

PROGRAMME EVALUATION AND IMPACT REPORT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Camden Schools
Art Biennale

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Camden Schools Art Biennale (CSAB) is a new celebration of artistic achievement by schools across the borough of Camden.

Launched in 2024 as a pilot initiative by Camden Council, Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London (CSM/UAL) and CL with additional support from the King's Cross Central Partnership Limited and John Lyon's Charity. The project is intended to become a key pillar of the borough's cultural and educational calendar, running once every two years.

The core of the Biennale was a week-long exhibition, celebrating art developed by every school and every key stage of learning in Camden – from primary education through to A-Level. Alongside the exhibition, an engagement and events programme also provided opportunities for families, young people and teachers. Prior to the exhibition, a major component of the CSAB initiative has been a range of outreach work within schools, particularly those that do not have dedicated art teaching or facilities.



OBJECTIVES

The CSAB initiative had several key objectives linked back to the development of Camden Council's education strategy from 2020–2030.

- **Objective 1:** Strengthen and inform the teaching of art in Camden schools and beyond. Specifically, working to enhance the prestige of art teaching and the arts curriculum.
- **Objective 2:** Showcase Camden as a centre of arts and creative education excellence in the UK and bring a wide, diverse and prestigious audience to see students' work within the borough. This is key during a period when art and design provision faces a number of threats within the curriculum and education policy landscape.
- **Objective 3:** Open student's eyes to the possibilities of a career in the arts, design and creative sector, through exposure to the creative community in and around UAL, as well as the broader networks of cultural practitioners and artists in the area.
- **Objective 4:** Build links between local schools, arts organisations and businesses.
- **Objective 5:** Celebrate the diversity and creativity of all of Camden's young people including those with SEND and those from less advantaged backgrounds.





PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUT

The programme was divided up into three key areas:

1. There were a range of outreach activities pre-exhibition that aimed aimed at meeting objective 1

2. There were a variety of activities linked to the events and workshop programme during the exhibition.
3. There was the exhibition and the audience engagement around the galleries themselves. Woven through these three areas were a range of teacher CPD opportunities to reinforce long-term arts practice within schools in Camden.

The below table provides a top-line breakdown of the numbers of participants and activities in each area:

Activity Type	Number of individual events or activities delivered	Total number of participants
CSAB Outreach Programme	68 individual outreach activities (such as two-day workshops in schools or half-day gallery visits)	1,900 students
Teacher Continuing Professional Development	7 individual events and training initiatives	91 teacher engagements (individual teachers may have attended more than one event)
CSAB Exhibition	The gallery was open for a 7-day block in July 2024. 76 classes from 24 schools booked and attended the exhibition.	5,249 exhibition attendees
Camden Exhibition workshop and events programme	23 workshops and events linked to the Biennale	984 participants



FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION

The CSAB initiative gathered feedback and audience responses from a number of different sources, including reaction cards and exhibition feedback directly from audience members, a survey of teachers post-exhibition, feedback from headteachers and audience data gathered by the project team. This feedback then informed an evaluation of the extent to which the programme managed to impact upon the objectives.

1 Strengthen and inform the teaching of art in Camden schools and beyond. Specifically, working to enhance the prestige of art teaching and the arts curriculum.

- There is strong evidence to suggest that the Biennale made an impact against this objective. 85% of teachers surveyed believed the Camden Schools Art Biennale strengthened and informed the teaching of art in their schools and raised the profile and prestige of art teaching and the arts curriculum in their school.
- 88% of teachers who participated in an additional Biennale activity (i.e. workshop) believe it had a positive impact on art teaching.
- Adult attendees to the Biennale picked up on the links to strengthening arts education in the curriculum with a specific focus on funding. One attendee stated 'This show has made me cry. It is wonderful and in the face of the decimation of arts and creative education in schools in the last 14 years it is a wonder and a triumph'.

2 Showcase Camden as a centre of arts and creative education excellence in the UK and bring a wide, diverse and prestigious audience to see students' work within the borough.

3 Open student's eyes to the possibilities of a career in the arts, design and creative sector, through exposure to the creative community in and around UAL/, as well as the broader networks of cultural practitioners and artists in the area.

- 5,249 visitors came through the main exhibition at the Lethaby Gallery. However, most of these audiences were made up of school groups, the families of students and local organisations and stakeholders to the area, rather than broader audiences who may have been interested in coming to see the Biennale exhibition for other reasons. The exhibition was therefore impactful in terms of one of its primary audience groups, but less so on a broader or more general audience demographic.
- Teachers were highly positive about the Biennale's impact in this area though. 95% of teachers surveyed agreed that the exhibition showcased Camden as a centre of arts and creative education excellence in the UK.
- Teachers involved in the initiative felt that it had been less successful in achieving impact in this area - only 65% of surveyed teachers agreed that CSAB opened student's eyes to the possibilities of a career in the arts, design and creative sector, although 85% agreed that the Biennale's activities have a positive impact on the skills, knowledge and capabilities of pupils.
- Attendee feedback to the gallery seemed to echo the view of teachers that the exhibition had been less specifically impactful on thinking about future career aspirations. A large number of children who visited the Biennale talked in general terms about being inspired by the show and the programme, but did not link that specifically to future work.

4 Build links between local schools, arts organisations and businesses.

- The strength and variety of the outreach work developed through the initiative (both in the build up to the main exhibition and during it) shows that there were some tangible developments in terms of building links between local schools and arts organisations in particular, although less so for businesses.
- Camden Learning led outreach activities linking schools to The Photographers Gallery, October Gallery and The Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration. Central Saint Martins also contributed in this space, and in total 29 individual workshops or sessions were delivered by these partners into schools.

5 Celebrate the diversity and creativity of all of Camden's young people including those with SEND and those from less advantaged backgrounds.

- The initiative aimed to be inclusive in its approach to involving all Camden Schools. Special Schools and Hospital Schools participated in the submission of art works to the Biennale, and were represented alongside the work by all other schools. Outreach work was also specifically conducted with Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children and Swiss Cottage Special School.
- 90% of teachers believed that CSAB successfully celebrated the diversity and creativity of all of Camden's young people including those with SEND and those from less advantaged backgrounds and 85% agreed that the Biennale's activities had a positive impact on pupil self-esteem, confidence and wellbeing.

ADDITIONAL OUTCOMES

There has also been a post-programme boost for arts teaching in Camden. The status of art has been raised at both school and Local Authority level, with The Local Authority appointing an Excellence Lead for Art to build upon the good practice and links with arts organisations developed through the Biennale.

Ten primary schools are currently being supported through art curriculum reviews and staff development, with Art being selected as a priority for school improvement. Attendance at the Art Lead meetings for Camden schools is now the highest of all subjects and partnerships and visits to galleries have significantly increased.



CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The Camden Schools Art Biennale, launched as a pilot initiative in 2024, has been a highly positive programme for both the partner organisations, school teachers and, through feedback, the young people that have participated in the programme. For the stakeholders, the initiative provides a strong proof-of-concept that a bi-annual exhibition and programme of artistic outreach and schools-based activities is of significant value within the borough of Camden.

The majority of next steps with the programme focus on how to refine and potentially grow the initiative, leading to a stable programme for future years, including:

1. Making the exhibition longer, and exploring at which point in the year schools are most able to engage with the programme.
2. Finding ways to engage more young people in the development and delivery of the programme.
3. Build on the positive attention and momentum generated by the Biennale to draw in more cultural and artistic institutions as possible programme partners.
4. Finding additional ways to link the programme to work on creative careers and careers development more broadly, adding to its usefulness as a cultural intervention for young people.
5. Explore whether thematic contact could be developed at the outset of the programme, rather than layered onto an open submission of art works.
6. Exploring the exhibition and concept as a multi-venue, rather than single venue, Biennale.
7. Developing a clearer evaluation framework or Theory of Change model for the Biennale, which would allow for a stronger analysis of the impact of the initiative.

CREDITS

BIENNALE TEAM

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Artist practitioners – school workshops

Alix Smith, Jan Periton, Kally Laurence, Katrin Hall

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Finally, thank you to the schools, teachers and students for sharing their work and making the Camden Schools Art Biennale a reality.

PARTNERSHIP

The Camden Schools Art Biennale is a partnership initiative between Camden Council, Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London and Camden Learning. The initiative has also received generous funding and support from King's Cross Central Partnership Limited and John Lyon's Charity. Additional material support to the exhibition has been generously provided by G . F Smith.

PHOTOGRAPHY

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