

# You are... a virtual school

**Artsmark** works with an ever-growing network of schools and alternative education settings to develop and celebrate their commitment to arts, culture and creativity.

Your  
Artsmark  
journey  
starts here

We support a wide range of education settings, including **virtual schools**, to achieve an Artsmark award.

While we consider the unique context of every setting, we understand that there may be additional considerations or challenges for your virtual school that could affect your Artsmark journey.

The guidance below is designed to reassure you that:

- the Artsmark framework is **relevant** and **adaptable** to your setting
- we have an **awareness** and **understanding** of the key issues you may face on your Artsmark journey
- our assessment will be **sensitive** and **sympathetic** to the broader context of your setting
- we have a range of **support options available**, including learning modules delivered by our national delivery partner, Goldsmiths, University of London, online resources, and networking opportunities, to support you through your Artsmark journey.

For more information on how to embark on an Artsmark journey and what it involves, go to **Your Next Steps**

## Will Artsmark work for us?

Yes! Artsmark is designed to support schools and education settings to develop and celebrate their commitment to arts, culture, and creativity. Virtual schools play a vital role in advocating for, and providing creative opportunities, for care-experienced children and young people. Artsmark is flexible and adaptable, making it highly relevant for virtual schools.

## How Artsmark benefits children and young people and virtual schools

**Fostering resilience and confidence:** Creative activities, such as drama and music workshops, can help children and young people develop emotional literacy, communication skills, and self-esteem.



**Broadening cultural awareness:** Partnerships with museums, theatres, and galleries etc. can introduce children and young people to enriching experiences, nurturing curiosity and expanding their horizons.

**Supporting therapeutic goals:** Arts-based interventions, such as art therapy or music therapy, can support with processing trauma and developing coping mechanisms.

**Building identity and belonging:** Collaborative arts projects build creative capacities and facilitate exploration of concepts and self-expression; in turn this can foster a sense of connection and identity for children and young people in care.

Artsmark provides virtual schools with a framework to embed arts and creativity across their provision. Whether through Personal Education Plans (PEPs), commissioned arts projects, or enrichment activities, virtual schools can highlight the importance of the arts and creativity in supporting children and young people's development, wellbeing, and education.



Photo © Staffordshire Virtual School / rehearsing for the film 'Misunderstood'



Photo © Staffordshire Virtual School / care leaver taking part in an arts activity.

Artsmark helps maintain strategic visibility for arts provision; this can help when building engagement with cultural organisations and other partners, making it more meaningful and sustainable. The more embedded such connections become, the more they showcase the unique value of tailored arts commissioning for children and young people within local authority contexts.

**Virtual schools can highlight the importance of the arts and creativity in supporting children and young people's development, wellbeing, and education.**



# Your virtual school and the Artsmark criteria

We understand that some of the criteria in the Artsmark framework may be interpreted differently by virtual schools, for example:

## Cultural Collaborations

Partnerships are a cornerstone of virtual schools' arts provision. Collaborating with cultural organisations, creative practitioners, or community groups allows virtual schools to enhance their creative offer and provide high-quality arts experiences. Artsmark encourages virtual schools to build partnerships that align with their goals and meet the needs of their diverse cohorts.

**Commissioning with purpose:** Virtual schools can collaborate with local and regional cultural organisations to deliver workshops, performances, or projects tailored to the needs of children and young people. For example, a theatre company might run drama workshops that support confidence-building and emotional expression.

**Aligning with trauma-informed approaches:** When partnering with organisations, virtual schools should ensure that practitioners are trained in working with care-experienced children and young people and adopt inclusive and supportive methods.

**Fostering long-term collaborations:** Sustained relationships with cultural organisations can offer continuity and deeper engagement, such as annual creative residencies or multi-year partnerships.

### Examples:

Partnering with a music school to provide accessible **music therapy sessions** for children and young people with SEND or emotional needs.

Working with a museum to create a **co-curated exhibition** where participants contribute their own creative responses to historical artefacts or themes relevant to their lived experiences.

Collaborating with a dance company to support well-being and expression, working with children and young people to deliver **movement-based storytelling workshops**, using dance as a tool for emotional expression and confidence-building.

## Curriculum Design and Delivery

Virtual schools do not follow a traditional curriculum model. Instead, they can interpret curriculum design and delivery through a combination of **personalised arts provision**, **commissioned projects**, and **enrichment activities**. Artsmark provides virtual schools with the flexibility to frame their arts offer in ways that align with their unique context and responsibilities.

**Embedding creativity in Personal Education Plans (PEPs):** Arts-focused targets in PEPs can ensure that creativity is directly linked to each child's development goals, making the arts a consistent part of their educational journey.

**Commissioning tailored arts projects:** Virtual schools can strategically commission arts activities that meet the needs of their children and young people, such as group storytelling sessions, therapeutic music workshops, or drama projects to build confidence.



## Providing out-of-hours enrichment opportunities:

Many virtual schools offer creative activities outside school hours, during weekends, or over holidays. These enrichment programmes – such as holiday arts camps or evening arts workshops – can be positioned as an alternative curriculum.

### Examples:

#### Using arts in PEP targets to support transitions

– A virtual school works with schools and creative practitioners to develop arts-based transition projects for children and young people moving between placements.

#### Commissioning an artist-in-residence for personal development

– A virtual school commissions a visual artist or musician to work with care-experienced children and young people over an extended period, building their confidence, creativity, and self-expression through tailored one-to-one or small-group sessions.

#### Designing an arts-led mentoring programme

– A virtual school partners with a theatre company to deliver a drama-based mentoring programme, where participants explore confidence, emotional resilience, and teamwork through role-play, improvisation, and storytelling.

## Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is a vital element of a virtual school's arts provision. By equipping staff, carers, and key adults with the knowledge and skills to support creative opportunities, virtual schools can ensure that care-experienced children and young people benefit from high-quality, inclusive, and impactful arts experiences.

### How CPD can support arts and creative learning

Virtual schools can deliver CPD workshops to help practitioners and carers use creative techniques to support emotional well-being and educational outcomes. For example, training in music therapy or storytelling can



provide carers with tools to engage children creatively at home. CPD is often flexible and delivered through bespoke training sessions, workshops, and reflective practice groups. Given that virtual school staff work across different local authorities and settings, CPD is more likely to involve remote learning, multi-agency workshops, and on-the-job reflective practice rather than structured INSET days.

CPD may focus on equipping staff, carers and cultural partners with awareness and skills to support and deliver arts provision in ways that are sensitive to children and young people's experiences and contexts.

### Examples:

#### A one-day training session for designated teachers on embedding arts into Personal Education Plans (PEPs).

A partnership with a theatre company to deliver **trauma-informed drama techniques for social workers and carers**.

**Online CPD modules for foster carers**, focused on using everyday creative activities to strengthen relationships and support emotional expression.

Photos © Elliot Howarth Films / Creative workshop for young people / young carers led by Everyman Theatre and artist Emma Evans.



## Children and Young People's Engagement

Engaging children and young people in their own learning and decision-making is central to Artsmark. For virtual schools, this means working with a range of partners, including schools, artists and carers to empower children and young people in care to shape their creative experiences, express themselves, and actively participate in arts-based opportunities. Virtual schools can demonstrate how their interventions with partners ensure the arts are not only offered to children and young people in care, but co-designed with them, ensuring that their voices are heard and valued.

**Capturing children and young people's voice:** Virtual schools can use creative methods - such as youth-led podcasting, digital zines, drama improvisation – to document children and young people's feedback on arts activities. These methods are particularly effective for children who may struggle with traditional forms of feedback.

**Co-designing arts projects:** Virtual schools can involve children and young people in planning arts activities, allowing them to choose themes or shape project outcomes. For example, a group might collaborate with an artist to create a zine reflecting their experiences and aspirations.

**Encouraging leadership roles:** children and young people can take on leadership within arts initiatives, such as acting as creative ambassadors, mentoring peers, or presenting their work to audiences.

Photo © Leicestershire Virtual School



### Examples:

A virtual school supports children and young people to **develop a podcast series**, where they explore topics important to them, such as identity, resilience, and aspirations. Young people can take the lead in storyboarding, interviewing, and editing, working with spoken word artists and audio producers to develop their skills and amplify their voices.

A virtual school partners with a local museum to **commission young people as curators**, giving them the platform to showcase their creative work through an online exhibition. Young people select themes, work with artists, and write about their experiences, allowing their perspectives to shape the final display and ensuring their voices are heard in a public cultural space.

A virtual school establishes a **Creative Leadership Council**, where young people co-design arts programmes, choose visiting artists, and decide how enrichment funding is used.

## Evidence gathering

Our assessment will take into consideration the unique ways virtual schools gather and present evidence in their Statement of Impact, which may include:

- testimonials from children, carers, and practitioners
- descriptions of creative outputs and how they reflect children and young people's learning
- case studies showing the impact of commissioned arts projects on individual well-being and development
- data related to attendance and engagement



We understand that virtual schools do not have a single physical setting or a stable, daily cohort of children attending lessons. Instead, they operate across a network of relationships, partnerships, and commissioned services, working with children who may frequently change placements, educational settings, or levels of engagement. This can impact on how a virtual school gathers evidence for the Artsmark Statement of Impact.

Below are some examples of how virtual schools can capture impact when writing up their Artsmark journey.

<b>How virtual schools operate: Serving a diverse and dispersed community</b>	<b>How to gather evidence</b>
<p>Unlike a mainstream school, virtual schools do not have a single cohort of children in classrooms where impact can be easily measured through attendance, attainment, and classroom engagement. Children and young people in care may move between schools or placements during an arts project, making it harder to track their participation consistently.</p>	<p><b>Focus on individual journeys:</b> Instead of tracking impact at a whole-school level, virtual schools can document individual children and young people's creative progression through PEP reviews, practitioner feedback, and personal reflections from children and young people.</p> <p><b>Use case studies:</b> A before-and-after narrative for children and young people involved in arts activities – describing changes in confidence, engagement, or well-being – can be more meaningful than attendance records, for example.</p> <p><b>Capture multi-setting impact:</b> Instead of relying on evidence from a single setting, gather feedback from multiple partners, such as foster carers, social workers, and commissioned arts providers, to build a more holistic picture of impact.</p>

## How virtual schools operate: Delivering arts provision through partnership

Virtual schools do not directly teach or deliver a curriculum; instead, they commission arts programmes or advocate for arts inclusion in the schools their children and young people attend.

## How to gather evidence

### **Document commissioning decisions:**

Virtual schools can describe how they select arts partners, ensuring that provision aligns with need and, where necessary, is trauma-informed.

**Use partnership reports:** Periodically ask cultural organisations, mentors, or commissioned artists to provide written reflections on children and young people's engagement, development, and feedback on creative projects.

**Capture advocacy efforts:** If virtual schools influence schools or local authorities to embed arts in education, they should document these strategic changes as evidence of their impact.

## How virtual schools operate: Responding to need and personal circumstance

Children and young people may face barriers to participation, such as placement changes, emotional difficulties, or instability at home.

Unlike a mainstream school where pupils attend daily lessons, children and young people in care may have irregular engagement with creative learning opportunities.

## How to gather evidence

### **Focus on 'meaning over frequency':**

Instead of measuring engagement by attendance rates, focus on the significance of each arts experience – even if children and young people only engage intermittently, how has it impacted them?

### **Use short-term and long-term indicators:**

Evidence of impact can be gathered through:

- **Short-term:** children and young people expressing enjoyment, confidence, or new skills immediately after an arts activity.
- **Long-term:** children and young people returning to arts-based activities later, expressing interest in further creative opportunities, or using creativity as a coping tool.

### **Provide flexible engagement options:**

Virtual schools may need to offer different types of arts engagement (eg, digital, in-person, one-to-one, or group-based) to accommodate varied needs. Virtual schools can show how this flexibility increases access.

**When writing up an Artsmark Statement of Commitment (SoC) or Statement of Impact (Sol), virtual schools may wish to consider:**

**Framing arts as a long-term influence:**

Instead of focusing on individual events, describe how creative opportunities build a sustained culture of engagement, confidence, and learning for children and young people in care.

**Using multiple perspectives to show impact:**

Evidence should come from children and young people's reflections, carer/social worker feedback, practitioner observations, and strategic reports, rather than a single source.

**Showcasing the virtual school's role as a facilitator & advocate:** Highlight how the virtual school advocates for arts access, designs creative opportunities, and ensures children and young people in care receive high-quality provision, even if they are not delivering the learning directly.



Photo © Leicestershire Virtual School

**Focusing on transformation, not just participation:**

Artsmark is not about simply offering arts opportunities – it is about embedding creative learning and improving outcomes. The best evidence will show how creativity has influenced well-being, engagement, and personal growth for children and young people.

Photo © viswaprem anbarasapandian-unsplash





# How we will support you

## Goldsmiths' training programme

Our national delivery partner, Goldsmiths, University of London, will support you through your Artsmark journey. Goldsmiths is renowned for its research and teaching, celebrated world-wide as a vibrant hub for creativity, arts, and culture. Their Artsmark learning programme offers a mixture of online and in-person sessions, networking and peer mentoring opportunities.

Find out more about [Goldsmiths' learning programme](#)

**Goldsmiths**  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

## Resources and Guidance

We have a wide range of [resources and guidance](#) to help get you started and to support you throughout your Artsmark journey.

- [Download our Artsmark booklet](#)
- Use our [Artsmark Framework](#) to consider your current arts and cultural provision and reflect on the areas you may wish to develop
- Read our [Artsmark application guidance](#) to understand the process



Additional resources are also available specifically for virtual schools, these include:

- A [toolkit](#) developed in partnership with The Mighty Creatives, written by and for virtual schools with experience of developing a creative offer.
- Examples of what Artsmark activity might look like across the [framework](#) and at the different award levels
- A case study of an Artsmark journey from [Staffordshire Virtual School](#)
- Artsmark supports a national peer network of virtual schools engaged with Artsmark and creative and cultural learning. Contact us and we can put you in touch!

Visit [artsmark.org.uk/support](https://artsmark.org.uk/support)

## Contact us

If you have any questions or require further information and guidance, visit our [website](#) or email us: [artsmark@artscouncil.org.uk](mailto:artsmark@artscouncil.org.uk).

# Next steps

Virtual schools are at the forefront of commissioning and delivering innovative, inclusive arts education. Artsmark is a fantastic way of developing and celebrating your offer. We hope this guidance reassures you that Artsmark offers a flexible framework tailored to your unique needs.

Register for Artsmark today at [artsmark.org.uk/register](https://artsmark.org.uk/register)