

Getting into... **Creative Arts**



Getting into the arts can be challenging. Not only is there no set route into the industry, meaning that you will need to proactively create your own opportunities, but it is also extremely competitive, with many graduates competing for the same roles.

To stand out, you need to use your time at university wisely to develop relevant skills and accumulate useful work experience. While doing so, it is important to have a realistic understanding of the industry. Temporary contracts are common, wages are usually relatively low, and work often comes through who (rather than what) you know.

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Exploring Your Options

In this section we will be talking about the types of roles that exist within the arts industry, and where you might expect to work. There will be many roles and employers that we don't cover here, but these are some popular examples that you can use as a starting point when exploring your options.

Typical roles and employers

Arts Education / Community Arts

These roles require you to work in local communities, using drama, dance or music to engage with local people and with social/cultural issues. Arts outreach is a growing area, and usually a major component of funding agreements (most shows/activities must demonstrate they have engaged parts of society that might not have otherwise engaged with the arts).

Typical jobs include: running after-school activities, staging performances and organising festivals. **Typical employers include:** a local authority, housing association, community arts organisation, school, museum or gallery.

Performance, Writing & Directing

These roles involve creating and bringing performance pieces to life. You might work in theatres, a theatre company, at events or at festivals.

As a performer you can find work through auditions, networking and employing an agent. Writers and directors typically work freelance and apply for funding – for example from the [Arts Council](#) – to develop their work. Some theatres and arts organisations run development programmes for writers and directors in the early stages of their careers.

Backstage and Front of House

These roles can be permanent or seasonal, depending on the venue. They are good entry points into the arts, as they can help you meet people in the industry and build your network. They will also develop your practical understanding of how successful events are run.

Work is located in theatres, theatre companies, festivals, arts centres, dance centres. You can work for particular theatres or arts venues, or (for backstage roles) for a crewing company. Once you've gained some experience in backstage work, you can go freelance.

Typical back stage jobs include: Stage Manager, Stage Hand, Lighting Technician and Wardrobe Assistant. **Typical front of house positions include:** Box Office Assistant and Usher.

Arts Administration

These roles exist in arts organisations across the sector, such as dance companies, art galleries, theatres and festivals. In these roles, you will plan, organise and manage arts events, as well as support the overall smooth-running of arts organisations. **Example jobs include:** Marketing Assistant, Fundraising Assistant or Events Assistant.

Roles will be available within numerous small organisations, where you might be responsible for a number of different tasks, as well as in larger ones (e.g. [National Theatre](#), [Royal Opera House](#)) where you are more likely to specialise.

For further detail about the roles available within the arts, visit Prospects' [Creative Arts and Design page](#).

Getting Industry Ready

In this section, we will talk about the kinds of skills and experiences employers might be looking for within this industry, and how you can go about gaining them yourself. What employers are looking for will vary depending on the role, but below is a general overview of key areas you might like to think about. It is important to always read the job description carefully to see exactly what the job responsibilities are, and what skills and experiences are required.

What employers want

Qualifications

A masters is not required, however as the arts is a competitive industry, further study might give you an advantage when applying for certain roles. Remember though, a masters is not a substitute for work experience (where you develop skills in a professional environment) and will not guarantee you a job.

Gaining work experience is a great way to test whether it really is the right career area for you before you commit to further study. You might also first want to take part in short courses run by professional associations or adult education centres to explore the subject before committing to a longer and more expensive course.

Before deciding on postgraduate study, read job descriptions for junior and senior positions in the area you're interested in to find out what qualifications are typically required. You should also consider what resources the university has, the experience of those teaching the course, and what their alumni have achieved.

Skills

Here are some key skills many employers within the arts are looking for when hiring graduates. As was mentioned before, it is important to always read the job description carefully to see exactly what the job responsibilities are, and what skills and experiences are required for that particular role.

Research and evaluation

The ability to identify potential funders, and understand how they evaluate projects so that you know how best to pitch your ideas to meet their requirements.

Passion/Creativity

Arts professionals are passionate about what they do. Careers in the arts are rarely highly-paid, and many of the skills necessary for a career in this area can be easily used in other sectors too. It is often real passion, as well as belief in the social value of the arts, which produces success.

Interpersonal and teamwork skills

The ability to collaborate, communicate and work well with others.

Flexibility and dedication

You need to be willing to work long hours and take on a wide range of tasks.

Resilience/living with uncertainty

You will need to have a thick skin, and be able to deal with failure as well as success, making sure to learn from your experiences. The arts is famously not a very stable career, so you will need to cope with temporary contracts or gaps in employment.

Other ways of making money

You might not be able to cover the cost of living while developing your skills and experience, meaning you should consider roles such as temping, teaching or a bar/restaurant work to cover day-to-day expenses.

Opportunity awareness

Always be thinking about how you can develop your experience and network.

Planning and organisation

The ability to manage multiple projects and ensure projects are completed on time.

Creativity and talent

In order to stand out from the crowd, you need to be innovative and generate new ideas.

Commercial awareness

Commercial awareness can be simply defined as staying up-to-date on daily happenings and developments in a particular industry. In the world of the arts, you need to know what is going to be of interest to the public and what will sell. A common mistake graduates make when applying for arts jobs is to only talk about the performances or galleries they like. You need to understand what is attracting audiences and also be aware of how to find funding. This knowledge can help you stand out from other candidates.

How to gain relevant skills and experiences

Here are just a few ways in which you can develop the above mentioned skills while at university. There are of course many other ways you can develop skills, but you can use these as a starting point if you are stuck for ideas.

Volunteer

You can volunteer for a charity, theatre or production company and help with their productions, marketing or admin. This is a useful way to build initial experience in this competitive area, improve your chances of gaining further work experience and grow your network. Take a look at the Queen Mary [Volunteering](#) page to find out more.

Make your own opportunities

As there is no set route into the industry, you need to create professional relationships with others in your field to maximise your chances of finding work. Get started by making your own website or blog, entering competitions and open auditions, or getting involved with a student society or club (like the [Art Society](#), [Drama Society](#) or [Music Society](#)).

Attend careers events

These can be [Careers and Enterprise events](#) or events across London. Events allow you to gain insight into the industry and make contacts who you can add to your network. The [Drama](#) department regularly organises events, and you can search websites such as [Eventbrite](#) and social media to find interesting opportunities.

Go to performances, exhibitions and workshops

Make the most of London's thriving cultural scene, and develop your understanding of new trends and critics' responses to them. This will prove your motivation for the arts and act as a source of inspiration for your own work. (At interview, you could be asked about recent performances or exhibitions you have been to and what you liked about them.)

Take a short course/Teach yourself a skill

This will demonstrate initiative and your motivation in the industry. It is also an opportunity to build your network of contacts and develop a portfolio of work. You can find short courses online using websites like [Find Courses](#).

Prepare for interviews

Employers don't always give much notice before inviting candidates. Practise for potential writing tasks and brush up on your sector awareness. You could be asked where you see the industry in five years' time, or what your favourite exhibition or performance has been, so be ready to answer this type of question. Once you have been invited for an interview you can [book a practice interview](#) with the Careers and Enterprise team.

How can Careers and Enterprise help you?

There are a number of ways Careers and Enterprise can help you build skills and prepare for applying for opportunities.

Appointments

We have a range of one-to-one appointment types with expert careers consultants. These include [Career Guidance appointments](#) where you can talk about your options and ideas, [Application Advice appointments](#) where you can have an application or CV checked before submission and [Practice Interview appointments](#) where you can practice for an interview you are invited to.

Events

We hold a range of [careers events](#) throughout the year where you can learn more about an industry, network with employers and find out what people look for in a graduate.

Programmes

If you are looking to develop your skills, we have several [skill-building programmes](#) that you can apply to and complete alongside your studies.

Online Resources

Our bank of [online resources](#) is a great place to go for careers support. We have guides (such as [this one](#)), templates for things like CVs and applications, as well as tools that you can use to build or improve a CV ([QM CV Builder](#)), practice for a psychometric test ([JobTestPrep](#)) or practice for a video interview ([Interview Stream](#)).

Make the most of work experience opportunities

Once you have found a work experience opportunity, it is important to make the most of it! Here are some things to keep in mind before, during and after the opportunity.

1. Discuss your expectations with the employer at the start, so that you have the same understanding of what the experience will involve.
2. Always be polite, motivated and interested. Work experience can involve boring tasks, but being flexible, helpful and willing to get involved will make a good impression and could lead to more opportunities.

3. Be inquisitive and learn everything you can about the way the organisation works. How do they hire? What key skills are they looking for? What are the main issues affecting the organisation at the moment?

4. Talk to people who work at the organisation and find out what they do and how they got there. You might uncover job roles and employers that are new to you, as well as pick up some helpful tips. Keeping in touch with people you meet can be a great way of finding out about future opportunities and expanding your network.

5. Ask for feedback at the end of the placement to identify your strengths and the skills you need to develop further.

For more information on where you can develop your skills and experiences, see the Resources section.

Finding Opportunities

Before finding paid positions, graduates often complete a number of work experience opportunities, including longer-term placements that allow you to contribute to something tangible that you can reference when applying to things in the future. This building block approach is a common way to enter the industry (gradually building experience and moving to bigger and better opportunities). Here are a few ways you might want to go about finding opportunities within the arts.

Work Experience

This doesn't just have to be in the arts, as administrative and customer service experience are particularly useful for getting into the industry, and will be a valuable addition to your CV. There is no one way of finding a job. Successful candidates are likely to be those who do a little of everything: apply to opportunities on job boards, attend events, network, make speculative applications and utilise personal contacts.

Arts Jobs Boards

Jobs boards are a great place to start when looking for opportunities. The [Arts Council's](#) jobs board offers great scope to build experience whilst you are at university, but we have more listed in the Resources section.

Networking

Networking is about meeting people who are linked to the industry you would like to go into, and developing a connection with them. This will create a group of work-related contacts who may be able to give you help, information and provide you with opportunities. Many roles in the arts are never formally advertised, so you could hear about opportunities through the people you know.

Networking is also an excellent source of information about trends and developments in the industry that you can use to build your commercial awareness and inform your own projects. Make sure to follow [Queen Mary Alumni](#) on LinkedIn to connect with other Queen Mary alumni working within the industry.

Speculative applications

As well as applying to advertised vacancies (for work experience or full time work), send out speculative applications to organisations that interest you. Sending a speculative application means sending an application to an organisation and enquiring whether they have any opportunities available. This is particularly beneficial if you are sending it to someone you already know, as they are more likely to reply. By doing this, you are showing initiative and drive.

Attending events

Attending events will allow you to not only learn about opportunities that may be coming up, but meet people who you can add to your professional network, and who may be able to point you in the right direction.

Boosting your online profile

Create social media accounts and follow organisations who interest you or work in the industry e.g. your favourite local theatre, gallery or production company. You will also be able to increase your commercial awareness by following organisations like @BritishArts, @ahrcpress and @royalacademy.

Promote your work and contribute to conversations on current issues in the arts world. Keep in mind potential employers might check your online profile to find out more about you, so ensure it creates a professional first impression.

See the Resources section for links to where you can look for opportunities.

Resources

Getting Industry Ready

Here are some resources that you can use to learn more about the industry, and begin searching for organisations to which you could send speculative applications. This list is by no means extensive, but you can use it as a starting point.

[Arts Council](#)

See for funding opportunities & case studies

[Arts Industry](#)

Industry news plus vacancies.

[Eric Festival](#)

News, interviews, features & advice related to working in the creative world.

[The Stage](#)

Industry information, advice and vacancies for theatre, performance, backstage, technical, front of house and admin jobs

[Arts Admin](#)

Sign up for the weekly e-digest.

[Arts Hub](#)

Industry news, a grant finder tool and a jobs board.

Finding Opportunities

Jobs Boards

Here are some jobs boards for you to take a look at when searching for opportunities. Remember many organisations will post their jobs directly to their own website or social media platforms, so make sure that you are also looking there.

[Arts Jobs](#)

Jobs and news from the Arts Council. See their main site for funding opportunities & case studies.

[Arts Culture Media Jobs](#)

Jobs board for performing arts, culture & heritage, media & new media, and education.

[Arts Jobs](#)

Online Jobs board

[Arts Professional](#)

Vacancies, news, events & courses.

[Creative Choices](#)

Vacancies, plus careers advice articles, industry overviews and job profiles.

[Creative Access](#)

Offers paid internships in the creative industries for UK nationals from a black, Asian or non-white ethnic minority.

[Voluntary Arts](#)

Vacancies, news, volunteering and resources

[Casting Call Pro](#)

Lists jobs and auditions, as well as a directory and resources.

[To Be Seen](#)

UK acting auditions and casting calls.

[Stage Jobs Pro](#)

Theatre jobs site for backstage crew and theatre professionals.