

Career-Ready: Bridging the employability skills and confidence gap

The role of music and performing arts education in developing the transferable life skills that matter most for work readiness and career success





Foreword

At its heart, the creative and performing arts are about people: the stories we tell, the connections we build, and the skills we develop along the way. They bring joy and inspiration, but they also do something else often overlooked - they power economies, create jobs, and through their teaching methods, prepare individuals with the very skills that employers value most.

The global creative industries are valued at US\$2 trillion and support around 50 million jobs¹. For every dollar invested, the sector returns more than double in economic value globally. These numbers are impressive, but what excites me most is what's behind them: a steady flow of global talent shaped by education in music, communication, drama, and performance - and increasingly, by applying these performance-based teaching methods across all subjects.

Through these disciplines and their pedagogical approaches, learners build capabilities that go far beyond the arts. Creativity, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, empathy, and resilience - these are the human skills that are in demand, and that organisations everywhere need to thrive.

As technology and AI accelerates and automation reshapes industries, it is these human skills that will increasingly define the future of work and ensure our economies grow and our societies are connected.

This new report, based on an expansive survey with teachers and young people, explores their perspectives on how performance and creative education builds the skills that help learners be ready and confident to start work, and keep learning for life. The evidence shows that students who experience these teaching methods - whether through dedicated arts subjects or integrated into other disciplines - demonstrate significantly higher workplace confidence.

Teachers tell us they value performing arts education and want to do more to grow these skills but often lack the time and resources. Young people strongly agree but many are entering the workplace unprepared and anxious, needing more chances to develop, practice and showcase they can apply these skills in the real world. Performance and creative qualifications and education activities - whether in music, drama, or dance - can offer exactly that.

At Trinity College London, we support educators and learners in developing human expression and building these capabilities. Our syllabuses and assessments are designed to recognise technical and academic capabilities but also embed these wider human transferrable skills. And while education policy continues to evolve, one thing is constant; the need for fair access to performance and creative learning, and for trusted ways to demonstrate progress in the skills that matter most.

In England, the government's decision to scrap the English Baccalaureate and dial up music and drama within the national curriculum signals a watershed moment for creative education. The new curriculum framework explicitly recognises creative and performance subjects with equal status alongside humanities and languages. This policy shift validates our research evidence: that performance and creative education is not supplementary, it is core and essential to building both creative and work-ready skills.

Education in the creative and performing arts fuels more than artistry. Our research highlights its critical role not only in sustaining a world-class sector, but in shaping the confidence and human skills that every employer is asking for. Investing in creativity and creative teaching methods is not a cultural luxury, it is a strategic imperative.

We look forward to working with you in supporting the next generation transition into the workplace confidently and equipping them with the tools to succeed.



Erez Tocker
Chief Executive Officer
Trinity College London

¹<https://www.ifc.org/en/what-we-do/sector-expertise/creative-industries>



Executive summary

The creative advantage - how performing arts education builds workplace confidence and readiness

1. A critical skills gap threatens workplace readiness.

Two national surveys of 1,538 Gen Z individuals and 803 secondary school teachers reveal a work preparedness divide. Only 48% of teachers believe students leave school well-prepared for work, while only 54% of Gen Z feel ready. This gap masks deeper anxieties about even the most basic of workplace interactions.

2. Gen Z's top workplace fears centre on human skills.

Before entering work, 42% worry about working with unknown people, 38% fear face-to-face small talk, and 30% experience phone anxiety. These concerns about communication, teamwork and social fluency directly align with the skills employers increasingly demand most.

3. Performance and creative education offers a proven solution. Students who participated in music, drama, or dance education, beyond compulsory schooling, demonstrate significantly higher workplace confidence and readiness for work. Performance and creative arts students feel more confident and better prepared for work (65% vs 46%) and show stronger belief in their transferable skills (96% vs 86%). This “confidence shield” reduces anxiety across all workplace scenarios, with young people that had some performance and creative arts education 14 percentage points less likely to worry about sharing different opinions and 12 points less anxious about presenting work.

4. Teachers recognise performing arts education's power but face systemic barriers. An overwhelming 92% of teachers want schools to do more on transferable human skills development. High percentages believe that performance and creative arts education builds essential teamwork (87%) and communication (85%) abilities. However, they report significant obstacles. Funding limitations (46%), curriculum constraints (44%) and staffing shortages (36%) prevent expansion of such skills-focused teaching.

5. Music and Performing Arts - subject-specific evidence demonstrates consistent benefits. Teachers and young people are in strong agreement on the value. Teachers agree that music education develops creativity (82%), concentration (77%), and resilience (76%). Drama education excels in building communication skills (84%), while dance education strengthens adaptability (77%) and teamwork (81%). These subjects provide structured, repeated practice in the exact behaviours and skills employers value most.

6. The economic case is clear. The global creative industries are valued at US\$2 trillion, support around 50 million jobs, and play a significant role in fostering more resilient and prosperous economies, reducing social inequalities, and driving innovation.¹ With employers expecting 39% of workers' core skills to change by 2030⁴, schools investing in human expression via performance and creative arts-based education are building the people skills the global economy needs, beyond the creative sector across all industries.

7. Immediate action is required. Building a fair, inclusive, and high-quality system for music and performing arts education requires alignment between curriculum, assessment, and opportunity.

In England, the Curriculum and Assessment Review provides education policy makers and educators with the opportunity to protect and extend performance and creative learning opportunities and pathways, use structured assessments to evidence skill development and focus on school-to-work preparation to address the specific anxieties Gen Z report.

We now urge the UK government to act swiftly and decisively to implement the Review's recommendations, and to address the practical conditions that must underpin their success: teacher supply, sustainable funding, and equitable access. The new curriculum framework confirms what this research demonstrates: performance and creative education isn't an optional extra. It's essential preparation for work-readiness and career success in a rapidly evolving economy.

Main findings

The work-ready gap is real, but young people still back themselves

The preparedness gap: teacher and student perspectives



Teachers reporting students are well prepared for work

48%

vs



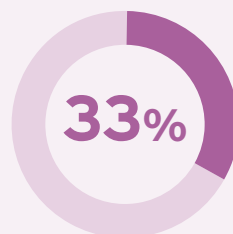
Gen Z saying they feel well prepared for work

54%

Fewer than half of teachers surveyed feel students are leaving school well prepared for working life. Forty-eight percent (48%) say students are very or quite well prepared, with only 15% choosing very well.

On the Gen Z side, 54% feel well prepared, combining those who feel ready and prepared with those mostly ready. Seventeen percent (17%) say school left them underprepared for transition to the workplace.

But readers need to approach this data with care as it tells two stories that can both be true. Teachers sense a system level problem and want more room to build life skills. Young people are more positive about what they can do, yet a sizeable minority are not confident and do not feel ready for the world of work.



Job requirements are shifting quickly

Lightcast estimate that the Top 20 skills for the average job have changed by about 33% since 2021, underscoring the need for adaptable, transferable skills⁵.

⁵Lightcast (2025). The Speed of Skill Change

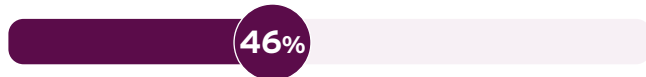
Performance and creative study after the compulsory years is linked with higher skills and work-ready confidence

The performance and creative education advantage

Feeling well prepared for work



Performance and creative arts students



Non-performance and creative arts students

Believing they have transferable life skills

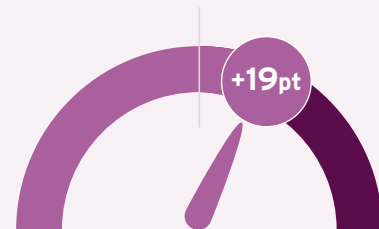


Performance and creative arts students



Non-performance and creative arts students

The case for prioritising and continuing to study music, drama, dance or creative subjects is strong. Those Gen Z respondents who kept studying performance and creative subjects beyond the compulsory years, alongside other subjects, report a stronger sense of preparedness for work (19 percentage points higher) and higher confidence across a suite of transferable human skills. More than nine out of ten performance and creative arts students say they have the transferable life skills to succeed, compared with four in five of those who did not. Where students choose to stay active in performance and creative education, they gain confidence and practice in the life skills that matter.



Work-readiness advantage

Performance and creative arts students feel **19 points** more work-ready than their peers