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Published in:
International Journal of Music Education

DOI:
10.1177/0255761414558653

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Recommended citation(APA):
Bennett, D., & Bridgstock, R. (2015). The urgent need for career preview: Student expectations and graduate realities in music and dance. *International Journal of Music Education*, *33*(3), 263-277. https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761414558653

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Download date: 30 Sep 2023

Performing arts careers: An Australian study of student expectations and graduate realities

Dawn Bennett and Ruth Bridgstock

ABSTRACT

Unlike the work available in many creative disciplines, musicians and dancers have the possibility of full-time, company-based employment; however, participants far outweigh the number of available positions. As a result, many graduates become 'enforced entrepreneurs' as they shape their work to meet personal and professional needs. This paper first explores the career projections of 58 music and dance students who were surveyed in their first week of post-secondary study. It then contrasts these findings with the reality of graduate careers as reported by five of that cohort four years later. In contrast with the students' overwhelming focus on performance roles, the graduate cohort reported a prevalence of portfolio careers incorporating both creative and non-creative roles. The paper characterises the notion of a performing arts 'career' as a messy concept fraught with misunderstanding. Implications include the need to heighten students' career awareness and position intrinsic satisfaction as a valued career concept.

KEYWORDS *performing arts, identity, careers, higher education, creative workforce*

BACKGROUND

Careers across the creative industries are highly distinctive. Unlike the traditional career pattern, which tends to involve a linear career trajectory and longer term employment relationships with a single employer, creative work is likely to be undertaken on a 'portfolio' (Cawsey, 1995) and non-linear basis involving a continually unfolding, self-managed patchwork of concurrent and overlapping employment arrangements. These employment

arrangements can be full or part-time, casual, and/-or undertaken as part of a creative worker's own business. The creative portfolio career happens because much creative work is conducted on a by-project basis, with each project drawing upon the creative skills of different combinations of different people (Daskalaki, 2010). Decisions regarding creative work are much less likely than in other careers to rely on formal application processes, educational credentials and professional accreditation; rather they are often dependent on informal contacts and the quality of previous work outputs.

The performing arts portfolio career

It is possible for musicians and dancers to work in their artistic occupations as full-time company employees (as, for example, a dancer with a ballet company or a violinist with a symphony orchestra). However, there are always far fewer such jobs than applicants, and these opportunities represent a very small minority of the employment options available to performing artists. An audit of Australian-based music performance positions conducted from 2003 to 2005 identified less than 600 full-time company positions for instrumentalists and 50 for vocalists, for which there was global competition (author 1, 2008). Research in the US, Europe and the UK has reported similar deficits, and all have noted the corresponding need for entrepreneurial activities within a portfolio model of work. Whilst there are unique features in every location, difference is often a matter of scale (Beeching, 2010; Perkins, 2012; Smilde, 2012).

Vincs (2007: n. p) has described a similar situation in the dance sector, coining the term 'hybridity' to describe dance work that connects "a range of elements, the dancer's own subjective orientations and preferences, [and] the dancer's circumstances and opportunities". [Author's] work on the Australian dance sector (2009: 28) found 85% of Australian dance

artists to be registered as a business and concluded that the Australian dance sector, in which there are approximately 200 company positions, consists “almost entirely of dance artists for whom independent project-based work is the norm and the inclusion of non-performance roles almost inevitable”. Similarly, Siddall’s (2001) study of the dance sector in England identified less than 400 company positions and only 44 year-long contracts, and Burns (2007: 12) concluded that UK dancers typically accept “arts related work, such as teaching, alongside their performance work and they often work in non-arts work in order to earn an adequate living”.

Work that is self-employed is prevalent within the portfolio, and this demands the skills required to create and manage a small business. Throsby and Zednik’s (2010) large-scale survey into the working patterns of Australian professional artists found that performing artists are between two and five times more likely to be self-employed than other workers, with 56% of professional dancers, 67% of professional musicians and 93% of professional composers undertaking freelance work as at 2009. The high rate of self-employment is similar in other countries and in city-based studies (see for example Center for an Urban Future, 2008).

As Throsby and Zednik (2010) have shown, the portfolio of work in a creative worker’s principal artform is often supplemented with other work such as community cultural development, writing, acting, or choreography. It can also include support work involving arts administration, retailing or management (Cunningham and Higgs, 2010). One in five creative workers also undertake a ‘day job’ entirely unrelated to the creative industries (Throsby and Zednik, 2010).

There is also statistical evidence that a significant proportion of performing artists settle in ‘embedded’ employment, engaging in performing arts work that is outside the arts and creative sectors entirely. To understand this embedded work, Cunningham and Higgs

(2010) conducted census-based analyses into sectors that employ artists. They discovered that as of 2006, 65.5% of those employed as dancers or choreographers were employed principally outside the creative industries. Of those employed principally as musicians, singers or composers, 40.5% were employed in those roles outside the creative industries.

Higgs's later analyses of 2011 Australian census data (Higgs, 2013, personal communication) established that these earlier findings were not anomalous: in 2011, for example, 42.6% of musicians and performing artists (some 11,094 individuals) were employed in those roles outside the creative industries. The most common divisions the embedded musicians and performing artists were employed in were Retail Trade (13.31%), Public Administration and Safety (8.16%), Education and Training (18.05%), non-Arts Recreation Services (9.07%), and Other Services (16.40%). Of the 14,959 musicians and performing artists employed within the creative industries, 78.2% were employed in the 'Arts division' with another 19% employed in 'Information Media and Telecommunications'.

When reading these findings it is crucial to bare in mind that extant survey and census-based research tends to emphasise the creative worker's 'main occupation' and may de-emphasise or ignore completely other work undertaken in a portfolio career pattern. As in other countries, the Australian census asks only about the respondent's occupation in their main job last week. Because of this, researchers have suggested that it underestimates the artist population by more than 50 percent (Throsby, 2008). The Given that the ~50% of creative workers captured by the census will tend to be almost certainly over represents established or company-based artists for whom arts work is a fairly 'steady job'. Conversely, artists who are attempting to become established, have a regular 'day job' outside the arts, or for whom arts work is part of a portfolio career, are likely to be underrepresented by the census data.

National university Graduate Destination data in Australia and elsewhere (Graduate Careers Council of Australia, 2012) have been criticised for painting an artificially dismal picture of the employment outcomes of creative and performing arts graduates, because they rely on 'full-time employment' as their sole indicator of graduate success and do not acknowledge the prevalence of the portfolio career in these sectors (author 2, 2009; Brown, 2007). Whilst the graduate data may be artificially dismal, however, graduates are known to struggle with the transition from study into the complex creative labour market.

Transitions from university to creative career

Studies of graduate transitions indicate that many students experience a significant period of personal and professional identity uncertainty as they attempt to move into the world of work (Buckham, 1998; Nyström et al., 2008). This is particularly the case for those whose courses are not associated with specific prescribed and accredited vocational career paths, such as graduates of humanities, sciences, and creative industries and arts programs (as opposed to graduates of education, medicine, or pharmacy programs).

As mentioned earlier, graduates of arts and creative industries programs consistently have the poorest graduate outcomes of the 40 broad disciplines measured in Australia's annual graduate destination statistics collection (Graduate Careers Council of Australia, 2012). Whilst main occupation is a factor, in most part this is because creative graduates face distinctive challenges to employability and career building that graduates from other fields may face to a lesser extent, or not at all. These challenges include structural labour market barriers and intense competition for entry-level jobs; the highly individual self-initiated and self-managed portfolio career pattern; and non-traditional informal, networked ways of obtaining or creating work through reputation building.

Creative career identity development

In addition to the outward challenges of navigating the path from study to work, performing arts graduates are likely to experience inward transformations in personal and career identity as they start to experience the world of work. Career identity is the definition people have of themselves in terms of work or career (Meijers, 1998). It can be thought of as 'who I am', 'who I want to be' and 'what's important to me' in career. Career identity changes throughout the lifespan and reflects an individual's motivations, personal meanings and individual values as they relate to work. Identity has a strong effect on career-related behaviour, acting as a "cognitive compass" (Fugate et al., 2004: 17) that directs, regulates and sustains an individual's learning, job creation and acquisition actions, and career building strategies. It follows that understanding students' perceptions of work, career and identity, and tracking these through the early career phase, might enhance our ability to offer timely and meaningful support.

APPROACH AND ANALYSIS

This study was situated at an Australian conservatoire and involved a survey of incoming first year students followed by a detailed qualitative survey of five respondents 12 to 18 months after they had graduated. The incoming student survey was administered to 58 students in the first week of their first year of university study. Nine of the students were majoring in dance, and the remaining 49 students were music students with major studies in jazz and classical performance, composition and music technology. A total of 58.6% of the respondents were male. The incoming student survey first addressed students' learning experiences prior to coming to university and went on to ask about students' expectations of their courses. It then asked students to project the types of activities they hoped and expected to undertake as graduates both two and five years after graduation. Survey items included those requesting

both closed and open-ended response, and repeated items for purposes of triangulation, validity and reliability.

Four years later an Internet search revealed contact details for 15 of the participants (12 from music and three from dance), who by this time were early careerists approximately 12 - 18 months after graduation. Invitations to participate were sent by email and followed up with a phone call, and five graduates completed an in-depth survey to create a profile of their work. The graduate survey included questions about the nature of the graduates' careers, including the amount of time allocated to both paid and unpaid activities over a six-month period. It also asked the graduates to reflect on their careers in relation to their studies. Finally, graduates were given aggregated findings from the incoming student survey they had completed four years earlier, and they were asked to comment on these findings.

The chapter draws as its framework the Creative Trident methodology (Higgs et al., 2007), which categorises creative work in terms of both industry and occupation, with creative occupations categorised in three distinct ways:

1. Specialist creatives: Creative workers working in creative roles within the core creative industries (e.g. a company dancer);
2. Embedded creatives: Creative workers working in creative roles outside of the creative industries (e.g. a musician working as a musician in a therapeutic setting in the health sector); and
3. Support workers: Workers undertaking non-creative roles within the creative industries (e.g. administrative, business support and retail roles).

Work that falls outside the Trident is known as 'non-creative' work.

This was a transcendental phenomenological study (Creswell 2007) involving analytical procedures as described by Moustakas (1994). Textual data were transcribed, coded and analysed for emergent themes with the assistance of NVivo qualitative analysis software.

As suggested by Brannen (1992: 73), quasi-quantification was applied where appropriate “as a means of summarizing qualitative material as an alternative to more indeterminate presentations of data”. Two researchers independently conducted initial coding on a 10% sample of the survey responses, after which coding was compared and refinements applied.

Against this background, we first explore what music and dance students are hoping and expecting their careers to look like two and five years after graduation. We then introduce the graduate cohort and compare projected and actual careers in terms of the Creative Trident employment modes. Finally, we draw on the graduate profiles to explore the work experiences and reflections of the graduates 12 to 18 months after graduation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Incoming student survey

What do incoming first year students hope and expect to be doing two years after graduation?

Students were asked both what they hoped and what they expected to be doing two and five years after graduation. Two years after graduation a small majority (54%) of incoming dance students *hoped* to be employed as professional dancers in dance companies. They also hoped to travel nationally and overseas to further their dance careers. Just under 20% of the dance students mentioned undertaking auditions or further study, or the desire for employment security.

The *expectations* of this cohort were fairly similar in that 60% expected to be employed as professional company dancers; however, almost twice as many students (35% compared to 18%) expected still to be training rather than having moved into professional roles. Far fewer students (30% compared to 54%) expected to be travelling nationally and

internationally. Short-term contract work, auditions, choreography, and non-creative work including teaching, featured in 56% of the responses.

For (40%) of the music cohort the *hope* two years after graduation was to have secured performance work as a "professional musician". A large minority (45%) of the music students hoped to be travelling to national and international destinations in order to establish their performance careers.

The *expectations* of the music students were somewhat different. Whilst 42% of the musicians expected to be working professionally, only 36% expected to be travelling nationally and internationally. Similarly, 10% specifically mentioned establishing their careers locally rather than (as hoped) pursuing opportunities elsewhere, although working towards international recognition still featured in 5% of those responses. Teaching arose as an expected activity for 12% of the music students, none of whom had mentioned teaching in their hoped-for career projections. Music students (5%) also mentioned income, with one student expecting to earn "*a steady-ish income from performing music*". Students also noted being entrepreneurial (5%), starting one's own band (4%), and playing original music (5%). Contemporary music students tended to report these activities as both expected and desired goals. For one student, career success was dependent on "*Being marginally competent*".

What do incoming students hope and expect to be doing five years after graduation?

Students were next asked to think about their hoped-for and expected career activities five years after graduation. Five years after graduation, 60% of the incoming dance students *hoped* to be employed as professional dancers in a national or international dance company. Of this number, over half (60%) specified that the dance company would be in another location. Only 12% or less of the students made mention of another role such as choreography, teaching and artistic direction, although some students noted they may be still seeking secure employment.

Whilst the responses did not reveal much difference between hoped and expected futures, analysis of the dance students' narratives highlighted the desire to achieve performance work that is secure and in high-profile companies. It also revealed that students position teaching roles as a fall back position, and that there is a strong desire to work in large national or international centres of activity. These themes are illustrated at Table 1, which shows the projected activities of four dance students five years after graduation.

Table 1: Hoped for and expected activities five years after graduation (sample quotes)

Respondent	*Hoped for activities*	*Expected activities*
D1	Still dancing in a company in Australia.	In Australia may be teaching
D2	Have danced for at least 10 different Companies throughout the world.	Been in at least 1 Company and coming back [home] to help teach the youth.
D4	Still Dancing! In a Company or Teaching.	Teaching and Working.
D8	Be employed permanently with a contemporary Dance Company.	Longer term rolling contracts with Companies.

Five years after graduation the music students were focused on performing as professional musicians (82%) and/or recording artists (20%), with 76% indicating a desire to travel and perform nationally and internationally. While some students (10%) hoped to have an established reputation, others hoped to have enjoyed "*Moderate international success*". For 8% this involved international experience with famous artists in an established company.

The expectations of the music cohort were markedly different from what they had hoped to be doing. While 30% of the students expected to travel and a further 32% expected to travel internationally, 15% of the students aligned their travel expectations with further training, 15% expected to be pursuing a career as an original artist, 12% expected to be studying or establishing their own bands, and 26% expected to include teaching.

Not surprisingly, 84% of the music students desired a career in performance or composition. Of these students 61% *expected* to perform or compose, mostly in combination with other roles including further study. As with the dance cohort there was a significant

focus on teaching as a fall-back career, with only 18% of music students mentioning teaching as a hoped-for career activity, mostly in combination with performance or composition roles. Two students specified that teaching would be at the tertiary level.

Comparison of the narratives in relation to teaching raises similar themes to those of the dance cohort: namely, that teaching was positioned as a fallback and often as a temporary role. Of particular concern were 11 of the music students who, when describing their expected career activities, did not include the performance or composition roles to which they aspired. These were the students' major study areas. Shown at Table 2, some of the students were expecting still to be focused on study in anticipation of performance success.

Table 2: Music students (11) who omitted their major study area from their expected careers

Respondent	*Hoped for activities*	*Expected activities*	*Notes on expected activities*
M1	Be travelling and playing my music for audiences	I will be travelling	Performance is absent
M14	A recording – CD	Travelled around getting experience from international musicians	Recording replaced by further training
M15	Be on recording in Australia and have gigged with some international artists (American)	Dip Ed. [Graduate Diploma of Education: teaching qualification]	Recording and performance replaced by teacher training
M26	To work in studios and accompany well-known musicians	Thinking about teaching	Performance replaced by teaching
M29	Ability to tour or teach abroad	School teaching	Performance is absent
M30	Travelling and performing regularly	I don't know!	Unknown
M33	Performing professionally, in open choruses, oratorio, etc.	Studying a 'real' degree, searching for professional performance opportunities, looking into further study overseas	Performance ambitions not realised and possibly reconsidered
M40	Be a part of a company, and be making a living from performing	Teaching	Performance replaced by teaching
M45	Performing a lead role in an opera house anywhere in the world	To have a degree. To maybe have a Masters as well. Also a larger repertoire, either opera or recital and oratorio!	Performance ambitions retained whilst further training is undertaken

M46	Steady income from playing/ making music	Nowhere near as much as I hope	Performance ambitions retained
M52	Be touring (maybe cruise ships)	Teaching	Performance replaced by teaching

The responses in Table 2 suggest that some students enter their degree programs not expecting to succeed in their major study area. Moreover, students who do not expect to achieve their ambitions appear to have little idea of alternative pathways within and beyond the creative industries. Indeed, across the sample of incoming students the only mention of embedded work was from one student who wrote of performing on cruise ships. Similarly, non-creative work was limited to teaching. Whilst these were incoming students with years of study ahead of them, their responses indicate the amount that needs to be done within higher education if such students are to emerge as prepared, resilient and employable graduates.

The graduate profiles

Twelve to 18 months after graduation, five of the participants from the incoming student survey provided a complete profile of their work by responding to a graduate survey, which included questions about the nature of the graduates' careers including the amount of time allocated to both paid and unpaid activities over a six-month period. The survey also asked the graduates to reflect on their careers in relation to their studies. Finally, it shared key findings from the incoming student survey completed four years earlier and asked for comment on these findings. The five graduates, reported here using pseudonyms, included two males and three females. Two had graduated from dance and three from music (one from composition and two from performance). One graduate had moved to another city to pursue her work. The two graduates from dance were aged 23 (Laura) and 25 (Adrian), and the music graduates were aged 33 (Sarah), 34 (Martyn) and 22 (Amanda). As incoming students they described their hopes and expectations of graduate life as shown at Table 3. Also included at

Table 3 is an overview of their careers at the time of the graduate survey, which is a subject to which we will return in the final section of the paper. The chart included at Table 3 illustrates the weighting of each employment mode in the responses from each phase of the study.

Table 3: Career activities as expressed by the graduates when incoming 1st year students and, later, as graduates

	Student				**Graduate**
	Hoped for	**Expected**	**Hoped for**	**Expected**	**Actual**
	After two years		**After five years**		
Adrian	Be employed permanently with a contemporary Dance Company.	Short term, sporadic, casual project work for independent artists.	Employed permanently with a contemporary Dance Company.	Longer term rolling contracts with Companies.	Full-time unrelated work. No income from dance. No dance activities reported.
Laura	Dancing in a professional Australian Contemporary Company.	Same [as hoped-for activities]	Dancing in a professional Australian Contemporary Company. Or in an overseas company.	Dancing in a professional Australian Contemporary company. Or in an overseas company.	Freelance/contracted dance work with multiple companies. Non-creative work added as required.
Sarah	Working professionally as a full time musician – performing and teaching.	As above [same as hoped-for activities].	Touring nationally with my own group, recording albums of mostly original tunes and touring internationally.	As above but not sure about touring internationally.	Music work replaced with full-time unrelated work. Active as a performer and composer (unpaid).
Amanda	Start writing music for films.	Same [same as hoped-for activities].	Start a production company for composing music for films.	Same as 6a [hoped-for activities].	Freelance composer, performer, teacher, conductor and researcher. Permanent part-time non-creative work.
Martyn	To be employed performing music at a high level.	Doing a few gigs.	To work in studios and accompany well-known musicians.	Thinking about teaching.	Three part-time teaching jobs, self-employed. Performance work - weddings and corporate events.
Emphasis (%)	100% 80% 60% 40% 20% 0% Desired after 2 years Expected after 2 years Desired after 5 years Expected after five years Actual Specialist Support Non-creative				

Adrian, dance graduate

Adrian (25) described his arts practice as contemporary dance. At the time of the study he was working full-time in an unrelated role outside of the creative industries and had not generated an income from dance during the past twelve months. He did not expect to continue working as a creative worker, despite retaining a desire to work full-time within dance. When asked to define his professional identity, he replied "Human resources".

Reflecting on his tertiary level dance training, Adrian felt he was best prepared for "*the variety of skills required to be a successful artist, within music and business skills*". However, he was least prepared for

> *… learning how to manage your time between non-dance work and practical training. Because there can be large gaps between either paid or unpaid dance projects, it can become difficult to maintain your level of training while still being able to support yourself financially.*

The impact of employment gaps on physical and technical ability is felt by both musicians and dancers, and relates to the elite level of technical skill and physical fitness needed to maintain professional-level performance skills (Annett, Wilson and Piech, 1981). As such, gaps in employment can be difficult to overcome in terms of career progression and opportunities.

Laura, dance graduate

Laura (23) was a contemporary dance graduate who worked full-time in the dance sector, fulfilling consecutive projects with multiple companies on a fixed-term or hourly-paid basis. Laura expected to work as a dance artist throughout her working life

and described herself as a contemporary dancer. Despite regular contracts with little time between them during the six-month reporting period, Laura reported supplementing her income as required with skilled and unskilled creative work and with non-creative work.

Laura described the value of physical disciplines such as martial arts, yoga, meditation and surfing, which informed and enhanced her own bodily understanding and awareness. Yoga, which she described as "*a physical discipline very much aligned with dance*", also provided additional income in the form of a regular yoga class taught for one of the dance companies. Laura included the administration of her dance practice as an integral component of her creative work, explaining: "*opportunities to work in the arts often come to fruition when you are on top of your own administration*".

As a new graduate, Laura felt best prepared for "*Many styles of work, versatility, ability and/or openness to work with all kinds of bodies and personalities*"; however, felt underprepared for the precarious nature of dance work: "*The ups and downs. The unpredictable, ever-changing nature of freelance/project work. Fleeting employment and un-employment, a gypsy travelling (following the work) lifestyle*". Whilst Sarah had created a career within the dance sector, these reflections align with Adrian's concerns about managing gaps in employment. A range of physical activities helped Laura maintain her level of fitness when dance work was scarce.

Sarah, jazz performance graduate

Sarah (33) was the oldest of the graduate respondents. Sarah expected to practice as a musician throughout her working life and held part-time roles in music, but she did not derive an income from her music activities during the survey period and worked instead as a full-time local government officer. Asked what she did, Sarah first referred to her

day job but would sometimes add: "*and I play in a band. If I know they are an artist of some sort, and I feel chatty, I would add this*". Sarah reported irregular composition work including concert music and musicals. She no longer desired full-time creative work, having created secure non-creative work to compensate for the fluctuations in her arts income.

Sarah held a double degree in multimedia and sustainability in addition to her jazz performance studies. As a music graduate she felt best prepared "*to work as a music teacher or a performer",* and least prepared for *"organising gigs, making a living as a musician*". Again, the difficulty appears to relate to creating and managing a career, rather than to the level of specialist skill acquired during training.

Amanda, composition graduate

At the time of the study, Amanda (22) was working full-time as a composer, arranger and teacher. She supplemented her income with non-creative skilled and non-skilled work and she described herself as follows:

> "*I am a composer. My career is a 'portfolio career', meaning I work within many fields in the same area. As a composer I write music (and research papers), I perform, I conduct, I teach and I study."*

When describing herself, Amanda would change her response according to "*target audience and the amount of time I have to describe what I do*".

In line with her portfolio career, Amanda's activities were "*based on what is available at the time and whether I have the time and skills to do the job*". As a graduate, Amanda felt she was best prepared for "*the variety of skills required to be a successful artist*". She struggled, however, with the need to identify her "*own artistic*

voice", acknowledging that this is necessary in order to "*create a 'brand' for your art*". In Amanda's case the explicit mention of a portfolio career in which multiple activities were housed suggests an entrepreneurial attitude alongside intrinsic satisfaction with a complex and flexible career. Her permanent, post-time position with a local bakery was reported as an important and valued role that supported her creative practice.

Martyn, jazz performance graduate

Martyn (34) graduated with a degree in jazz performance, and at the time of the survey he held part-time work as a performer and teacher. He anticipated working as a musician throughout his working life and did not supplement his arts income with other activities. Martyn described himself as "a musician and a music teacher", and 71.4% of his paid hours were spent as an instrumental teacher. Although teaching was reported as a single role, analysis revealed three different teaching positions including two school-based positions and teaching work at a music school, all on a self-employed basis. Whilst performance was his focus, Martyn reflected that teaching had prompted him "*to think of wider applications for my art, making me review the steps I have taken in my career*". Performance work largely consisted of band engagements for weddings and corporate events, which required standard repertoire rather than the music he preferred to perform.

As a new graduate, Martyn felt he was best prepared "*to teach, play easy music [and] to keep learning*". The high standards required to attract high-level work, however, came as something of a shock, and he wrote that he was least prepared "*to join the tight and exclusive ranks of performing jazz artists*". Martyn was the only graduate to mention inadequate technical skills as the major barrier to securing work.

Imagining a career

The graduates were asked how their career related to what they had imagined as students. Their responses were summarised at Table 3, and an excerpt from their narratives (Table 4) suggests a lack of career preview as graduating students.

Table 4: 'How does your career relate to what you imagined as a student?'

How does your career relate to what you imagined as a student?	
Adrian	My career does not relate to my field of study.
Laura	I did not imagine being a freelance artist. But I think this is because I didn't gain a very good understanding of freelance/project-based work. Whilst I was [studying] I was headstrong on finding a full-time position in a dance company. These positions are so rare! But I would not change anything in my career thus far - because I am a freelance artist, I am exposed to so many different choreographers and experiences so I've learnt such a wide range of skills and met such amazing artists. Travelling and performing all over Australia is a dream come true.
Sarah	Not what I imagined at all, as a music student.
Amanda	[No response]
Martyn	I never knew there would still be so much to learn. I didn't know then that to be an artist is to keep learning forever.

A common goal for many of the incoming students was to become a company artist, which is a coveted position. In fact, these positions are rarely the secure, full time positions imagined by students. The profile of the company artist is changing to reflect the growing number of 'ensemble companies' that interchange instrumentalists, vocalists or dancers on a project-by-project basis. Alongside the ensemble companies are project-based companies offering dancers and musicians short term, full time or part-time contracts, many of which demand a wide range of skills such as teaching, rehearsal direction, work within education, or community work. Still more companies are artist-led initiatives that are self-funded or assisted by supporting organisations. As Siddall has noted (2001), even year-long contracts are often contract-based work with

no certainty of renewal. This was illustrated by the work of dance graduate Laura, whose full time work as a company dancer was undertaken on a contractual basis across multiple companies and locations.

Whilst it is hoped that students develop an understanding of work and career as they progress through their studies, the graduates' comments suggest this is still lacking within some tertiary programs. Until very recently, career and identity development was largely overlooked by tertiary education. With the bulk of most courses concentrating on imparting the disciplinary and generic skills and knowledge required for performance in the target discipline (author 2, 2009), tertiary institutions are only beginning to address professional practice issues in capstone work experience and internship programs. They are also beginning to realise that the (re)negotiation of professional identity is often highly troublesome for students (Burland and Pitts, 2007).

The matter of identity

Students can engage in higher education courses with only a vague notion of what they might do afterwards or how their intended industry works. In Marcia's (1987) classic identity status model, this is known as a "diffused" career identity. Perhaps guided by unrealistic, media-influenced ideas about the world of work, other students develop a rigid, overly specific "foreclosed" career identity (e.g. aspiring to a performance career just like that of Maria Tallchief or Dave Brubeck). This was evident in the student responses, many of which were focused on company roles and performance positions without consideration (or perhaps awareness) of the changing nature of company positions or of potential complementary or alternative pathways within and beyond the creative industries. This issue becomes particularly important when considering that the

inconsistent nature of performance work can result in a loss of technical ability unless the physical regime of daily practice is maintained even whilst other work is being undertaken.

Career identity foreclosure is a particular risk in creative industries careers, where, in the absence of better information, the existence of highly visible, successful star individuals and companies can skew students' views of what a creative career involves (author 2 at al., forthcoming). The incoming music and dance students reported here were surveyed in their first week of tertiary study. Given that students were asked to consider both desired and expected career activities, the focus on specialist roles was striking. From an educational standpoint this is pertinent because it suggests that either students are choosing not to consider a variety of different roles, or that these broader career options are simply not known to them. Perhaps to some extent it is both of these factors, which emphasises the need to encourage students to redefine what might be successful and desirable to them as performing arts graduates.

Specialist, embedded and non-creative work is likely to feature throughout the portfolio of a performer's work and to be an important component of a performer's professional identity. One of the anomalies of the Trident model is that teaching in all its domains is deemed a 'non-creative' activity, which positions this most obvious and primary use of performance skills outside of a creative worker's creative portfolio of work. Whilst teaching was positioned as a fallback position by the incoming students, it emerged as a central and valued component of the music graduates' portfolios and is known to be a central component of musicians' work (author 1, 2007; Rogers, 2002). As Martyn explained:

Most of the professional musicians I know or have met combine some combination of performance and teaching work, so that is very achievable, and common. I found during and following my music studies that my impression of what the music industry is and what place I could make for myself in it changed considerably from how I originally perceived it. I had big dreams of performing internationally, and being a paid professional musician; but found it hard to get paid gigs, and a very uncertain insecure way to make a living.

Sarah agreed that teaching offers regular income for musicians, adding that financial security can also mean artistic compromise:

I have a measure of financial security as a teacher and by playing music that other people like. To play the music I like requires giving up some of that security … A negative assessment of my career at this point could be that little of my work is really art, for art's sake. And that I am really doing the same things now that I was doing before my degree. I am definitely doing them a lot better ... I now a lot more about my art and have far greater prospects.

Interestingly, while Cunningham and Higgs' (2010) and Higgs' (2013, personal communication) Census analyses suggested that embedded jobs are common in the performing arts, none of the graduates in the present study reported undertaking embedded creative work. It is possible that studying a larger sample of graduates from the cohort might reveal embedded work. It might also be that embedded work is less prevalent among performing artists, who have completed highly specialised programs designed to prepare them for specialist performance careers. Further empirical investigation into embedded cultural production roles including their characteristics, frequency in different geographical locations and industries, and education/training

requirements, seems warranted.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Only one of the graduates complained of an initial skills deficit. Rather, the graduates struggled with enforced entrepreneurship, multiple roles, the need to build and run a small business, finding their niche, and the need to retain and refine their technical skills even when undertaking other work. These realities are typical of the distinctive challenges to employability and career building faced by graduates of arts and creative industries programs.

These challenges are exacerbated by poor career preview, which was evident in the responses of both students and graduates. Students' career identities inevitably shift as they progressively encounter work-related situations and learn more about careers in the field they have chosen. Some tertiary arts institutions in Australia are starting to build career identity development into their curricula in attempt to address some of these issues. For instance, the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts runs a graduate dance company and Griffith University has a program-long course titled 'My Life as a Musician' (Tolmie, 2013). Similarly, Queensland University of Technology's Bachelor of Creative Industries program (author 2 et al., forthcoming; author 2 et al., 2012) commences foundational creative career identity development from the first year of study, as a result of which [Author 2 et al] (2013) report lower student attrition, higher engagement with learning, and enhancement of creative employability.

In both policy and academic discourse, tertiary education is tasked with conducting specialist disciplinary education and training and with equipping students for their professional lives (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013; UNESCO, 1998).

Extended education-to-work transitions resulting from mismatches between educational provision and sectoral requirements are costly in a number of ways. These include graduate unemployment and underemployment, reliance on social security, distress, sectoral attrition, and expensive retraining (author 2 and Hearn, 2011). If initial and early professional education for the arts can better address the learning needs of emerging performing artists, many of these issues and costs could be forestalled.

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