

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



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

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How to read this report

The analysis that follows interweaves student and teacher voices and perspectives to reveal both opportunities and challenges in confidence and preparedness for the transition from education to work. Each section examines specific transferable human skills – such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability – through the lens of performing arts-based, creative education practice.

Subject-specific deep dives on music, drama and dance demonstrate the role and how these disciplines develop the precise behaviours and capabilities employers seek. The final section outlines Trinity College London's assessment approaches as one model for evidencing transferable skills development and assessment, offering tools for educators seeking to track progress and recognise these important life skills.

Throughout, the report focuses on actionable insights for classroom teachers, school leaders and education policy makers seeking to strengthen the school-to-work transition through creative, performance arts-based education.



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.



Introduction

Skills for a rapidly changing economy

This new research² examines the specific contribution of music and performing arts education to developing transferable life skills that employers identify as essential for career success. It brings together comprehensive survey evidence from both Gen Z and teachers to understand where performance and creative education intersect with workplace readiness.

Throughout this report, 'performance and creative education' encompasses music, drama, dance, and visual arts - the four creative subjects covered in both surveys. We use this term interchangeably with 'performing arts' to reflect Trinity College London's (Trinity) focus on performance-based learning that develops artistic skills, transferable human skills and workplace capabilities.

Research methodology

Two complementary surveys underpin this analysis. The Gen Z survey covers 1,538 respondents aged 16 to 29, with 78% currently working and 22% still in education in the UK. Among the Gen Z respondents, 65% continued with some performance and creative education beyond compulsory years alongside other subject areas, with the most common activities being learning an instrument (26%), drama (20%), visual arts (20%), dance (19%), and choir/band participation (16%). These students were not exclusively studying arts subjects but rather incorporating some performance and creative education within a broader curriculum. The sample also includes representation from both state (78%) and independent (20%) school backgrounds, broadly matching UK sixth form demographics.

The teacher survey covers 803 secondary school educators from across all subject areas and across state, grammar and independent settings, with balanced representation between classroom teachers (60%) and those in senior leadership roles in schools and colleges (40%).

This dual perspective allows for a direct comparison between young people's self-assessment and professional educator observations, revealing both the convergence and divergence in perceptions of workplace readiness.

International policy context

This research also reflects broader economic and policy trends. International bodies continue to flag the importance of human skills alongside technical ones in a labour market shaped by technology and organisational change. The OECD's Creative Minds in Action (2025)³ extends PISA's creative-thinking work and offers practical insights for teaching and analysing creative responses in educational settings, while the World Economic Forum⁴ identifies creative thinking and resilience among the capabilities rising fastest in importance.

International policy increasingly recognises performance arts as foundational rather than supplementary. India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 positions music, dance, and theatre at the heart of a holistic, multidisciplinary curriculum, explicitly linking creative practice to critical thinking and cultural identity.

In the United Kingdom, the Creative Industries Sector Vision and the new National Centre for Music and Arts Education in England reaffirm the arts as an essential component of national education policy, connecting creative learning to wellbeing, social mobility and economic innovation.

In November 2025, the government published its Curriculum and Assessment Review response for England, scrapping the English Baccalaureate performance measure. While its original intent to promote academic breadth was well-meaning, the unintended outcome has been to narrow curricular choice and marginalise the creative and performing arts. The new national curriculum, to be implemented from September 2028, establishes creative arts with equal status to humanities and languages and introduces a core enrichment entitlement spanning arts and culture so young people can access and benefit from the full cultural and creative breadth that the Curriculum and Assessment Review envisions.

These examples illustrate a policy momentum shift which sees performing arts education not only as enrichment, but as a strategic investment in human potential that drives both social cohesion and the human skills that build sustainable growth.

²The research behind this report was carried out online by Perspectus Global during June and July 2025 for Trinity College London (Trinity). Not all percentages will add up to 100 due to rounding

³OECD (2025). Creative Minds in Action: Students' imagination and ideas in storytelling, design and problem-solving tasks on the PISA test

⁴World Economic Forum (2025). The Future of Jobs Report 2025

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



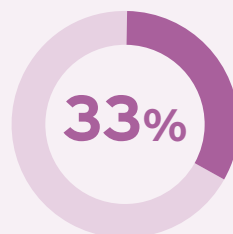
Gen Z saying they feel well prepared for work

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

Main findings

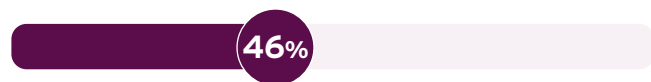
Performance and creative study after the compulsory years is linked with higher skills and work-ready confidence

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

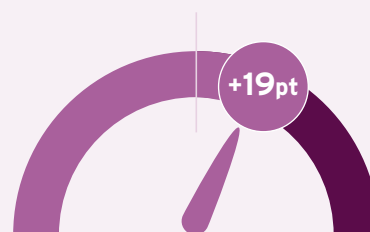


Performance and creative arts students



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

Communication and social fluency are top priorities, and they are where anxiety shows

Communication Skills: **teacher** and **student-perspectives**

Teacher perspective:



Agree **performance and creative education** develops communication and social fluency



Rate communication skill development by subject:

Drama education



Music education



Dance education



Gen Z perspective:



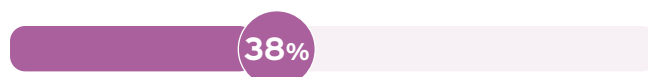
Rate **communication** as **top skill** needed for the next decade



Worry about working with unknown people



Are **anxious** about face-to-face small talk



Experience **phone anxiety**



Top communications and social fluency workplace anxieties for Gen Z that are still in education

Working with unknown people

42%

Having to do face-to-face small talk

38%

Phone anxiety

30%

Speaking up

30%

Presenting work

25%

Accepting criticism

22%

Being enthusiastic at work

22%

Communication is the top skill rated for Gen Z over the next decade, selected by almost half as important for career success, followed by collaboration, teamwork, problem solving and critical thinking. And while confidence levels are relatively consistent, there is a sizeable minority with insecurities in their abilities. Six in ten (60%) feel extremely or very confident in communication, compared to 65% for teamwork and 63% for problem solving.

Anxiety peaks around social and live interactions. Before entering work, two in five worry about working with people they do not know, more than a third about small talk, and three in ten worry about phone calls.

Teacher perceptions align on the challenge and on the remedy. More than eight in ten agree performance and creative education plays a significant role in developing communications and social fluency, and a similar amount say it builds teamwork.

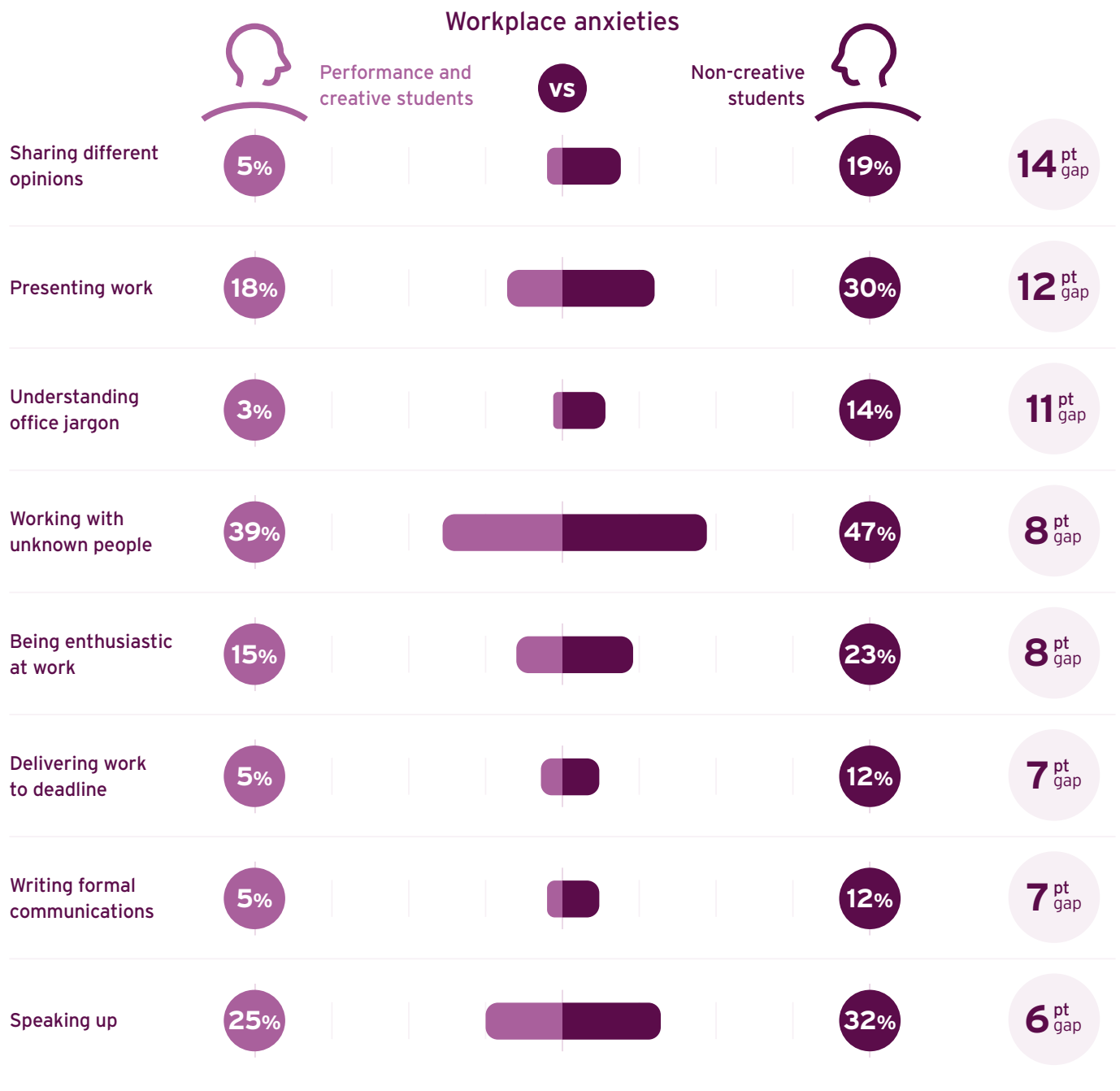
Starting work reduces these concerns but doesn't eliminate them. Among Gen Z already working, one in five cite working with people they do not know as an ongoing challenge. A similar percentage mention small talk and a quarter still report phone anxiety.

For teachers, communication is rated as one of the easier skills to assess, but many still report difficulty assessing social fluency in a classroom context.

This assessment challenge creates problems for both educators and employers. Teachers struggle to document these skills reliably, while employers cannot easily identify which candidates actually possess them. This highlights why structured performing arts education with formal assessments that integrate transferable life skills development are essential when selecting education programmes and qualifications.

Performance and creative education acts as a confidence shield

The performance and creative education "protection effect"

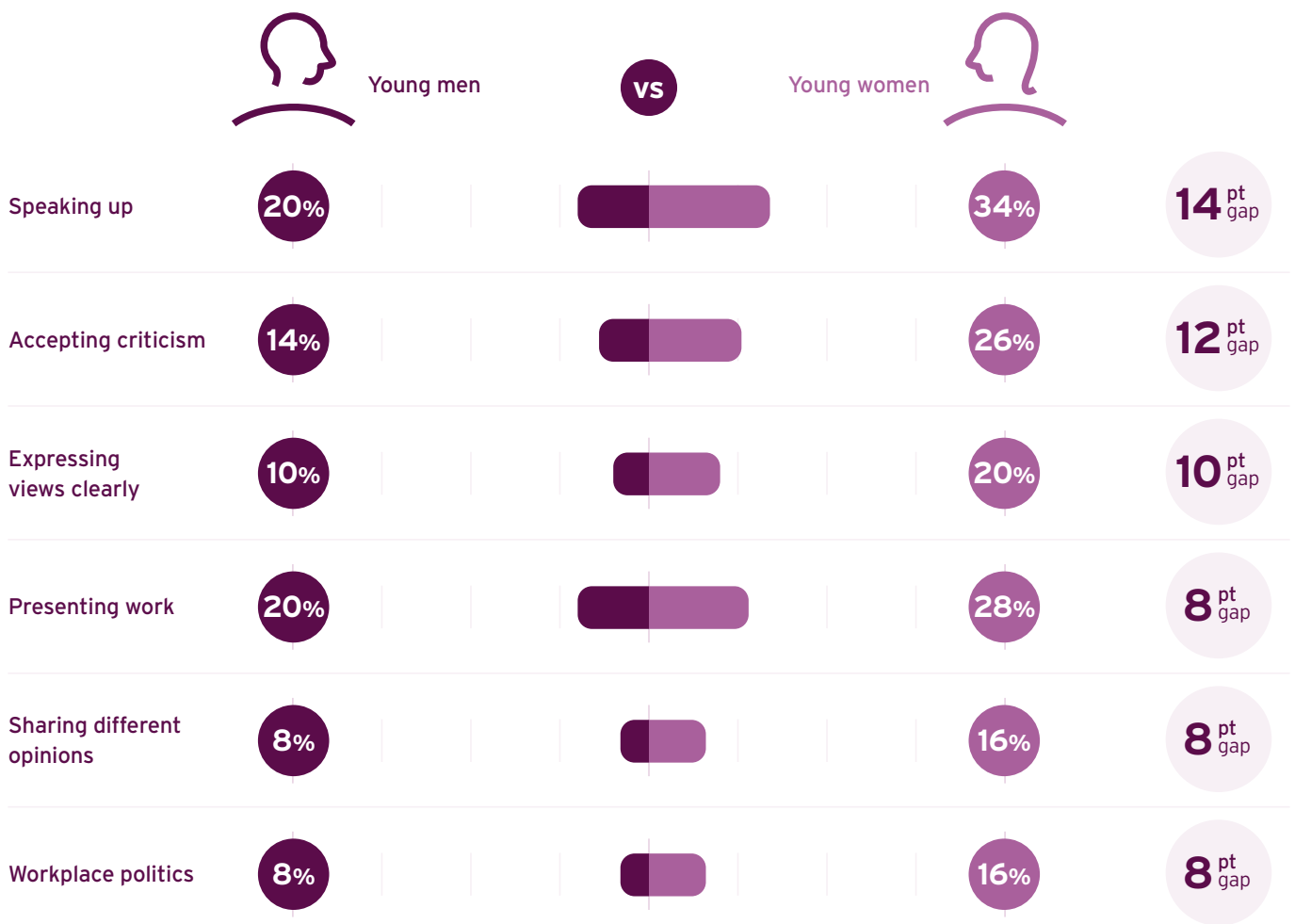


The data reveals a striking pattern. Performance and creative education appear to act as a "confidence shield" against workplace anxieties. Students who continued with performance and creative subjects alongside others beyond compulsory years report significantly lower concerns and anxiety across multiple workplace scenarios.

The gaps are substantial. Performance and creative arts students are less likely to worry about sharing different opinions, less anxious about presenting work, and more comfortable with office jargon. This protection effect extends across practical workplace challenges, from presentations and meeting deadlines to collaborating and formal email writing.

Gender differences require targeted support

Workplace anxieties



Young women report significantly higher anxiety about key workplace interactions. The gender gaps are most pronounced in areas where performance and creative education excels – speaking up, presenting work, accepting criticism and expressing views.

These areas of highest gender anxiety align directly with the core strengths that performance and creative education can deliver. Teachers report that drama education develops

communication skills (84%) and social fluency (78%), while the structured feedback and public presentation elements common to music, drama, and dance all provide repeated practice in the exact scenarios young women find most challenging. The research suggests that performance and creative education may offer particularly valuable preparation for addressing these gender-specific workplace confidence gaps.

Teamwork and collaboration is valued, leadership confidence lags

Teamwork and leadership skills

Gen Z confidence levels:



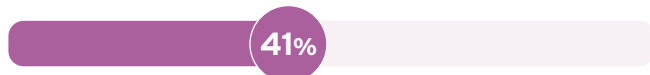
Teamwork: 65% feel extremely/very confident



Leadership: Only 54% feel extremely/very confident



Priority gap: 41% prioritise leadership for career success



Teacher perspective:



Say creative education builds teamwork skills



Say creative education builds leadership and influence skills



Teamwork and collaboration is central. Gen Z rate it highly and feel strong in it. Almost two thirds feel extremely or very confident about their teamwork skills. Leadership tells a different story. Two in five place leadership in their priority list, but only half feel highly confident about it.

Teachers see a route forward in performance arts participation. Almost four in five say performance and creative education builds leadership and influence skills, and nine in ten say it builds teamwork and collaboration. This suggests that the collaborative yet leadership-rotating nature of creative activities - from ensemble work to group performances - provides the kind of opportunities that help develop both skill sets simultaneously.



Problem solving and creativity work together

The creativity-problem solving connection

Gen Z perspective:



Rank problem solving in top 3 skills for career success

42%

Feel confident in their problem-solving abilities

63%

Prioritise creativity as important for their career

35%

Feel confident in their own creativity

51%

Teacher perspective:



Say performance and creative education develops creativity

88%

Say it develops problem solving and critical thinking

74%

Say confident students leave school with adequate creativity levels

69%

Problem solving ranks among Gen Z's top three career priorities, while creativity sits much lower in their estimations. Students don't connect creativity with problem solving, even though teachers see creative tasks as analytical skill-building in action. Just a third of Gen Z prioritise creativity as a career skill, compared to two in five for problem solving - revealing a disconnect between what students value and what they're actually developing.

This perception gap suggests students may not recognise their analytical work in creative subjects as "problem solving," while teachers understand that creative tasks inherently develop decision-making abilities under pressure. Schools can bridge this divide by explicitly connecting creative processes to workplace problem-solving scenarios, helping students recognise the transferable value of their

creative work. Performance preparation demonstrates this perfectly. Working to a deadline while considering others' views and representing varied ideas requires problem-solving, creative thinking, and communication skills in tandem.

Students who continue with performance and creative education alongside other subjects report higher confidence in both their creative abilities and problem-solving skills compared to peers who stopped performance and creative study after compulsory years. This confidence advantage suggests that the repeated experience of navigating creative challenges - where there's rarely one "right" answer - builds comfort with ambiguity and analytical thinking that transfers directly to workplace problem-solving.

Main findings

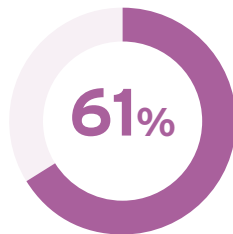
Adaptability and resilience are needed, and many students practise them in performing arts settings

Adaptability and resilience skills

Gen Z perspective:

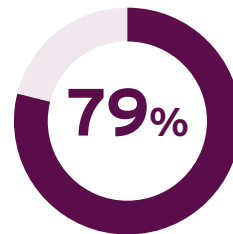


Rank adaptability and learning agility as important for career success

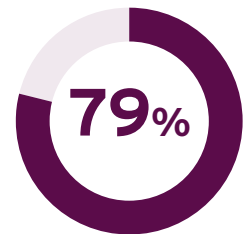


Feel strongly about their resilience capabilities

Teacher perspective:



Nearly 4 in 5 say performance and creative education builds resilience



The same proportion say performance and creative education builds adaptability and flexibility

Gen Z recognise resilience as essential, with nearly two-thirds feeling confident in their capabilities. Teachers agree that performance and creative education provides opportunities to build this quality. Learning a new piece of music, preparing for a performance and assessment, or working through choreography all require students to persist through difficulty, accept imperfect attempts and develop tolerance for setback. The structured feedback cycles common to music, drama, and dance normalise learning from setbacks as part of progress rather than failure.

Teachers find human skills significantly harder to assess than technical academic ones. More than a quarter (28%) struggle to reliably evaluate resilience and adaptability in classroom settings, while communication and teamwork prove more manageable to assess. This assessment gap creates problems for both educators trying to document student progress and employers seeking entrants to their talent pool with proven transferable human skills.

Main findings

The school to work handover: Barriers and pinch points

Teacher-reported barriers to developing transferable life skills

Funding limitations

46%

Curriculum constraints

44%

Staffing constraints

36%

Assessment pressure

36%

Systemic issues

31%

Parental expectations

29%

Training gaps

28%

Political policy

26%

Leadership priorities

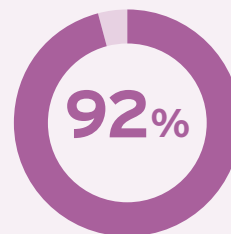
21%

Governing body resistance

20%

Teachers overwhelmingly agree and report the value of transferable life skills and want to do more. Ninety-two percent (92%) say schools should do more to teach and develop transferable life skills. But they report extensive barriers. Funding is cited by 46%, curriculum constraints by 44%, staffing by 36% and assessment pressure by 36%. These are system issues, not individual will. The same teachers still report strong improvements over the last five years across most skills, which shows effort is already under way.

The research also shows overwhelming agreement within the teaching profession for the role performance and creative arts education can play in building these essential transferable skills. Almost nine in ten (87%) of teachers concurring in the value for developing teamwork and communication skills alone. This evidence underscores how creative subjects are not peripheral but central to developing the human capabilities that underpin employability and lifelong learning.



Teachers want to act

Nine in ten teachers say schools should do more to teach transferable life skills

The OECD's 2025⁶ review of teenage career preparation reports very high levels of career uncertainty among students internationally. This is another reason that explains why educators and schools feel a growing responsibility to strengthen transferable skills and work awareness within their curricula.

Main findings

The assessment challenge - why traditional evaluation methods fall short

The difficulty in measuring these transferable capabilities highlights why structured performance education has a key role and matters. Where traditional classroom assessment struggles with skills like resilience and leadership, performance-based learning provides authentic opportunities to observe and evaluate these competencies in action through rehearsals, feedback cycles, live presentations, recorded performances and specialist qualifications.

Performance builds resilience through repeated practice under realistic conditions. Students must remember lyrics, lines, and technical details while knowing their performance may be imperfect, overrun, or require repetition. This creates environments where resilience develops naturally.

Students learn to pivot when things go wrong, iterate until they improve, pick up from any given point, and treat mistakes as normal parts of learning rather than failures. These recovery skills - alongside the confidence to keep going despite setbacks - transfer directly to workplace challenges.

Top 7 skills teachers find hardest to assess

Resilience

28%

Adaptability and flexibility

26%

Leadership and influence

23%

Creativity

22%

Concentration

22%

Social fluency

22%

Problem solving and critical thinking

20%

Culture and conduct at work

Language matters. The survey used the term “workplace banter” to probe perceived appropriateness. Half of Gen Z in work consider elements of banter inappropriate, and 72% report having experienced inappropriate culture or banter in the workplace. This is one reason social fluency, communication and confidence to speak up are not optional extras. Drama and music education and practice, with steady feedback, assessment and safe challenge, can help young people develop judgement in how they participate and respond.

Performance subjects and activities also allow students to engage with older materials and contexts that may no longer reflect modern values. Through drama and music repertoire, students explore themes that were common and accepted at the time of creation but require critical examination and interpretation today. This helps build resilience, cultural understanding and the ability to engage thoughtfully with difficult material. All are capabilities that benefit both individuals and wider society.

Opinion

The performance and creative arts advantage

Ask any employer what makes a new starter stand out and you will often hear the same set of skills: clear communication, effective teamwork, reliable follow through, the ability to handle change, and the confidence to question. These life skills are learned through practice. And that is where creative education plays a critical role.

In a rehearsal room or studio, students build these habits every week. They learn to listen, to adjust, and to give their best under time pressure. They learn to reflect, accept advice, try again and improve. They learn to turn individual effort into a shared result. For many students this is the first space where their voice feels both heard and responsible. The same behaviours show up later in a team meeting, a client call or a project or shift handover.

But this is about more than outcomes and benefits for any individual student. As education systems worldwide grapple with curriculum reform and evolving accountability frameworks, creative education offers a sophisticated solution to modern workforce development challenges. Where traditional academic assessment struggles to capture and validate human skills, performance-based learning and assessment provides authentic evidence of capability.

Our survey reveals a critical alignment between what employers need, what students value, and what teachers know works. Yet systemic barriers have prevented schools from acting on this knowledge. In England for example, the government's Curriculum and Assessment Review response seeks to address some of these barriers directly. By scrapping the EBacc and granting creative and performing arts GCSEs equal status with humanities and languages, the curriculum framework recognises creative and transferable life skills development within, rather than alongside, core educational frameworks. The new enrichment entitlement recommended reinforces that creative and performance education develops capabilities essential for both economic competitiveness and social cohesion.

For parents concerned about their children's career readiness, performance and creative education provides measurable progress in communication, collaboration, and adaptability. For employers frustrated by skills gaps in new starters, performance-trained students bring proven experience in feedback integration, deadline management, and collaborative leadership. For policymakers seeking

cost-effective workforce development, creative education delivers multiple outcomes through integrated pedagogy.

The assessment complexity that often concerns stakeholders actually becomes one of performance and creative education's core strengths. When students prepare for a musical or dramatic performance, they simultaneously develop technical competence and professional skills and behaviours. The resulting qualifications provide employers and universities with reliable evidence of both subject knowledge and transferable capabilities.

This matters for national competitiveness. Teams work better when people can listen, communicate clearly, organise themselves and adapt to change. Those habits are formed long before a first job title. When education systems protect and prioritise performance and creative learning for all, they are not preserving tradition for its own sake. They are building the human infrastructure that enables economic adaptability and social cohesion using proven routes to develop highly valued skills.

Trinity champions that all young people should have access to high quality performance and creative arts education for its own merits: to enjoy the disciplines, to develop undiscovered talents and interests, and, if desired, to enter one of the many creative professional industries.

Equally, the evidence from our research is clear. Structured performance and creative education activity provide exactly the kind of authentic, repeated practice that transforms anxious and unconfident school leavers into confident workplace contributors. Trinity's role is to champion human expression and help education leaders implement this understanding within contemporary assessment frameworks, giving learners portable proof of capabilities that matter for their future success.



Dr Eleanor Andressen
Chief Academic Officer
Trinity College London

Music findings

The role of music education

Music education uniquely balances two modes of learning. Solo practice demands self-direction, attention to detail and individual accountability. Ensemble work requires listening, coordination, and collective responsibility. Students must often excel at both simultaneously - a combination that mirrors the modern workplace where professionals must deliver their own work while contributing to team outcomes.

Teacher ratings of skills developed through music:

Creativity

82%

Concentration

77%

Resilience

76%

Teamwork

74%

Adaptability

74%

Communications

74%

Time management

69%

Social fluency

69%

Problem solving

67%

Leadership

66%



Building focus, discipline and collaborative excellence

Music lessons and ensembles offer repeated, structured chances to practise the behaviours employers name as important. Students commit to a programme, work to deadlines, prepare for performance, receive feedback and adjust. Teachers confirm this picture in volume. Four in five say music develops creativity. Three quarters say it builds concentration, resilience, teamwork, adaptability and communication. Two thirds say further benefits include time management, social fluency and problem solving.

Music's economic impact

In the UK alone, music industry contributed £7.6bn GVA in 2023 and supported 216,000 jobs, representing not just economic value but cultural soft power extending Britain's influence globally.⁷



£7.6bn
contributed



216,000
jobs supported

The economic and cultural context

Music represents humanity's first and most universal form of communication, predating spoken language and transcending cultural boundaries. Access to musical education can be viewed as a fundamental right. It develops cognitive, social, and emotional capacities that are essential for human flourishing.

Some students pursue performing as a career, others enter related fields like production or teaching, many simply enjoy lifelong participation, and all benefit from the transferable life skills developed along the way.

How music builds workplace-ready skills

Deadline management: Music education operates on strict timelines. Concert dates, exam schedules, and ensemble rehearsals cannot be moved. Students learn to work backwards from fixed deadlines, managing practice schedules and preparation time. This mirrors project management in any professional setting.

Feedback integration: In music, receiving and acting on feedback is constant. From weekly lessons to masterclasses, students learn to hear feedback and critique as an improvement opportunity. They develop resilience to setback and the discipline to iterate until the required standard is reached.

Collaborative leadership: In ensembles, every musician must balance individual excellence with group responsibility. A first violin carries melodic leadership while supporting overall sound. A rhythm section provides foundation while allowing soloists to shine. These dynamics directly translate to professional teamwork where individuals must both excel in their role and serve collective goals.

Performance under pressure: Whether performing for an examiner, in a school concert, or at a competition, music students regularly experience high-stakes evaluation. They learn to manage nerves, maintain concentration despite distraction, and deliver their best work when it matters most. These are core workplace competencies.

⁷UK Music (2024). This Is Music 2024.

The practice room as skills laboratory

Daily practice develops micro-skills that build into major strengths. Working through a difficult passage teaches persistence and problem-solving. Memorising repertoire builds concentration and attention to detail. Playing with others requires active listening and real-time adjustment. Preparing for performance develops confidence, time management and pressure response.

“My current path as a software developer and my musical journey may not seem relevant but they are. I had to have discipline and perseverance to learn and prepare for the music exams, similar to the tech industry where you strive to get your foundational skills, to then develop them. I learned how to collaborate and communicate well when playing in ensembles. Similar to working on a project with others at work I need to use these same skills for it to be successful. But most importantly, resilience. You make mistakes as you practice but the important thing is to continue in order to learn and improve, and the tech industry is the same - you learn from your mistakes and your next project or product is an improvement.”

Adrian Dsouza - Trinity Grade 3 Electronic Keyboard and Grade 2 Music Theory

The education to work transfer effect

Gen Z behaviour supports the case for music as a training ground. Beyond the compulsory years, 26% continued with an instrument and 16% with choir or band. In general, 71% of Gen Z respondents agree that music, drama, visual arts and dance education help people feel more confident and ready for the workplace.

Research shows that students who continue with musical study report higher confidence across all transferable skills compared to those who do not. This correlation suggests that the habits formed in musical practice - persistence, attention to detail, collaboration, and performance confidence - create a foundation for success in both work and life.

Music education - the confidence effect

(22pt)

22-point higher confidence in finding creative solutions

65%

Performance and creative students

vs

43%

Non-performance and creative students

36%

of Gen Z continued with music education beyond compulsory years

Opinion: Music

Music education is far more than a cultural asset – it forms part of a country's infrastructure, fuelling one of the world's most dynamic industries. But the talent pipeline begins in schools, youth ensembles and community spaces – many of which remain vulnerable to inconsistent provision and curriculum marginalisation.

Trinity welcomes recent policy moves such as the UK's National Plan for Music Education, the continued support and funding for Music Hubs and proposals for a National Centre for Music and Arts Education. These signal renewed ambition and better recognition for the role of music in both education and economic strategy.

In England, the Curriculum and Assessment Review response marks the most significant policy shift for music education in over a decade. The explicit granting of equal status to creative and performing arts GCSEs alongside humanities and languages creates parity. The new enrichment entitlement – which includes arts and culture as one of five core categories – provides a framework for schools to prioritise creative learning.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer reinforced music's educational value, describing how performing “helped me build confidence”⁸ and orchestra participation “taught me how to be a team player”⁸ – precisely the transferable skills our research identifies as essential for workplace readiness. While his experience centred on instrumental learning, these benefits extend across all forms of music education: classroom learning and qualifications, instrumental study, vocal performance, ensemble participation in diverse musical traditions and with progression into further education or the creative industries.

What matters is structured music education developing both musical capability and transferable life skills. Political commitment must now translate to investment in specialist

teacher training and capability across this full spectrum, adequate school resourcing and equitable access – not a narrow model that creates artificial barriers.

Going forward, there is a valuable opportunity to build even stronger alignment between cultural investment and curriculum delivery – ensuring that music education is consistently embedded as a core component of a broad and balanced education.

Our research shows music education develops the very capabilities employers say they need: adaptability, collaboration, creative thinking and resilience. Whether through ensemble performance, graded assessments or digital music creation, students gain sustained, high-stakes practice in real-world skills. These are not extras. They are core.

Music education also offers rare opportunities for formative, performance-based assessment. Students learn to reflect, iterate and persevere – habits directly transferable to the workplace. As the music industry itself evolves through AI, streaming platforms, and new IP models, music education must prepare learners not only for artistic excellence but for entrepreneurial and technological fluency.

Trinity's role, as a long-standing global awarding organisation providing music qualifications, is to support both musical development and transferable skill development and recognition. Our digital innovation and inclusive approach aim to extend access and ensure high-quality provision for all, regardless of background.

Protecting and prioritising music education is not about preserving tradition. It is about futureproofing national capability. When education systems support high-quality, widely-accessible music learning, they are investing in creative strength, economic resilience and social cohesion – all through a subject that young people already value, and in which they thrive.

Trinity's music portfolio

Learning to play an instrument isn't solely about musical proficiency. It also develops crucial transferable skills such as creativity, confidence and resilience. Trinity recognises this, and our comprehensive, internationally recognised progression framework is designed to develop both musical expertise and vital transferable skills. Our learners are equipped for success in further education and the global workforce, whatever industry they end up working in.

Trinity's music qualifications, learning materials and teaching resources support students from beginner

to advanced levels for careers in the music industry and beyond. Some of our learners go on to study at the top music conservatoires worldwide. Always encouraging authentic musical expression through performance, we offer assessments across a diverse range of instruments and genres.

Our syllabuses encompass an inclusive and diverse repertoire – from classical traditions to international contemporary rock and pop hits – and our learner-centred approach ensures accessibility for students of all ages, skill levels and backgrounds.

Performing arts findings

The role of drama and dance education

Performance education is fundamentally experiential. In drama studios and dance spaces, students learn by doing - inhabiting roles, navigating scenarios, making choices in the moment, and communicating through voice, movement and presence. This embodied learning gives students the confidence to speak without a script, the flexibility to respond to the unexpected and the judgment to read social situations accurately.

Drama: voice, presence and the confidence to speak up

Drama education gives young people frequent chances to practise public speaking, listening, turn taking, and stepping into unfamiliar roles. This maps directly to the anxieties Gen Z report before transitioning to the workplace, such as small talk, sharing views and making phone calls with people they don't know. Teachers report drama is particularly effective for building communication and social confidence. More than four in five say drama develops communication, teamwork and creativity. Three quarters see gains in social fluency, adaptability, resilience and leadership. Seven in ten report improvements in problem solving.

Teacher ratings of skills developed through drama:

Creativity

84%

Teamwork

84%

Communications

84%

Social fluency

78%

Adaptability

77%

Concentration

76%

Resilience

75%

Leadership

75%

Problem solving

71%

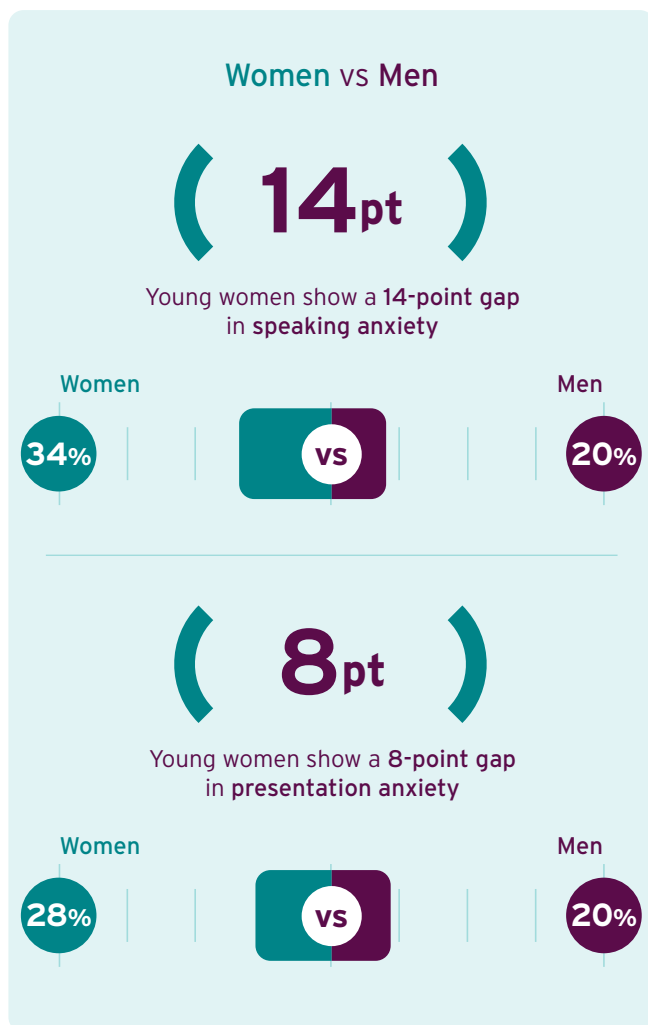
Time management

69%



Addressing gender confidence gaps

Drama education also helps close gaps that appear in subgroup analysis. Young women report higher anxiety about speaking up, presenting and accepting criticism before work. Drama offers repeated, safe practice to speak in front of others, give points of view, and receive advice, which helps build confidence and progress in education and into work.



The workshop and stage as a professional training ground

Voice and presence: Drama helps teach students to project their voice, use space confidently, and maintain presence under observation. These physical skills translate directly to presentations, meetings, and interviews. Students learn to command attention appropriately and convey authority through posture and vocal delivery.

Emotional intelligence: Role work requires students to understand and portray different perspectives, developing empathy and social awareness. They learn to read non-verbal cues, adjust their communication style to different audiences, and navigate complex interpersonal dynamics. These skills prove essential in customer service, management, and team collaboration.

Improvisation and adaptability: Drama exercises regularly require students to respond spontaneously to unexpected situations. Whether improvising dialogue, adjusting to a scene partner's choice, or recovering from a forgotten line, students develop cognitive flexibility and the ability to perform well under pressure. In professional contexts, this translates to adaptability in meetings, crisis response, and creative problem-solving.

Critique and iteration: Drama workshops involve continuous feedback cycles. Students perform, receive advice, adjust, and perform again. This creates comfort with critique and a growth mindset around improvement. They learn to separate feedback on performance from judgment of personal worth – a crucial professional skill.

From scene study to professional communication

Public speaking: Every drama exercise involves speaking to an audience, whether classmates or external viewers. Students overcome initial self-consciousness and develop natural presentation skills. They learn to structure spoken communication for maximum impact and adjust their delivery based on audience response.

Negotiation and persuasion: Scene work often involves characters with conflicting objectives, requiring students to practise persuasion, compromise, and negotiation. They learn to advocate for their position while remaining open to alternative viewpoints. These are core skills for career advancement and workplace collaboration.

Cultural fluency: Drama repertoire can expose students to different social contexts, historical periods, and cultural perspectives. They develop sensitivity to diverse communication styles and social norms. This cultural awareness becomes increasingly valuable in globalised workplaces.

“Taking the Trinity Speech and Drama exam really strengthened my confidence and communication in my Politics and International Relations university degree. Whether I'm presenting arguments in seminars, debating, or representing students, the ability to speak clearly, think critically, and connect with others has made a real difference. It gave me the tools to express complex ideas with clarity and put forward my ideas with confidence.”

Ananya Agroya - Trinity ACTL Diploma in Performing (Speech and Drama)

Small format, big impact

Schools need not oversee major productions to capture these benefits. Short scene work, monologue presentations, and improvisation exercises can be more easily introduced and integrated without need for large-scale productions. Assessed speeches, paired dialogue work, and small group projects all provide structured opportunities to practise professional communication skills while developing dramatic techniques and abilities.

Drama education - the confidence effect

(15pt)

15-point higher confidence in problem solving

66%

Performance and creative students

vs

51%

Non-performance and creative students

20%

of Gen Z continued with drama education beyond compulsory years

Dance: discipline and team coordination

Dance education offers a complementary pathway to developing workplace-ready skills through physical expression and ensemble coordination. Where drama develops verbal and emotional communication, dance builds spatial awareness, precision, and non-verbal team dynamics. Teachers confirm dance education's contribution to workplace readiness. Four in five recognise how it builds teamwork skills, with three quarters highlighting communications development, leadership and resilience.

Teacher ratings of skills developed through dance:

Creativity

85%

Teamwork

81%

Adaptability

77%

Concentration

76%

Communications

74%

Resilience

72%

Leadership

72%

Social fluency

71%

Time management

69%

Problem solving

64%



Physical intelligence and professional success

Dance develops acute awareness of body language, posture, and spatial relationships. Students learn to communicate through movement and read physical cues from others – skills that translate to stronger presence in groups, in meetings and effective use of gesture and posture in work situations such as presentations. Dance demands exact timing and precise positioning, developing attention to detail that can transfer to quality control, project management and roles requiring careful execution.

The studio as team laboratory

Group dance requires choreography and precise coordination where individual excellence serves collective success. Students learn to match tempo, mirror movement, and support partners while maintaining their own technique. In dance classes, students regularly switch between leading and following roles, building both leadership confidence and the ability to take instruction – essential for professional advancement.

Resilience and recovery under pressure

Dance training involves repetition to achieve mastery. Students learn that excellence requires sustained effort and that initial setbacks are part of the learning process. They develop tolerance for discomfort and persistence through difficulty. Regular performance builds comfort with being observed and evaluated, teaching students to maintain composure under scrutiny, recover gracefully from mistakes, and continue without losing momentum.

Dance education - the confidence effect

(13pt)

13-point higher confidence in working as a team

68%

Performance and creative students

vs

55%

Non-performance and creative students

19%

of Gen Z continued with dance education beyond compulsory years



Opinion: Performing arts

This research report was completed as the UK government published its response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review recommending strengthening drama provision, in its own right as well as integrating into English oracy within the curriculum to deepen communication.

Recognising drama as a distinct component creates exciting opportunities to centre learning around performing, creating, and responding to dramatic works. This reinforces its dual role as both an academic and practical discipline – enhancing self-expression, building confidence, and developing the life skills that Gen Z tell us they need so they are prepared for further study and successful careers. We welcome policymakers signalling and recognising drama education is central to preparing young people for work and life.

The findings from our research frame performance-based education as one of the most effective tools for developing young people's communication skills, collaboration, confidence, and adaptability – qualities employers increasingly identify as essential. It is striking how closely performance skills map to the work-related anxieties students self-identify around entering the workplace: small talk, presenting, speaking up, and handling feedback to name a few. By offering students opportunities to perform, improvise, and reflect, performance education can, quite pragmatically, transform anxieties into strengths.

Social anxiety about speaking and presenting is particularly high for many of the young women surveyed. Practical drama sessions normalise such activities, creating a supportive and safe space to gain confidence. Performance education, encompassing drama and dance, is both a core creative subjects and a skills training ground where students build empathy through roleplay, adaptability through improvisation, and resilience through receiving feedback and iteration. Performance education also turns these often-abstract competencies – emotional intelligence, creative problem-solving, and the ability to collaborate with others – into lived, and evidenced, experience.

Crucially, the benefits of engaging with drama and dance teaching and learning are felt across all types of delivery and outcomes. Workshop activities, studio-based improvisation and working in pairs and small groups, have an equally powerful impact on learners as performing in large-scale ensemble productions. Performance education is scalable and flexible, well able to adapt to differing contexts and resources.

In a global job market that increasingly values adaptable human skills alongside technical knowledge we will do our learners, and the market, a disservice to position performing arts education simply as a bolt-on, a 'nice-to-have' in the curriculum. Instead, an approach that treats time and resource dedicated to disciplines like drama and dance as a core investment in employability feels both appropriate and increasingly essential.

Trinity's Performance portfolio

Trinity drama qualifications and assessments are designed to elevate communication and performance skills.

We offer disciplines such as Acting, Acting for Screen, Communication Skills, Musical Theatre, Performance Arts, and Speech & Drama. Through these, learners gain practical experience in performing, presenting, collaborating, and thinking creatively. Our performing arts drama qualifications are accessible to learners of all ages, abilities and confidence levels. With flexible exam formats – including solo, pair and group options – students are encouraged to demonstrate their strengths in ways that suit their learning styles and personalities.

Trinity's inclusive, learner-centred approach also allows students to draw from their own cultural backgrounds and personal interests, ensuring a relevant and meaningful learning experience.

Our assessments reflect real-world scenarios, helping learners build confidence in everything from public speaking and interviewing to teamwork and collaboration. They don't just prepare learners for stage and screen – they also uniquely equip them for success in a whole range of academic, professional and personal contexts.

Evidencing transferable life skills

How Trinity supports transferable skills development

Trinity's role is providing high-quality, industry-aligned qualifications in music, drama and performance, and communications. Our programmes and assessments can sit alongside, or integrated within, any curriculum and can prepare students for careers in the creative industries while simultaneously developing broader capabilities that serve them across all professional contexts.

This dual outcome happens in three interconnected ways:

1. **First, our qualifications are designed for creative industries and beyond.** Trinity's syllabuses meet professional standards and prepare students for careers in music, theatre, and performance arenas.
2. **Second, these subjects and our qualifications naturally develop transferable skills.** Students acquire the capabilities employers across all sectors value - communication, collaboration, resilience, adaptability - as an integral part of learning to perform and preparing for assessment. Many of these transferable skills are explicitly embedded in our syllabuses and assessment criteria; others develop organically through the learning process whether by receiving and acting on feedback, working to fixed performance deadlines, managing pressure, and balancing individual excellence with ensemble contribution. This isn't a bolt-on or separate agenda. It's inherent to what performance-based learning requires.
3. **Third, we provide comprehensive support for teachers.** Our resources help educators deliver these creative and transferable skills and outcomes confidently. This includes teaching qualifications and certification that validate and enhance teaching skills, learner and teacher products and materials for all levels, free CPD programmes for the global teaching community, and specialist webinars and events that enable knowledge sharing and networking.

For learners, Trinity qualifications provide portable, internationally recognised evidence of both technical competence and 21st Century transferable capabilities. For employers, they offer an assurance that graduates are work-ready and possess the skills needed to thrive in complex, fast-changing workplaces.

Top 5 skills teachers find hardest to assess:

Resilience

28%

Adaptability

26%

Leadership

23%

Creativity

22%

Concentration

22%

Assessment difficulty data shows that teachers find resilience, adaptability and leadership challenging to evaluate in the classroom - exactly where structured performance assessments excel.



Conclusions

A practical way forward

Young people are clear about what matters for their future. They identify communication, teamwork, collaboration, and problem-solving as key capabilities that will define career success over the next decade. Many feel confident in these areas, yet too many still feel underprepared and anxious about transitioning to working life.

Teachers and young people are strongly aligned. Performance and creative education develops these essential skills and build confidence. And both groups want schools to do more. Yet systemic pressures on time, staffing, and resources often prevent progress.

The solutions are practical and achievable. The message is simple. When education systems prioritise and invest in performance and creative learning, they are investing in the life skills that employers worldwide value most.

Policy recommendations and change alone are insufficient, it requires targeted investment. Our research shows teachers want to deliver creative education - 46% cite funding limitations and 36% report staffing constraints as the primary barriers. Without addressing these systemic capacity issues, equal status risks remaining symbolic rather than substantive.

Solving the teacher supply challenge must be a priority. Without a strong pipeline of confident, specialist educators in music and drama - both in classrooms and in instrumental teaching - the ambition for equitable access will remain unrealised. Trinity supports robust initial teacher training, ongoing professional development, and long-term workforce planning to sustain the creative education workforce alongside curriculum reform.


Education systems and curricula need to recognise and prioritise the role performing and creative education in building these skills, alongside the traditional numeracy and literacy and growing STEM focus. We call on the use and implementation of structured assessments and qualifications that evidence progress in these areas and support career success.

Parents should support and champion the development of these skills, and for their children to participate in performing arts education. They must recognise the opportunities that build confidence and human skills through music and performance - whether presenting to new audiences, negotiating in group work, and collaborating with unfamiliar peers, or through realistic role play and tasks that prepare them for those workplace moments they find most challenging.

The evidence is clear performance and creative education acts as a confidence shield.

Students who continue with music, drama, and dance education, alongside other subjects, have less workplace anxiety, stronger confidence in their transferable skills, and greater readiness for the transition from study to work.

At Trinity, we stand ready to help educators act on this knowledge - supporting institutions and teachers, recognising, certifying and awarding learners, and ensuring that every young person has the chance to build the confidence and skills they need to succeed in work and in life.



About Trinity College London

Trinity College London is a leading international awarding organisation, education publisher and independent education charity with over 150 years of expertise. Our offerings stand at the intersection of heritage and modernity, comprising a globally recognised suite of regulated qualifications and assessments in communicative English, music and performing arts tailored to meet the evolving demands of all learners and the modern economy.

We are the awarding organisation of human expression, and aim to inspire teachers and learners alike with assessments that are enjoyable to prepare for, rewarding to teach and that simultaneously develop learners with academic, technical and 21st century life skills:

Active learning

Our syllabuses emphasise real-world applications, boosting student ownership, retention, and motivation.

Communication and collaboration

Our group-based exercises enhance teamwork, empathy and active listening, preparing learners to communicate and collaborate in diverse environments.

Leadership and influence

Confident communication, speaking, debating and influencing skills are at the core of Trinity's syllabuses.

Adaptability and problem-solving

Performance-based learning, public speaking and debating hone articulation, critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Confidence and resilience

The performance-based skills in our syllabuses build self-confidence and resilience.

Social fluency

Our frameworks embed and develop skills in expression, tone, posture and debate, empowering confident social and professional interaction.

Citizenship and responsibility

Critical thinking, active listening and storytelling skills developed through our qualifications enable our learners to become engaged citizens contributing to social cohesion.

In alignment with global education priorities and workforce development goals

Trinity's performing arts and communications solutions offer multidisciplinary and adaptable pathways for critical skills development. We support an inclusive, equitable and flexible educational model across:

- **All learning stages** (early pre-school, primary, secondary, higher education, adult professional)
- **All learning modes** (academic, vocational, extra-curricular)
- **A wide range of delivery formats** (in person, digital, blended)

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