different arts and cultural experiences have uneven effects on student learning. Rather than viewing this as evidence of "failure" address the unevenness as data, harvesting information about what does and doesn't work and hypothesis why that might be. It will help you plan your future arts learning in more informed ways.

6: Stay alert to surprises.

It is often the case, for example, that students who participate in research and evaluation are most affected by interventions. This might be an unintended effect; but it shows that placing young people in the role of collaborators can accelerate their learning.

7: Share and use the findings for improvement.

Hold annual meetings with headteacher, teachers, governors and arts and cultural organisations. Discuss what your Artsmark experience was – and wasn't yet – accomplishing and used those discussions to set goals for the coming year. The more people are inside the evaluation discussion the better – it improves planning, builds a consensus of expectation and increases the quality of understanding about impact and the time it takes to see lasting change take place.

8: Keep the evaluation phase in mind during initial planning.

Make sure the evidence you will be looking for when writing up your case study relates to the effects and impacts you planned to achieve in the first place. The case study should directly link back to the desire to see demonstrable changes in children's learning or staff competence – in short, whatever the focus was for the arts interventions you planned. Evidence can include examples of student's work, testimony and perception of participants, test scores, teacher observation and so forth. The more explicitly you can point to a variety of evidence, the stronger your case study will be, but any evidence will always be better than none!

Long before any data collection or evidence gathering begins, ask all participants to help co-define a shared outcome – for example whether improved literacy is defined as children's increased ability to express themselves powerfully, or as the % of students reaching level 6b or above will influence what you will seek as evidence of impact. If you get agreement and clarity early on – at the planning stage - the case study write-up is made easier.