



Research Fellow 

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Should I Stay or Should I Go':
future-proofing the UK music
industry by understanding
the motivations and challenges
of its young creative workforce

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Executive Summary

Recorded as part of their *Combat Rock* album, ‘Should I Stay or Should I Go’ by English punk rock band The Clash rocked the music scene upon its release in 1982. While the lyrics alone suggest that the question in its title appears to be one posed by a disgruntled lover to another, this title also encapsulates a sentiment that most of the cultural and creative industries’ workforce have likely grappled with at some point in their career – should they ‘stay’ and continue to work in the industry, or ‘go’?

From external influences such as policy and political agendas, pandemics, and constantly-evolving technological developments, to internal difficulties caused by precarious work conditions and skills gaps, it is no secret that the cultural and creative industries have continuously been, and will continue to be, subject to all types of pressures and crises. While extensive research has already been conducted into understanding the composition of the cultural workforce – its demographics, educational experiences, socioeconomic backgrounds etc. – they have tended to understand the workforce based on a top-down, generalised, and data-driven approach. Focusing on a subset of the current cultural workforce, the main aim of this investigation is therefore to ‘future-proof’ the cultural workforce by better understanding its talent pipeline beyond the statistics.

To accomplish this, interviews with young freelance creatives, members of the future workforce, and third-party support organisations were held to understand the motivations and challenges which affect their reasons behind pursuing and remaining in a career in the UK music industry. A phenomenological approach was used to discover young creatives’ experiences, opinions, and sentiments, which ultimately resulted in the identification of three categories of motivations, namely fulfilment from turning passion into a career; experience, skills, and qualifications; and a ‘sunk-cost fallacy’ (stemming from a larger skills recognition issue). Conversely, challenges identified include lack of remuneration and financial stability, poor mental wellbeing (as a result

of social isolation and overcompensation by feeling the need to diversify income streams and skill sets to maximise opportunities for income generation), and industry beliefs, norms, and stereotypes that have had a detrimental effect on the morale of young creatives more generally.

As a result of the identification of the above motivations and challenges, three key pillars highlighting opportunities wherein structural change should occur were conceptualised. The first pillar concerns funding structures – not only in terms of requiring more funding, but a specific need for the development of alternative funding models which prioritise income regularity and stability. Financial education was also identified as a need to help young creatives in planning for and anticipating the future. The second relates to skills and education, specifically, the need for skills taught in tertiary educational institutions to be more well-informed by the ever-changing demands of the workplace, so that their relevance and applicability are made more apparent, in addition to the possibility of education being the reason for, and solution to existing detrimental norms within the industry. The final pillar, mental wellbeing, focuses on the need to cultivate more personalised support systems, such as mentorship programmes, to support young creatives in navigating the 'experience' of being a creative freelancer.

The purpose of this report is to serve as an exploratory study – an initial diagnostic; a triage – to gain better visibility of the strength of the future cultural workforce by understanding its thoughts, sentiments, and priorities. This report will therefore provide a survey of existing research regarding the current state of the creative industries, including the threats and challenges it faces, as well as an understanding of how they have led to precarious employment conditions, followed by an outline of the chosen methodology. The interviews conducted will be analysed to identify key motivations and challenges young creatives are facing. The report ends with a proposal of three pillars for structural change, as well as highlighting the next steps for consideration. Using the three aforementioned key pillars as a starting point, this report ultimately argues that prioritisation of structural support for the talent pipeline is critical to enhancing the industry's resilience and robustness within an ecosystem of constant polycrisis, enabling it to thrive, prosper, and grow in a sustainable manner.

The Creative Industries, Precarity, and Future-Proofing

The concept of employment precarity is no stranger to the cultural and creative industries. A surge of research emerging in the wake of COVID-19, which saw the number of cultural workers in the EU fall by over 100,000 to pre-2015 levels (Eurostat, 2022) has placed this issue under increased scrutiny (Owen et. al, 2020; Comunian, 2020; Shaughnessy et. al, 2022). In the UK specifically, a drastic 30% decrease (55,000) of jobs in music, performing, and visual arts was recorded during the pandemic, with freelancers being one of the most hard-hit groups, as evidenced by a decline of freelancers in all creative occupations by around 38,000 from the beginning to end of 2020 (Florisson et. al, 2021).

Compared to other creative industries more generally, Florisson et. al (2021) also notes that the UK's music, performing, and visual arts industry, due to the prevalent composition of its freelance workers (27%, compared to 9% from other creative occupations and 3% of the UK workforce more generally), has been perceived to be at 'the epicentre of the crisis for freelancers' (in terms of freelancers' departures). Reasons for their departure were numerous, yet consistent – ranging from practical issues, such as low pay (resulting from a lack of work and the cost of living crisis) (UK Music, 2022, p. 31) and lack of government support (or ineligibility for initiatives which were in place), to emotional issues such as worsening mental health and increased levels of anxiety (Price, 2021). This section will therefore focus on highlighting how, and the extent to which numerous intrinsic and extrinsic threats have affected the creative workforce, specifically freelancers in a creative role, and their ability and desire to remain in the creative industries.

It is worth noting that these detrimental effects evidenced by creative freelancers during the pandemic are not newly emerging – rather, they are amplifications and extrapolations of the challenges that have been normally associated with the inherent precarity of freelance work. While not necessarily corresponding directly with the creative industries, economist Guy Standing (2011) provides a comprehensive overview of the populations who undertake precarious work more generally by identifying the emergence of a new 'class-in-the-making' (p. vii) known as the precariats (a portmanteau of precarious and proletariat). Born out of a belief originating in the 1970s that market competitiveness was central to the growth of economies as a whole, increasing labour market flexibility by transferring all 'risks and insecurity onto workers and their families' became more common, and resulted in the establishment of this new social

and economic class consisting of 'millions around the world without an anchor of stability' (p. 1). The precariat class is precisely characterised by those whose employment prevents access to these anchors, including but not limited to the following ways:

- **Precarious (pattern of) income:** income is often irregular; lack of access to enterprise and state-provided benefits; lack of community support (p. 12).
- **Short-termism:** not only in terms of having a temporary job/being in part-time employment, but an inability/added difficulty in thinking and planning for the long term (p. 18).
- **Lack of agency over day-to-day tasks and progression:** the precariat is 'dependent on others for allocating them to tasks over which they have little control' (p. 16).
- **Lack of occupational identity:** as a result of aforementioned factors (p. 12).

In addition to the lack of these anchors of stability, Standing further notes the emotional challenges faced by the precariat class as well, namely through the four 'A's:

- **Anger:** feeling out of control and deprived of a meaningful life, lack of material success (usually in comparison with peers), and lack of 'ladders of mobility' to progress through, leading to 'deeper self-exploitation and disengagement' (p. 20).
- **Anomie:** experiencing a lack of direction and ambition caused by continued defeat, compounded by external condemnation from authority figures (such as politicians and commentators), labelling them as 'lazy, directionless, undeserving, [and] socially irresponsible' (p. 20).
- **Anxiety:** feeling insecure (about their employment situation) and conflicted by a fear of 'losing what they possess even while feeling cheated by not having more' (p. 20).
- **Alienation:** feeling that they are constantly working for others (and not themselves); resulting in lack of self-esteem and social worth with regards to employment (p. 21).

These issues seem far-fetched when considered in relation to the creative industries (Standing, for example, notes call centre employees as one of the quintessential examples of the precariat), however, the reality is that the lack of stability, predictability, and chronic uncertainty regarding the precariat's employment situation and status are similarly felt and experienced by many creative freelancers.

While the negative impacts of precarity on creative freelancers have been widely acknowledged, the pandemic has also highlighted differences in how different subgroups – particularly regarding age – of creative freelancers have been affected by these challenges. Existing research has tended to focus on the sentiments of older and more established freelancers and the impacts of their departure on the creative industries, yet in the UK, young (and less established) creatives in particular were observed to have been more negatively impacted by the decline in freelance workers. Not only had they 'not been protected by the [then current] range of government and sector interventions' targeted towards assisting creative freelancers during crises (Florisson et. al, 2021), they additionally face difficulties due to being in an early stage of their career which is characterised by instability and uncertainty that is exacerbated by the challenge of establishing themselves in their profession and the search for employment (Manturzewska, 1990), therefore becoming 'one of the most vulnerable sub-groups within the sector' (Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre and Centre for Cultural Value, 2021, p. 3). Due to these aforementioned circumstances, young freelance creatives are thus even more susceptible to the challenges and sentiments posed by Standing, and are placed in a more precarious position than their older (and more experienced) counterparts.

Being young in an industry that particularly values experience presents another challenge – namely, having to navigate the transition from being a student to a professional. While institution-based education is not a prerequisite, professionals in the creative industries are among those who are most well-educated, and are more likely to have received education from a traditional creative educational institution (usually at the tertiary level, including both universities and conservatoires) (OECD, 2022). Despite this, an understanding of how to translate skills acquired from traditional education into employability (i.e. skills required in industry/the workplace, such as entrepreneurial skills and digitalisation skills in this case) is lacking, leading to a commonly-cited skills paradox that further exacerbates the difficulties faced by young people. Projects and networks, such as Project StART in the UK (Royal Northern College of Music, n.d.) and the NXT project developed by the European ELIA network, are already in place and have identified that nurturing the act of 'enterprising' in young creatives, such as 'fostering resilience, risk-taking, creativity and innovation, is essential' (Danhash et. al, p. 15), yet the methods of determining how this can be done and in what settings are still being explored.

These challenges are also exacerbated by factors larger than the creative industries. UK policy has tended to approach STEM and the arts and humanities in a dichotomous manner. This is particularly evident within educational policy, whereby STEM education and arts education are still considered separately (as opposed to the combined STEAM approach that is increasingly more common), upholding a narrative that people excel at either the arts, or maths and science (and not both). At the tertiary level, for example, funding for arts courses including a range of subjects such as music, art, and design was proposed to be cut by a drastic 50% in favour of other 'high-cost' subjects including STEM, medicine, and healthcare in 2021 (Weale, 2021). While there is acknowledgement that focus on STEM ultimately should not be at the expense of the arts and humanities, continued resourcing and funding inequalities have indicated that policy priorities have often been at the detriment of the creative industries.

This imbalance is also reflected from an employment perspective. One of the most apparent comparisons is a recruitment advertisement, released in October 2020 as part of the UK government's Cyber First campaign, to 'help young people explore their passion for tech'. Depicting a young, non-White ballerina tying her ballet shoes, the advertisement is captioned with 'Fatima's next job could be in cyber. (she just doesn't know it yet.) Rethink. Reskill. Reboot.' The message that the ad conveys – i.e. those who are currently working in the creative industries (and especially those who are young and from non-traditional backgrounds) should rethink their career choice, reskill, and embark on new careers in more 'desirable' industries, such as tech – makes clear that professions within the creative industries are perceived to be of less value.

From education to employment, by restricting the fostering of a holistic, full-cycle environment that is conducive to cultivating both an interest and subsequent professionalisation within the creative industries, policy has not only contributed to a lack of material and spiritual support for young people to enter and sustain a career in the creative industries, but it has also perpetuated a narrative to young creatives that their work and industry are deemed less valuable and desirable, contributing to the 'external condemnation' that Standing (2011, p. 20) notes as being characteristic of the precariat class. While it must be acknowledged that the recently-published Creative Industries Sector Vision (DCMS, 2023) has addressed and proposed initiatives to target these exact issues regarding education, skill gaps, and opportunities by 2030 (and, by extension, ameliorating existing negative narratives surrounding a career in the creative industries), the extent of its effect remains forthcoming.

On a global scale, there have also been prominent debates surrounding the rise of technological developments, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), and their potential to replace the workforce. With AI's proven ability in not only automating rote and manual tasks, but also creative tasks such as composing, drawing, and writing which require 'uniquely human skill[s]' that were once deemed irreplaceable (Parsons, 2023), the rapidness and complexity of its development could be perceived as a concern, if not a deterrent, for those seeking to undertake roles in the creative workforce which AI could eventually replace.

Despite the combination of all these aforementioned intrinsic and extrinsic issues painting a bleak picture for the future of the creative industries (and may thus seem particularly undesirable for young people seeking to join the creative workforce), numbers for youth employment remain relatively high on the European level. 17.6% of the creative workforce is aged 15-29 compared to an average of 17.3% across all industries in the EU (Eurostat, 2023). Within the UK, youth employment in the creative industries has continued to rise despite the pandemic, while other non-creative industries have evidenced a decrease within the same timeframe (Office for National Statistics, 2022). This discrepancy has therefore revealed a need to explore how exactly young creatives feel impacted by the precarity and threats associated with their choice of career, as well as the overall reasonings behind their decisions to pursue and maintain a creative freelance career in the music industry.

It is undeniable that the creative industries will always continue to be subject to challenges and threats. Whether they be internal (e.g. precarious work conditions, skills paradox) or external (e.g. policy and political agendas, pandemics, technological developments) to the industry, the creative industries ultimately thrive because of the people who choose to work in it. The goal of this study is therefore to act as an exploratory first step to identify how the creative industries can be better future-proofed by increasing its resilience – that is, to ensure that it has a robust and diverse talent pipeline consisting of individuals who are well-supported to do their best creative work – so that the opinions and thoughts of young people, the future of the workforce, are heard, valued, and taken into account to inform wider policy-making.

Methodology and Process

In addition to drawing upon existing research and literature, the methodology of this study primarily consisted of interviews with two groups: young creatives, and third-party networks and advocacy groups whose focus was on increasing young people's access to creative careers in the UK.

The core part of data collection was the interviews with young creatives. Considering the policymaking audience of this study, this profile was chosen based on Jansson et. al's (2022) definition of the 'artistic precariat' – i.e. those who have high occupational commitment (a highly subjective and individualistic prerequisite that is arguably much harder to encourage at a general policy level), but a diminished ability to viably sustain an artistic practice.

With a sample size of 5, criterion sampling was used to source interviewees who met all of the following criteria:

- Based in the UK
- Aged 30 or under
- Consider freelancing in a creative role in the music industry (e.g. composing, producing, songwriting, performing) as one of their current main careers

Individual interviews were also prioritised over focus groups in an attempt to isolate any impacts of peer influence, which has been prevalently identified as a commonality amongst younger members of the workforce. Owing to the sensitive nature of topics of discussion (e.g. income, personal upbringing, family background etc.), these interviewees were mainly sourced through personal connections (friends, friends of friends etc.) to mitigate, to the best possible extent, issues relating to trust and vulnerability that could potentially affect interviewees' ability and willingness to provide genuine and truthful data. Conscious effort was made to ensure that interviewees came from a wide range of backgrounds, though it is also recognised that the methodology for sourcing interviewees will undeniably limit this to a certain extent.

A phenomenological approach was chosen and utilised for these interviews. These interviews lasted around 90 minutes and were semi-structured, consisting of guiding questions relating to interviewees' socioeconomic contexts, pathways into music, their experiences as creative freelancers, and their perceptions towards the longevity and sustainability of their music career

as a whole. Questions were not necessarily asked in the same order (or phrased in the same way) – a more fluid and flexible approach was utilised to allow interviewees to formulate their thoughts and journeys in a manner that felt most comfortable and authentic to themselves. Focusing first and foremost on the interviewees' individual experiences allowed for a more holistic and in-depth view of the individual through meticulous tracking of their journeys into and through a career in the music industry, as well as facilitating a more nuanced understanding of how their individual socioeconomic contexts have influenced their decision-making processes. The ultimate goal was to be able to situate these subjective accounts within a larger shared experience to identify objective overarching themes that would facilitate the implementation of institutional measures and policies that were reflective of, and relevant to more people, which could then be extrapolated to other sectors within the creative industries.

The analytic approach for these interviews was interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) – a 'bottom-up' approach commonly used for phenomenological studies whereby interviewees share similar experiences. This method was chosen to ensure that analytical focus was placed not only on *what* young creatives were saying, but to also observe *how* they were saying it and how they interpreted and made meaning of their own experiences, providing an added depth of information and context to their responses.

These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using AI transcription software. Transcripts were then annotated according to sentiments and opinions which began to emerge. An example of this distinction is as follows:

'It's true that there's not a lot of money in the arts, but that's just how it is and I knew that was what I was getting into when I first chose this path.'

In this response, the opinion itself is simply that there is a lack of funding in the creative industry. The derived sentiment, however, stems from a belief that this lack of funding is intrinsic to the industry ('that's just how it is') and infers their belief that this phenomenon will likely be immutable as a result. Focusing on sentiment as well therefore provides a more in-depth and well-rounded picture of what is being said. Each individual sentiment and opinion was then catalogued into larger groups, whereby similarities and patterns were then identified, resulting in the development of themes that later informed both the motivations and challenges themselves,

as well as the nuances in understanding how each motivation and challenge was understood and experienced by young creatives.

In addition to interviews with young creatives, interviews were also conducted with third-party networks, advocacy groups, and enterprises whose focus was on increasing young people's access to creative careers in the UK – namely Young People in the Arts, Creative Mentor Network, and ERIC. These interviews were likewise semi-structured. The purpose of these interviews was to substantiate and ground the subjective accounts presented by young creatives by providing a wider birds-eye view of general industry issues and trends, as well as shedding light on existing initiatives and measures and how they sought to rectify these issues. For analysis, these interviews were similarly transcribed – however, instead of identifying emerging themes from within these transcripts alone, the data collected from these interviews were instead used in reference to the larger themes identified from interviews with young creatives, to observe whether (and how) they supported/detracted from young creatives' accounts of their experiences. This allowed for more relevant and cogent connections to be made.

While the main purpose of this study has generally remained similar, the scope of this study was narrowed down significantly compared to when it was initially conceived – from understanding the motivations and challenges of young people in Europe's cultural and creative industries, to understanding the motivations and challenges of young creatives in the UK music industry more specifically – to cultivate a bottom-up approach (as opposed to the initial top-down method) so that more applicable trends could be identified. This specificity therefore resulted in a narrowed criteria (as aforementioned) that was used to source interviewees.

Age was used as a criterion (as opposed to level of experience) to better understand the trajectory of arguably the most common archetype of creatives – those who have pursued music at the tertiary education level, and who have gone directly into the music industry – as opposed to the less common later-career-switcher type. An emphasis was specifically placed on creatives due to two reasons. Firstly, creatives are predominantly responsible for the supply of the creative value chain by materialising creativity and expression into, essentially, a product that can be subsequently marketed, disseminated, and consumed by an audience. In the context of this specific study, creative roles are also more likely to be freelance – an identifier of precarity – and are therefore more relevant in the context of seeking to understand how

members of the creative workforce deal with existing precarious working conditions. Occupations of interviewees thus hailed from a variety of roles ranging from freelance composers, performers, and producers. Notably, all young creatives also concurrently hold other occupations in the music and entertainment industry (such as freelance teaching and tutoring, social media strategising, and ushering) – this idea of the 'jack of all trades', multi-hyphenated creative will be further explored in following sections.

Aside from changes to the scope, the methodology for interviews has also been refined. The original methodology consisted of interviews with three groups; two of which were included in the final research (young creatives and third-party support organisations). The group that was not included referred to young people who had prior education and training in the creation of music (to a pre-professional level), but who ultimately chose not to pursue a career in the music industry. This was in recognition of the fact that the insights gained from this project could, in part, already address the challenges and concerns this group may have faced in their career choices – interviewing this particular group would therefore be more beneficial as a next-step, future research direction.

Finally, the way in which the results of this study have been articulated has also been amended. The premise of this study was initially posed to identify the motivations and deterrents of young creatives in their decisions to pursue and remain in a creative career within the music industry. By definition, the dichotomy of motivations and deterrents implied that these were diametrically opposite – motivations referred to the reasons why and how young creatives felt encouraged to continuously pursue, and desired to remain in a career in the music industry; deterrents referred to reasons why and how they felt discouraged and desired to leave. While this may have been impacted by the profile of the interviewees (i.e. that they are all currently active in the industry), it became evident during the early stage of interviews that such deterrents did not, in fact, deter any of the young creatives from a career in the music industry (in the sense that they felt put off or dissuaded) – rather, they were merely acknowledged as challenges that were intrinsic to the industry and how it operated, and that these challenges would eventually be overcome through experience and time. This dichotomy was thus reframed as 'motivations and challenges' to better reflect this nuance.

Motivations, Challenges, and Three Key Pillars

From the interviews conducted, overarching motivations and challenges were identified in relation to young creatives' desire to pursue and maintain a career in the music industry. These findings have also been broken down into three key pillars requiring additional structural support, offering insights for policymaking and further consideration.

Motivations:

Motivations are defined as factors that have encouraged young creatives in their decision to pursue and remain in a career in the music industry. These consist of both positive (such as fulfilment/passion and investment into acquiring experience and skills) and negative (such as sunk-cost fallacy) sentiments, driven by a mix of both passion and fear.

Fulfilment from Passion to Career

'The most important thing for me is fulfilment – and I'm so lucky to love what I do for a living!'

The primary motivation underpinning young creatives' desire to pursue a career in the music industry is passion. Seeking mental and spiritual fulfilment, as well as joy, is of primary importance. In this case, having an initial passion for music has caused increased fulfilment, creating positive reinforcements for added creativity and productivity, and has become the fuel that keeps young creatives constantly motivated throughout their career.

Experience, Skills, and Qualifications

'Music is what I'm trained and qualified in.'

Young creatives are also confident and assured in their abilities as a result of having ample quality experience, skills, and qualifications provided by a specialised education. Pursuing music education, usually at the tertiary level, exemplifies a significant investment of both time and money, further bolstering their sense of commitment to maintain a career in the music industry.

'Sunk-Cost Fallacy'

'I've invested too much.'

'I'm not convinced I'd get another job outside of music.'

The above themes indicate that all interviewees perceive their career in the music industry to be inextricably linked to who they are and who they perceive themselves to be. This has, on a general level, been an affirming and positive process that has helped to shape who they are today.

However, it is also this exceptionally intertwined relationship that has caused a sort of 'sunk-cost fallacy'. The substantial investments they have already made from a young age, in terms of time, resources, energy etc., have led to the belief that departure from the industry would not only invalidate their previous investment, but would also be an admission of personal failure, even if reasons for departure were due to factors beyond their control (e.g. lack of available jobs). This fear-driven determination to stay, therefore, results in a sense of entrapment.

Challenges:

Remuneration and Financial Stability

'In some ways, it doesn't really function as a career – people don't want to pay musicians.'

A key challenge highlighted by young creatives is the notion that their current freelance career on its own, falls short of meeting basic living needs. This is less an issue of the quantity of remuneration (though there is a desire for more), but rather, a lack of financial stability and predictability associated with having regular income. This has therefore resulted in an impulse to overcompensate in terms of time, effort, and other resources to not only increase income prospects, but to gain better control of their career trajectory.

Mental Wellbeing

'You just constantly have to be on the lookout for what's next, and that can get pretty stressful!'

The main mental challenges for young creatives are associated with the mental burden of constantly having to future-proof themselves as a result of a lack of structural and institutional support. Examples of this include frequent engagement in networking to ensure a stream of opportunities (for income, and to sustain drive and momentum), which requires increased levels of planning and proactivity. The individualistic nature of freelance creating also leads to a lack of external/peer-led accountability and social isolation, often causing a 'floundering' feeling and thus leading to overcompensation, as exemplified in the previous section.

Industry Beliefs and Norms

'If you're not going to be on world stages as a solo musician, you might as well give up. I don't want you to be a wedding soloist.'

Those working in the music industry have significant influence over how 'work' is to be perceived. Two key perceptions were highlighted from the data collected. Firstly, young creatives often view the aforementioned challenges as necessary sacrifices/a rite of passage they have to go through, and are therefore inherent to being a freelance creative. Another observation was made regarding the perception of specific types of music-making and creativity and whether they could be seen as being valuable enough to be considered a career. These ideas will be discussed in the following sections.

Three Key Pillars for Structural Change

The wider impact of the aforementioned motivations and challenges on the industry can be categorised into three larger pillars requiring additional structural support: funding structures, skills and education, and mental wellbeing.

Funding Structures

Based on the 'Remuneration and Financial Stability' section, funding is a crucial consideration. The ability to sustain a livelihood was recounted by an interviewee as being a 'bottom-tier-of-the-pyramid-basic' that separates music-making as a hobby versus a career. This visualisation alludes to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, but reframed to understand career engagement more specifically. In this case, adequate remuneration and financial stability satisfy

the most basic survival needs – its importance is crucial to the very definition of a career (Goler et. al, 2018).

As aforementioned, the absence of (stable) income has resulted in young creatives' impulse to overcompensate in terms of time, effort, and other resources to increase income prospects and gain better control of their career trajectory. One observed solution for this is to pursue multiple ongoing careers at the same time to diversify income sources – each young creative had an average of 2-3 concurrent income streams in areas closely related to the music industry, such as social media strategising for artists, teaching composition at educational institutions, private instrumental tutoring, and working in customer-facing guest experience roles at performing arts institutions. The majority of these additional careers were also on a part-time contracted basis with more regular expected hours of work. In most cases, these alternative careers were perceived to be supplementary to their creative role, despite this not being reflected in terms of income distribution (income from these secondary roles, on average, makes up for 60-70% of their total income).

This challenge stems from an individualisation of risk that is particularly relevant for freelancers. Most creatives operate as freelancers on a project basis, and are therefore less likely to be able to take advantage of benefits offered by working in institution-based settings, such as a regular income, statutory benefits, and clarity of financial progression within their career. Addressing this issue therefore requires a collaborative approach that 'de-individualises' risk – this could include the development of alternative funding models that promote income stability (e.g. universal basic income), exploring the implementation of industry-wide/government-based initiatives that provide benefits, tax incentives, and grants for creative freelancers specifically, and even provision of financial education to help young creatives better manage their finances. Ultimately, securing the financial wellbeing of young freelance creatives requires not only increased inpouring of funding, but also the development of structures that ensure that funding is effectively managed so that it is continuous and sustainable.

Skills and Education

While funding undoubtedly constitutes a significant consideration, it is evident that each motivation and challenge can, in turn, be connected to skills and education in some way. The prominence of this theme cannot be ignored, and has been made particularly clear in this case

as most interviewees are recent graduates who are still transitioning from education to industry.

Education has played a pivotal role in determining young creatives' motivations and challenges. Their passion for music usually stemmed, from a young age, through influence from school, family, and friends and was supported by an early-age, institution-based education. This continuous and consistent commitment to specialised music education reflects the larger impact education has on young creatives' self-worth. It is also seen as a method to separate the hobbyist from the professional (in terms of investment), and also acts as third-party assurances of their ability and skill.

However, as exemplified in the 'Sunk-Cost Fallacy' section, young creatives' extensive specific commitment can also become a type of entrapment. One interviewee recounts how she 'wasn't convinced [she'd be able to] get another job outside of music' because of how focused and specific her previous education and experience were, and was therefore unconvinced that she would be able to bring these skills into a role, in another industry, that is 'too far away from the music industry'. There is the belief that skills that they already possess are inherently linked to the industry as opposed to the individual (e.g. the focus is on their ability to *make music*, and not only to *make*). This inability to recognise the applicability of their skills in other areas has thus motivated them to stay in the music industry, no matter the cost.

Aside from a lack of recognition, this can also be extrapolated to the inapplicability of skills acquired through education in the workplace. Interviewees who had obtained a university-level qualification in music remarked that while they were taught 'how to create', they were 'underprepared' when it came to understanding how these skills could be utilised in a professional setting. More importantly, this was due to a lack of entrepreneurial 'real-life skills' (as coined by an interviewee), such as optimising social media for visibility, building websites for portfolios, and even doing basic accounting and taxes. As a result of this discrepancy between schooling and reality, interviewees were forced to constantly upskill by 'self-teaching' these essential skills to learn how to run their practice as a business more effectively.

Additionally, education extends beyond skills. It also applies to the dissemination of values as part of a process of enculturation – the gradual learning of characteristics and behaviour that a group collectively holds – which affects how 'the norm' is perceived. As identified in the 'Industry Beliefs and Norms' section, young creatives often accept the aforementioned challenges as

inherent to a career in the industry; there is therefore little motivation to improve the status quo, leading to its negative reinforcement. Awareness of this should therefore be improved, particularly within traditional educational settings. The second 'norm' concerns the types of music-making that can be perceived as being valuable and *serious* enough to be considered a career. An interviewee, for example, felt dissuaded when told by a teacher that she 'may as well give up' if she was not committed to striving towards becoming a solo musician 'on world stages', and would become a wedding soloist instead. The notion of the latter being less respectable is one of many examples that demonstrate how values transmitted in educational settings can be destructive to one's career.

These beliefs and norms are far-reaching, informing hidden standards of *who* can work in the creative industries, *what* they should be doing, and *how* they can be deemed worthy of the privilege to label themselves as a professional creative. What the industry deems as being socially acceptable is, in reality, based on privilege and exclusion, posing added challenges for young creatives, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds, who are seeking to take part. Ultimately, education can and should act as a bridge – breaking existing detrimental norms, and upskilling and empowering young creatives so that they are better equipped to overcome challenges and crises, and build fulfilling and sustainable careers.

Mental Wellbeing

While the above two factors equip young creatives with 'tangible' resources such as remuneration, skills, and education, consideration for the mental wellbeing of creatives should not be neglected either. The more pressing issue for young creatives concerns the anxiety associated with a consistent need to anticipate and future-proof themselves, whether this be through diversification and self-learning of new skills, or constant socialisation and networking in an attempt to materialise new opportunities – a crucial aspect of an industry that relies strongly on networks and connections. This breadth of activity creates a mental load that leads to feelings of insecurity and a lack of direction, which is compounded by feelings of social isolation, as well as the anomie that Standing refers to as being characteristic of the precariat class. More generally, a conflicting love-hate relationship with their career can also be evidenced among young creatives. This relationship consists of a mix of feeling like they should be grateful for their position to be able to pursue a career in the music industry in the first place, yet also feeling helpless and believing that they require/deserve more institutional help, resulting in

increased levels of anxiety.¹ In this case, the cultivation of more personalised support systems and experience-based teaching, such as mentoring, could be a beneficial complement. Existing organisations and networks in the UK such as Creative Mentor Network and Young People in the Arts, for example, are good examples of how this can be achieved – providing one-to-one mentorship matching, programming networking events, upskilling workshops, and conducting active outreach to provide young creatives, particularly those lacking access to existing networks and more experienced professionals in the industry, with advice, assurance, and possibly even validation specifically aimed at helping them to navigate these feelings.

¹ Standing (2011, p. 20) defines the type of anxiety felt by the precariat as 'chronic insecurity associated not only with teetering on the edge', but also 'with a fear of losing what they possess even while feeling cheated by not having more', leading to a situation where they are both 'underemployed' and 'overemployed'.

The CIRCE Connection

With passion, fulfilment, and experience being key motivators, the results of this particular study indicate that young creatives remain unwaveringly driven and dedicated to pursuing and remaining in a career in the music industry, despite a keen awareness of its associated challenges. From the results of this study alone, it does not appear as if the industry is prone to another COVID-era-esque brain drain. However, this notion and their commitment should not be mistaken as a holistic reflection of the robustness of the talent pipeline of the industry – behind young creatives' sentiments lies evidence of larger institutional insufficiencies.

Despite this study focusing purely on the music industry (and only a subset of the workforce), there are many parallels between how the music industry and other sectors within the cultural and creative industries operate. Like any other industry, it is inevitable that the cultural and creative industries will always be susceptible to crises imposed by external forces that cannot be controlled, such as pandemics, market conditions, and new technological developments (which have contributed to talent exoduses and brain drains in recent years). It is also undeniable that how the industry currently operates has also opened itself up to risk, such as precarious work conditions (which are exacerbated in the case of creative freelancers), lack of income stability, lack of skills recognition, and a disconnect between the types of skills which are taught in educational institutions and those that are required in the workplace. The main way to increase the resilience of the industry, therefore, is to fix, improve, and bolster from within – to implement alternative structures that encourage continuous and sustainable management of funding, to teach skills and values that accurately reflect the needs of the industry, and to ensure that creatives have the support systems required to navigate challenges associated with the industry. With the objective of this report being to act as a diagnostic starting point to understand the industry from an on-the-ground, people-centric perspective, the next step would be to determine how and whether each of these suggestions can be implemented in actuality – some of which, in fact, are already being explored by other members of the CIRCE network.

In reflection of CIRCE's objectives to enhance the resilience and innovative strength of the cultural and creative industries, it must ultimately be recognised that the *people* who work in the cultural and creative industries are its greatest strength – the most fundamental and valuable resource. The ability for the cultural and creative industries to be (continuously) perceived as

pioneers of innovation, key economic drivers, and tools of emotional and social resonance is dependent on having a talented workforce that is fulfilled, both in terms of material and spiritual needs, who feels able and desires to participate in this industry. A full-cycle, holistic approach should thus be kept in mind with regard to policymaking to ensure the health of this talent pipeline. Examples of this are far-reaching, and can include factors such as investment into early-years cultural education and engagement to ignite the sense of passion that later fuels a desire to become professional, development of educational curricula that are reflective of the skills required of the workplace (i.e. not only focusing on artistic craft, but entrepreneurial and digital skills as well), and the implementation of effective funding structures to ultimately cultivate an environment that is able to incubate and nurture creativity. Crucially, interventions must happen at both structural and individual levels, in a parallel manner, to maximise impact.

As The Clash's song ends, 'So you gotta let me know/Should I stay or should I go?' The answer to this question should not be understood as a need to lock talent within the cultural and creative industries for as long a time as possible – rather, it is a matter of ensuring that the choice itself to partake in the industry is a viable, sustainable, and productive one, and it is up to the industry, together with other stakeholders such as academics, policymakers, and creators, to collaboratively future-proof its talent pipeline against global polycrisis. The crux of this is ultimately to provide talent with the necessary conditions, infrastructure, skills, and opportunity to continuously learn and adapt as the industry evolves, so that they are empowered to make innovative contributions that bolster the cultural and creative industries' strength and legacy, on a global scale, and long into the future.

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