



**‘It helps to  
have more strings  
to your bow’**

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**Exploring the careers and  
success of graduates of the  
Conservatoire for Dance and Drama**

**A report commissioned by the  
Conservatoire for Dance and Drama**

**October 2020**

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## **Exploring the careers and success of graduates of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama**

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Authors: Robin Mellors-Bourne and Tristram Hooley

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### **About CRAC and ISE**

The Careers Research & Advisory Centre (CRAC), registered as a charity in 1964, provides research, expertise and innovation services for all those who support career development, at all ages and across all sectors. CRAC's research and consultancy work focuses on career-related learning, employability development and career transitions, including evaluation studies and career tracking. One of its other main activities is Vitae, a programme that promotes and facilitates the professional, career and personal development of researchers who work in higher education (owned and managed by CRAC).

The Institute of Student Employers (ISE), formerly the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR), is a not-for-profit membership organisation established in 1968. An independent voice for student employers, the ISE works with its members to bring together employers, the education sector and labour market intermediaries and provide leadership and support in all aspects of student recruitment and development. A key element of the ISE's work is conducting research on the student labour market and on a variety of themes relevant to the employment of students and graduates.

Cover image credit: Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, photograph by Ed Felton

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## Foreword

As Chief Executive of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama, I am regularly reminded of the wide range of our students' expertise and I am constantly inspired and impressed by the careers that they subsequently embark upon. These are not always straightforward or easily gauged via standardised higher education (HE) metrics such as LEO data. It is therefore particularly important that our graduates' outcomes are measured and understood within the more relevant and useful context of long-term involvement and satisfaction within our (creative and performing arts) sector.

We commissioned this research prior to the Covid-19 pandemic but the findings are now even more significant as we see an evolving education sector; one where students and industry are increasingly conscious of the need to ascertain the actual value of teaching pathways and to assess how certain choices may benefit them in the future. It also reflects recent research from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC), which has found that creative HE offers significant value to graduates beyond the reductive measures of graduate earnings.

The findings in this report provide tangible evidence of the opportunities and destinations for performing arts graduates and, above all, demonstrate a real prospect for encouragement and development. It is compiled from a wide base of both contemporary and historical experiences and is consequently comprehensive in its conclusions and analysis. As the Executive Summary states, in addition to the interest it will have for educators and policymakers, we hope that individuals can use the results to identify potential pathways, assess their personal development needs and consider their career aspirations against graduates' clear statements of expectations and objective measures of success identified within the report.

For many years potential performing arts students have only been able to evaluate their prospects against the more rigid datasets found within typical HE provider frameworks – that do not necessarily take a nuanced or holistic approach to success measurements beyond being a salaried employee. Now that has changed. Robin Mellors-Bourne and Tristram Hooley have developed a research methodology that is relevant for all subjects but also takes into account the complexities of differing career choices that are perhaps atypical for most graduates. These include an acknowledgement of the flexibility of the performing arts sector as a whole, be that in working almost wholly self-employed or part-time across multiple projects. This report is a much needed and more meaningful assessment of graduates' success, and a great way for aspiring performing artists, educators and evaluators to ascertain the ultimate fulfilment or otherwise of those working within the sector.

I hope you will find it inspiring and thought-provoking reading.

**David Ruebain**

Chief Executive





## **1. Executive summary**

The Conservatoire of Dance and Drama (CDD) currently comprises six member Schools (Bristol Old Vic Theatre School; Central School of Ballet; London Contemporary Dance School; National Centre for Circus Arts; Northern School of Contemporary Dance; and Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance) which are all delivering world-leading education and specialist vocational training in the performing arts. This report explores the careers pursued by the graduates from these Schools and asks what success looks like for these individuals.

This executive summary sets out the key findings of the research. However, there is considerably more depth in the full report, particularly relating to the differences between the different disciplines of acting, dance, circus and production.

### **Rationale**

Studying the careers of performance and production graduates is critical for CDD, but it also has a wider importance for performing arts students and other graduates who are poorly served by traditional graduate success measures focused around employment and salary. Indeed, asking questions about what constitutes graduate success is important for the regulation and management of a higher education (HE) system that current policy is driving to become more 'outcomes focused'.

Existing research shows that performance graduates have complex careers that do not follow the typical career scripts associated with graduates. Performance graduates are more likely to be self-employed, working part-time in portfolio careers (combining multiple jobs and contracts at the same time) and less likely to achieve high incomes. However, they often have a strong vocational drive and report high levels of satisfaction with their work and life. Another important feature of the careers of performance graduates is that their time as a performer may end well before they are ready to retire from paid work. Physical, social and financial demands often see these graduates leave their field after a period of professional success.

This report offers a range of meaningful measurements that allow observers to judge graduate success in the round. They were designed with performing arts graduates in mind but may also be of interest to a wider range of graduates, disciplines and institutions. The study does investigate employment and salary outcomes, but also asks whether students use the skills that they learnt in their course during their careers and whether they believe they are satisfied, happy and healthy.

### **Research approach**

To explore the careers of CDD graduates we created an online survey. The survey questions were informed by pre-existing research and refined by input from experts within each of CDD's Schools. The survey explored:

- Graduates' demographics and other personal characteristics;
- Their experience at the CDD Schools including both their technical training and their wider career and employability learning;
- The extent to which graduates consider that they have developed a range of attributes, capital and resources concordant with a successful career;

- How they have spent their time building a career since leaving the CDD institution;
- What activities they are currently involved in;
- Objective and subjective measures of career success.

The survey ran from July to October 2019 and received 753 usable responses drawn from across the six CDD Schools and the key broad disciplines of acting, production, circus and dance. Respondents were sought from as wide a period as possible with a majority graduating over the last ten years, but a small minority of respondents graduated as far back as the 1990s.

Respondents were broadly representative of contemporaneous students at the CDD and of the creative arts discipline in general. Most of the respondents were female (64%), UK-domiciled (69%), white (88% of UK-domiciled students), from a professional background (68%) and 15% of them reported a disability or specific learning difficulty. Current CDD cohorts tend to be somewhat more diverse, especially in relation to ethnicity and disability.

### **Graduates' perceptions of studying at CDD schools**

We asked graduates about their experience of studying at the CDD and to make a judgement about their knowledge, skills, attributes, networks and resources at the beginning and end of their time at the school. Key findings were as follows:

- Graduates felt that they had the opportunity to improve their technical skills (98%) and meet people working in their artform (85%), but they were less likely to report that they had the opportunity to develop skills for alternative careers (39%) or receive individual career guidance (39%) whilst at CDD. But the opportunities to receive wider career support appear to have increased in recent years.
- When asked about what could have been improved whilst they were studying at CDD, respondents reported that they would have liked more support in developing an independent career, better pastoral support, greater access to industry contacts and better career guidance. They also reported that they would like the support that they received to extend after they had graduated.
- Respondents reported that while they were at the CDD they increased their confidence in their subject or artform and built a stronger support network that could help them in their career. However, they became less sure (than when they entered their CDD School) that they had sufficient financial resources and less certain that they would have a successful career, especially one related to their artform. This suggests that CDD develops graduates' skills and networks and also helps them to gain a more realistic insight into the challenges of a career in the performing arts.

### **Graduates' employment and careers**

On the basis of this research, almost all CDD graduates go on to paid work, but the nature of this paid work varies considerably. Portfolio careers (combining multiple forms of work) and self-employment are common as are patterns of work that see graduates working less than full-time. A key difference in outcomes emerged between those who had studied performance degrees and those who had studied production degrees so we will highlight some of the differences between these groups.



- Two thirds (66%) of performance graduates go on to work between four and five days a week. But only 45% of this group have a single paid role, with the rest having portfolio careers.
- Three quarters (75%) of production graduates are currently working between four and five days a week. The majority of this group (81%) are working in a single paid role.
- One third (33%) of performance graduates report that their main paid occupation is in performance, with another third (33%) reporting that it is in a related occupation. Overall, 93% of performance graduates report that they are still actively working (either paid or unpaid) in the artform that they trained in.
- Almost two thirds (63%) of production graduates report that their main occupation is in production, with an additional 10% reporting that it is in a related occupation.
- Almost half (49%) of performance graduates and 39% of production graduates gain most of their income through freelance work, and are at least partially self-employed.
- Graduates who are working less than four days a week typically have more complex working lives which combine a variety of jobs and contracts including some unpaid work, usually in their artform, and activities to support their career.
- The proportion of graduates in performance occupations declines over time while the proportion in unrelated work or related teaching grows over time. This decline happens sooner and is most marked for dance graduates and is much less pronounced for production graduates who work in technical/production occupations.

The complex career patterns described by performance graduates, and to a lesser extent by production graduates, have substantial implications for attempts to judge graduate success based on employment or salary.

## **Earnings**

Although earnings are not sufficient as an indicator of success, it is important to improve our understanding of the earnings of CDD graduates.

- The range of annual earnings for CDD graduates was very wide, ranging from zero to £450,000 in the year preceding the survey.
- The median income for all respondents graduating in 2018 or earlier was just under £24,000 per year. This increases to £26,000 a year when those who were working less than four days per week were excluded.
- Median earnings were highest for production graduates (£28,000) and lowest for circus graduates (£18,000).
- Salaries were higher for those whose main occupations were technical/production roles (£30,000) or in occupations unrelated to performance (£28,000). Conversely, they were lowest in performance (£20,000) or related teaching roles (£18,000).
- On average, annual earnings were £6000 a year lower for those graduates who were self-employed in comparison with those who were employed for their main income generation.
- Graduates earnings improved over time with those who graduated in 2018 reporting a median of £11,000 and those who graduated before 2003 reporting a median of £30,000.

The way in which salary increases suggests that it takes longer for CDD graduates to get established in the labour market than is the case for the general graduate population.

## **Considering graduates' career success**

Defining 'success' for graduates, and particularly performing arts graduates, can be difficult. This study has considered more objective measures of success around employment, salary and the development of skills and career capital. While all of these measures are important, they are not sufficient as an indicator of career success. It is important also to capture more subject measures of career success.

We defined seven domains or concepts of graduate success (skills utilisation, artistic engagement, making a difference, earnings through the arts, general earnings and work-life balance, health and wellbeing, and career development). Taken together these provide us with multi-faceted insights into the career success of CDD graduates. Key findings are as follows.

- Graduates report high levels of agreement with a range of statements designed to measure their career success. Particularly strong agreement can be found with the following statements: 'I enjoy my work', 'I continue to develop and learn in my subject or artform', 'I am involved in my subject or artform' and 'I am happy with the relationships in my life'. The only statements that did not receive at least 50% agreement were 'I volunteer for things I believe in', 'I earn enough from my artform to live the way that I want to', 'I am happy with the balance of art and performance in my working life' and 'I will continue to earn a good living through my artform or subject'. Overall, the profile suggests a high level of career success and satisfaction amongst these graduates with the only area with a neutral (but not negative) overall average response being for the 'earnings through the arts' concept.
- The levels of subjective career success reported were fairly consistent across the different disciplines although there was some evidence that the actors were slightly less satisfied with their career success and particularly with their ability to earn through their artform.
- The career trajectories that graduates have taken since leaving CDD provide further insights into the career success of the graduates. Unsurprisingly those whose main income came from an unrelated profession were less likely to be satisfied with their artistic engagement and their earnings through the arts. However, in other respects they reported a comparable level of satisfaction with their career success.
- There is some evidence to suggest that graduates' satisfaction with their careers rises for the first ten years after graduation and then dips, before recovering again in mid-career. This could reflect that it is common for performance graduates to change their main occupation after around ten years, either leaving performance altogether or moving into a performance-related field like teaching.

## **Conclusions**

Any attempt to understand graduate career success must inevitably struggle with definitional questions. In this research we have sought to adopt a broad definition of graduate success which combines both objective and subjective measures. The picture that has emerged of CDD graduates' careers moves us away from the binary question of whether the graduates are successful or not and creates a rich picture of the careers of performance and production graduates. Such graduates are employable, entrepreneurial, engaged in the arts, optimistic about their career, sometimes struggling with multiple responsibilities and often underpaid. We

believe that this picture is far more useful in supporting career decision-making and career building than some of the reductive measures that are currently available.

## **Recommendations**

The report finishes by offering ten recommendations.

*CDD and other providers of performing arts degrees should:*

1. Improve the generic career support offered to current CDD students as well as increasing the delivery of performance- or production-specific career support within courses.
2. Review and improve pastoral support with a particular focus on supporting good mental health.
3. Establish or enhance alumni association/s and transition support for graduates.
4. Commit to a regular longitudinal tracking exercise and make careful use of this data as part of institutional quality assurance and improvement agendas.

*The higher education sector and policy-makers should:*

5. Broaden the way graduate career success is understood.
6. Ensure that the complexities of employment status are recognised.
7. Recognise the specificity and unique contribution made by performance graduates.

*The performing arts sector should:*

8. (Re)consider the forms of employment that are used within the performing arts sector.

*Researchers should:*

9. Undertake this kind of broad graduate success research with a wider range of graduates.
10. Undertake further research to explore in detail the ways that careers of performing arts graduates evolve over time.

## 2. Introduction, context and aims

*“I’ve had a very busy career and am very happy with where I have come and where I am going. I have a balanced career having dance theatre, purely physical work and corporate/commercial work and I feel it personally really ticks every box. I have also nearly reached the point in my career where I know a lot about the industry so I feel confident I can now share the knowledge with recent graduates and younger dancers, which I never thought I would reach”*

This report explores the career outcomes of graduates of the Conservatoire of Dance and Drama (CDD). It will argue that the graduates from the CDD Schools go on to build successful careers and that most are employed in occupations relating to the subjects they have studied whilst at CDD. It will use these facts to explore critically the ideas of ‘graduate outcomes’ and ‘graduate success’ and argue that the way that these ideas are sometimes understood simplistically is not fit for purpose for creative and performing arts graduates (and perhaps not for many other graduates either).

The study was commissioned by CDD and is primarily aimed at providing its constituent Schools with insights, recommendations and evidence of the impact they provide for their students and graduates. However, the CDD Schools’ focus on the creative and performing arts means that the report is likely to be of interest more widely. We believe that it helps to illustrate what careers in the creative and performing arts look like and that it opens some important questions about what constitutes success for graduates from these degree programmes. Such insights are particularly important in the light of the focus of policymakers and those involved in developing institutional rankings on reductive definitions of success based around salary and full-time employment. As we will show, a successful career can sometimes look a little different in the creative arts and, if that nuance is missed, we are unlikely to be able to use ‘conventional’ outcomes data to shed much light on what a good course looks like or what value an institution is delivering in relation to graduates’ careers.

The report begins by looking at the background of the CDD Schools and the debate on graduate outcomes. It then moves on to discuss pre-existing research on careers in the creative arts. The next chapter describes the rationale and approach taken in this project. Chapter 4 then discusses graduates experiences of studying at CDD Schools and asks what they felt that they gained through those experiences. Chapter 5 explores how these graduates have progressed since they left their institution and Chapter 6 explores their earnings. Chapter 7 then introduces a series of subjective measures of career success and asks whether CDD graduates’ career trajectories can be viewed as a success. Chapter 8 draws together the findings and explores what the implications are for the graduates, the Schools where they have studied and for the wider higher education (HE) sector. Finally, in Chapter 9 we make a series of recommendations for CDD and other providers of performing arts degrees, the HE sector and policymakers, the performing arts sector and researchers. It should also be added for context that the research within this report was undertaken in 2019 and before any impact of Coronavirus.

### 2.1. CDD and its courses

The Conservatoire for Dance and Drama was formed in 2001 and currently draws together six member Schools (Bristol Old Vic Theatre School; Central School of Ballet; London Contemporary Dance School; National Centre for Circus Arts; Northern School of

Contemporary Dance; and Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance).<sup>1</sup> All are committed to delivering world-leading education and specialist vocational training in the performing arts. Until recently two further Schools were within the CDD, but their alumni have not been included in this study.

Within the Conservatoire there is a balance between the art forms of dance, drama and circus arts, and between classical and contemporary styles. The Schools that are part of the Conservatoire are internationally renowned centres of training and creative laboratories where national and international artists work with students and showcase new work.

The CDD Schools are prestigious and entrance to them is competitive.<sup>2</sup> The CDD performs well in the National Student Survey, reporting high levels of student satisfaction.<sup>3</sup> The CDD can also cite a wide range of internationally renowned alumni who have graduated from the schools and gone on to work at the highest levels within their respective fields.

## 2.2. Graduate outcomes and their measurement

Much recent policy has sought to describe the 'value' of HE largely in transactional terms, viewing students as investors, albeit investors who may often make poor investments, and their earnings (when graduates) as the return on that investment.<sup>4</sup> While policymakers have been important in framing HE in this way, the media has also played a significant role through the creation of university league tables within which graduate outcomes are a central metric.<sup>5</sup> Universities themselves have sought to utilise these employability rankings and statistics as a key part of their marketing strategies.<sup>6</sup>

There are a range of different ways in which the outcomes of graduates are described, measured and quantified. Almost all of these relate to a graduate's position within the formal labour market, with key metrics being: (1) the proportion of graduates who are employed or go on to further study; (2) the proportion of graduates who are employed within high status or 'graduate' jobs (increasingly seen as being analogous to standard occupational classification<sup>7</sup> groups 1-3, i.e. managers, professionals and associate professionals); and finally (3) the salaries that graduates can earn both in the short and long term. The interest in salaries has intensified following the development of the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes dataset which

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<sup>1</sup> For further information on the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama see its website at <http://www.cdd.ac.uk/>.

<sup>2</sup> The Independent. (2013). Conservatoire for Dance and Drama. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/student/into-university/az-uni-colleges/conservatoire-for-dance-and-drama-458900.html>.

<sup>3</sup> CDD (2020). Conservatoire students report high satisfaction levels in 2019 National Student Survey. Retrieved from <http://www.cdd.ac.uk/2019/07/conservatoire-students-report-high-satisfaction-levels-in-2019-national-student-survey/>.

<sup>4</sup> Brooks, R. (2018). The construction of higher education students in English policy documents. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 39(6), 745-761.

<sup>5</sup> Turnbull, S. (2018). *A guide to UK league tables in higher education*. London: HEPI.

<sup>6</sup> Christie, F. (2017). The reporting of university league table employability rankings: a critical review. *Journal of Education and Work*, 30(4), 403-418.

<sup>7</sup> Further information about the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) is available on the Office for National Statistics website at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/standardoccupationalclassificationsoc>.

has linked educational data with individuals' tax records to offer new insights about the salary returns associated with different educational courses and institutions over the long run.<sup>8</sup>

There are a range of potential problems in defining graduate success solely through labour market participation. Many of these problems can be seen by what is not measured. Up until the launch of the new Graduate Outcomes survey<sup>9</sup> there has been no attempt to measure graduates' wellbeing, career or job satisfaction, or whether they have found their education to be a useful preparation for their working life. The Graduate Outcomes survey makes some movement in this direction but early reactions to its first results are still dominated by questions about employment (and whether it is 'graduate employment') and salary.

Furthermore, it is possible to challenge the idea that the aim of all HE courses is to maximise lifetime earnings.<sup>10</sup> While the ability to earn a living and make a positive economic contribution to society is a legitimate aim for an individual in their career, this does not mean that higher earnings necessarily mean more successful graduates and therefore better courses. If we rely on earnings alone, we would have to conclude that nurses are less successful than stockbrokers and that therefore nursing degrees are less valuable than, for example, economics degrees. This leads us down a dangerously reductive way of thinking about careers and graduates' success.

There are, of course, other ways to think about career and what career success looks like, than simply counting the money and assets that an individual has accumulated. Watts has argued that the term 'career' describes an individual's journey through life, rather than merely their paid work, and that it includes their participation in learning, work, family, society and other activities.<sup>11</sup> The individual's ability to establish a viable livelihood is clearly an important part of such a life project, but earnings alone miss much of the richness of a person's career. The need to view a career more broadly is potentially more critical within sectors such as the creative and/or performing arts, in which career success may intersect only tangentially with the extent or consistency of earnings.

Recent research for the CDD suggests a range of employment profiles of its graduates (structured, unstructured, peripheral and permeable).<sup>12</sup> For many of the graduates involved, each of these profiles could be categorised as successful, but not all of them would necessarily meet the definition of 'in graduate employment' (or even necessarily 'in employment') when viewed through the lenses of the Graduate Outcomes measure or the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data, which are increasingly touted nationally as indicators of graduate success.

The instruments currently being proposed to measure graduate career success have several important weaknesses. For example, the longitudinal tracking of graduates using HMRC data on earnings and employment (i.e. LEO) linked to education records is a clumsy and partial

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<sup>8</sup> Universities UK. (2019). The uses and limits of Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data. Retrieved from <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/our-work-in-parliament/Documents/Universities%20UK%20parliamentary%20briefing%20-%20the%20uses%20and%20limits%20of%20LEO%20data.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Further information about the Graduate Outcomes survey is available at <https://www.graduateoutcomes.ac.uk/>.

<sup>10</sup> Times Higher Education (2019). Skidmore: Orwellian to base policy on graduate earnings alone. Retrieved from: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/skidmore-orwellian-base-policy-graduate-earnings-alone>

<sup>11</sup> Watts, A.G. (2015). Reshaping career development for the 21st century. In Hooley, T. & Barham, L. (Eds.). *Career development policy and practice* (pp.29-42). Stafford: Highflyers.

<sup>12</sup> Vigurs, K. and Burke, C. (2018) *Diverse routes: Investigating journeys into employment for performing arts students and graduates*, International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

measure of graduates' career progression. Not only is it blind to occupation or sector of work, but it does not acknowledge the extent of employment (i.e. it does not distinguish full-time from other modes of work). Yet the LEO appears to be increasingly embedded in performance measures relating to HE outcomes such as the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and other data that may drive institution-specific targeted allocation (ISTA) funding in the future.<sup>13</sup>

HESA's Graduate Outcomes survey has replaced its Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) surveys.<sup>14</sup> While this provides better data than LEO in terms of recording a graduate's occupation, sector and mode of employment (including portfolio working, and full-time equivalent earnings), or their further study destinations, it is now reduced to a single survey 15 months after graduation. Previously, the DLHE survey data six months after graduation were supplemented by the subsequent 'Longitudinal-DLHE' survey three years later which gave further insights into graduates' careers and included questions around career satisfaction and the perceived value of the degree.<sup>15</sup> However, the L-DLHE survey has now been abandoned and not all of its questions persist in the new Graduate Outcomes survey.

In the context of HE provision and training for the performing arts, LEO data in particular will shed little light on the professional outcomes of graduates from the CDD or other similar institutions, due to LEO's narrow focus on gross earnings (i.e. it will be oblivious to the complex and portfolio-style working arrangements of many graduates). This will potentially not only under-report the potential 'success' of graduates but could be damaging to creative- and arts-focused HE institutions and contribute instrumentalist critiques of creative arts degrees that argue that such degrees lead to 'below-average' earnings for graduates.<sup>16,17</sup>

It will be in the interest of the CDD and other institutions in the creative and performing arts arena to develop alternative or additional measures of graduate outcomes in terms of professional, artistic and/or cultural success, to challenge the growing policy focus purely on graduate earnings as an indicator of outcomes.

### 2.3. Existing knowledge about creative arts graduates and their outcomes

Many of the difficult issues around defining and measuring graduate outcomes and success are brought into sharp relief when examining the careers of artistic, creative and performance-based graduates. Work looking specifically at the outcomes for CDD graduates found that those graduates were defining their own success in a more complex and nuanced way than many of the existing national measures.<sup>18</sup> This highlighted the importance of personal

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<sup>13</sup> Department for Education. (2018). Teaching excellence and student outcomes framework: Subject level. Government consultation responses. Retrieved from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/765860/Subject\\_TEF\\_Govt\\_Response\\_Final\\_v2.0.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/765860/Subject_TEF_Govt_Response_Final_v2.0.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> See <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/graduates> for further information about the DLHE survey.

<sup>15</sup> For further information about the L-DLHE survey see <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions/longitudinal-destinations>.

<sup>16</sup> Ali, A. (2016). Creative arts graduates are the lowest-paid in Britain, survey finds. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/student/student-life/Studies/creative-arts-graduates-are-the-lowest-paid-in-britain-survey-finds-a6983846.html>; Featherstone, E. (2019). Want a good salary? Here are the degrees to avoid. Retrieved from <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education-and-careers/2019/07/16/degrees-statistically-offer-lowest-salary/>.

<sup>17</sup> Britton, J., Dearden, L., van der Erve, L. and Waltmann, B. (2020). The impact of undergraduate degrees on lifetime earnings. London: Institute for Fiscal Studies.

<sup>18</sup> Vigurs, K. & Burke, C. (2019). *Diverse routes: Investigating journeys into employment for performing arts students and graduates*. Derby: International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.



fulfilment, reputation and respect amongst peers and artistic/cultural integrity, noting that these were at least as important as earnings and employment-based metrics. Other work on graduates from arts and creative subjects has also argued that more subjective success criteria are needed to capture these graduates' outcomes in a way that is meaningful.<sup>19</sup>

The need to view artistic, creative and performance-based graduates differently is driven, in part, by a recognition that employment and careers within artistic and performance-based sectors follow a particular pattern. While this pattern is not necessarily unique to artistic and performance-based graduates, it does differ from the career script that typical graduates are assumed to follow. The assumption that graduates will achieve a well-paying, permanent and full-time job, followed by an orderly ascent up a defined occupational career ladder, does not hold true for a large proportion of graduates, but is especially problematic when applied to the performing arts.

Careers in the performing arts are rarely organised through the kinds of full-time employment relationships that are found in much of the rest of the economy. Analysis from the United States suggests that artists (including performers) are more likely to be self-employed than any other occupational group.<sup>20</sup> The nature of this self-employment varies, but often takes the form of a 'portfolio career' where performers construct their living out of a number of different jobs, occupations, and economic and artistic activities, sometimes combining self-employment with part-time employment and other contractual forms.<sup>21</sup> Recent research by Bloom has replicated a lot of these findings in the UK.<sup>22</sup> In the latest UK graduate outcomes data, recorded 15 months after graduation, one third of the recent first degree graduates in the creative arts who were working were doing so on a part-time basis, the highest proportion in any subject.<sup>23</sup> Some pursue what Carr describes as 'career duality' within the creative sector, combining performance and creative roles with other roles within the sector such as teaching or administration.<sup>24</sup>

The complex and entrepreneurial portfolio careers that artists and performers build do not typically result in high salaries. It is worth noting that, on average, self-employed workers earn less than employed workers right across the economy and so it is reasonable to presume that the contractual arrangements through which performers pursue their career account for at least some of their relatively lower salaries.<sup>25</sup> While a minority of performers achieve high salaries, on average performance graduates are less well remunerated than many of their graduate

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<sup>19</sup> Bloom, M. (2020). *For love or money? Graduate motivations and the economic returns of creative higher education inside and outside the creative industries*. London: Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC); Christie, F. (2018). *Constructing early graduate careers: navigating uncertainty in transition*. Lancaster University.

<sup>20</sup> Woronkiewicz, J., & Noonan, D. S. (2019). Who goes freelance? The determinants of self-employment for artists. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 43(4), 651-672.

<sup>21</sup> Wyszomirski, M. J., & Chang, W. (2017). Professional self-structuration in the arts: Sustaining creative careers in the 21st century. *Sustainability*, 9(6), 1035.

<sup>22</sup> Bloom, M. (2020). *For love or money? Graduate motivations and the economic returns of creative higher education inside and outside the creative industries*. London: Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC).

<sup>23</sup> Higher Education Statistics Agency (2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/18-06-2020/sb257-higher-education-graduate-outcomes-statistics/study>

<sup>24</sup> Carr, C. S. (2019). *Music business careers: Career duality in the creative industries*. London: Routledge.

<sup>25</sup> Office for National Statistics. (2018). Trends in self-employment in the UK. Retrieved from <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/trendsinselfemploymentintheuk/2018-02-07>.



peers.<sup>26</sup> Yet, despite the objectively lower earning power of performers, they often surpass their peers in measures of satisfaction with income and career.<sup>27</sup> Such findings highlight some of the limitations of a sole focus on income (as a measure of graduate success) and require the recognition of some other factors in order to account for the continued appeal of performance 'professions where work is precarious and career calling is strong'.<sup>28</sup> In addition, there is an important distinction to make between commercial and artistic success within performance, with many performers feeling that they have to trade one off against the other.<sup>29</sup>

It is also important to recognise that some graduates either choose not to pursue a performance career or ultimately leave the creative industries and pursue a career in another field for a range of reasons including health, family and financial need or aspiration. It is worth noting that in disciplines which require high levels of physical fitness, e.g. dance, performers may anticipate a natural end to their performance career long before they are likely to be able to collect their pension.<sup>30</sup> There is a clear parallel with the short careers of professional athletes, where again the physical demands of the role drive career changes in response to ageing and injury.<sup>31</sup>

Just as we should be careful not to elevate salary as the sole definition of a successful career, it is also important to recognise that success cannot be measured in terms of the proximity of an individual's occupation to their degree discipline. This is by no means an issue only for the creative or performing arts. Government-sponsored research into the careers of STEM graduates revealed that they voluntarily entered a wide range of career sectors, many that were 'far' from the subject they studied in HE, and that they thrived across that spectrum of sectors.<sup>32</sup> Previous research with CDD graduates has discussed the tension felt by some graduates in maintaining a professional career in the arts over the long-term and having a family.<sup>33</sup> This resulted in some graduates considering that they might have to leave the arts and enter alternative employment. Such a decision to pursue more stable and higher paying work to enable family life is not usefully understood as either a 'success' or 'failure' of the graduates, but rather as the exercise of careership in the face of labour market realities. Research has shown that creative graduates take the skills and knowledge that they have

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<sup>26</sup> McGettigan, A. (2017). Lessons from LEO: time to think differently about subject funding. Retrieved from <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/lessons-from-leo-its-time-to-think-differently-about-subject-funding/>; Britton, J., Dearden, L., van der Erve, L. and Waltmann, B. (2020). The impact of undergraduate degrees on lifetime earnings. London: Institute for Fiscal Studies.

<sup>27</sup> Miller, A., & Cuntz, A. (2018). Unpacking predictors of income and income satisfaction for artists. *Economic Research Working Paper Series*, 50.

<sup>28</sup> Bennett, D., & Hennekam, S. (2018). Self-authorship and creative industries workers' career decision-making. *Human Relations*, 71(11), 1454-1477.

<sup>29</sup> Wirtz, B. W., Mermann, M., & Daiser, P. (2016). Success factors of motion picture actors—an empirical analysis. *Creative Industries Journal*, 9(2), 162-180.

<sup>30</sup> Jeffri, J., & Throsby, D. (2006). Life after dance: Career transition of professional dancers. *International Journal of Arts Management*, 8(3), 54-63; Sobrino, F. J., & Guillén, P. (2017). Overuse injuries in professional ballet: influence of age and years of professional practice. *Orthopaedic journal of sports medicine*, 5(6), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2325967117712704>

<sup>31</sup> Bird, H. A. (2009). The performing artist as an elite athlete. *Rheumatology*, 48(12), 1469–1470. <https://doi.org/10.1093/rheumatology/kep257>

<sup>32</sup> Mellors-Bourne, R., Jackson, C., & Connor, H. (2011). *STEM graduates in non-STEM jobs*. London: Department for Business, Innovation & Skills.

<sup>33</sup> Vigurs, K. & Burke, C. (2019). *Diverse routes: Investigating journeys into employment for performing arts students and graduates*. Derby: International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

acquired through creative degrees and reapply them to other forms of work in other sectors.<sup>34</sup> Any measurement of success therefore needs to recognise that success may take a variety of forms, and may not align with the imagined career script set out for that discipline or degree programme.

Research on performance careers provides a range of useful insights into the capabilities that help individuals to build successful careers within this sector. Some such research emphasises the important foundational role that artistic education has in helping performers to build successful careers within their artform.<sup>35</sup> Other research raises more critical concerns about artistic education, suggesting that there is often a need to prepare graduates better for the reality of performance in practice by developing entrepreneurial and career management skills as well as ensuring that students receive training in a broad range of styles and approaches which can enable them to be flexible performers.<sup>36</sup> Others still address the attitudes, skills and psychological features that underpin career success within creative professions.<sup>37</sup>

In this study we have built on the published literature to identify both a range of different definitions of success and to identify the key enablers of such success. Taken together these have allowed us to develop a framework to investigate the careers of CDD graduates. Existing research has highlighted the importance of individuals developing sufficient 'enabling resources' to underpin the development of their performance careers; for example, highlighting the importance of finding supplemental and relational forms of paid employment ('side hustles'), building social capital and identifying mentors, intermediaries and champions.<sup>38</sup> We have particularly built on a previous qualitative study of CDD graduates which utilised the Bourdieusian categories of social, cultural and financial capital to describe the resources that individuals draw on, in addition to the knowledge and skills they have gained through study at the Schools of the CDD, which together support them to capture career success.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Brook, S., & Comunian, R. (2018). "Dropping out and working": The vocational narratives of creative graduates. In Martin, L. & Wilson, N. (Eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Creativity at Work* (pp. 125-141). Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>35</sup> Bille, T., & Jensen, S. (2018). Artistic education matters: Survival in the arts occupations. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 42(1), 23-43.

<sup>36</sup> Bennett, D. (2009). Academy and the real world: Developing realistic notions of career in the performing arts. *Arts and humanities in higher education*, 8(3), 309-327; López-Íñiguez, G., & Bennett, D. (2019). A lifespan perspective on multi-professional musicians: does music education prepare classical musicians for their careers?. *Music Education Research*, online first, 1-14.

<sup>37</sup> Kogan, N. (2002). Careers in the performing arts: A psychological perspective. *Communication Research Journal*, 14(1), 1-16; Zhukov, K. (2016). Building successful music careers: A case study of five Australian classical pianists. *ISME Commission on the Education of the Professional Musician*, 92.

<sup>38</sup> Montanari, F., Scapolan, A., & Gianecchini, M. (2016). 'Absolutely free'? The role of relational work in sustaining artistic innovation. *Organization Studies*, 37(6), 797-821; Lizé, W. (2016). Artistic work intermediaries as value producers. Agents, managers, tourneurs and the acquisition of symbolic capital in popular music. *Poetics*, 59, 35-49.

<sup>39</sup> Vigurs, K. & Burke, C. (2019). *Diverse routes: Investigating journeys into employment for performing arts students and graduates*. Derby: International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

### 3. Research approach

This chapter sets out the approach that was taken to the project. It explains how the survey was developed and then provides a detailed analysis of the respondents to the survey. While it is not possible to view these respondents (or their responses) as 'representative', the chapter finishes by comparing the sample with some key benchmark populations in the higher education sector and the creative arts disciplines.

#### 3.1. Project aims and scope

We worked closely with CDD to create a project that could allow the organisation to gain a more thorough understanding of the trajectories and career journeys of the graduates of its Schools. The CDD intends to use these insights to inform further development of its programmes and the wider support that it provides to students and graduates. Such insights may also be used to support more nuanced assessments of the value of performing arts courses in HE and move thinking beyond the frequent narrow focus on salary and labour market outcomes, discussed in the previous chapter.

At the same time, the CDD needs to respond to aspirations for increased diversity in the arts and has developed a Widening Access and Success Strategy. As modern conceptions of widening participation include the full student lifecycle (i.e. not just increasing access to HE, but also enhancing the experiences of such students in terms of successful HE participation and outcomes), there is a need to consider the extent to which measures of graduate outcomes are being achieved across the range of backgrounds of students.

We adopted a quantitative survey-based approach to build on and extend previous qualitative work that the CDD had undertaken into the careers of its graduates.<sup>40</sup> Through the survey we sought input from both recent and historic alumni to gain insights on the way in which the institution's graduates' careers unfolded over the long run. The aim was to capture graduates' career paths, including but not exclusively their paid employment, in order to evaluate how they have developed their artistic activities and/or interacted with the labour market, and how they have sustained their livelihoods. We were also keen to understand how directly their paths related to the skills, experiences, resources and capital they gained from training at a CDD School, as opposed to their social/cultural background.

In addition to the substantive research aims, we also aimed to develop a survey of CDD graduates which could potentially be re-used in the future as a template for more systematic, regular and longitudinal research on creative and performance graduates' pathways and outcomes, for CDD, other providers of performing arts training, and within the wider performing arts sector. As part of this CDD was keen for us to make recommendations about how it should understand, track and report on graduate outcomes in the future.

As researchers, we were also keen to devise and implement a novel approach to measuring career success and satisfaction in a way that captures the complexity and subjectivity of artistic careers but which could also have potential utility in other career sectors where financial earning power may give a limited view of graduate success.

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<sup>40</sup> Vigurs, K. & Burke, C. (2019). *Diverse routes: Investigating journeys into employment for performing arts students and graduates*. Derby: International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

## 3.2. Approach and methods

At the heart of the research was the design, development and first implementation of an online survey of CDD graduates which sought to capture information and perceptions from graduates who had attended courses at the CDD Schools. This approach aimed to include alumni further into their career than had been captured in the qualitative research which CDD had previously commissioned, which only covered graduates within 10 years of graduation.<sup>41</sup> This longer perspective was informed by wider research which suggests that performing arts careers frequently change significantly beyond this period, due to physiological changes in the graduates but also other aspirations such as raising a family. In addition, use of a quantitative method enabled us obtain results and information from a much larger sample which should be more representative than the earlier qualitative study.

### 3.2.1. Survey development

The online survey questionnaire we developed was designed to capture graduates' demographics as students, their current circumstances and their experiences of studying at a CDD School. Information about them as individuals and their careers to date was sought in relation to a logic model we devised for the study (Figure 3.1) from a reading of the pre-existing literature on performance graduates' careers. This model describes the components of CDD graduates' career journeys, suggesting that it was necessary for us to:

1. Understand students' personal characteristics (i.e. their background demographics, and prior experiences);
2. Identify to what extent graduates consider that they have developed a range of attributes, capital and resources that are concordant with the pursuit of a successful career;
3. Examine their education and training experience at their respective CDD School (including the level of qualifications that they achieved and participation in career- and progression-support programmes) and the developmental impact upon them;
4. Track the way in which they have spent their time following completion of their course, in terms of employment and other artistic activity or contributions;
5. Examine both objective and subjective measures of career success.

We designed the questionnaire to allow for analysis that could explore the relationship between different aspects of the model. For example, could particular profiles of activity undertaken during CDD training be correlated with particular conceptions of career success, and/or to what extent might they be determined by student background? The questionnaire also had to accommodate the full range of CDD graduates, employment profiles and different art forms, including the provision of production/technical courses at one of the Schools, while providing the basis for comparative analysis between art forms or cohorts or against data collected in future surveys. In order to simplify the respondent experience, six parallel surveys were launched, one for each School, which were identical other than in naming the School that the respondent had attended.

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<sup>41</sup> Vigurs, K. & Burke, C. (2019). *Diverse routes: Investigating journeys into employment for performing arts students and graduates*. Derby: International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

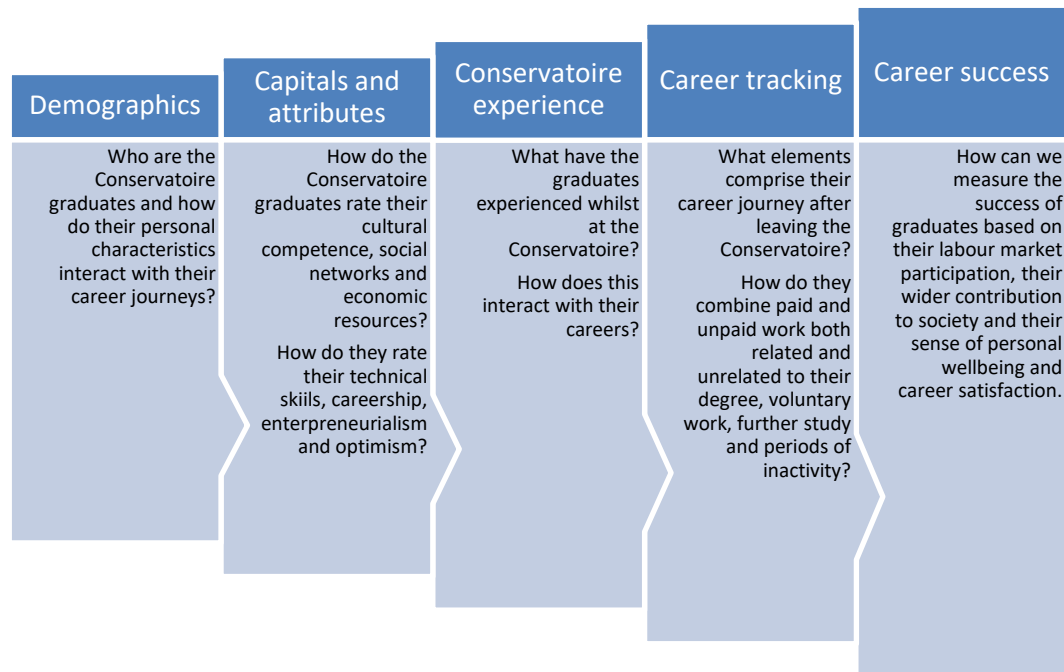


Figure 3.1 Logic model underpinning survey questionnaire development

A further practical aim of the survey was to secure participants' permission to store their response data and for re-contact with them in future for the purposes of career tracking through further surveys.

### 3.2.2. Expert stakeholder consultation

As an early phase of the research to inform development of the survey themes, audience attraction and segmentation and potential themes for analysis, we undertook a consultation exercise including representatives from each School. Telephone or face-to-face interviews took place with senior School staff and an expert focus group with academic programme leads across the CDD. This group were also invited to provide comments on a draft version of the survey.

### 3.2.3. Survey implementation

It was agreed with the CDD that as wide a variety of graduates as possible should be targeted for this baseline survey, subject to the contact details and consents held by the Schools about their alumni. We deliberately sought to recruit respondents from as far back as possible in order to explore challenges that graduates faced further into their careers (such as possible career direction changes to accommodate family responsibilities).

Survey invitations were issued by CDD Schools to their alumni contacts either by email or through social media supporting alumni groups (or both). The survey was launched in July 2019 and held open until October 2019, with Schools sending at least one follow-up email to those they had invited during this period. A prize draw was offered as an incentive for graduates to participate.

### 3.2.4. Survey data analysis

Response data from the six online surveys were downloaded from the survey platform into Excel files for recombination into a single response file. This was uploaded into SPSS for data cleaning, coding and grouping, prior to quantitative analysis. Frequency tables for the overall sample and a range of constituent sub-samples were generated in order to develop descriptive statistics and quantitative results to questions. Several cross-tabulations were also performed on the response datasets in order to explore differences in the responses of some key groups. Open-ended responses were coded and grouped to provide additional insights, extracts from some of which are included in this report to illustrate certain findings.

Feedback on initial findings was sought from subject experts within the CDD Schools who provided guidance on further analysis and aided in the interpretation of the findings.

### 3.3. Response sample profile and demographics

In total, 753 useable discrete responses were obtained from the six surveys, although not all were complete in the sense of every question having been answered (as is commonplace in online surveys). The breakdown of respondents across the six Schools is shown in Table 3.1. The variations in response numbers by School reflect both significant variations in the sizes of the alumni pool for each but also that not all avenues for potential contact were available for all Schools, partly due to data consent issues. Due to the variety of methods used to promote the survey to targeted alumni, the total population sampled was not known and it is not possible to derive an overall response rate. Of these respondents, 680 gave consent to be re-contacted in any future career tracking.

School	N	%
Bristol (Old Vic Theatre School)	252	33.5
Central (School of Ballet)	149	19.8
(National Centre for) Circus Arts	69	9.2
London (Contemporary Dance School)	84	11.2
Northern (School of Contemporary Dance)	173	23.0
Rambert School of Ballet & Contemporary Dance	26	3.5
Total	753	

Table 3.1 Number of respondents, by School

#### 3.3.1. Study characteristics

Based on the course title given by respondents, the profile of the response sample in terms of key artforms/disciplines is summarised in Table 3.2, with over half of respondents having studied dance courses. The 17.5% of respondents in the Production category were all graduates from Bristol.

<b>Artform/discipline</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Acting	113	15.2%
Production	130	17.5%
Circus	69	9.3%
Dance	432	58.1%
Total	744	

Table 3.2 Broad artform or discipline of respondents, based on course title reported

Just under two thirds of respondents had studied an undergraduate degree course (BA, BPA) at their School, and a further 8% a Foundation degree, while 16% had studied a postgraduate diploma or Masters course (Table 3.3). A further 11% studied courses leading to a variety of other qualifications, including professional awards. Due to the modest size of the sample, most analysis in this report is of this (total) composite sample rather than of those with a particular qualification level such as undergraduate.

<b>Qualification level</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Foundation degree	55	7.6%
Undergraduate degree (e.g. BA, BPA)	460	63.9%
Postgraduate diploma	66	9.2%
MA (postgraduate)	50	6.9%
Other (please specify)	79	11.0%
<i>No qualification</i>	10	
Total	720	

Table 3.3 Level of qualification of course studied

A total of almost 29% of respondents reported that they had subsequently undertaken a further higher education course and/or qualification. Of these 195 graduates, the majority had progressed to some form of postgraduate study, including 40% studying a Masters-level course and a further 11% a PGCE course (Table 3.4). The proportion studying a higher-level qualification was significantly higher for dance graduates (at almost 40%) than other artforms/disciplines (all around 15%).

<b>Further qualification level</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Undergraduate degree (e.g. BA, BPA)	30	15.4%
Postgraduate diploma	20	10.3%
PGCE	22	11.3%
MA (postgraduate)	79	40.5%
Doctorate	6	3.1%
Other (please specify)	38	19.5%
Total	195	

Table 3.4 Level of study of subsequent qualification/course

Examination of the subjects studied subsequently at higher level revealed that over half of these graduates went on to study another performance-focused course (31%) or a related arts

course (22%). In a small number of cases, such a course was at the same or another CDD School. Just under one fifth of these respondents studied a more general teaching course (19%, including PGCE), while the remaining 28% studied for a qualification unrelated to their original artform or discipline. A higher proportion of the dance graduates (who were the group who had most commonly studied a further qualification) studied a further performance-related qualification than of the other groups.

While a substantial minority of the respondents had gone on to study another HE course at some point, the survey questions were deliberately written to focus on the experiences or benefits relating specifically to the course undertaken at the CDD School in question, not their experiences of HE overall.

We hypothesised that the year in which respondents graduated would be an important determinant of their current situation and their relationship to the discipline that they studied. Because of this we sought to recruit from as wide a range of years as possible. The profile of graduation years is shown in Figure 3.2; this illustrates that, overall, more than 30% of respondents had graduated more than 10 years ago, including a significant minority who graduated during the 1990s, indicating that this aspect of the sampling strategy was successful. Those graduating during 2018 or 2019 (just under 13%) were included although it was acknowledged that their post-study career experiences could be very limited.

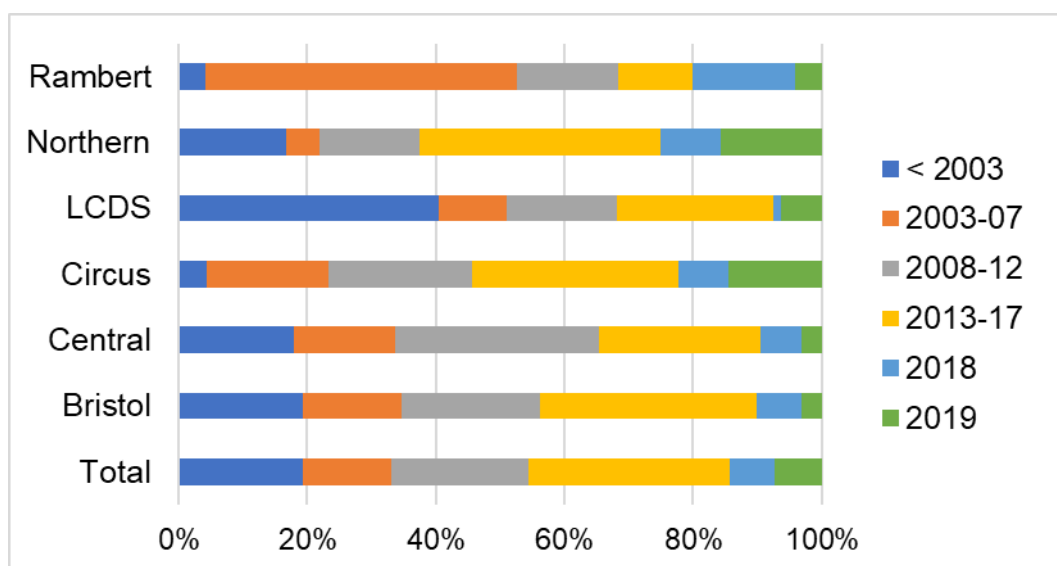


Figure 3.2 Respondents year of graduation (grouped), by School

Examination of Figure 3.2 also shows that the proportion of respondents from earlier periods varied considerably by School. In some cases this reflects the longevity of the institution, while the high proportion of 'early' respondents from LCDS is thought to be an artefact of the response sample obtained. Nonetheless, there was a sufficient spread of graduation periods in all schools to allow us to undertake analysis of the overall sample by graduation period.



### 3.3.2. Personal characteristics<sup>42</sup>

Just under 64% of respondents reported that they were female (and 35% male, with 0.5% reporting other and a further 0.5% preferring not to state this). These proportions varied by School, with the highest proportion of females in dance (at over 70%) and lowest for acting (45%). Over half (62%) of those on production courses were female.

Most (69%) of the respondents were of UK domicile, with 17% from EU countries and 13% from countries outside the EU. Analysis within this report was carried out for all respondents, rather than just those of UK domicile, in order to keep sample sizes as large as possible during analysis. The ethnicity of UK-domiciled respondents was sought in the survey, revealing the profile in Table 3.5, from which it can be seen that 88% of UK-domiciles were of white background. These proportions did vary somewhat by artform/discipline, with a higher proportion of those of ethnic minority background in contemporary dance (where, for example, 4% were of Black origin). There was also some evidence for increasing ethnic diversity over time, overall and at School level, with the lowest proportion of white respondents in recent years (and no Black graduates prior to 2003).

<b>Ethnicity (of UK domiciles)</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
White or White British	435	88.4%
Asian or Asian British	6	1.2%
Black or Black British	11	2.2%
Mixed/multiple	29	5.9%
Other	6	1.2%
Prefer not to say	5	1.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>492</b>	

Table 3.5 Ethnic background of UK-domiciled respondents

Just under 15% of respondents reported that they had a disability or specific learning difficulty. Dyslexia was by far the most commonly reported condition or difficulty, by 75 of the 102 individuals reporting a disability or learning difficulty. A small minority of these respondents indicated that they had not disclosed this to their School. A physical disability was reported by only five individuals. The proportion reporting some kind of disability or difficulty was slightly higher amongst those who studied circus arts or production courses (at around 20%) and somewhat lower in the other performance arts.

From the outset of the research, we were interested in the socio-economic background of the graduates, so insights into their background were probed in a variety of ways. 31% indicated that they were the first in their family to experience HE, and this was slightly higher amongst those who studied circus arts (37%). These graduates were also slightly less likely to have had another immediate family member study a performing arts degree (11%) compared with the proportion overall (14%).

A further insight was obtained by asking respondents to name the main occupation of each of their parents/carers at the time they had studied their CDD course. This revealed that 68% of respondents had had at least one parent/carer in an occupation we classified as 'professional'

<sup>42</sup> Due to the wide period over which the respondents studied their courses, comparison of the demographic profile of respondents with current HESA Student Record statistics (or for a particular year) is of limited value

(corresponding to NS-SEC categories 1-3) while a further 8% had at least one in a performance or related occupation. These appeared to be relatively similar across the Schools and disciplines, although with a slightly lower proportion of those with professional parents amongst those who studied circus arts.

### **3.4. Comparison with the wider population**

Given that we wanted the response sample to contain alumni who had graduated across a wide range of time periods, there is no simple comparator population with which to compare its profile directly, such as a single student cohort captured by HESA. On the other hand, very broad comparison with recent cohorts revealed no evidence to suggest that the response sample stands out as radically different in any particular respect of its profile. It is thought to be broadly representative of those who have studied at these Schools and certainly contains graduates relevant to this study.

On this basis, the profile of the response sample exhibits a number of trends which may be relevant to this study of graduate careers, including the following, which are expressed as comparisons with other key segments of student populations from recent HESA data:<sup>43</sup>

1. It comprises roughly two thirds female respondents, in line with current CDD students and the broad subject area (creative arts) but higher than amongst students overall (now, and more so historically);
2. Its UK-domiciled respondents were dominantly white with slightly lower proportions of ethnic minority background than seen amongst current CDD students, which is less diverse than students overall (but in line with other creative arts subjects and similar institutions);
3. There is a relatively high proportion reporting a disability, in line with this subject area, although lower than amongst current CDD students, with the vast majority who reported a disability disclosing a learning difficulty while physical disability was rare;
4. Compared with students overall, a higher proportion of respondents are from relatively advantaged family backgrounds, with somewhat low proportions indicating that their parents/carers had occupations in lower NS-SEC classes and/or who had not attended HE themselves;
5. The proportion of respondents who are not of UK domicile are broadly in line with recent institutional profile data;
6. The proportions who undertook study at different qualification levels (i.e. around 70% undergraduate overall, although this did vary significantly by discipline and School) were broadly in line with recent student characteristics for these CDD Schools.

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<sup>43</sup> Student characteristics provided by CDD, and/or from HESA Student Record data, retrieved from <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he>

## 4. Graduates' perceptions of studying at CDD Schools

*"I feel lucky to have had the opportunity to train at [CDD School] and thoroughly lived my training. In hindsight I would have benefitted from some hand holding and guidance on graduating. I started my training at 16yrs so was only 19yrs when I graduated. I think I would have gained more had I been a bit older"*

*"While I don't work in dance anymore, I continue to work in the arts and media and I consider the soft skills in creativity and collaboration that I learnt at [CDD School] were essential to my success".*

This chapter explores how graduates experienced studying at the CDD Schools. It asked them what opportunities they had to prepare them for their subsequent careers. We also asked what additional experiences and support they would have liked. In this chapter we use the idea of 'career capital' to describe the personal knowledge, skills, attributes, networks and resources that individuals had that could help them to develop and manage their career. We asked participants to reflect on their career capital at the beginning and the end of their course and used these reflections to try to quantify some of the career-related impacts of their course.

### 4.1. Experiences during study

We asked respondents to indicate what career-relevant experiences they had encountered while studying on their course. Figure 4.1 summarises respondents' reporting of the opportunities that they thought they had while studying at their CDD School.

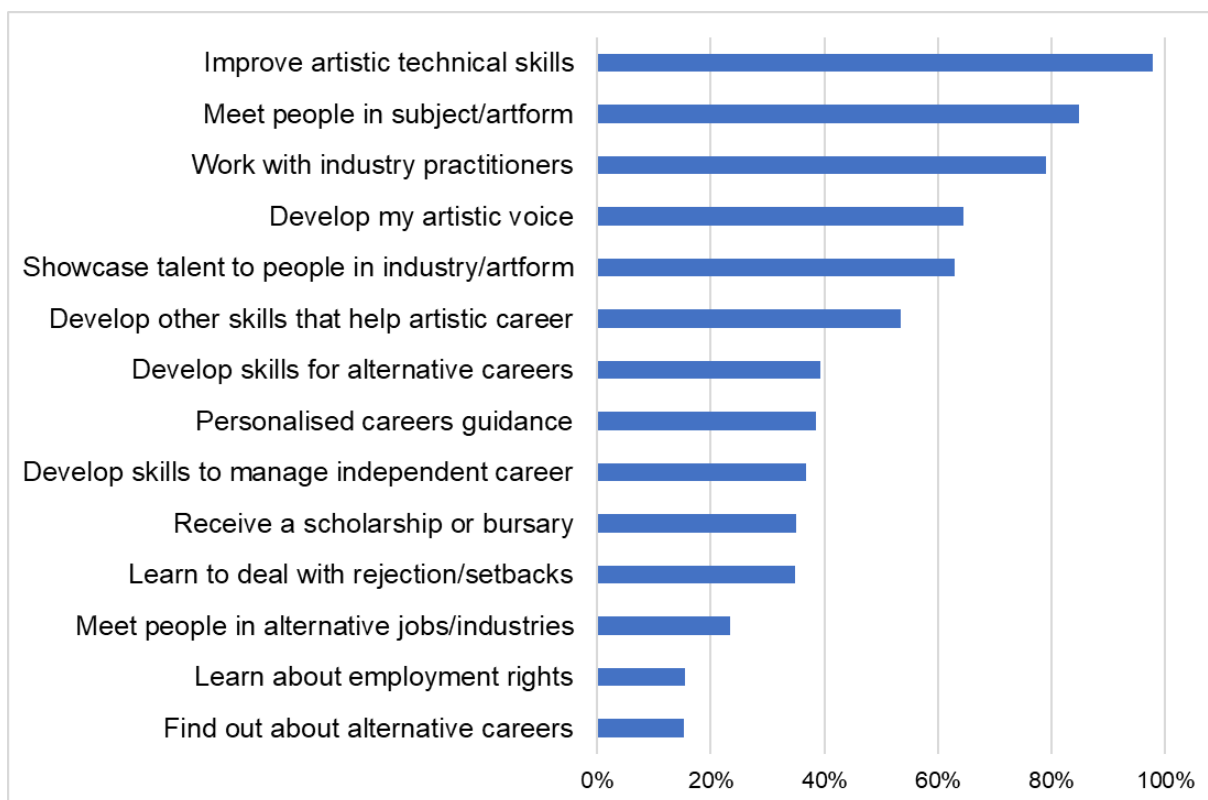


Figure 4.1 Proportion of all respondents considering that they had particular opportunities while studying at their CDD School (N=671)

This suggests that almost every graduate felt they had had the opportunity to improve their technical skills within their artform or discipline, and around 80% or more had had opportunities to meet people working in their artform and work with industry practitioners within it. The majority had opportunities to develop their personal artistic voice and to showcase it to professionals in the artform, as well as developing some skills that would help them forge an artistic career if they wanted one. On the other hand, fewer than 40% of respondents reported that they had received 1-to-1 careers guidance or developed career management skills, and few felt that they had learnt much about alternative careers or industries.

When we analysed these results by year of graduation (Figure 4.2), we can see that in almost all cases slightly or significantly higher proportions of more recent graduate respondents reported having these opportunities. Although it is possible that this could partly be due to better memory of experiences by more recent graduates, it is consistent with an improvement in the opportunities provided over time. The analysis was only taken back to just over 15 years ago, as the courses and the study environment could have been significantly different before then. The chart suggests that particularly significant improvements have been seen in relation to career-related learning and opportunities to develop resilience and independence.

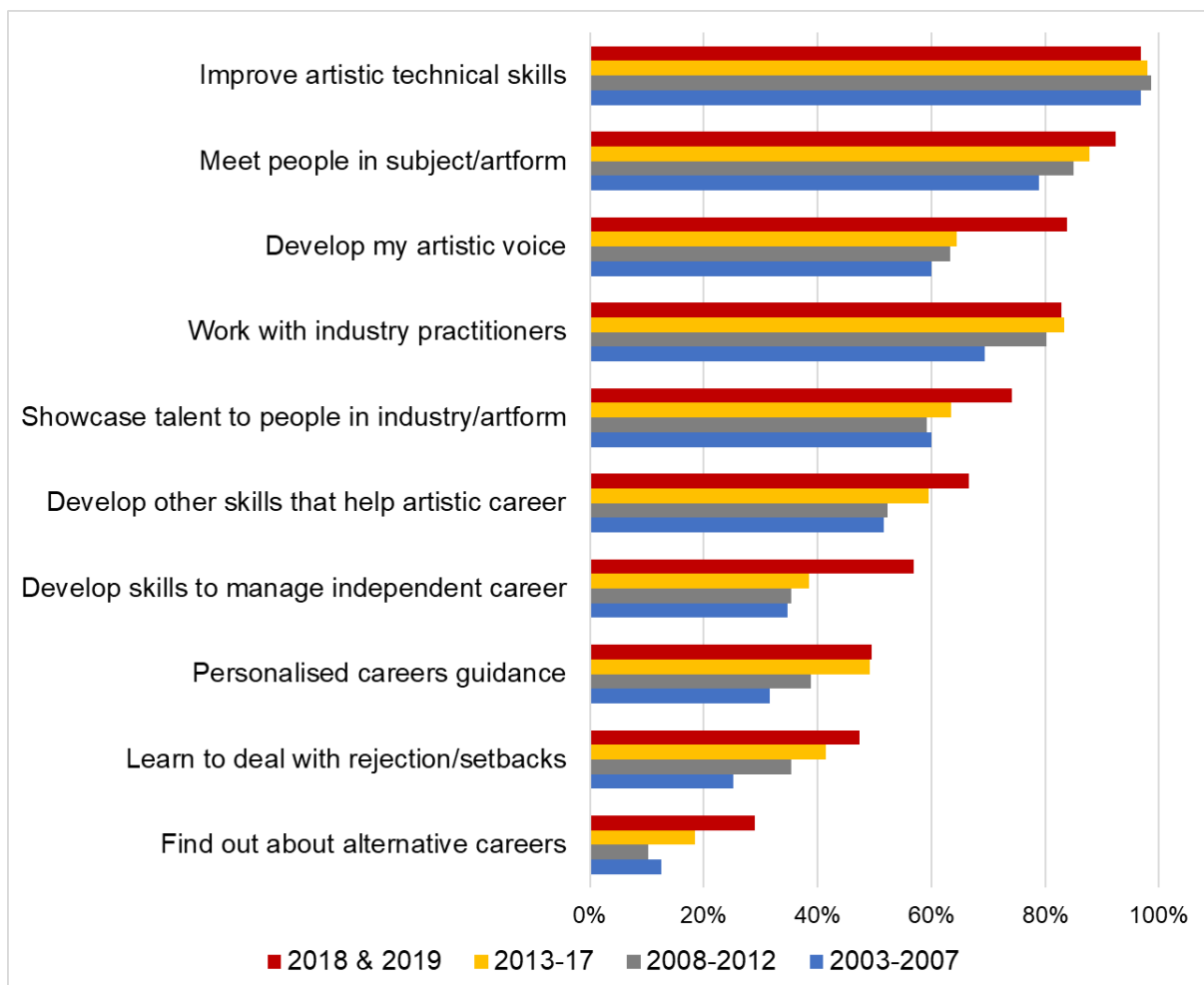


Figure 4.2 Proportion of respondents considering that they had particular opportunities while studying at their CDD School, with year of graduation (N=543)

Analysis of these data by artform (broad discipline), over the entire period, showed many of these results to be roughly consistent across the broad disciplinary areas. However, there appeared to be a number of exceptions, including that more of those who studied acting had opportunities to develop wider skills to support independent career development, higher proportions of those studying acting or dance had been able to consider how to deal with rejection or setbacks, and over half of those studying production had received personalised career guidance.

#### 4.2. What was missing or could have been better

In the survey, respondents were invited to identify additional things they now felt their School could have done, during the course and also in the three years after graduation, to help them in their careers. These suggestions were provided as open-ended comments by 340 respondents in relation to their course, and by 210 respondents in relation to the three years post-completion.

Coding and grouping their responses (Figure 4.3) revealed that over a third who made a comment would have liked more emphasis on how to develop an independent career (labelled in the chart for brevity as ‘working life support’), including support on practical issues like dealing with tax if self-employed, preparing for auditions and also specifically showreel preparation and support (for actors).

A significant minority would have liked more attention to pastoral care, in a number of respects, including some who indicated that they had struggled with mental health problems and others a perceived lack of inclusivity. Several expressed the view that there was a lack of compassion and that the culture was overly competitive.

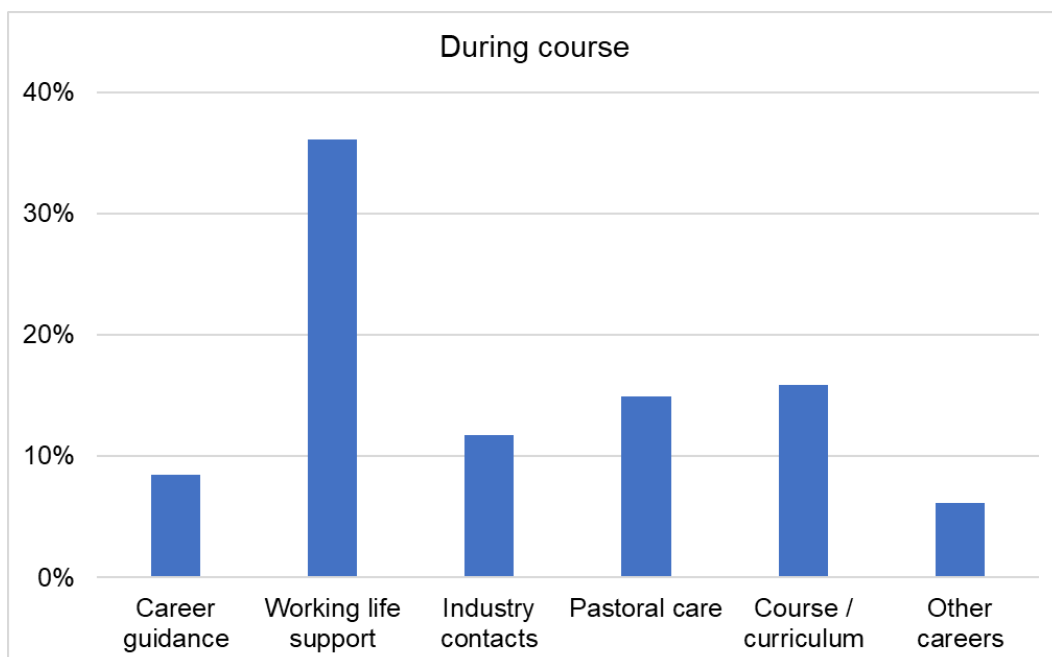


Figure 4.3 Areas where respondents thought their School could have provided more support (expressed as proportion of respondents making a comment, N=340)

Around 1 in 8 of these respondents would have appreciated greater access to industry contacts, and just under 1 in 10 better career guidance support (and others felt that there should have been discrete attention to career options outside their artform or discipline). Comments relating to the respondent's specific curriculum or teaching were grouped together but covered a wide range of detailed or individual issues. Other comments which when grouped comprised less than 5% of the comments have been omitted from these charts.

The open-ended comments have been supplied to the CDD, after de-personalisation and/or redaction to avoid any chance of respondent identification. However, a few examples are included here for illustration, first around career-related and work support:

*"Provide much more comprehensive career information and advice. Not everyone will work within a traditional ballet or dance company. Tutors need to be better informed about all aspects of the dance performers industry, and support students accordingly"*

*"[Should have] started the conversation about careers sooner. Most freelancers need to have another thing 'on the side' that they do, and I don't think I started thinking about this in time to find what that might be for me before I graduated"*

*"I think a lot has happened at [...] since I graduated and some of the things I could have benefited from, career advice, admin related skills, more knowledge in other art forms and how to build a portfolio career, is now on the curriculum"*

*"Been more realistic and practical about job opportunities; prepared us for contemporary style auditions rather than traditional auditions; made us proper showreels and voice-reels rather than a short film project; had our showcase earlier"*

*"We should have been given much more support on how to create a career alongside acting which can sustain you financially; also [to] be more positive / proud of the 99% of students who work in regional theatre [and only part-time] rather than praising the students who achieve fame - that would be more supportive for graduates and realistic for students to look up to"*

*"More preparation for entering the real world. Practical stuff. I would have like every student to have left with a personal plan - what to do next. Given me a better understanding of life as an artist – a portfolio career, self-management, networking skills, writing funding applications etc"*

Many of the more detailed comments about pastoral care, or the perceived lack of it, were personal, and not appropriate for inclusion in this report, but several mentioned both mental health or stress and also a desire for more compassion:

*"I would have liked more support in accordance with the stress and challenge aspect. Feeling that I was included and not always have to be in a competitive, comparison-based mindset would have helped a lot. [School] is great at fostering competition and strong technical and artistic abilities. But I would have loved more compassion. Then I might have believed in myself a bit more. [Art] is rough without compassion"*

*"Could have had more support with regards to mental health, as I believe it is a hot topic now. Maybe a mentor or someone you could speak to freely and confidentially"*

When this analysis was split by period of graduation, there was surprisingly little variation in these results over time (although the sample sizes were admittedly small and limit the robustness of the analysis). This suggests that the main issues are relatively persistent.

A similar presentation of results for comments about what the School could have done in the three years following graduation is shown in Figure 4.4. The most popular comments relate to desire for some continuing guidance or mentoring from School staff, as graduates began to forge their own paths after leaving the School (suggested by almost a third of all who commented). Some respondents did mention that a mentoring scheme existed but felt it was inadequate. Again, significant minorities would have liked support around how to develop an independent working career and some continued support in relation to access to industry contacts. Interestingly, 1 in 10 would have appreciated the opportunity to access further training sessions provided by or through the School.

There was also a strong signal around a desire for greater contact with them as alumni. 10% of those making a comment specifically suggested there should be a more developed alumni network, while a further 18% (not shown in Figure 4.4) simply stated that they had had no contact from their School after graduation. This could be interpreted as further respondents seeking alumni engagement and support, so in practice nearly 30% of comment-makers were raising the issue of better alumni relations.

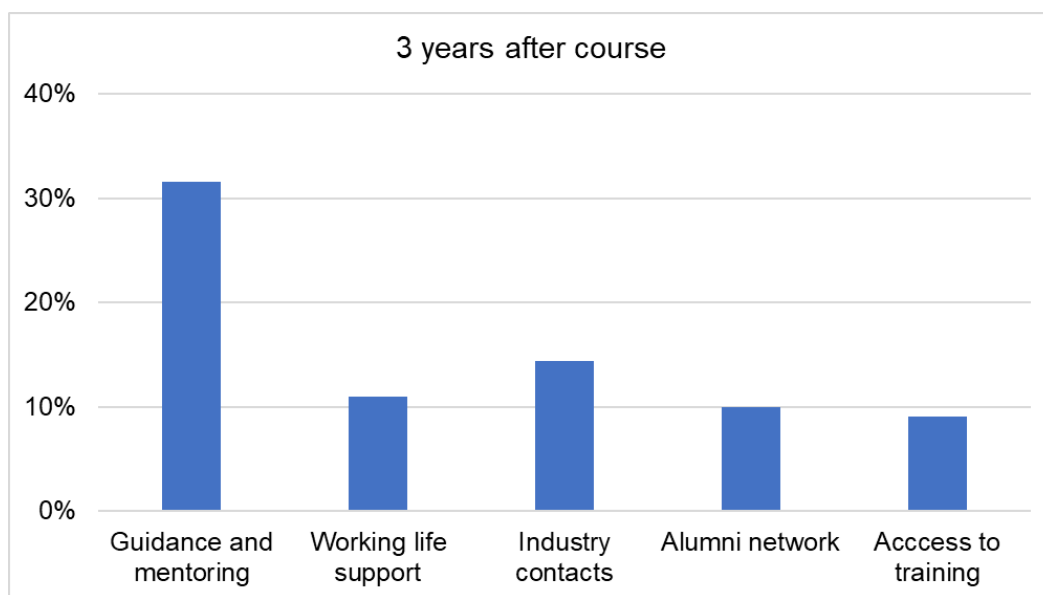


Figure 4.4 Areas where respondents thought their School could have provided more support in the three years after graduation (expressed as proportion of respondents making a comment,  $N=210$ )

When this second analysis was considered with time since graduation, there was some evidence to suggest that it was the most recent graduates who more commonly raised the question of continued access to industry contacts after they had graduated and especially a desire for further access to training sessions in their artform, possibly indicating that these areas of support are most keenly felt soon after graduation and before independence is established.

### 4.3. Career-related capital at the point of graduation

Respondents were asked to reflect on how they felt when they graduated from their CDD School, in relation to a variety of aspects of their confidence and readiness to embark on their career after their course (by asking them to indicate their extent of agreement with a series of

statements). The statements were designed and grouped so as provide indications relating to the three different broad types of capital used in the Bourdieusian approach suggested in the prior iCeGS study – respectively cultural, social and financial – in addition to levels of career optimism and confidence at this point. Collectively we viewed these elements as ‘career capital’ as they described the personal attributes that individuals could use to advance their career.

The proportions are summarised in Figure 4.5 which shows, broadly, that at the time they graduated, high proportions of respondents felt that they understood and could talk about their artform or discipline and to a slightly lesser extent possessed confidence in their technical skills within it. Equally, high proportions now had contacts within their artform and had a good personal support network, and the majority had relevant professional contacts who might be supportive as they developed their career.

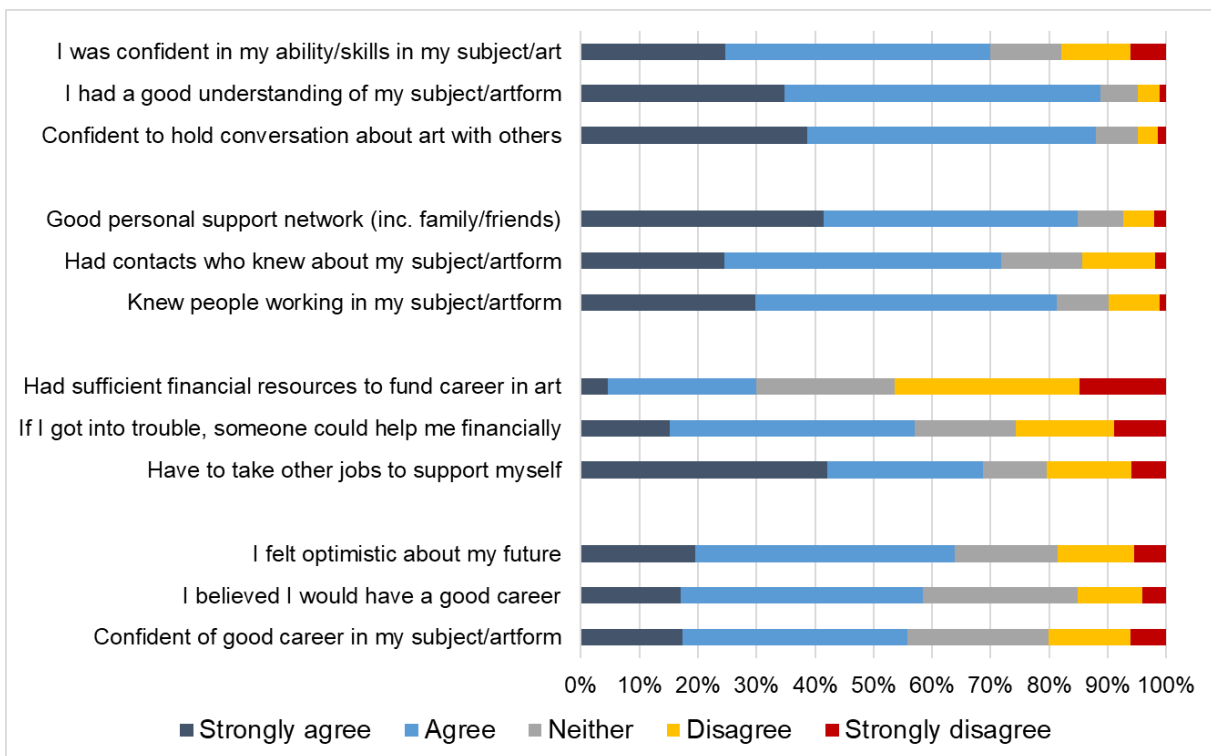


Figure 4.5 Proportion of respondents indicating extent of agreement with a range of statements relating to aspects of their career-related capital and confidence, at the point of graduation (N=650)

In contrast, most respondents felt that their financial prospects were not very strong, with around half not believing they would have sufficient financial resources at their disposal to fund an artistic career, and only around half were confident that they could rely on personal sources of support financially if they ran into difficulties. Two thirds accepted that they would need to take other jobs in order to support their career. Collectively, it could be argued that these results indicate realism in recognising that relatively few graduates of this type will be able to develop a full-time career as an artist or performer.

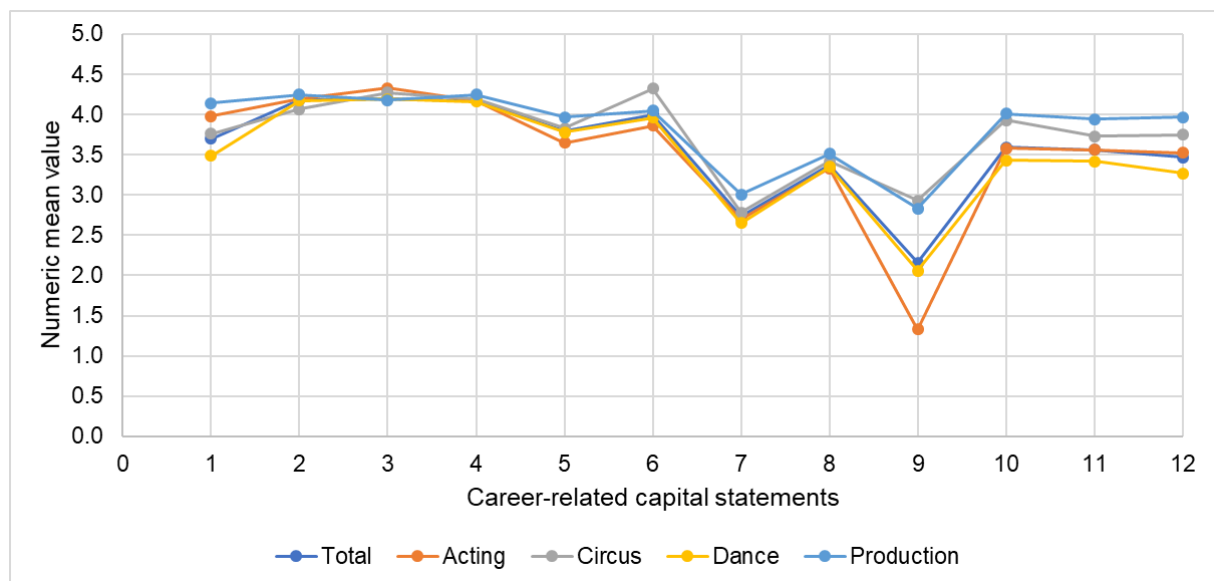
Related to this, levels of confidence about developing a good career within their own subject or artform were relatively low (under 30% were confident that they could do so). However,



extents of confidence were higher in relation to having some kind of career that was good and two thirds of respondents positively expressed optimism about their future career.

Comparisons of these perceptions between certain sub-groups of graduates are more easily made comparing numeric values rather than using multiple stacked bar charts shown in Figure 4.5. To assign a numeric value the answer 'strongly disagree' was allocated a value of 1, 'disagree' 2, 'neither agree nor disagree' 3, 'agree' 4 and 'strongly agree' 5, and then an average score calculated. In Figure 4.6, numeric values are plotted for the overall sample and for each main artform/subject area. The numeric values for having to work outside the subject/artform for support have been inverted in order to provide a comparable form of statement to the others.

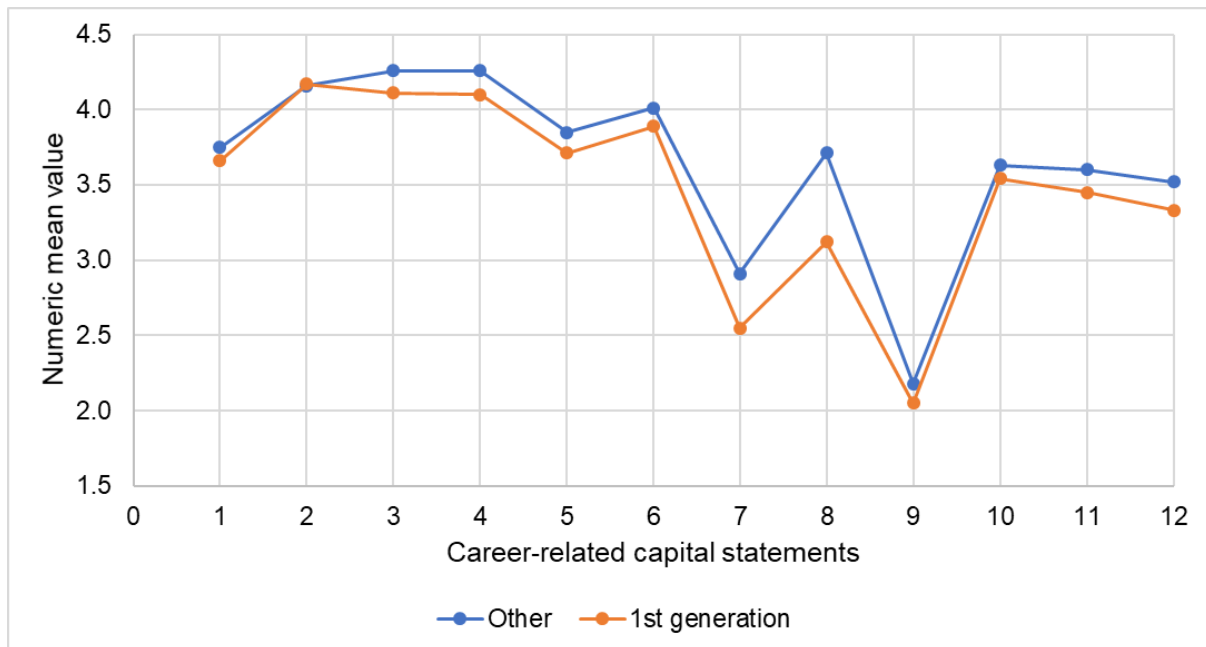
This diagrammatic representation shows that responses in the different artforms displayed extremely similar trends, albeit with those who studied acting more strongly than others expecting to have to work outside their art to support themselves. It can also be seen that those who studied production courses tended to provide, slightly, the most positive views, across almost the whole spectrum of statements.



**Key to capital statements (x-axis):** 1 - I was confident in my ability/skills in my subject/art; 2 - I had a good understanding of my subject/artform; 3 - Confident to hold conversation about art with others; 4 - Good personal support network (inc. family/friends); 5 - Had contacts who knew about my subject/artform; 6 - Knew people working in my subject/artform; 7 - Had sufficient financial resources to fund career in art; 8 - If I got into trouble, someone could help me financially; 9 - Have to take other jobs to support myself [Inverted score]; 10 - I felt optimistic about my future; 11 - I believed I would have a good career; 12 - Confident of good career in my subject/artform.

Figure 4.6 Numeric representation of career-related perceptions charted in Figure 4.5, by broad subject studied

This form of presentation also enables ready comparison of other sub-groups of respondents. In Figure 4.7, graduates are split into those from more advantaged and less advantaged backgrounds, based on whether they were the first in their family to attend HE. For most of the statements, at graduation, those from more advantaged backgrounds were slightly more positive. This was most pronounced in relation to two of the statements around financial capital: whether they had somebody to help them financially if they got into financial trouble (statement 8) and expecting to have sufficient financial resources to pursue an artistic career.



**Key to capital statements (x-axis):** 1 - I was confident in my ability/skills in my subject/art; 2 - I had a good understanding of my subject/artform; 3 - Confident to hold conversation about art with others; 4 - Good personal support network (inc. family/friends); 5 - Had contacts who knew about my subject/artform; 6 - Knew people working in my subject/artform; 7 - Had sufficient financial resources to fund career in art; 8 - If I got into trouble, someone could help me financially; 9 - Have to take other jobs to support myself [Inverted score]; 10 - I felt optimistic about my future; 11 - I believed I would have a good career; 12 - Confident of good career in my subject/artform.

Figure 4.7 Numeric presentation of career-related perceptions, by whether respondent was first in the family to attend HE.

#### 4.4. Gains in career capital

Respondents were also asked about their perceptions, on the same issues, when they had started their CDD course. In this way, an indication of the changes in perceptions could be obtained during their course and CDD School experience, i.e. by subtracting the numeric value for each statement when they started the course from the value when they graduated. This produced the changes summarised, for the whole respondent sample, in Figure 4.8, expressed as a percentage of change for each statement, averaged across all respondents. Thus, a hypothetical mean value for a statement of 4 at graduation from which a mean value of 3 at start of the course was subtracted would plot as a positive change of 1 (or a 33% increase).

It should also be noted that one of the financial confidence statements was stated differently at the two time points, requiring inversion for a comparable numeric value.

Figure 4.8 shows that, for the whole respondent sample, graduates reported increases in their confidence in relation to understanding and talking about their subject or artform, and some increase in their technical skills. They also reported a strong increase in their professional networks, especially their industry contacts, and a very slight increase in their personal support networks. In contrast, there were decreases in their confidence in relation to financial capital and prospects, and in their career confidence. The most marked change was in relation to having to work outside their artform to survive financially, but there was also a decrease in the proportion thinking that they would have sufficient resources to progress within their artform. Equally, lower proportions were confident that they would have a good career within their

specific artform, or that they would have a good career (of some kind), and their optimism in relation to career thinking was lower than when they started their degree.

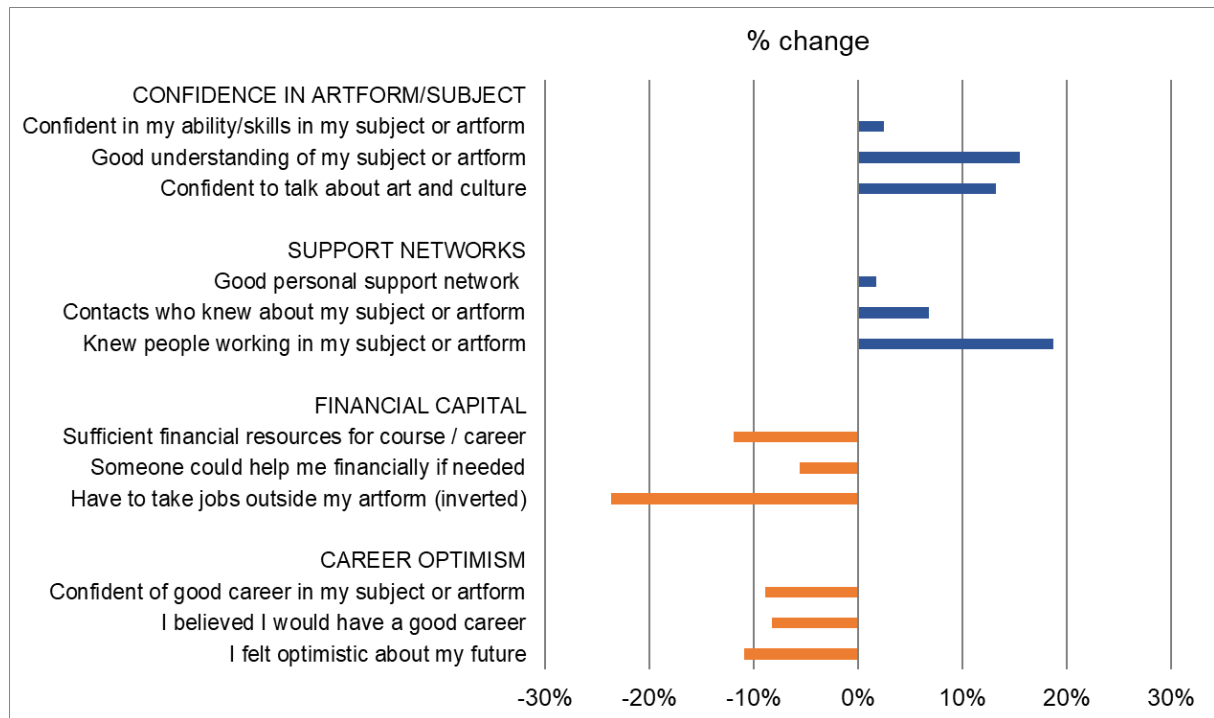


Figure 4.8 Percentage change in extents of confidence from start of course to graduation, based on differences in mean values for total respondent population

To summarise, these results suggest that respondents perceived the courses made them feel more confident as artists and connected them to relevant professional networks. However, by the end of their course they had also become more realistic about the financial challenges that they were going to face and recognised the difficulty of building a performance career. Hopefully such realism may mean that students are better equipped to handle the challenges of a potential performing arts career and that they have developed a better understanding that they might have to have a portfolio career, or work outside their artform some or all of the time.

When this analysis was applied to respondents within different broad artforms/subjects, in most cases similar patterns were observed between those groups, with a few exceptions. Figure 4.9 shows the statements where some difference was seen between groups. Positive gains in confidence about their technical skills and subject were seen for all groups, other than dance where the extent of change over time was not significant or respondents were even slightly less confident about their technical skills. Dance respondents were also less confident in relation to the extent to which their networks had improved while at their CDD School.

Optimism about careers was slightly lower than when they had started their course, for all groups, while financial perceptions differed widely. Those who had studied acting, and to a lesser extent dance, had dramatically increased their realisation of the need to work outside their artform in order to support themselves, whereas graduates of circus arts appeared to have become more confident that they could have a sustainable income from that artform.

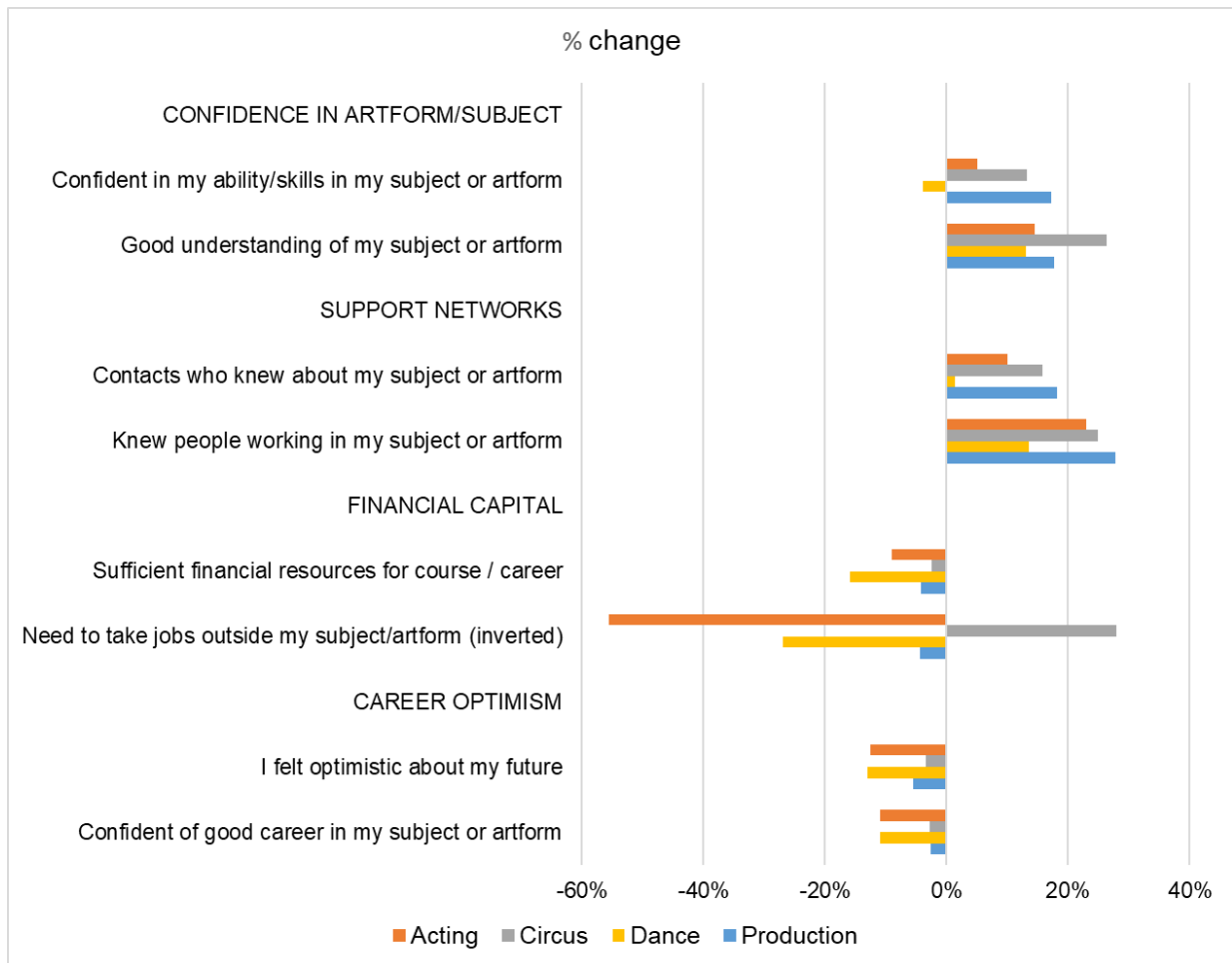


Figure 4.9 Percentage change in extents of confidence from start of course to graduation, based on differences in mean values, by artform/subject studied

Those who had studied production courses displayed amongst the strongest positive responses over the period of their course, and the weakest negative changes.

Analysis of these changes in career capital by respondents' background revealed relatively small differences. There was little or no evidence of substantial differences in the extent of positive growth in confidence in relation to technical skills, subject understanding or network building, between those from less advantaged or more advantaged backgrounds. If anything, the extent of the decreases in confidence in relation to financial prospects, and overall career optimism, tended to be smaller for those who had been first-generation HE students. This seems to show that the CDD courses have been delivering benefits roughly equally to both more and less advantaged students, which could be limited evidence that this has levelled up the playing field.

## 5. Graduates' employment and careers

*"Since graduating I worked for a couple of years and then decided to get a 9-5 as was struggling financially. I have since had two children and although working part time am glad to say have finally found myself dancing and creating again. Thank you for the solid training you gave me that has enabled me to go back at a better level than I had expected after having two children!"*

This chapter looks at the employment and career histories of the respondents. It examines what graduates are doing now, whether they are employed and what form that employment or work takes. It then goes on to look at the career trajectories of the respondents since they graduated and examines how they have pursued performance and creative careers and how, in some cases, they have combined this with other activities.

### 5.1. Current employment

Overwhelmingly, respondents were currently undertaking some paid work, with only eight individuals (out of 560 reporting details of their current activities) not working at all due to unemployment, retirement or full-time parenthood. The pattern of work and types of contract reported by respondents varied considerably. However, almost all (97%) reported that they were doing at least one day per week of paid work currently.

It is useful here to separate those who studied performance courses and those who studied production courses as their working patterns were quite different. Amongst the former, two thirds (66%) reported that they were currently in paid work for 4 or more days per week (33% full-time and a similar proportion between 4 and 5 days per week). Initially we will focus on this group, i.e. these 66% in work 4+ days per week whom we could consider as in full-time work or nearly so.

Within this group, 45% of them had a single paid role and slightly more of them (55%) had two or more different paid roles currently (12% had three or more). Drilling down further, it became clear that working full-time only in a performance role was relatively rare (roughly 8% of all respondents). A similar proportion had a single full-time role in a related occupation, and somewhat more had a single full-time role in an unrelated occupation (about 12% of all respondents). Thus, essentially, just 28% of all respondents had a single, full-time job, split into roughly 8% performance, 8% related and 12% unrelated.

However, not only did the majority have more than one work role but performance work was far more commonly found as one of those multiple paid roles (than as a single full-time role). Most of those with several paid roles had at least one which was a performance occupation. This was the most common employment position, i.e. to work 4+ days per week with multiple roles of which at least one, but not all, was in performance (this was in total almost 30% of all respondents).

Amongst those working less intensively (i.e. the other 34% of performance graduates), the work patterns were complex and comprised portions of paid work of varying kinds as well as significant time spent on unpaid activity to further their art or career.

Meanwhile, amongst those who had studied production courses, the picture was somewhat simpler, with a higher proportion (75%) of them working 4 days or more per week. In turn, the majority (81% of that 75%) of these graduates were working in a single role, and about two thirds of these were working in a directly related occupation (corresponding to nearly 40% of

all production graduates). Where graduates had two roles, in all but one instance one of those roles was directly related to their degree subject. The proportion in work who were doing unrelated occupations was much lower than for performance graduates, at fewer than one quarter of production graduates.

To summarise, the profile of the sole or main occupations of those working full-time (or nearly, i.e. 4 or more days per week), is shown in Figure 5.1, for performance and production course graduates. Very broadly, within this subset of graduates, those who had studied performance courses were roughly evenly split between performing, related and unrelated occupations, while far more of those who studied production courses were in directly applied production or technical roles and fewer in related roles. These charts include those working in a single role and in multiple roles.

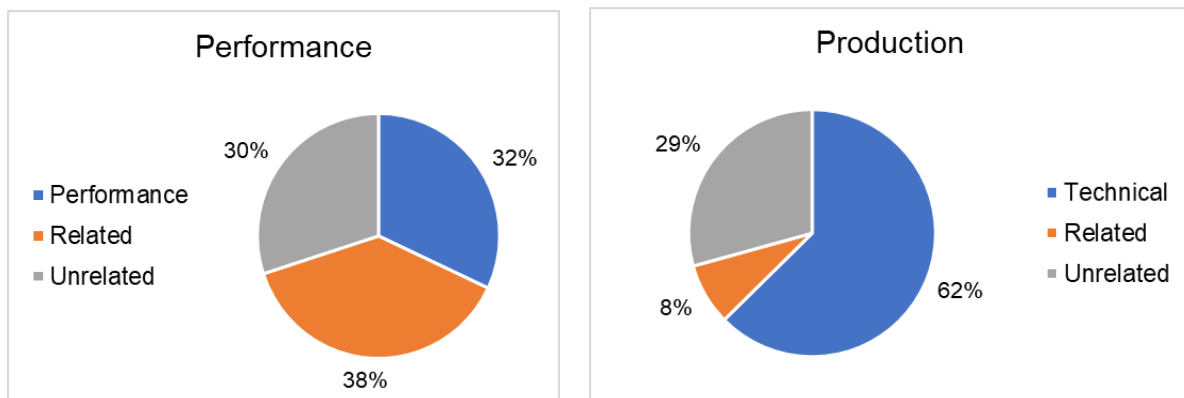


Figure 5.1 Broad type of sole/main occupation for graduates working 4 or more days per week, for performance and production graduates

Together these results depict a working landscape where many graduates are either not in full-time paid work and/or, even if they are, work in multiple roles and for more than one employer. 45% of all respondents indicated that they had more than one paid role currently (and this was higher still, about 55%, amongst the two thirds of respondents who were working 4+ days per week) – demonstrating that portfolio working was very common.

Amongst graduates who were portfolio working, responses indicated that two fifths were working in a performance or technical role for more than one day per week and almost as many working in related occupations for at least one day per week. This seems to suggest that, across all current working patterns, the majority of graduates were undertaking a significant element of paid work in or related to the artform or subject that they had studied.

When they were asked to report these working patterns as an average across their career to date, rather than just currently, around 45% of respondents said that they had been able to sustain full-time (or nearly full-time) work throughout the period since they graduated. This suggests that the results for current work described above are not a temporary situation but indicative of long-term career complexity including portfolio and partial working patterns.

These observations have important implications for some earnings-based assessments of graduate outcomes for institutions like the CDD. For example, earnings reported in LEO data take no account of whether a graduate is in full-time or part-time work, and so will shed little

light in relation to the working reality for many of these graduates, or potentially on the 'quality' of (i.e. earnings from) degree-related work that they might be undertaking on a part-time basis.

## 5.2. Main source of income

Given the complexity of these graduates' working patterns, a simpler approach was required to investigate the types of work that different groups of graduates were engaged in and how these might vary over time, i.e. to enable more systematic analysis. Respondents were asked to identify the activity from which they currently derived the largest proportion of their income, and this 'main activity' was used as the basis for comparative analysis. It was again valuable to separate graduates who had studied production courses from the main groups who had studied performance courses, as it became clear that their outcomes in terms of type of role were quite distinct.

Figure 5.2 shows that one third of the performance arts graduates were currently employed (on the basis of their main paid activity) in a performance role and a similar proportion in a related occupation (19% related teaching and 14% other related work), while the remaining third were in unrelated roles (including 7% in other teaching jobs). By comparison, almost two thirds (63%) of those who had studied a production/technical course were in a directly relevant technical role, under 10% in other related roles and just over a quarter in unrelated occupations.

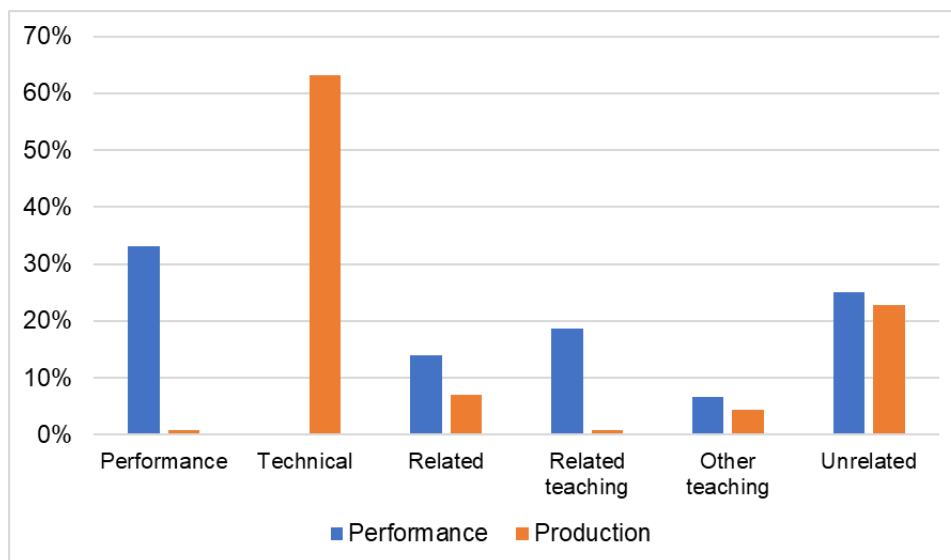


Figure 5.2 Type of current main paid activity of respondents, by broad course discipline

This analysis masks some variation between graduates of different performance disciplines (Figure 5.3), which suggested that it was circus arts graduates for whom the highest proportion worked in a directly related performing role and the lowest proportion unrelated to their art, although the sample size was small. The lowest proportion of performers was seen for dance.

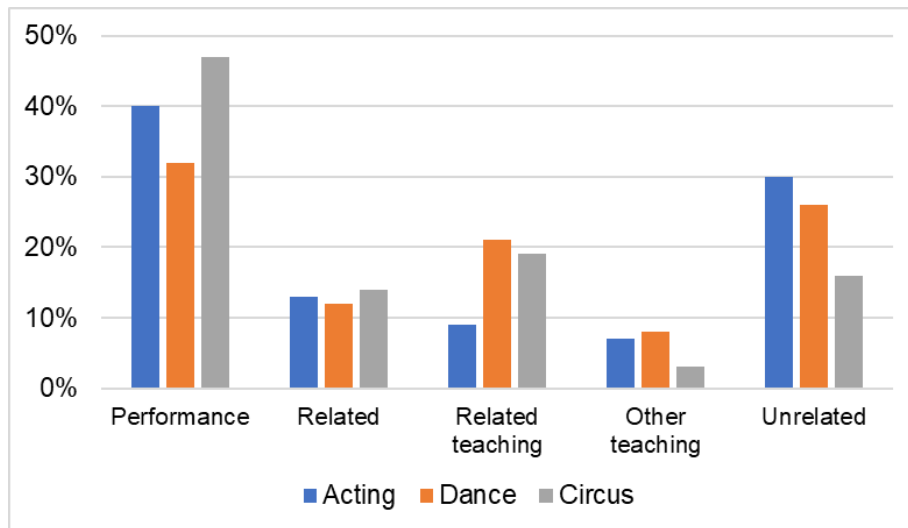


Figure 5.3 Type of current main paid activity of performance course respondents, by course discipline

Similar analysis applied to the employer they reported was involved in their main paid activity (Figure 5.4) showed that almost half of the performance graduates currently obtained the majority of their income through freelance work (hence at least partial self-employment), and that just over 30% were employed by an arts sector organisation. In comparison, amongst production course graduates, a somewhat lower proportion (but still nearly 40%) were predominantly freelance workers and 35% worked for an arts organisation.

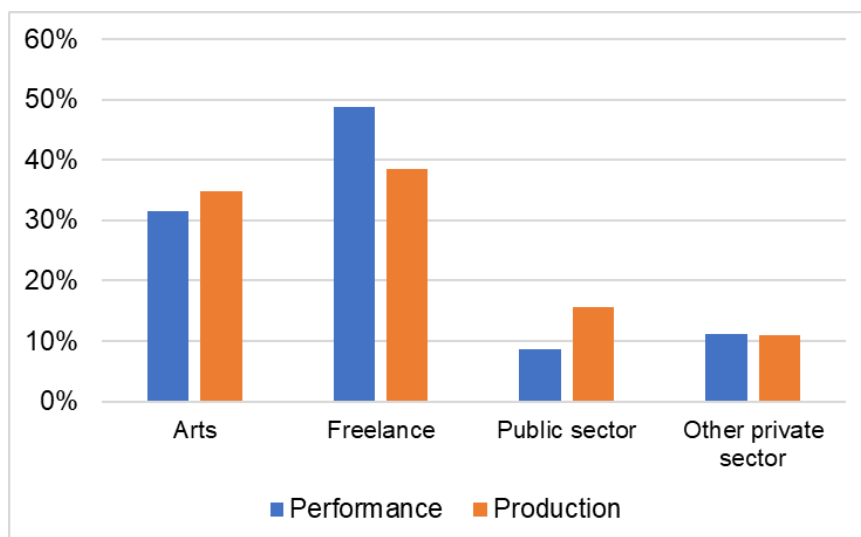


Figure 5.4 Broad sector of main employer for respondents, by broad course discipline

Given the stated interest of the CDD in the outcomes of students from less advantaged backgrounds, in the context of its Widening Access and Success strategy, the current main paid occupations of graduates were also analysed by graduates' backgrounds. This was attempted on the basis of identifying graduates who had been 'first generation HE' (i.e. the first generation in their family to attend university) and also on the basis of classification of the occupations of their parents (i.e. parents who had not been in professional/managerial



occupations). Using the first of these indicators, some difference was seen in the current main paid activity (Table 5.1), with a lower proportion of '1<sup>st</sup>-generation' (less advantaged) graduates being in performing roles and a higher proportion in unrelated occupations. Differences appeared to persist for both those who had studied performance and production courses, which were analysed separately. On the other hand, when the parental occupation was used as an indicator of level of advantage of background, no systematic differences were seen.

	<b>1st generation HE</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Performance course graduates</b>		
Proportion of all graduates	81%	81%
Main paid occupation		
Performance	29%	36%
Related	35%	33%
Unrelated	35%	31%
<b>Production course graduates</b>		
Proportion of all graduates	19%	19%
Main paid occupation		
Technical	58%	63%
Related	3%	11%
Unrelated	39%	25%
<i>N</i>	215	484

Table 5.1 Main paid activity of graduates, by broad type of course and whether or not they were first in family to attend HE

A further analysis was undertaken based on whether the graduate was the first in their immediate family (i.e. parents and siblings) to have studied a performance-related course or not, but this did not result in any significant differences in relation to the main occupation.

### 5.3. Career trajectories

Based on a variety of data collected, it was interesting to note that very few respondents (only about 2% of the total) had never worked in a performance or related role at all since graduation, suggesting that the overwhelming majority had used their training to undertake at least some full-time or part-time work relating to it at some stage, even though for some it may not have been their main income at any point in their career.

Although this was not a longitudinal study, an approximation of career trajectories can be made by assessing the type of current work for graduates at different periods of graduation. Figure 5.5 displays the current main paid work activity for graduates from 2018 and earlier, for all respondents. The trends for each type of work are indicative of the progression of an average graduate over time, from graduation (on the left, 2018) with increasing time (to the right). This shows that the proportion of all respondents who worked as performers peaks a few years after graduation and declines around 10 years after graduation. In contrast, the proportion undertaking related arts teaching rises over time, and ultimately exceeds the proportion performing. These are the broad trends expected, as many performers (particularly in dance) will have a limited performing phase in their career due to physiological and other changes.

On the other hand, the proportions undertaking related work and entirely unrelated work did not appear to change consistently over time.

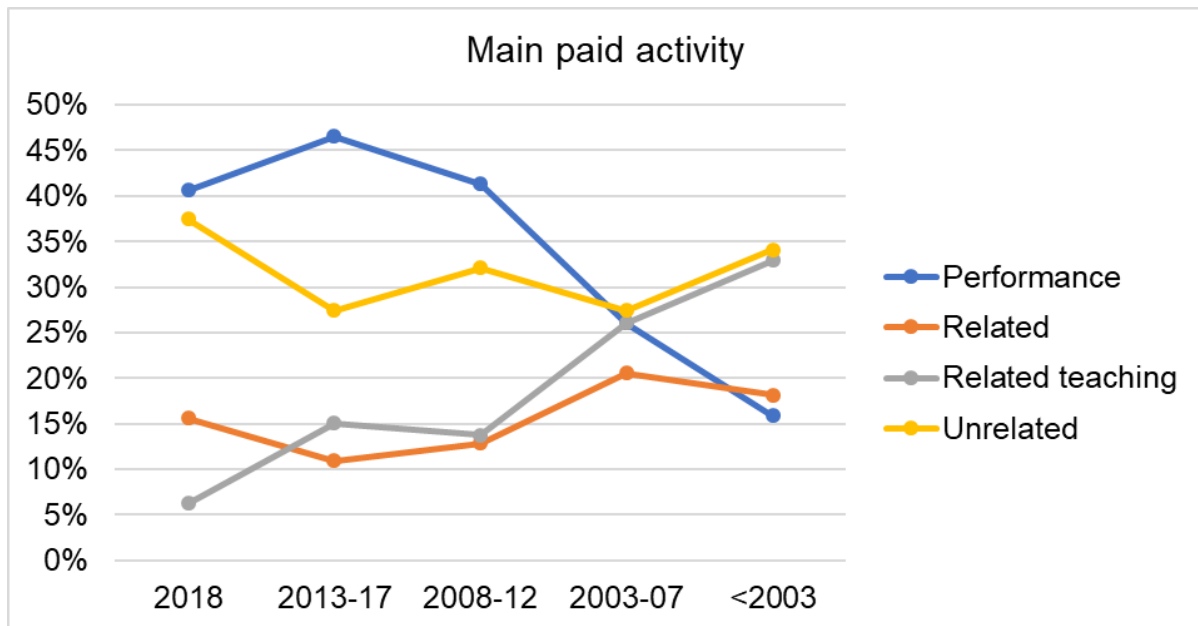


Figure 5.5 Main paid activity for all respondents, with graduation period

Analysis by broad course discipline revealed somewhat different trends (Figure 5.6), although there were insufficient circus arts graduates to undertake such analysis, and results for 2018 graduates have been removed as they were too limited in number to analyse in this more granular way. The categories for type of work have also been aggregated by combining related and related teaching, again due to the limited sub-group sizes. For dance (the artform delivered by four of the six Schools, and which here includes ballet), the proportion working in performance declines strongly from 3-7 years after graduation onwards, while the proportions undertaking related occupations (especially) and unrelated roles rise with time to compensate (Figure 5.6a).

Amongst those who graduated from acting courses (Figure 5.6b), the highest proportion that mainly earn from performance occurs much later, with relatively few able to do this soon after graduation and most having to undertake unrelated work initially.

In contrast, much higher proportions of those who trained on production courses (Figure 5.6c) mainly work in production and technical roles throughout most of their career, although there is evidence for some decline in favour of related work in mid-career.

The main paid activities of performance graduates who graduated in 2018 bore little resemblance to what was observed for 2013-17 or earlier (2018 graduates are omitted from these charts, being a relatively small sub-group). This inconsistency could relate to short-term work being taken on by recent graduates, before they settled into a more established working pattern. In contrast, the main paid activities for 2018 production course graduates (admittedly a small group) appeared to be similar in profile to those from 2013-17, suggesting that they may have moved more quickly into settled work.

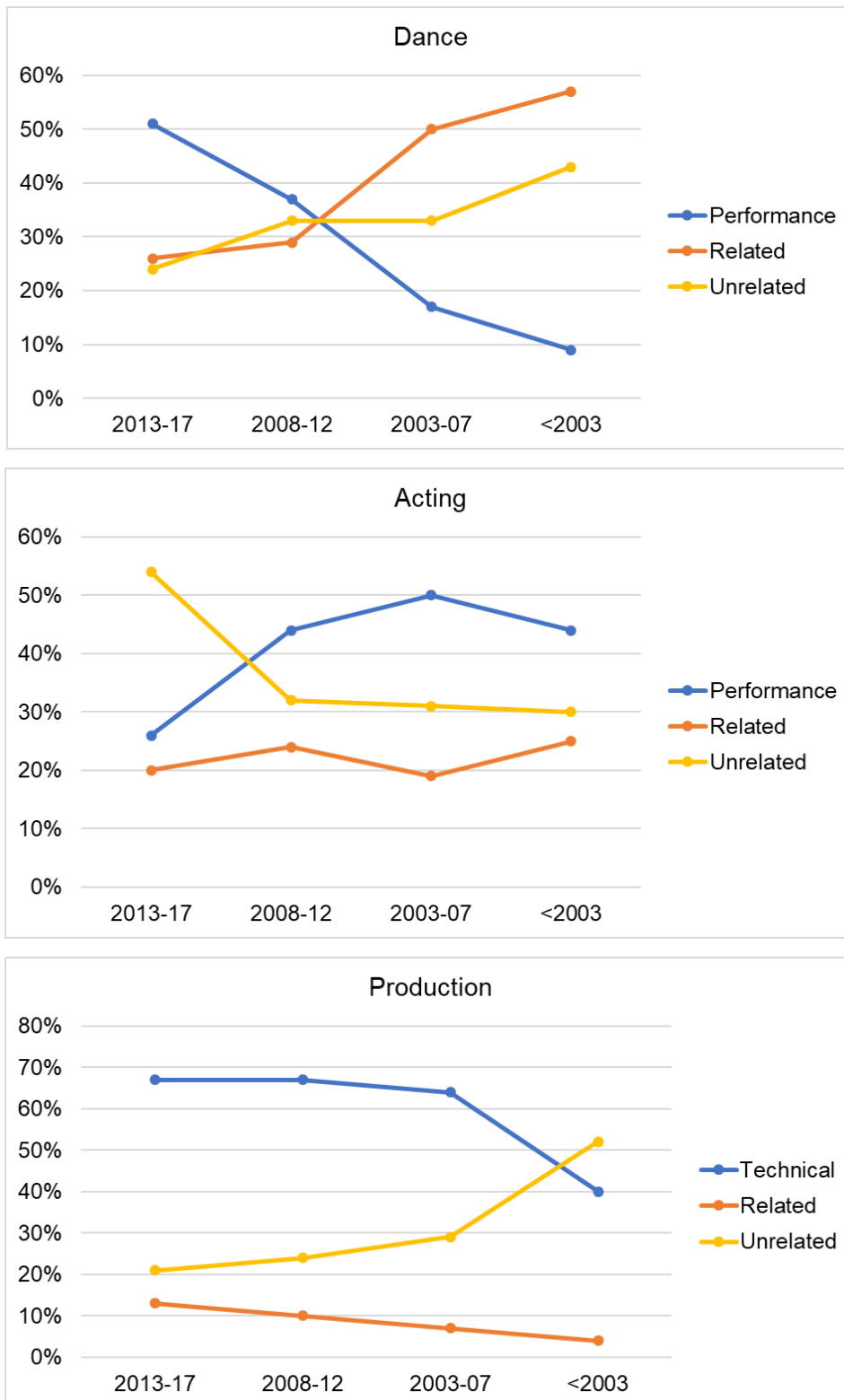


Figure 5.6 Main current paid activity of respondents with graduation period, by broad course discipline

These trends in results seem to confirm previous understanding about career development in different disciplines within the performing arts and demonstrate the complexity of careers that ensue. The proportions of the different groups that obtain employment that is vocationally close to their course, or related to it, vary overall and also change in different ways and at different

rates over time, some remaining vocationally aligned for far longer than others. Longitudinal or in-depth cohort research, rather than this snapshot research with different periods of alumni, would be valuable to understand these career patterns, and what drives them for individuals, more fully. Nonetheless, these initial insights demonstrate that blunt measures of graduate outcomes, such as raw earnings, over time could mask very significant employment changes during a typical performing arts graduate career trajectory.

#### **5.4. Unpaid activities**

The extensive data we collected about respondents' activities included insights into both paid (i.e. work) and unpaid activities within their working lives. With only one third of the graduates in paid work on a 100% basis, there is immediate interest in what else the others do in their working week. Overall, more than 60% of all respondents reported that they undertook some kind of unpaid activity related to the artform or subject that they had studied, which was the vast majority of those who were not in full-time (5 days a week) paid work.

Analysis of unpaid activities was restricted to those who were not in paid work 5 days per week because in the survey we only sought information on activities within a conventional working week or life, i.e. not in their free/leisure time. In this section we do not quote precise results as we suspect that some respondents may have interpreted these questions differently. Self-evidently, those in 100% full-time work cannot also have been undertaking unpaid activity, on this basis. Amongst the two-thirds of the total who were not in full-time paid work, however, almost exactly half reported that they were doing some unpaid work relating to their art, most of whom (c.40%) said that this took half a day per week or more (and 20% saying it was more than one day per week). This was significantly lower amongst the production course graduates although, of course, the majority of those were in full-time work anyway.

Of the performance graduates who were not working full-time, two thirds indicated that they spent significant time doing other unpaid activities to support their working life, including activities like self-promotion, auditioning or taking professional classes or, presumably, practising and physical training. The majority of these graduates spent up to one day per week on this type of unpaid career support activity, and this appeared to be the case whether they were freelance workers or not.

Other categories of activity in which many were engaged on an unpaid basis included teaching (in their artform) and getting involved in amateur productions and other wider activity which furthered their artform one way or another. Up to 30% of all respondents indicated that they undertook at least some extent of unpaid activity of this type, although it is hard to draw boundaries between what might be considered voluntary activity within the working week and what people in other sectors might consider a leisure interest.

The results emerging from the survey are further evidence for the complex and varied combinations of activities that these graduates undertake as they develop careers related to their artform, with several of these types of unpaid activity critical in supporting their progress building and sustaining independent professional careers. Taken together with the type of paid work undertaken, they also show that the vast majority of these graduates currently maintain some active connection with their discipline, with only 30 graduates (or around 7%) having no current paid or unpaid activity related to it.

## 6. Earnings

*“It seems that unless you are part of the few that fly straight out of drama school, you must expect not to earn a living just from acting for some time, and therefore it helps to have more strings to your bow, learn other skills and be fluid and flexible. Also write, direct, produce, create your own work”*

In this chapter we report information provided by respondents about their current income and from those data infer some trends about the earnings of those with performing arts degrees as they progress through their careers. We also highlight the importance of unpaid activities within their lives and the contribution that these make to sustaining their working career and/or engagement with their artform.

### 6.1. Current earnings

Although the focus of this study was intended to be a more rounded view of the career outcomes of performing arts graduates at the CDD, it was felt important to address their earnings, not least to compare what they told us about their earnings in the survey (in the context of the complex work patterns emerging) with earnings data published by HESA and from linked tax records in LEO. Respondents were asked to indicate their total earnings before tax in the previous year and just over 500 graduates did so.

The range of earnings was very wide, from zero to £450,000. Seven individuals reported that they earned £100,000 or more last year. Two individuals with very high earnings – which we were able to validate to some extent, independently – we regarded as outliers, as their earnings were far above any others’ and would have had a material effect on calculations of mean earnings. However, in this analysis we chiefly report median earnings (rather than mean), partly to avoid this problem, and we have also excluded 2019 graduates from this analysis as their earnings in the previous year will have been at the time they were students.

On that basis, the median earnings value for the remaining respondent sample (N=484) was just under £23,000. Amongst those who reported that they were in paid work at least four days per week, i.e. those who were full time or nearly so, the median was £26,500. It should be remembered that this figure is derived from graduates at a wide range of career stages, not just from recent graduates. For comparison, the average annual salary in the UK for all full-time workers was just under £30,000 in 2018<sup>44</sup> (a comparable period to that reported in the survey). Overall, the median figure for these respondents is therefore relatively low, even for those in full-time work, in comparison with other graduates, and lower than for all UK employees, although it could be that reasonable daily earnings rates are being achieved on a part-time basis. Those managing independent, self-employed careers will also have had to spend some unpaid time finding work (through self-promotion, auditioning and so on), so full-time working of this nature is likely to be the exception not the norm.

Figure 6.1 illustrates the distribution of earnings for all respondents, excluding 2019 graduates, showing that 40% earned £20,000 or less in the previous year. It should be stressed that these

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<sup>44</sup> Office for National Statistics (2018). *Employee earnings in the UK: 2018*. Retrieved from <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/annualsurveyofhoursandearnings/2018#analysis-of-employee-earnings>

results are raw and include those working part-time, but this relatively simple analysis enabled comparative analysis between different sub-groups, and over time, whereas restricting it only to full-time earners would reduce those sample sizes dramatically.

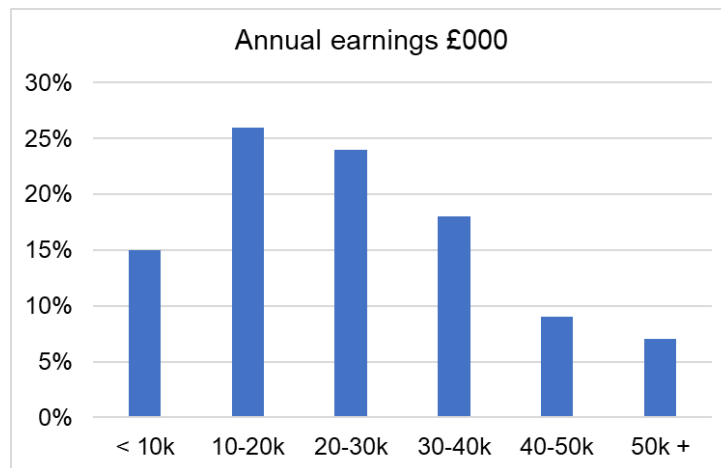


Figure 6.1 Median pre-tax earnings in the year prior to survey, for all respondents (irrespective of whether working full- or part-time), excluding 2019 graduates

With the caveats above, it was possible to compare earnings for graduates across different disciplines (Figure 6.2), employment sectors (Figure 6.3) and over time (in the next section). In Figure 6.2, we can see that there was some difference between disciplines, with production graduates earning the highest. Some caution is needed as these disciplinary groups differed somewhat in relation to their profile in terms of time since graduation; a group with a higher proportion of respondents further into their career could be expected to have a somewhat elevated earnings profile than one with respondents who on average were closer to graduation.

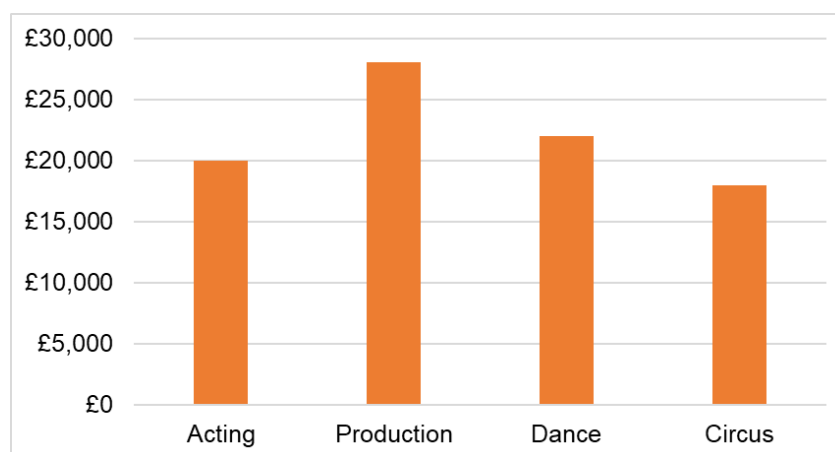


Figure 6.2 Median pre-tax earnings in the year prior to survey, for all respondents excluding 2019 graduates, by course discipline

By sector of current main employment (Figure 6.3), it seems clear that higher earnings were derived by those who had studied production courses and were now in technical roles, and by those in unrelated occupations, while lower earnings were achieved by those whose main paid activity was performing or teaching the artform that they had studied.

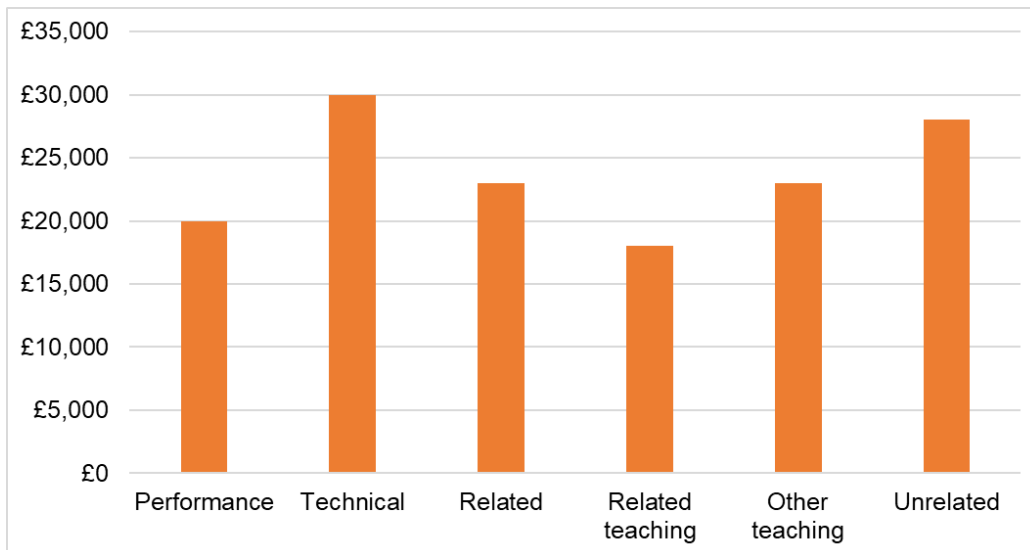


Figure 6.3 Median pre-tax earnings in the year prior to survey, for all respondents excluding 2019 graduates, by broad sector of main employment

Analysis of earnings for those who were self-employed (as their main economic activity) and those who were employees of organisations showed a significant difference, with a median earnings figure of just £19,000 for the self-employed and £25,000 for employees. This difference presumably reflects not only that many of the self-employed were not working on a full-time basis but also that more of those who were employees were concentrated in sectors that on average were better paid (such as technical roles in arts organisations, and unrelated work). It is also worth noting that self-employed people on average earn less than those who are employed, across the economy (including graduates, as evidenced by the slight decrease in overall average graduate earnings in LEO when self-employed graduates are included).<sup>45</sup>

## 6.2. Earnings with career evolution

In the same way that it was possible to investigate career trajectories over time, by analysing the current work of graduates who obtained their degrees from different times, it was possible to gain some insight into how earnings varied as their careers developed. This is potentially interesting in the context that the development and publication of LEO data is providing measures of graduate earnings further into their careers than previous systematic outcomes data such as graduate destinations surveys.

Figure 6.4 illustrates the median and mean pre-tax earnings in the last year of all respondents, which show a rising trend with time (i.e. the current earnings of those who graduated longest ago are the highest). The median is considered to be the more reliable measure where earnings are highly variable, as the mean can be influenced by a small number of 'outlier' figures, as was the case here (had we not removed two exceptionally high earners from the mean calculation, the mean value would have been several thousand pounds higher). This raw analysis takes no account of the complex occupational trajectories described earlier, nor would it be a substitute for systematic longitudinal measures if they were available in a way

<sup>45</sup> Department for Education (2017). *Experimental statistics: Graduate outcomes using the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data – inclusion of self-employment earnings*. SFR 76/2017, 20 December 2017.



that could be related to the different career trajectories of these types of graduates. However, in the absence of the latter, we were able to analyse these data to investigate earnings development in more detail. In the last section of this chapter, we also present them in comparison with LEO data.

However, what is immediately worthy of note is the particularly low earnings reported by those who have graduated recently, which plot below the trend from the remaining data points. 2019 graduates were excluded from this analysis as in the previous year they would have been students (rather than earning as graduates), but the chart suggests that many 2018 graduates were not earning at all strongly during 2018-19 (the period they reported on). It seems highly likely that these low figures for recent graduates result from an incomplete year of earning, and/or that some graduates were yet to obtain sustained income. If so, other reporting of earnings for these types of graduates a year or so after graduation (such as the Graduate Outcomes survey, or LEO) could produce results that are not indicative of stable employment. This suggests that performance graduates' transition to the labour market might take place somewhat more slowly than for other graduates. The entrepreneurial nature of much performance-based work may require graduates to lay more groundwork as they start to earn, in comparison with other graduates who can potentially seek fully paid employment from the day after they graduate.

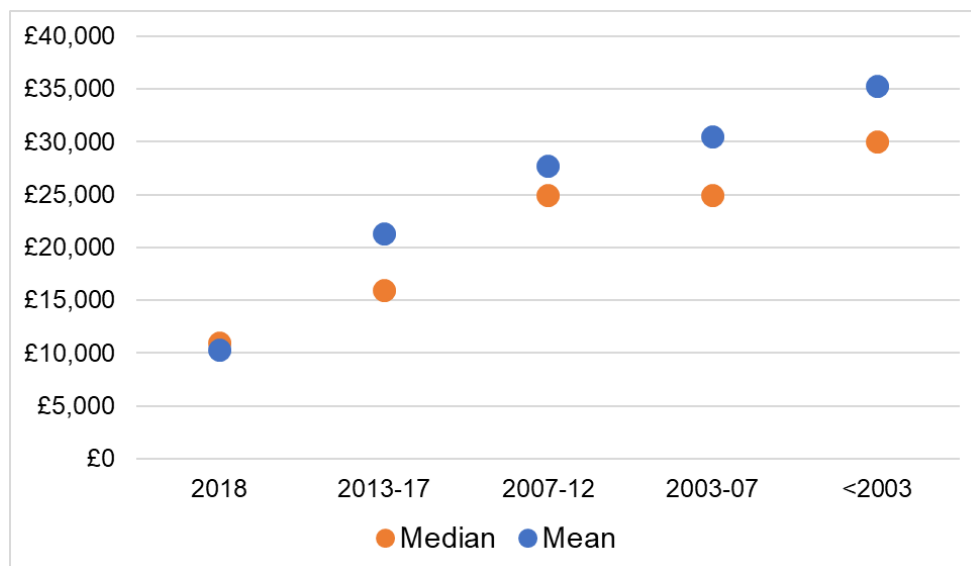


Figure 6.4 Respondents' median and mean pre-tax earnings last year, by period of graduation

It is not possible from the earnings data collected to make robust comparisons with graduate income information for CDD graduates recorded in published LEO data, the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey or the new Graduate Outcomes survey results. Due to the sample size, in this study we have not isolated first-degree graduates separately, for example, nor only UK-domiciles, which tend to be the groupings published by HESA and in LEO. However, with those caveats, our 'snapshot' approach in the survey captured respondents whose years of graduation do deliberately approximate to the years for which LEO data has been published, offering a proxy basis for at least a very rough comparison. Table 6.1, albeit incomplete, suggests that the earnings reported in our survey in the years immediately after graduation are broadly comparable with what has been published to date through LEO, but somewhat higher earnings further into career than LEO has so far identified.

Years since graduation	CDD (survey) <sup>1</sup>	CDD (LEO) <sup>2</sup>	Creative arts (LEO) <sup>2</sup>
	£ 000s	£ 000s	£ 000s
1	12	10.9	14.5
3	16	14.2	18.4
5	25	16.7	19.7
10	26	-	-

Table 6.1 Median earnings for CDD graduate respondents compared with published LEO data.

<sup>1</sup> 2017 graduates used as proxy for 1 year from graduation; 2015 graduates for 3 years etc.

<sup>2</sup> Based on graduation years 2014/15, 2012/13, 2010/11, measured in tax year 2016/17

Analysis was undertaken of the median earnings over time for a variety of broad sub-groups of respondents, including broad course subject (Figure 6.5). Several sub-group sizes were small which may account for some of the irregularity in the trends shown, but the chart appears to demonstrate the most consistent earnings (but with only modest growth) for those who studied production courses. Those who studied dance or acting did see stronger rises eventually but possibly had fluctuating earnings in the first ten or more years after graduation. This could reflect that more consistent earnings are achieved once the graduates rely less upon performance for their main income and increasingly shift towards work that is related or unrelated to their art. It is possible that the downward inflections for the two performance course groups reflect the transition for some from established performance work to alternative sources of income as their careers progress.

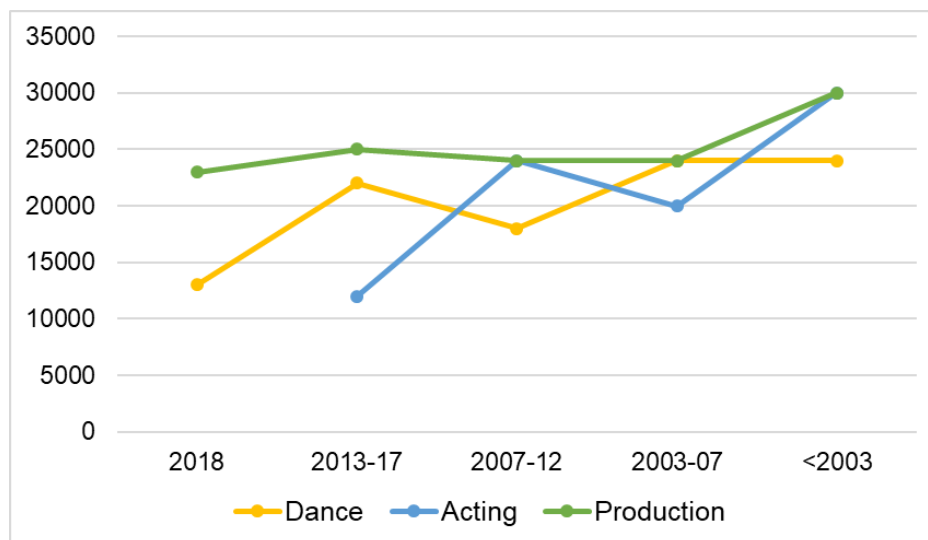


Figure 6.5 Respondents' median pre-tax earnings in last year, by period of graduation and broad subject of study

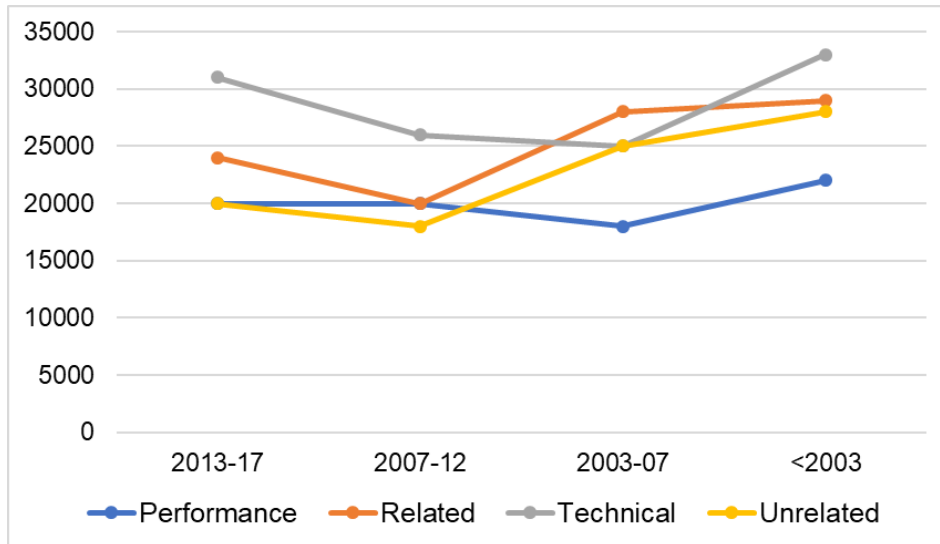


Figure 6.6 Respondents’ median pre-tax earnings in last year, by period of graduation and broad occupational type

A similar treatment by type of current occupation (Figure 6.6) demonstrates the relative weakness and apparent lack of growth of earnings for those whose main work is in performance. The lack of growth could partly relate to a decreasing extent of performance work, while it is still their main activity, further out from graduation, also bearing in mind that the number of graduates in performance occupations is much lower for the earliest graduates, while the proportions of those undertaking related and unrelated roles rise with time since graduation.

Our analysis of earnings did not result in any evidence to suggest that those with less advantaged backgrounds were earning either more or less than those from more advantaged backgrounds, based on the two different indicators of background used (1<sup>st</sup> generation HE, and parental occupations). Unfortunately, the sample sizes were insufficient to undertake this type of analysis by background while also simultaneously controlling for factors like occupational type and time since graduation, which would be a more robust approach to this type of analysis. That type of analysis could be valuable if, at some stage in the future, samples of large enough size could be obtained.

## 7. Considering graduates' career success

*"I am now the Head of Ballet at a large ballet school overseas. I am hoping to continue my career in another country soon, eventually have my own school and eventually become an RAD examiner. I dance weekly with a contemporary dance company. It works out eventually!"*

In previous chapters we have highlighted that most CDD graduates believed they had undertaken useful learning whilst they studied in higher education and also developed their career capital. We have also detailed that these graduates are almost all in paid work currently and that almost all of them continue to practise in the artform in which they originally trained, albeit not always on a paid basis. However, our discussion has also highlighted the complex and often fractured nature of performing arts careers. Many graduates are entrepreneurial careerists who are often engaged in multiple forms of work, both paid and unpaid, and whose employment often looks very different from traditional forms of graduate career. Finally, we have looked at these graduates' incomes and noted that many of them report relatively low incomes in comparison with many of their graduate peers. However, these salaries are explained to some extent by the sectors in which they work and the self-employed and frequently part-time nature of their work.

In this chapter we look at the career success and satisfaction of the graduates. To explore this, we identified a series of key components of career success. Figure 7.1 sets out the key concepts that we used and explains what we were investigating in relation to each of these.

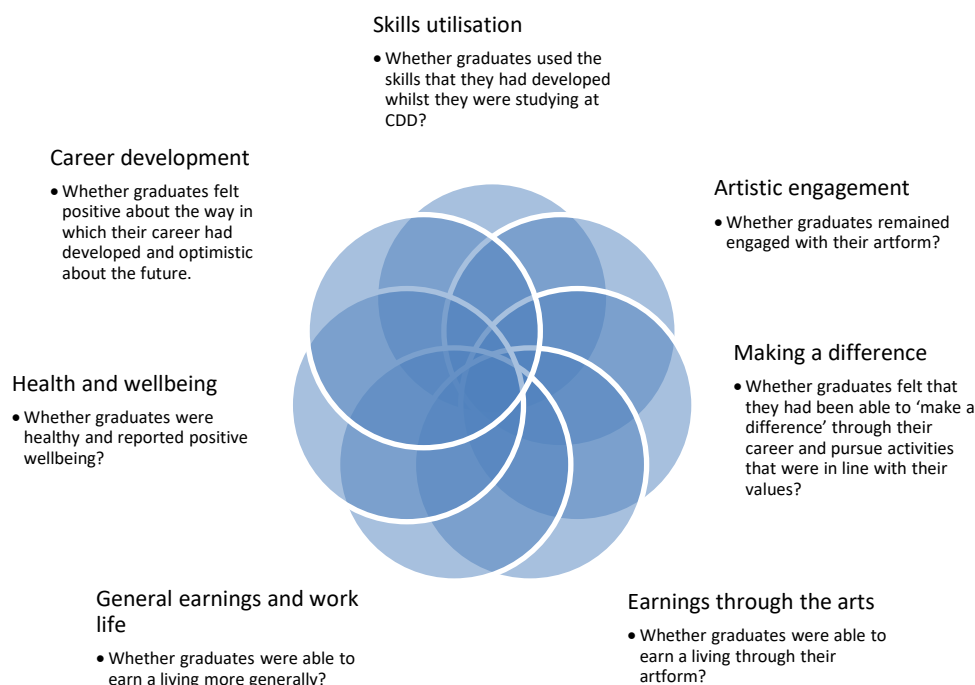


Figure 7.1. A conceptual model of graduate career success

One way to view this model of career success is as a single measure, with those who agreed with more statements and reported greater levels of success in all of the areas judged to be the most successful. However, this single measure of career success does not chime with the

experiences that the graduates reported in the survey. It was clear that there were a variety of ways in which CDD graduates pursued their careers and consequently a variety of ways in which career success could be described. Given this, it is better to view these areas as a series of domains within which graduates could be successful. While success in more domains is desirable, it may not be realistic to be successful at everything. This is particularly the case as the previous chapters have shown that there can be tensions between areas such as engagement with artform and achieving higher salaries.

It is important to recognise that this is a subjective model of career success. We have already discussed more objective measures of employment and earning and used an approach based on the graduates' recall to assess the extent of development of their skills and knowledge while at their CDD School. These more objective measures are useful but not sufficient to measure success. For example, consider one graduate who is a high earner but is very unhappy with their salary and compare them with another who is a more moderate earner but is satisfied with their salary. In such a situation it becomes a philosophical debate as to who is the more successful. The approach we have developed seeks to capture all of these factors and allow institutions and policymakers to view a range of objective and subjective measures together.

### **7.1. Measuring career success and satisfaction**

Respondents were asked in the survey to indicate the extent to which they agreed with a series of 28 statements designed to explore their success and satisfaction in relation to the key concepts set out in Figure 7.1. Table 7.1 lists the specific statements that were used to explore career success and satisfaction with the graduates in relation to each of the concepts. Respondents were asked how far they agreed with each of the statements and a numerical value was allocated to each possible answer (5 – strongly agree, 4 – agree, 3 - neither agree nor disagree, 2 – disagree, 1 – strongly disagree). Thus, a score of 3 is essentially neutral, and a score of over 4 represents overall strong satisfaction. The values for each of the statements were then summed up to give an overall score for each of the concepts for the respondent sample being investigated.

Although an immediate idea of their thinking can be gained purely from the numerical mean values in Table 7.1, Figure 7.2 gives more detail by illustrating the proportions of all respondents who strongly agreed and agreed with the statements, ordered by the proportion who strongly agreed, i.e. listing the statements with which most agreed at the top. This depiction shows that respondents were most positive about enjoying their work, continuing to engage with their artform, and using and sharing their skills, as well as with their relationships in life. As many as 80% agreed or strongly agreed with many of these statements including, notably, that they considered their course had played a positive role in their career. It is also worth noting that 80% of graduates agreed with the statement that they were happy with the career decisions that they have made, with only 5% disagreeing with this (the remaining 15% being neutral about it). This is a key insight in terms of judging the level of subjective success reported by the graduates and in terms of their assessment of the value of CDD in propelling them onto their career path.

The only statements with which under half agreed were in relation to either earnings or the extent to which their artform was part of their working life. Figure 7.2 also shows, with few exceptions, the low proportions of respondents who actively disagreed with the statements; these were exclusively for statements about earnings or being able to work in their artform.

Construct	Statement	Value
<b>Skills utilisation</b>		4.04
	I use the artistic/technical skills developed during course	4.06
	I use the wider skills that I developed during my course	4.04
	I use the subject/disciplinary knowledge learnt during course	4.01
<b>Artistic engagement</b>		3.80
	I am involved in the subject or artform studied through course	3.95
	I work regularly as a performer, creator or production professional	3.48
	I have been able to help shape/develop my subject/artform	3.55
	I continue to develop and learn in my subject/artform	3.96
	I share knowledge of my subject/art with other people/communities	4.04
<b>Making a difference</b>		3.71
	I make a positive contribution to my local community	3.77
	I think my work is in line with my values	4.13
	I spend time volunteering for things I believe in	3.22
<b>Earnings through the arts</b>		3.01
	I can earn enough to live on through work in my artform/subject	3.15
	I earn enough to live the way I want to through my artform/subject	2.79
	I will continue to earn a good living through my art/subject in future	3.03
	I am happy with balance of art/performance in working life	3.05
<b>General earnings and work life</b>		3.67
	I think I am paid fairly	3.43
	I earn enough to live on	3.56
	I enjoy my work	4.30
	I am happy with balance of paid and unpaid work in my life	3.39
<b>Health and wellbeing</b>		3.90
	I am happy with my relationships and/or family life	4.19
	I have good mental health	3.83
	I have good physical health	4.09
	I am satisfied with my work/life balance	3.49
<b>Career development</b>		4.02
	I have been able to build a good career since I graduated	3.98
	I think the course has played a positive role in my career	4.04
	I am happy with the career decisions I have made	4.07
	I am optimistic about my career	3.98

Table 7.1 Concepts of satisfaction and statements used within them, with mean numeric values for all respondents

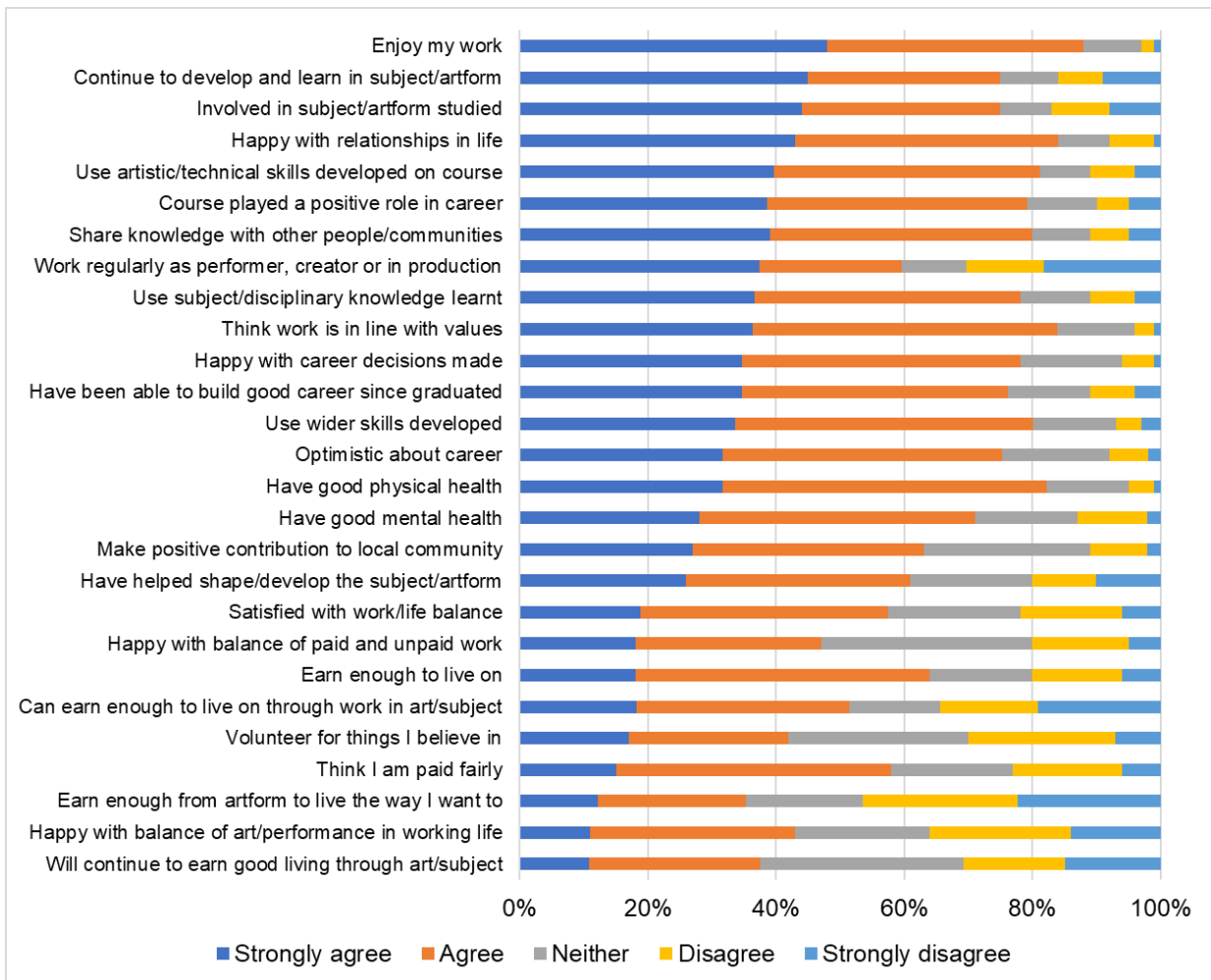


Figure 7.2 Respondents' extent of agreement with statements in Table 7.1, ordered by proportion in strong agreement

As was the case in Chapter 4, applying numeric scores to these results enables more detailed analysis to be undertaken for various sub-groups within the response sample. Figure 7.3 introduces this style of depiction for all graduates who studied performance subjects and those who studied production courses. Their scores are actually mostly very similar, with the performance graduates showing slightly higher satisfaction in skills, artistic and wellbeing constructs, but both types having very marked low values for earnings related to the artform/subject. What this chart masks, however, is some extent of variation between the different artforms; Figure 7.4 suggests that those who pursued acting courses tended to score lower on almost all constructs than those who studied dance or circus courses, including in relation to earnings.



Figure 7.3 Mean numeric values for career satisfaction concepts, for all performance course and production course respondents

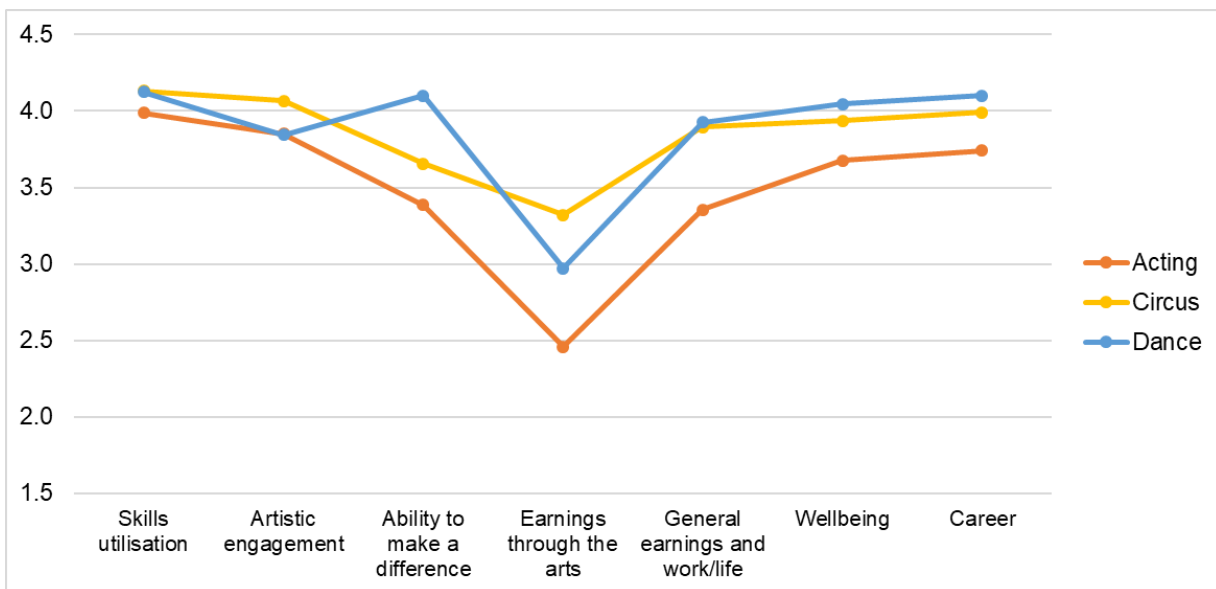


Figure 7.4 Mean numeric values for career satisfaction concepts, for performance graduate respondents by main course discipline

In Figure 7.5, this analysis is presented for the different broad occupational groupings from which respondents obtained most of their income. Unsurprisingly, this does show some distinct variances. Predictably, those who were currently performers or in technical roles scored particularly highly in relation to use of their skills, engagement with their art and overall career, while in contrast those in unrelated occupations scored generally lower for many constructs and especially those relating to the artform that they had studied. It is also perhaps interesting that those in unrelated occupations did not score particularly highly in relation to general earnings.



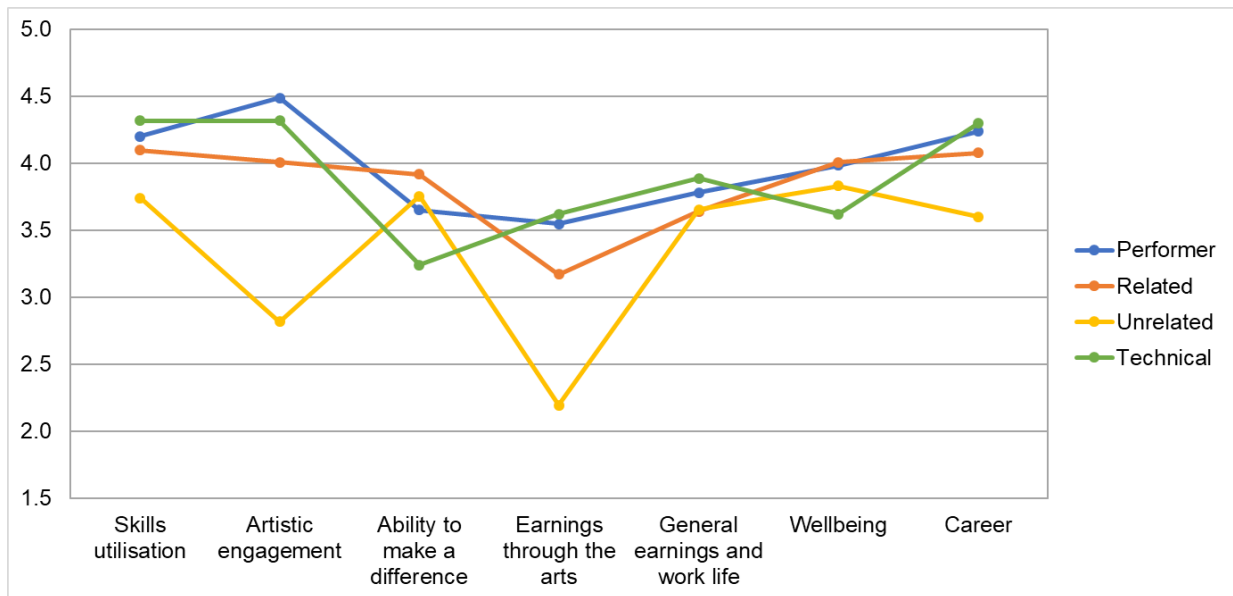


Figure 7.5 Mean numeric values for career satisfaction concepts, by type of occupation from which respondents obtained most of their income

It was also possible to apply this analysis to respondents who had graduated at different times (Figure 7.6). In this case the style of the chart has been reversed, with time since graduation from left to right on the x-axis, as used previously to look at career trajectories, and the constructs plotted as separate trends. The analysis was applied to the entire respondent sample in order to keep group sizes adequate.

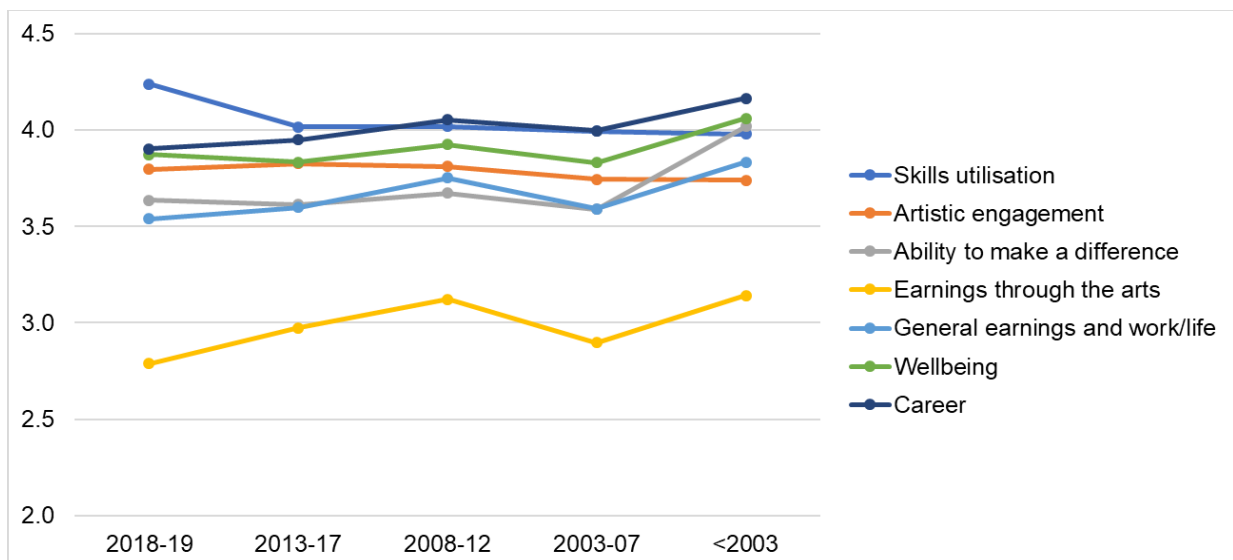


Figure 7.6 Mean numeric values for career satisfaction concepts, by respondents' year of graduation

This analysis shows that, overall, there is some apparent decrease in satisfaction in relation to artistic engagement and the use of specialist skills over time, which could be expected as many graduates do move out of performing roles as their careers progress and an increasing number enter unrelated occupations. On the other hand, scores on earnings and work-life balance improve with time. Importantly, both wellbeing and overall career satisfaction scores tend to rise slightly with time. The overall career score above 4.0 in mid-career should be welcomed (given that a score of 4.0 on this scale indicates a positive level of satisfaction) and the presence of such scores for several constructs as these graduates reach mid-career are particularly to be welcomed.

There is also some evidence in Figure 7.6 of possible stages of a performing arts career, with several constructs on a rising trend to a peak at around 10 years after graduation, and then declining for five or so years before rising again into mid-career. Such a pattern was also discernible in the analysis of annual earnings, so again the trend could reflect the significant number of graduates who initially undertook performance roles but after around 10 years had to adjust their career trajectory. It is possible that it takes some years for a graduate to adjust and settle in a new direction, which could account for the slight declines in satisfaction constructs temporarily at this time, before rises are seen again into the longer term (perhaps once they are more settled in their new occupational direction and potentially begin to appreciate some of its benefits).

It would be interesting to see if these sorts of trends are replicated for more recent cohorts of graduates as they progress towards mid-career, through similar analysis of data obtained in future surveys tracking graduates.

Interestingly, there was some evidence to suggest that graduates who were from less advantaged backgrounds tended to have just as, or even more, positive perceptions of their career satisfaction as others. As Figure 7.7 demonstrates, the mean values for graduates who reported that they had been first generation HE students were either similar to or above those for other graduates.



Figure 7.7 Numeric values for satisfaction concepts, with whether graduate was a first generation HE student or not

These differences were most pronounced in relation to their overall earnings and the extent to which they felt they were contributing to society, and to a lesser extent to in relation to how they felt about the earning power (or lack of it) that their artform brought them. The two earnings-related differences could reflect that their financial expectations were lower than those of graduates from more advantaged backgrounds. Qualitative research would probably be necessary to investigate why such differences emerged.

## 8. Conclusions

*"I am so lucky and privileged to [have] my job, but it is a struggle to keep going. I probably can't stay in it long term if I am to have a family, or buy a house, or maintain (or just see) my family and have social life. Most of my energy is put into making it keep going. Money isn't that important to me, but friends who didn't go into the arts started earning £25,000 straight out of uni and it has taken me six years to get near that. My earnings have now plateaued. And I am very aware I'm one of the lucky ones who works a lot and earns well at my level!"*

This chapter summarises the key findings of our study and reflects on the substantive findings as a way of challenging some of the negative public narrative that has developed about creative arts degrees and especially their value. It is clear that pursuing creative arts study is not a fast track to vast wealth. This fact has been well established in previous research and is confirmed by this study. However, it is possible to argue that this finding says a lot about the way in which contemporary society values, organises and rewards the arts and very little about the value of the courses which train students in these fields or the success of the graduates who pursue these courses.

This study has explored the careers of students who have graduated from the current CDD Schools over the last thirty years. While the limitations of the alumni data held by the Schools prevented us from gaining a fully representative sample of these graduates, the size of the sample and breadth of the respondents that we obtained can be viewed as strongly indicative of the experience of graduates from these Schools.

Respondents reported that during their time at a CDD School they experienced a range of opportunities to learn and develop their careers and successfully built their career capital. In particular they developed a range of technical and artistic skills and knowledge, built professional networks and gained a more realistic insight into what a career in performance or production might hold. They also provided useful insights into how these courses could be improved as a preparation for a career and argued that there would be value in developing more alumni networks and provision to support graduates after they have left the CDD.

Almost all of the graduates from CDD Schools were employed when surveyed, and almost all of them remain actively engaged with their artform or subject. However, their working patterns are very complex and this near-universal employment or engagement with the arts does not necessarily mean that all graduates are earning their living solely or mainly from that art. Only a minority of graduates work full-time for a single employer and while two thirds do work 4+ days per week, many of them do this by combining multiple roles and often on the basis of entirely or partly freelance work and self-employment. Running an independent freelance performance career requires unpaid effort (promotion, auditions and managing business affairs) and this helps to explain why traditional full-time employment (i.e. five days per week) is relatively uncommon. The complexity of the portfolio careers that performing arts graduates build is often difficult for conventional graduate surveys to capture and may also lead to an incomplete or difficult to interpret picture when salary metrics like those in the LEO are used.

Performing arts graduates' careers are not only complex on a day-to-day basis, they are also dynamic over time. Overall, roughly one third of performance graduates are primarily engaged in performance work, one third related and one third in unrelated work. But this pattern shifts over time with the proportion of performers gradually decreasing over time, especially in some disciplines such as dance. The career pattern of production course graduates is more stable

with around two thirds primarily engaged in directly related technical or production work, but the proportion in this type of work also declines over time to some extent. As people leave performance or production work, many move into related areas such as teaching the discipline or artform, but a growing proportion also move into unrelated fields. There are probably a range of reasons why this gradual bleed of graduates out of performance takes place. Some of it may be accounted for by physical ageing, and this is likely to be particularly true for highly physical performance roles in dance, but other reasons may include a desire for higher income, more consistent income and/or greater career stability.

Turning now to look at earnings, it is clear that performance graduates are less likely to achieve high incomes than other graduates. However, the range of earnings is large and there is a minority of performance graduates who go on to be very high earners. In general, earnings are low partly due to the sector that most graduates choose to work in, partly because many do not work full-time and partly because there is a high proportion of self-employment and portfolio work. Across their careers, these graduates progressively see their income increase, with an important factor being the shifts, as described above, in their main source of income away from purely performance roles.

This research provides useful context that helps to explain why some of the employment and salary outcomes that are often used to judge graduate outcomes suggest that creative arts courses are not valuable. It shows that it is not very helpful to compare performing arts graduates, or performance-focused courses, against highly paid degree cohorts such as those found in economics or medicine. Performance and performance-related employment, and the stages that these graduates' careers go through, are very different from traditional expectations of what a graduate career looks like. Comparing this cohort with other subject disciplines is therefore problematic and without an understanding of disciplinary context such measures become very limited as judgements of graduate success or the quality of courses or institutions.

To address this we have developed a new measure of career satisfaction which asks students to provide their own subjective feedback on their career success across seven domains (skills utilisation, artistic engagement, making a difference, earnings through the arts, general earnings and work life, health and wellbeing, and career development). In general, CDD graduates reported high levels of career success across most of these domains (the major exception being 'earnings through the arts' about which they were neutral rather than negative). It is also important to note that almost all of the CDD graduates are happy with the career decisions that they have made (only 5% stating that they were unhappy with them).

In general, our findings pull against reductive measures of programme quality or graduate success that reduce everything to a single score. There is a strong rationale for providing people who are embarking upon a particular course or career with insights as to how that career is likely to unfold. There is also value in understanding career pathways more clearly in order to support graduates within particular disciplines to transition effectively and build successful careers. We would argue that reducing this to an abstract score on course quality or to a single metric like salary does not provide students with sufficient information to make meaningful course choices. As this research shows, many graduates from CDD Schools believe themselves to be successful in multiple respects, even when they pursue complex and unconventional careers (compared with others'). We believe it is important that in the future the richness of graduates' career stories is made available to inform career decision-making and assessments of the relative value of different careers.

## 9. Recommendations

The research presented in this report tells a specific story about the careers of graduates after they leave the CDD Schools. However, as we have already argued, these stories are taking place in a context which is defined by the Schools where the students study, the sectors where the graduates work and the political and economic context which shapes both higher education and the labour market. In this final chapter, we draw out some of the implications of this research for CDD, other providers of creative arts degrees and the wider HE sector.

### 9.1. Recommendations for the CDD and other performing arts providers

Our first set of recommendations is offered to the CDD itself as well as to other providers of performing arts degrees. While there is much to celebrate in the existing provision, graduates also raised a number of issues which it would be useful to respond to as providers develop their programmes.

- 1. Improve the generic career support offered to current CDD students as well as enhance the delivery of performance-/production-specific career support within courses.** As we have seen, building a career within the arts is challenging for all graduates. Given this, there is a clear case for increasing the focus on career development within performing arts programmes. There is a need to improve access to professional career guidance and actively increase students' awareness about the wider labour market, the opportunities within it and how they can use their skills to access non-performance roles. Alongside this more generic career support it is also important that students are provided with more specific support that addresses the particularity of building a career within their performing arts discipline. While some is already provided, this should be enhanced to cover the spectrum of practical issues faced by performers within their careers ranging from succeeding at auditions to dealing with tax returns to organising a portfolio career.
- 2. Review and improve pastoral support with a particular focus on supporting good mental health.** The transition to HE can be a stressful one for all students. Many respondents revealed having to deal with challenging mental health issues whilst they were undertaking their studies. Providers should review how mental health is addressed and strengthen the wider pastoral support that exists in order to support student transitions, wellbeing and success.
- 3. Establish or enhance alumni associations and transition support for graduates.** Many graduates found the transition to the labour market challenging. There is some evidence in this study that labour market transitions are particularly difficult for performance graduates and that the duration of those transitions may be more extended than for other graduates. Graduates were keen to access support both from their peers (e.g. through an alumni association) and from their former School. Given this, providers should consider how more support can be extended beyond graduation to aid graduates in making these transitions. A key part of this is likely to be improving the collection and management of alumni data as both networks and further provision are dependent on knowing where alumni are and maintaining a dialogue with them.
- 4. Commit to a regular longitudinal tracking exercise and make careful use of this data as part of institutional quality assurance and improvement agendas.** This study has provided a rich insight into the careers of performance and production graduates. However, it remains a limited snapshot, with many of the findings based on a series of cohorts graduating in a particular labour market context (most notably the 2008 financial crash

which took place in the middle of the period we were studying). We have learnt a lot through this study and believe that there would be value in institutions (possibly a wider group of performing arts focused institutions than just the CDD Schools) committing to a regular study (for example, every three years) of this nature. Furthermore, there are a range of more detailed insights that could be explored at the institutional and disciplinary level. It is important that the CDD maximises the use of the data that it has collected and acts on the insights that are revealed.

## **9.2. Recommendations for the higher education sector**

The second set of recommendations is offered to the higher education as a whole and to the policy-makers and regulators who are shaping it.

5. **Broaden the way graduate career success is understood.** This research provides a clear example of some of the problems associated with reductive definitions of graduate success. Graduate success needs to be understood as multifaceted rather than reduced to one or two measures of labour market positioning. While information about salary and employment rates is important this needs to sit alongside other kinds of information about the successes that graduates achieve. Many performing arts graduates are successful in pursuing their vocational calling professionally and report high levels of subjective career success. This needs to be factored into thinking about how outcomes from programmes are understood and communicated. We do not believe that compositing all of the different forms of success into a league table or single score offers the best way to communicate the complexity of graduate success, but where this is done it is important that such assessments recognise subjective measures of career success alongside easily measurable labour market outcomes.
6. **Ensure that the complexities of employment status are recognised.** Traditional survey questions about employment status and salary assume that graduates will be employed, in a single job and working full-time. This research shows that this is not the case for most performing arts graduates. Given this, it is important both to ask more subtle questions and to interpret any data that is gathered carefully. Understanding the sectors in which people work, the number of hours they work per week and whether they are self-employed or are portfolio working are all essential to meaningful use of employment and salary metrics.
7. **Recognise the specificity and unique contribution made by performance graduates.** Existing debate around graduate success tends to view all degree pathways as the same and to judge success in the same way for all of them. This research demonstrates why this is difficult; if we judge performance graduates on the same criteria as economics graduates it is unsurprising that they may not do so well. There is a need to view different degree pathways within their own terms and to construct success criteria that are meaningful to graduates on that pathway. This is particularly critical if measurements of graduate outcomes are intended to serve as a measure of programme quality.

## **9.3. Recommendations for the performing arts sector**

The focus of this report is on the supply side of the labour market. We are primarily interested in how graduates move into and through the labour market and how higher education providers can enhance this process. However, the research also raises some questions for employers within the performing arts sector.

8. **(Re)consider the forms of employment that are used within the performing arts sector.** Many of the forms of employment that are offered at present are precarious and lowly paid. One result of this is that much high-quality talent leaves the sector within five to ten years of graduation. There would be value in a project, led by performing arts employers, to consider what can be done in terms of contractual arrangements, pay and long-term career support to improve the way in which the demand side of the performance labour market is organised.

#### **9.4. Recommendations for researchers**

Finally, it is useful to consider what further research is needed to understand more fully the careers of performing arts graduates and graduate success more widely.

9. **Undertake this kind of broad graduate success research with a wider range of graduates.** This report has focused on performance and related production graduates as an obvious group for whom present conceptions of graduate success are inadequate. However, it is possible that there are other disciplines that also see their graduate deviate substantially from assumed career scripts and that even within more conventional disciplines not all students are following the assumed script. Furthermore, it would be useful to have comparator data on the subjective measures proposed here to see whether performance graduates are typical or atypical in their tendency to report high career satisfaction and wellbeing.
10. **Undertake further research to explore the career pathways of performance graduates.** This study has provided us with a useful snapshot of the career pathways of performing arts graduates. In recommendation 4 we argue that CDD and other providers of performance-focused education should come together and commission this kind of research every three years. In addition, we think that there would be value in some deeper research which improves understanding of why we see some of the patterns that we do in performing arts graduate careers. Such research would ideally take the form of a large-scale longitudinal study which combined quantitative and qualitative elements. Another alternative would be to conduct life history research, within specific cohorts, as a follow up to this study and ask participants to provide further insights on why they made the decisions they did (such as to become self-employed, move into teaching or leave performance) at the point they made these decisions.



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