The Creative Practitioner

A Guide to Working in the Arts

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With

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Preface

The arts are at once a hugely rewarding and inordinately difficult place to make a living. Many artists struggle with the juxtaposition between artform and wage, practice versus business, and find themselves treading water in the uneasy position of how they can continue to dedicate themselves to their artform whilst making enough money to survive.

In writing a book like this, we hope to provide something in the way of guidance, insight, and relevant information for those wishing to navigate this path. The creative industries are vast and multifaceted, and no single volume can adequately present a detailed and comprehensive account of everything a practitioner of any artform might need to succeed and professionalise. Instead, we have adopted a strategy of signposting and conceptual exploration. Key concepts are explored in a way that is as applicable as possible to all artforms, and reference is made to more specific resources for those who wish to learn more about a specific topic.

This book provides guidance on how to balance vocational qualifications and professionalisation. It is designed to help individuals who want to professionalise their craft, regardless of whether they pursue a formal qualification. The chapters on qualifications should not dissuade readers who choose not to pursue them, as qualifications are based on professional principles. Also, individuals pursuing qualifications but not necessarily interested in professionalising their craft should not be concerned about discussions related to professional activities, as concepts of professionalism and professional activity are essential to the qualifications' criteria and requirements. Our aim is to make the topics, ideas, and references explored in this book helpful to anyone pursuing their craft, irrespective of their chosen path, interests, or level of experience.

This collaborative work is not just a book, but a guide tailored for those seeking to train or work in the creative industries. Aimed at individuals looking to professionalise and accredit themselves with qualifications, the guide caters to a diverse audience. Whether one is a student on a vocational pathway or an established practitioner entering the industry professionally, this manual is a valuable resource for anyone studying or practising a creative discipline.

Whatever the path, whoever the reader, and whatever the art they pursue, we hope that the topics, ideas, and references explored in this book go some way into easing the choppy waters in which they practice and seek to thrive, whether that be artistically, academically, or professionally.

- Paul Hose and Jonathan Curtis, Nottingham, November 2023

Disclaimer

This book includes information on a variety of topics, some of which are of a sensitive or legal nature. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information is correct at the time of publication, in line with current laws and regulations, and appropriate to the subject matter. However, this book is not a substitute for legal advice or direct expert assistance, and this book, its publisher, or the authors, can accept or assume no responsibility for errors, inaccuracies, omissions, or any damage or disruption caused as a result of such, or from negligence, accident, misfortune, or any other cause.

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Introduction

This book is written as a guide for those looking to professionalise within their artform. In this context, professionalisation refers to two things: the act of turning professional within the creative industries, and the act of bettering one's approach to their artform to operate at a professional level. Whether or not the act of professionalising comprises making a living from their art, artists can benefit from learning about the concepts of academic rigour, teaching pedagogy, the nuances of performance, subject knowledge, business approaches, and best practice principles within the creative industries.

In this sense, professionalisation also refers to the act of gaining the various vocational qualifications available across the arts, referred to here as the qualification pathways. Professionalisation in this context describes those students who seek to further engage with their art through these pathways. The principles and ideas discussed here are therefore appropriate both for those who wish to professionalise in a literal sense, taking their artform as their primary way of making a living, and also to those who wish to attain vocational qualifications, with or without the implied progression of working in the industry itself.

The material in this book rides the line between these two demographics, and it does so based on the principle that both approaches generally lead in the same direction. The learning required to attain a professional qualification is representative of what is required to be a professional, and the experience and depth of knowledge required to be a professional is referenced in the requirements for the qualifications.

Readers who are looking to professionalise without gaining a qualification are encouraged to consider the chapters that address those qualifications as covering various aspects that are nevertheless valuable and practical to professional practice. Academic rigour, subject knowledge, depth of study, best practice principles, legal and social obligations, and many other aspects related to obtaining a qualification are based on the things professionals need to do regularly.

Likewise, students looking to obtain a qualification without necessarily pursuing their craft professionally need not be deterred by talk of professionalisation. The principles discussed are concerned with the conceptual act of artistic development, of which professionalisation is a crucial aspect. Those who wish to keep their artform as something of a hobby, without the need to earn a living from it, will still benefit from these principles, even if they are never applied to the actual act of going into business.

This book operates on main principles. The realities of working in the arts, and of gaining qualifications pertinent to that, are vast and varied. To include the requisite details for every practitioner, qualification, and discipline, would take a volume many times the size of this one. Instead, this book explores and presents principles that are applicable in a fundamental sense, appropriate to a greater or lesser extent to all practitioners and all qualifications. Where further study is required, recommended reading lists and extra details are included in the **Appendices** at the back of this book.

Part 1: An Overview of the Creative Industries

This opening section presents an overview of the creative industries, especially their contribution to the UK economy both pre- and post-Covid-19. It presents a broad picture of the current state of the art and the people making it. We shall explore the economic, social, cultural, and psychological cost of the arts, and how the new generation of arts practitioners, both professional and hobbyist, are adapting to the changing face of the industry. This section also explores the vocational qualifications themselves, and presents the various requirements candidates may be expected to meet when applying to study at various institutions.

Part 2: Academic Rigour

This section explores the basic standards required by today's professionals. It highlights the various pathways we may take through the arts, but explores concepts important to all of them. Academic rigour is the description of standards and attention to detail when presenting work, and includes elements such as conducting research, preparing and presenting work, and quality of writing.

Part 3: Teaching the Arts

Part 3 is aimed at those wishing to teach the arts, whether as private tutors, educators, or teachers within an institution. It covers the practical, theoretical, and academic aspects of teaching, including the wealth of qualifications available to those looking to accredit themselves in this field. Professional teaching of the arts must evolve as technology, society, and best practice laws change, so this section aims to present a comprehensive guide to the pedagogy of teaching an artform.

Part 4: Performing the Arts

Part 4 explores the pedagogical factors associated with successful performance. It includes guidance for those following performance-based qualifications, as well as principles and ideas that are common to all great performers. This section covers such concepts as the act of studying and preparing for a performance, planning and logistical elements, subject knowledge, critical analysis, and a scheme of work typical of a performance diploma course.

Part 5: Working in the Arts

Finally, Part 5 tackles the act of going into business within the creative industries. It is aimed at those wishing to work in the arts professionally, which includes both educators and performers. It covers the act of being in business, the various business types, best practices, and the vast array of elements to be considered by those looking to professionalise within the industry. Professionalisation within an artform requires the practitioner to conduct themselves as a business, whether as a sole trader, limited company, or other form of legal entity. Here, we explore the various options, consider the various requirements and responsibilities of running a business, and cover the best practice principles that all professionals should strive to follow to keep their businesses safe, legal, and successful.

Vocational Qualifications

A vocational qualification, such as a professional diploma, is a college or university-level qualification aimed at individuals who wish to be recognised for the specialised training that they have undertaken. Typically, educational institutions offer level 4 and level 6 qualifications, commensurate with the first and final years of an undergraduate degree respectively. These qualifications are produced and accredited by various awarding bodies, and taught at institutions or by private tutors. Many people have completed such pathways in preparation for – and alongside – their studies at university, while others have undertaken diploma courses instead of an undergraduate degree.

Diplomas are an affordable alternative to studying at university. Studying both a level 4 and level 6 diploma with a credible mentor or institution will typically incur fees in the region of £6,000. Furthermore, diplomas also act as an important form of continued professional development (CPD). Such undertakings give the participant the chance to reinforce existing skills with a particular focus on the industry into which they wish to move.

In 2011 the Department for Education and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport published *Music Education in England: A Review* by Darren Henley. His review, together with the Government's response, has had a positive impact on the way music education is delivered in England. At its time of writing, Henley found that the provision was inconsistent, and that:

> Music Education in England was 'good in places, but distinctly patchy.'[1]

Henley speaks of the need to develop a new qualification for music educators, which acknowledges the role of educators in and out of school:

> **Recommendation 24**: A new qualification should be developed for music educators, which would professionalise and acknowledge their role in and out of school. Primarily delivered through in-post training and continuous professional development, musicians who gain this new qualification would be regarded as Qualified Music Educators. It would be as applicable to peripatetic music teachers as it would be to orchestral musicians who carry out Music Education as part of their working lives.[2]

The Government's response was as follows, and paved the way for new and exciting qualifications for educators:

> Professionalising the music education workforce would provide to music educators the status they deserve and would enable schools to identify those whose music education practice has been properly assessed. We will talk to the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and other ITT providers about this.[3]

Since then, examining boards including The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), Trinity College London, RSL Awards, London College of Music, and many others

[1] (Henley, 2011), p. 5
[2] (Henley, 2011), p. 26
[3] (UK Government, 2011), p. 10

have released Ofqual-accredited qualifications that directly address Recommendation 24 from the Henley report. In turn, many organisations have mapped curricula and schemes of work that facilitate the journey of independent practitioners in an effort to professionalise the industry and acknowledge the invaluable role of adequately qualified practitioners working in schools and the private sector. Moreover, the government has now published these qualifications as an alternative to the traditional university pathway on its own national careers service website.[4]

An example of this is the Level 4 Certificate for Music Educators, offered by both ABRSM and Trinity College London. This certificated course is aimed at people who are new to teaching music to children, and covers the process of music education. It specifically promotes best practice principles, and has been developed especially for:

- **Instrumental and vocal teachers working privately with schools**
- **Primary school teachers**
- **Community musicians**
- **Professional musicians who do educational work**

Other options include various teaching diplomas and training courses, such as the Instrumental Teaching Diploma offered by RSL.

Today, most examining boards have released suites of university-level qualifications across many artistic disciplines. The subsequent curricula devised by many independent organisations will no doubt vary in style, as will the delivery of their courses. Some will opt for a traditional face-to-face model whereas others will opt for blended learning that includes online classes, peer-to-peer sessions, and mentor review. The pathway for these diplomas includes continued professional development that can result in Qualified Teacher Learner Status (QTLS).

This is a particularly exciting new pathway. Traditionally, individuals would have studied at universities before progressing to a postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE); indeed, this is still the preferred pathway for many in traditional education.

In light of Covid-19, many higher education institutions announced that their 2020-2021 academic year provision was to be either exclusively online, or a form of blended learning in the manner discussed above. This raises further questions surrounding the growing costs associated with following a traditional university path.

The UK Government warns of a deep recession that will no doubt result in many redundancies. It will inevitably prompt some of the workforce to retrain. One 2020 report, published by the Department for Education, predicts that:

> …based on recent trends, the qualification profile of employment will continue to see a shift towards more people holding more high-level qualifications.[5]

[4] https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/

[5] (Wilson, Owen, Bosworth, & Barnes, Gov.co.uk, 2020), p. 40

Of particular interest is this statement:

> By 2027, around 55.2% of people in employment are expected to be qualified at level 4 and above, whilst the proportion of people with level 1 or no formal qualifications at all is expected to fall to 10.6%.[6]

It is reasonable to assume that employers will choose from a highly motivated, skilled, and qualified workforce within the next decade. It is incumbent on individuals to gain the necessary skills and experience together with, where appropriate, the requisite qualifications. Vocational qualifications are available across virtually all artforms, and the foundational skills covered in these pathways are applicable to many aspects of one's working life, within and outside of the arts themselves.

Qualification Frameworks and Pathways

Qualifications form the basis of professional advancement. Rightly or wrongly, many employment posts require some level of qualification in order for a candidate to even be considered. Though they may not be suitable for everybody, having a strong understanding of the availability of qualifications, their examining or awarding bodies, and the levels they represent is of value to any who work with or adjacent to the provision of education and instruction within the arts.

In the United Kingdom (UK), and often mirrored internationally, qualification frameworks are linked to nine levels of attainment. Those frameworks are:

- **The Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) for general and vocational qualifications**
    - Regulated by Ofqual in England, and the Council for the Curriculum and Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland
- **The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) in Wales**
    - Regulated by Qualifications Wales
- **The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) in Scotland**
- **The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (FHEQ) for qualifications awarded by bodies across the UK with degree-awarding powers**

Other frameworks include the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), an independent body that checks on standards and quality in UK higher education by conducting research and quality assurance assessments and reviews.

Within these frameworks, qualifications carry levels of difficulty and comprehension, each requiring higher standards to attain. There are nine qualification levels:

[6] (Wilson, Owen, Bosworth, & Barnes, Gov.co.uk, 2020), p. 40

Level	Comments	Examples
Entry Level	Entry levels 1-3	• English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
Level 1		• GCSE grades 1-3 • Music grades 1-3 • Level 1 NVQs, BTEC, and VQs
Level 2		• GCSE grades 4-9 • Music grades 4 and 5
Level 3		• A-Levels • Gold Arts Award • Music grades 6-8 • Level 3 Vocational Diplomas
Level 4	Commensurate with the first year of an undergraduate degree.	• Certificate of higher education (CertHE) • Higher National Certificate (HNC)
Level 5	Commensurate with the second year of an undergraduate degree.	• Diploma of higher education (DipHE)
Level 6	Equivalent to a degree with honours.	• Bachelor of Arts (BA) • Bachelor of Science (BSc)
Level 7	Equivalent to a postgraduate qualification.	• Master of Arts (MA) • Postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) • Professional Diplomas
Level 8	Doctoral level.	• Ph.D. • DPhil

Any recognised qualification in the UK sits at one of these numbered levels and is recognised as such internationally. Many music and dance students are likely familiar with the grades that occupy levels 2 and 3, as their respective grade assessments operate at those levels: a grade 8 in an instrument or dance is therefore an equivalent qualification to an A-level.

Vocational qualifications within the arts, operating at levels 4 and above, are generally offered across three pathways: teaching, performing, and business. Candidates can therefore pursue the associated courses that most accurately address the field in which they wish to focus. These three pathways also represent the three pillars of operating as a professional artist, and so constitute the main sections of this book.

Each awarding body publishes a syllabus for each qualification that encompasses its organisational culture and vision. These syllabi form the basis of the various curricula that educational institutes and private teachers follow to help their students attain these qualifications.

Though the specifics vary by syllabus and curriculum, the process of following one of these pathways comprises common elements:

- **Writing and speaking**
    - Such undertakings are used as a means of developing research techniques, acquiring knowledge, and presenting ideas and arguments in verbal and written form.
- **Practical exercises**
    - These are usually connected with the development of creative, technical, analytical, and aural skills that relate to the subject being undertaken, as well as the continued development of transferable skills.
- **Independent learning**
    - Expected from level 4 and above, whether as directed reading and listening related to essay writing, dissertation and project work, or as practice for developing creative skills, students are expected to be able to work independently and present their findings for formative feedback.
- **Peer learning**
    - This includes collaboration and critical analysis of their own and others' work.
- **Studio or laboratory work**
    - This typically includes hands-on experience in the use of electronic equipment for composition, performance, and recording, pertinent to the chosen discipline.
- **Distance learning**
    - This includes online lectures, blended learning methods, discussion groups, tutorials, and remote supervision.
- **External placements**
    - Covering vocational work experience in schools, arts organisations, recording studios, or periods of study abroad, placements are encouraged by many diplomas.
- **Fieldwork projects**
    - Students often attend, observe, and participate in events, and conduct interviews with performers, patrons, or listeners to improve their practical experience.
- **Non-assessed curricular activities**
    - This involves the participation in performances and other related activities not necessarily embedded within the syllabus.

Many diplomas carry a Total Qualification Time (TQT) requirement. In order for a qualification to be recognised, the units or modules within the course must list both the TQT of the course, as well as the total guided learning time, in terms of the number of hours offered. For example, a level 6 diploma in music performance may list a TQT of 1000 hours over the total course period, and a guided learning time of 100 hours.

This means that students working towards a level 6 diploma would require 100 hours of guidance from a reputable teacher, mentor, or organisation, and would be expected to practise and prepare their work over a period of at least 900 hours. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that such an undertaking ought to take approximately two years to complete, allowing around ten hours per week of dedicated work towards the qualification.

The Teaching Pathway

The teaching pathway describes the vocational routes available to those wishing to expand their teaching practice. It is based around the professionalisation of new or existing teachers, with a view to achieving various teaching diplomas for those who want them.

Diplomas in teaching are an internationally recognised qualification, beginning at level 4 and progressing all the way up to level 7. They give successful candidates recognised status without incurring the costs associated with studying at university.

There are many teaching diplomas available in the UK, many of which are also available to international students. A small selection of teaching diplomas currently offered in the UK are listed below:

Music

- **RSL**
  - Professional Diploma in Teaching: Levels 4 and 6
- **London College of Music**
  - Teaching Diplomas
    - Diploma of London College of Music (DipLCM)
    - Associate of London College of Music (ALCM)
    - Licentiate of London College of Music (LLCM)
- **Trinity College London**
  - Associate of Trinity College London (ATCL): Level 4
    - Diploma in Principles of Instrumental/Vocal Teaching
  - Licentiate of Trinity College London (LTCL): Level 6
    - Diploma in Instrumental/Vocal Teaching
    - Diploma in Music Teaching
- **Associated Board of the Royal School of Music (ABRSM)**
  - DipABRSM: Level 4
    - Principles of Instrumental/Vocal Teaching
  - Licentiate of the Royal School of Music (LRSM): Level 6
    - Instrumental/Vocal Teaching
  - Fellowship of the Royal School of Music (FRSM): Level 7
    - Instrumental/Vocal Teaching

Dance

- **Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD)**
  - Diploma in Dance Education (DDE): Level 4
- **Royal Academy of Dance**
  - Diploma in Dance Teaching Studies: Levels 5 and 6
- **RSL**
  - Diploma in Music and Performing Arts: Levels 4 and 6

Art

- **University College London (UCL)**
  - Art and Design PGCE: Level 7

The Performance Pathway

Performance diplomas are aimed at those looking to expand their ability and experience with performing at a high level, and to have this knowledge accredited with internationally recognised qualifications. They are for musicians and performing artists who wish to take their skills beyond a grade 8 level.

The various performance diplomas usually sit between levels 4 and 7, and are generally more focused on the practical aspects of artistic performance within the discipline. They are based on a model of progressive mastery, and provide numerous opportunities for live performance, collaborative projects, hands-on production and experience, and access to high-level teachers and mentors.

As with teaching diplomas, various options are available within the UK and abroad. The following list presents a selection of options across various disciplines:

Music

- **RSL**
  - Professional Diploma in Performance: Levels 4 and 6
- **London College of Music**
  - Performance Diplomas
    - Diploma of London College of Music (DipLCM): Level 4
    - Associate of London College of Music (ALCM): Level 5
    - Licentiate of London College of Music (LLCM): Level 6
    - Fellow of London College of Music (FLCM): Level 7
- **Trinity College London**
  - Performance Diplomas
    - Associate of Trinity College London (ATCL): Level 4
    - Licentiate of Trinity College London (LTCL): Level 6
    - Fellow of Trinity College London (FTCL): Level 7
- **Associated Board of the Royal School of Music (ABRSM)**
  - DipABRSM: Level 4
    - Music Performance
  - Licentiate of the Royal School of Music (LRSM): Level 6
    - Music Performance
  - Fellowship of the Royal School of Music (FRSM): Level 7
    - Music Performance

Dance

- **Trinity College London**
  - Diploma in Professional Dance: Level 6

Art and Drama

- **University of the Arts London**
  - Foundation Diploma in Art and Design
    - Levels 3 and 4
  - Performance: Design and Practice
    - BA (Hons)

Live Engineering

- **University of Derby**
    - Sound, Light and Live Event Engineering
        - BSc (Hons)
- **University of Hertfordshire**
    - Live Sound and Lighting Technology
        - BSc (Hons)

The Business Pathway

Working within the creative industries as a practitioner of the arts, whether as a performer, teacher, or as a combination of many roles, requires knowledge and experience in running a business. The majority of creative professionals are self-employed, and have developed themselves and their art as a business.

This pathway generally focuses on three main elements: increasing the student's understanding of organisations, their management, the economy, and the business environment; preparation for and development of a career in business and management; and the enhancement of a wide range of skills and attributes which equips the candidate to operate as a business. Though less common than the teaching and performance diplomas, business-based qualifications with a focus on the arts, often called creative enterprises, are available:

- **Trinity College Dublin**
    - Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship (P. Grad. Cert.): Level 8
- **University of the Arts London**
    - Professional Diploma in Creative Enterprise: Level 4
- **RSL**
    - Creative Industries Practitioner Diploma: Levels 4 to 6

Part 1

An Overview of the Creative Industries

The Creative Industries

The Creative Industries is a sector of the economy that focuses on the generation or utilisation of knowledge and information. The creative economy comprises advertising, architecture, art, crafts, design, fashion, film, music, performing arts, publishing, R&D, software, toys and games, TV and radio, and video games. The education industry, including public and private services, is now also said to form a part of the creative industries.

> The Gross Value Added (GVA) of the UK creative industries was provisionally estimated at £115.9bn in 2019 current prices. This is equivalent to contributing approximately £13.2m every hour at current prices (i.e., before adjusting for inflation). Since 2010, GVA has increased by more than 43 per cent, or more than twice as fast as the UK economy.[7]

Creativity also exists within science and technology. At the beginning of 2020, Covid-19 required scientists and engineers to think both laterally and creatively, and with pace. Companies such as Virgin Orbit, Dyson, and even a collective of UK-based Formula 1 teams all independently empowered themselves to use their innovations and technologies to provide much-needed ventilators for patients across the world.

The creative industries have become increasingly important to economies and governments across the world. In an age when artificial intelligence is ever-increasing, the ability to think laterally and gain transferable skills is becoming more attractive. Those who can think creatively and with divergence will not only survive within a modern economy, they will thrive in it.

There are 2.1 million people working within the creative industries in the UK, 67% of whom are employed. These roles range from accountants, tour managers, film, television, and game composers, to website designers and graphical artists. Employment in the creative industries is not limited to performing on a stage.

Half of UK workers plan to make career changes as a result of Covid-19.[8] A recent study suggests that as many as five million people are planning to turn a new hobby into a source of income.[9] Britain's education sector remains one of its most lucrative international assets, with new figures revealing that its exports overseas generate almost £20bn for the UK economy. In 2014/2015, 145,330 students were studying creative subjects, and 77.2% of graduates went directly into employment.[10]

All of the information here is evidence that the education sector and the creative industries are thriving. These figures show a demand for both education and educated practitioners, as well as for the art that they produce.

The figures shown in **Appendix 1** (page 212) show a thriving creative and cultural sector that would seem to suggest that those working within it are universally thriving. Unfortunately, for many artists actually conducting business, this is not the case. There is a clear disparity between those currently struggling within the artistic economy, and the sheer

[7] (Howkins, 2013), p. 267
[8] (Smethurst, 2020)
[9] (Castrillon, 2020)
[10] (Damian, Hinds; Stuart, Graham; Department for Education; Department for International Trade, 2019)

amount of money actually involved in the industry itself. Simply put, many individual artists are struggling to survive in an industry that seems to be thriving. In what follows, we shall explore a series of reasons that might explain why this is happening, and provide a series of suggestions to address this. The purpose is to trigger a conversation that many practitioners and institutions may need to have with themselves about the way that they conduct business, as well as a conversation society may benefit from having regarding the way independent artists are portrayed and provisioned.

There is a disconnect between the culture of art consumption and the creation of that art; consumers do not always make the link between the art that they enjoy, be it film, television, music, or video games, and the artists who are involved in its creation. Secondly, there is a disconnect between the demonstrable success of the UK creative industries sector, and the economic realities of the individuals who ply their trade within it. This chapter suggests that this disconnect can be explained and summarily addressed when individuals and small businesses adopt a path of modernisation and professionalisation with regard to their own practice.

How can it be that many figures suggest a declining interest in the arts through traditional routes, yet an increase in modern vocational pathways? Why are the creative industries thriving on a massive scale, yet individual musicians or independent artists are struggling, or moving out of the industry altogether? What are the implications of global events like Covid-19 on the expectations within the industry, and what can independent practitioners and smaller institutions do to ensure they stay relevant?

To begin, we must adopt a new perspective on the data that is regularly published, and learn to look behind the figures. By reforming the educational culture surrounding assessment and the delivery of information, the difficulties outlined by this growing disconnect can begin to be circumvented, whilst allowing new students to access arts education in the ways that most allow them to learn.

Acknowledging that trends differ between cross sections of society is one of the many keys to success for both independent practitioners and institutions. Results published by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport show interesting sets of trends: whilst 96% of 5–10-year-olds report that they access the arts outside of school, only 35% participate in music lessons. Much of the remainder report accessing the arts through watching films, streaming services, and participating in various craft-based hobbies.

Likewise, by the time they are 15 years old, 96.1% of those surveyed report that they access the arts outside of school. However, 44% do not engage in any form of out-of-school music activities at all, and only 10% engage in music activities within school hours.[11]

From this, we can conclude that accessing the arts is generally a passive activity; young people are listening to music without necessarily learning how to perform or produce it. It should also be noted that, as children develop, so do their tastes and preferences. Though there are many arguments to suggest that those who actively engage in the arts go on to thrive through their development of transferable skills, it cannot be assumed that all young people wish to participate in the arts. There are also socio-economic factors to consider, which can limit a child's access to the arts without inferring any lack of desire or motivation.

[11] (UK Government; Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2020)

Sir Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica discuss a case regarding 'a school in quite a poor area' in their work *Creative Schools*.[12] In their study, two students from a school of six hundred were learning the guitar, and this was the only provision that the school had for peripatetic music. Those lessons were given on a one-to-one basis, and the remaining students were deemed 'uninterested' in learning to play a musical instrument.

However, it was further observed that the majority of the students were listening to music whilst travelling to and from school, and during their breaks. It soon became clear that the challenge was rooted in the school's offering of music lessons, as the appetite for music in terms of its passive consumption seemed healthy. Students clearly enjoyed listening to music, yet the school assumed that the students lacked interest in studying music themselves. Conversely, the students assumed that the school was uninterested in teaching the musical disciplines in which they were actually interested in studying.

This highlights a case in which a vicious cycle of perceived disinterest by and toward both parties led to an unsatisfactory provision, and uptake of, musical education. Had the initial observations been challenged, the incorrect perception of the school into the lack of interest by the students could have been avoided, and more appropriate musical provision provided, which would, in turn, have increased the uptake by the students.

Likewise, figures published by the UK Government show a decline in the number of students taking GCSE and A-level music.[13] The figure given, however, is not as large as the headline suggests, falling by only 7.2% between 1994 and 2020. It is also an incomplete picture. Norton York, founder of the RSL Awards, states:

> For 60 years the mainstream music education establishment has been worrying why their version of music education has declined in popularity. During that time a new, contemporary and alternative approach to music education has been created in the UK. In schools and colleges this means more pupils and students are studying for music qualifications than ever before – but no one has made the government and the music industry properly aware of this.[14]

The number of GCSE and A-Level students in 2020 taking music was 39,885, falling from 42,803 in 1994. Though a decline, the number is actually fairly stable across a 26-year period. However, the number of students taking BTEC and vocational qualifications (VQs) has risen from only 83 in 1994, to 31,020 in 2020, giving a combined total that year of 73,823 students in the UK working towards an RQF level 2 or 3 music qualification.[15] These figures did not make headlines, yet they affect the funding allocated to institutions and their arts provision.

Furthermore, the Government's figures do not consider those studying graded music exams privately, outside of the school environment. In 2019 a staggering 279,795 people took a graded music exam in England alone. ABRSM took the lion's share of the market with 65.84% of those, while contemporary music awarding bodies RSL Awards and Trinity College London catered for 11.86% combined.[16]

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[12] (Robinson & Aronica, 2015)
[13] (York, GCSE and A Level Music – Only half the story about school music & qualifications, 2021)
[14] (York, GCSE and A Level Music – Only half the story about school music & qualifications, 2021)
[15] (York, Pop Music Education in the UK 1960-2020, 2021)
[16] (York, Pop Music Education in the UK 1960-2020, 2021), p. 30

From these figures, we can clearly see that the stated decline in musical engagement is, in fact, almost entirely aimed at the traditional pathways. However, unlike the picture painted by the headlines, we can also see an explosion of new vocational pathways and the number of young people who choose to take them. In the case of the traditional pathways, access by way of financial and social means, and a change of cultural exposure and engagement with the arts is a possible cause. In any case, it is clear to see a renewed and growing engagement by way of the modern vocational alternative, which certainly reinforces the view that institutions must change with the cultural times.

A Modern Vocational Approach

Often referred to as 'vocational' or 'technical' training, vocational education is designed to prepare people to work as technicians, or to take up employment in a skilled art, craft, or trade as a tradesperson or artisan. RSL Awards believes that:

> …the key focus should be on the application and development of creativity, allowing the learner to have a vocationally-relevant experience whilst studying for a qualification with the rigour and recognition of other qualifications in schools, colleges and training providers.[17]

This speaks of not only a new approach to vocational training within the creative disciplines, but the development of a whole new culture surrounding it. By developing a culture in which students and teachers work within communities of interest, and that promotes individuality, expression, respect, collaboration, accountability, planning, and delivery, students take responsibility for their progression (see **Performing Within the Arts**, page 97), rather than commanded via a traditional didactic approach.

In other words, not only does the learner progress within a subject that they passionately believe in, but they develop those important transferable skills that enable them to work within their chosen field.

Following a scheme of formative assessment (page 77), participants are encouraged to both progress and express themselves in a manner that relates to them, whilst working within a regulated framework. This is important, because one reason for the perceived lack of participation in music and the wider arts could be that of an outdated approach to learning. Simply put, many young people are put off by the idea of strict formal assessments, and so withdraw from learning an artform altogether.

A diligent student may ask their music teacher to teach them a favourite song that is featured in one of their favourite films. An equally diligent teacher can take this as an opportunity to set goals and devise a miniature curriculum that includes command of the instrument, synchronisation with accompaniment, discussions about notational accuracy from scores, the exploration of stylistic interpretation and stylistic awareness, and the communication and fluency of expressing non-musical ideas musically. Contrast this to the comparatively stagnant traditional assessment-based graded system, which presents a set of requirements, assessed via a formal exam at the end of the process.

The pedagogical implications of this idea shall be explored in much more detail in subsequent chapters, but the general idea is a shift in paradigm towards a more student-oriented, adaptive approach. The same information can be taught, but in a way that is much more appropriate for the student and the contexts of the modern industry. Inclusive approaches that cater to individual modes of expression, access, and means, as well as investing time in understanding how students receive information, are all important steps in the modernisation of vocational education. Relying on inaccurate surface perceptions that led to the school from Robinson's study concluding that 598 of their 600 students were simply not interested in music lessons.

[17] (RSL Awards Limited, 2022)

The appetite for the arts amongst young people is insatiable. Given that the arts are an extremely important and healthy sector, and that vocational qualifications are on the rise, independent practitioners would be well served to challenge any bias that they have towards teaching what they think students *ought* to learn, and consider teaching what students *want* to learn, in a way that is accessible to everybody. The traditional, summative pathways have been shown to be exclusive and inaccessible, as evidenced by the increasing uptake of alternative vocational qualifications in the arts.

The results will be beneficial to all involved, both on a personal and professional level, to say nothing of the continued economic benefits of sustaining happy and satisfied students. This is not to say that a teacher should never teach certain things, especially if those things are truly fundamental or imperative to the furtherment of the art form, but a shift in perspective towards the modern vocational culture described here suggests a change in approach for how those fundamentals are actually delivered.

In an age of abundant, easy-to-access teach-yourself opportunities, it is now argued by some that the enlisting of a teacher is becoming an option rather than a necessity. However, it is argued here that, in the changing climate, and with the availability of vocational opportunities, the role of a sufficiently well-versed and adaptive teacher is now more important than ever.

Case Study: The Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic marked a time of rapid and significant change for many, not least those working in the creative industries. Live performances and face-to-face tuition came to an abrupt and long-lasting standstill, and many educational institutions had to close. This process reveals an exodus out of the creative industries by those unable to stay afloat, or unwilling to adapt. Likewise, it shows the resounding success of those willing or able to make significant and permanent changes to their approaches that are still in effect today.

The experiences of many during the lockdowns will testify to the fact that the nighttime economy collapsed during the pandemic, leaving many musicians out of work, retraining, or choosing to leave the industry altogether. A BBC news report stated that music creators lost two-thirds of their income as a result of Covid-19. Revenues from concerts and festivals fell by 85%, and in many cases, musicians performing in venues lost up to 100% of their income.[18]

Though the UK Government enacted various plans to support the ailing economy, with financial aid of various kinds to businesses and individuals, their efforts were not universally felt. Many independent artists and small businesses fell through the cracks in the furlough scheme, and grants for the self-employed often seemed not to go far enough.

A survey of 2,000 members of the Musicians' Union found that 34% 'are considering abandoning the industry completely' because of the financial difficulties they faced during

[18] (Savage, 2020)

the pandemic.[19] The Musicians' Union also reported that 'one-third of musicians did not qualify for any support' during the pandemic.[20]

This loss of talent could have a long-lasting and damaging effect, not only on the arts, but on the mental health of those affected. According to a study by the independent UK charity Help Musicians, 90% of musicians reported that their mental health had deteriorated due to the Covid-19 pandemic.[21] The NHS strategy unit published a report estimating the Covid-19 related impacts on mental health services. It suggested that increased activity pertaining to mental health services could cost around £3 billion.[22]

Accessing audio-visual art like film, music, and television at home was an obvious activity for many people during the strict lockdown in the spring of 2020. For many, it was a necessary escape from the social, economic, and mental rigours placed on them by the changing global situation.

In 2020/21, the BBC achieved record viewing figures, with an average audience of 489 million adults every week, an increase of more than 20 million from the previous year.[23] Furthermore, live listening figures revealed that more than 34 million people tuned in to BBC Radio each week, either listening to keep abreast of current affairs, or simply for entertainment.[24]

This trend continued for television streaming services,[25] music streaming,[26] and podcast consumption.[27] These figures paint a picture of the arts as not only a source of entertainment, but of comfort, self-expression, escapism, and focus for those struggling in other areas of their lives.

Many of those actually working in the arts suffered greatly, both financially and mentally, during the pandemic. Yet, for some with the means, will, or knowledge, the pandemic was a catalyst for change that led to greater success, and further highlights the need for adaptability and reform within our approach to the arts.

MLC Nottingham is a private music education institution that, prior to the pandemic, offered face-to-face music lessons and courses in an out-of-school setting. In the face of the pandemic, thanks to a proactive attitude of both the organisation heads and the teaching staff, it was able to move its entire operation online within three working days of the first lockdown in March 2020.

Though this rapid adaptation was certainly something to be celebrated within the organisation, there were two other vital ingredients that made this transition both possible and relatively straightforward: the systems and processes already in place or under development and, most importantly, the willingness of the students and their families to embrace the new online setting. This institutional adaptation within such a short time frame was necessary for the survival of the company. Independent teachers and similar institutions

[19] (Beaumont-Thomas, 2020)
[20] (Savage, 2020)
[21] (Bienstock, 2021)
[22] (NHS Midlands and Lancashire, 2020)
[23] (BBC Media Centre, 2021)
[24] (BBC Media Centre, 2022)
[25] (BBC, 2020)
[26] (BBC, 2020)
[27] (Sweney, 2021)

also had to adapt quickly if they were to teach online. Pedagogical approaches, as well as systems and processes, evolved and, in many cases, were completely overhauled, in order to keep the students engaged with a positive learning experience.

Within MLC Nottingham, safeguarding toolkits were produced for the families of those who wished to participate in receiving online music lessons (see **Safeguarding**, page 185), and all online sessions were recorded. As it transpired, the ability to rewatch their lesson was a valuable asset for the students still adapting to the change in their music education.

Younger students and their families were invited to take part in an online orientation session. This was designed to give examples of how far-reaching the arts are, and to demonstrate the depth and breadth that might be possible throughout the course. The students were then given tasks to complete prior to subsequent online video sessions. This had unexpected but positive effects, not only on the students, but on their families as well. As Director of Education at MLC, Dr. Simon Brown explains:

> Due to the circumstances surrounding the lockdown and the revised timetable provided by schools, we found that families often worked together on different elements of the course[s]. Parents and carers frequently reported a sense of their own enjoyment when watching their children work through the tasks. A greater appreciation for the arts [and for the work that we undertook] was felt by all, as were the merits of their children pursuing their chosen art form.
>
> Here at MLC, the increased frequency of the sessions helped achieve greater contact with our cohort of students. Previously, tutor-student contact between lessons has been limited. Running these courses instilled a real sense of community and inclusivity, both of which are amongst our core beliefs. [28]

MLC, like many other institutions working within the creative industries, had been intending to expand its offering for quite a while. There were several challenges within the culture of music lessons that were somewhat restrictive to growth prior to the pandemic, that could now be seen and addressed:

- **Contact**
  - The contact time between the student and teacher in most cases was limited to the lesson.
- **Culture**
  - The culture regarding music lessons was both assumed and longstanding: receive the lesson and then go home and practise.
- **Equipment**
  - Many of the drum teaching team reported unsuitable drum kits or no kits at all among their students.

Following the move to online lessons, contact time between students and teachers increased, as students submitted work, rewatched lessons, and engaged in communal orientation sessions with their families and other students. The online platform was able to bring groups

[28] (Brown, 2020)

of students together on video calls to meet, chat, connect, and collaborate. People were genuinely shocked at the size of the music school that they were attending.

This in turn helped to redefine the culture of the music lessons. Prior to the change, music lessons for many existed within a bubble: the student is dropped off for their lesson, and collected half an hour later. Now, a greater sense of engagement was being cultivated, which not only increased the motivation of the students, but engaged their families as well.

Seeing the state of the instruments with which many students were working at home, the teaching staff were able to work with families to advise on better instrumentation, loan instruments that had been mothballed and, in some cases, even donate pre-owned instruments.

During the pandemic, MLC Nottingham was able to facilitate and deliver over 1,500 music lessons online every month. The move also hastened the launch of several educational courses on offer, and the institution was also able to offer these courses to non-instrumental creative arts like stop-frame animation, music for films and games, music production, podcasting, and vlogging.

This move also served to dispel the myth that online provision is inferior to that of face-to-face, and in many cases can offer as robust and valuable experiences to the student as traditional music lessons.

30% of the students who moved online during the lockdowns elected to receive online provision afterwards, as it was found to suit their lifestyle and time management. This shows a far-reaching change in the culture of music provision. As with the misinterpretation of data seen previously, in which we saw a vicious cycle between a perceived lack of interest by the school, and a perceived lack of opportunity by the students, many students and their families, having taken the plunge to online provision, actually found it to be beneficial. The flexibility of studying from home was simply too valuable to many busy families that otherwise may have struggled simply to get to their lessons every week.

This further served to reduce the number of missed lessons every week, as the flexibility allowed students to attend virtually who may otherwise have been unable to attend their lessons in person.

This case study highlights some of the benefits of a modern approach to vocational education. There are many reasons why the move was successful, and many possible ways in which it might have failed. It is also important to note that MLC Nottingham, as an established organisation, had the means and the resources to enact these changes quickly.

That said, the purpose of this case study is to highlight a practical approach to adaptability and the provision of education. A change of approach is as available to individual practitioners as it is to established organisations, even if the practical upshot is of a different scale. Many independent teachers began offering their lessons online, often with the added benefit of attracting distance students who would not have otherwise been able to attend lessons.