To work in the arts you need to be flexible. You are unlikely to land your dream job as soon as you graduate. Instead, think of each role, opportunity or experience as a building block which will enable you to reach your overall career goals over time.

Caroline Lisser, Careers Consultant for SED

Getting into the arts

If you love drama, art and performance, working in the sector can be a rewarding and exciting career path. But getting into the arts can be a real challenge: not only is there no set route into the industry, meaning that you will need to proactively create your own opportunities, it is also extremely competitive, with many graduates competing for the same roles. To make yourself stand out in this crowded job market, you need to use your time at university wisely to develop relevant skills and accumulate useful work experience. Make sure that you have a realistic understanding of the industry – in particular, be aware that temporary contracts are common, wages are usually relatively low, and work often comes through who (rather than what) you know.

Arts Education / Community Arts

Where? Work in local communities, using drama, dance or music to engage with local people and with social/cultural issues. Outreach roles may involve running workshops and educational events alongside an exhibition or performance.

What? Tasks might include: running after-school activities, staging performances, organising festivals. Arts outreach is a growing area, 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.

Who? Potential employers could be a local authority, housing association, community arts organisation, school, museum or gallery.

Performance, writing & directing

Where? Work in theatres, a theatre company or at events/festivals.

What? Creating and bringing performance pieces to life.

Who? 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

Where? Work is located in theatres, theatre companies, festivals, arts centres, dance centres.

What? Backstage roles include stage manager, stage hand, lighting technician, and wardrobe assistant. Front of house positions include box office assistant and usher. These roles can be permanent or seasonal depending on the venue. They are good entry points into the arts: 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.

Who? 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.

Arts Administration

Where? Work in arts organisations across the sector: dance companies, art galleries, theatres, festivals etc.

What? Plan, organise and manage arts events. Support the overall smooth-running of arts organisations. Tasks include: marketing, fundraising (including writing funding bids and liaising with potential donors), budgeting, general administrative tasks, programming performances, organising events and maintaining links with schools.

Who? Roles are available in numerous small organisations, where you might be responsible for a number of different tasks; in larger ones (e.g. National Theatre, Royal Opera House etc) you are more likely to specialise.

For further detail about the roles available, see the links at the end of this guide and visit Prospects: https://www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/browse-sector/creative-arts-and-design. In all areas of the arts, the type of roles available will depend on size of organisation. As in all sectors, opportunities exist in the arts in business support roles such as Finance, IT, HR and marketing. In small organisations, it is common for staff to have multiple responsibilities, so you could have PR, project management, outreach and exhibition management duties for example.

www.careers.qmul.ac.uk

‘To work in the arts you need to be flexible. You are unlikely to land your dream job as soon as you graduate. Instead, think of each role, opportunity or experience as a building block which will enable you to reach your overall career goals over time.’

Caroline Lisser, Careers Consultant for SED
**Where To Start?**

**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 and improve your chances of gaining further work experience.

**Be** proactive and make your own opportunities. Because there’s no set route into the industry, you need to get your name out there and create professional relationships with others in your field to maximise your chances of finding work. Get started by: making your own website or blog, organising your own events, talks or performances if you’re interested in arts administration, or if you’re a performer, entering competitions and open auditions, put on and promote your own shows. Keep a note of what you have done and consider what went well and why, as well as what you might do differently. This will be useful when preparing for interviews.

**Attend** careers events (on campus or across London) to gain advice and insight into the industry and make contacts – both speakers and participants - who you can add to your network of contacts (see networking information on page 5). You could discover new roles and potential organisations to work for. The Drama department regularly organises events, plus search Eventbrite and social media to find interesting and local events.

**Create** a Twitter and LinkedIn account and follow organisations who interest you / work in the industry e.g. your favourite local theatre, gallery or production company. Use social media to promote yourself and contribute to conversations on current issues in the arts world. This is an easy way to build your profile online, learn about what’s happening in the industry, and develop contacts, who could mention events or work experience opportunities. Keep in mind potential employers might check your online profile to find out more about you, so ensure it creates a professional first impression.

**Develop** the skills employers look for. This doesn’t just have to be from arts-related work experience - use part-time work, volunteering and involvement in societies to develop valuable skills to make your application stand out. Arranging an event for a society or charity will develop your planning and organisational skills for example. Starting an arts blog will give experience of regular content writing and an understanding of online communication platforms, whilst demonstrating initiative and enthusiasm for the industry.

**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 a source of inspiration and ideas 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.

**Tailor** your CV to the opportunity and have a speculative letter ready to adapt should you need to apply for an opportunity at short notice. To effectively demonstrate the relevant skills the recruiter is looking for, your CV has to be different for different roles e.g. a performer vs. an administrator. Get feedback and advice from Careers & Enterprise.

---

**SKILLS FOR SUCCESS**

**Thinking about how you can develop the following will help you thrive in the sector:**

- **Research and evaluation**: identify potential funders and understand how they evaluate projects, so that you know how best to pitch your ideas to meet their requirements.
- **Passion**: 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, perseverance and resilience.
- **Interpersonal and teamwork skills**: collaborate, communicate and work well with others.
- **Flexibility and dedication**: are you willing to work long hours and take on a wide range of tasks?
- **Resilience**: develop a thick skin, be able to deal with failure as well as success, and learn from your experiences.
- **Other ways of making money**: temping, teaching or a bar / restaurant job can help you to pay for day-to-day expenses.
- **Opportunity awareness**: look for the potential for career development and networking in all the situations you encounter – even the ones which don’t look promising at first!
- **Planning and organisation**: you’ll be required to manage multiple projects and ensure projects are completed on time.
- **Ability to live with uncertainty**: how will you cope with temporary contracts or gaps in employment?
- **Creativity and talent**: you need to stand out from the crowd, be innovative and generate new ideas.
Making the most of work experience opportunities:

1. Discuss expectations with the employer at the start, so you have the same understanding of what will be involved. Think about what you want to get out of the experience and ask whether there are opportunities to get exposure to project evaluation or data collection for example.

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.

3. Be inquisitive and ask questions. How do they hire? What skills are they looking for? What are the issues affecting the organisation at the moment (e.g. availability of funding)?

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 (see networking tips on page 5).

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

AN ENTRY LEVEL ROLE COULD HAVE MANY APPLICATIONS, SO...

- Provide examples of your skills and experience to show you match each point in the Job Description. If it asks for 5 years’ experience, there is no point in new grads applying.

- Don’t say ‘I love the theatre / exhibitions’. Be specific and show evidence of involvement with the arts e.g. performances and events.

- Check for typos and that names are spelled correctly. Treat your application as a sample of your work. A small error could cost you the job.

- Recruiters appreciate when CVs and applications are clear, concise and easy to read. Pay attention to detail, and be specific (especially on details of internships in the industry). Use bullet points, consistent formatting and keep it concise.

- Always aim to send to a named person. This increases the chances of it being read!

- Why this job? The sector? This company? Mention previous exhibitions / performances / actors from their company that resonate with you to demonstrate passion and show your understanding of market trends i.e. commercial awareness (see below).

Commercial awareness

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 the market – what is attracting audiences and why – and think objectively i.e. not just from your personal taste, to understand what is a commercial success. A key consideration for anyone working in the arts is how to find the money to put on productions, performances or exhibitions, particularly because of recent government funding cuts. Finding ways of working more efficiently (such as sharing resources and venues for example) is increasingly important. This in turn is creating new business models and opportunities. When you apply for jobs or work experience, understanding the business side of the organisation (i.e. who funds them, where their income comes from?) can set you apart from other candidates.

This knowledge is known as commercial / business awareness and will allow you to make informed decisions in the workplace, as you will be aware of relevant issues and trends, and what the potential challenges and opportunities to the business are. Commercial awareness also proves your interest and enthusiasm for the role and company. You could be asked about this at interview e.g. ‘Why do you want to work for us (and not our main competitor)?’ Have a good understanding of how arts organisations make their money, what the life cycle of a production or exhibition is – from initial idea to debrief meeting – and what you can bring to the organisation to help with these. Who is performing / exhibiting in the area you are interested in? Read the organisation’s website plus the websites listed in this guide to develop this knowledge.

Not all arts jobs are for performers! Many jobs in the arts have a commercial / sales focus – such as fundraising roles. These can involve large corporate sponsorship deals or running VIP events for example, so are often more diverse and challenging than people think! If you work freelance, or put on your own productions you will need to develop bid-writing and pitching skills to secure funding.
Gain 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 that do a little of everything: apply to opportunities on job boards (see the links on the final page), attend events, network, make speculative applications and utilise personal contacts.

Prepare for interviews in advance as 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. See our resources on how to prepare for interviews, including a list of sample interview questions.

Build your online profile. Create or update your profile on LinkedIn and follow organisations you are interested in on Twitter to find out about current trends and develop your commercial awareness - otherwise known as business focus or industry understanding (see previous page). These can be employers, professional associations, industry magazine and networking groups e.g. @nationaltheatre, @ace_national, @BritishArts and www.a-n.co.uk/news.

Learn a new skill! Taking a short course or teaching yourself a new skill 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. Examples include event management, curating, acting or marketing. Find short courses: Floodlight: www.floodlight.co.uk, Hot Courses: www.hotcourses.com, City Lit: www.citylit.ac.uk, The Actors Centre www.actorscentre.co.uk, Drama UK: www.dramauk.co.uk, UK Performing Arts Courses in performing arts, technical & management: www.ukperformingarts.co.uk.

Speculative applications. Enquiring whether organisations have any opportunities available, can be an effective approach - particularly when sending to a ‘warm contact’ e.g. someone you met during work experience, at an event or interacted with before on Twitter. You could apply to your favourite production company or venue for example, detailing your interest in the organisation. Many opportunities, especially in smaller organisations, are not advertised, so you could find yourself in the right place at the right time! Keep in mind that some larger organisations may not accept this type of approach. See ‘How to Find and Apply for Unadvertised Jobs’ for further details and read the networking section on page 5 to find out how to build your contacts.

The reality is that starting out in the arts, many organisations will pay expenses only, so you may need a part time job for a regular income (which can also be an opportunity to develop valuable transferable skills). Before finding paid positions, graduates often complete a number of work experience opportunities, including longer-term placements that allow contribution to a project/programme in a meaningful and tangible way. This building block approach is a common way to enter the industry. Make the most of your work experience (see previous page). Be positive and gather skills and contacts along the way, so you are in a stronger position to apply for roles in the future.

GAIN EXPERIENCE AND DEVELOP TRANSFERABLE SKILLS AT QMUL
- Consider becoming an Ambassador either for your school or the University as this will be a fantastic way to use and develop your communication skills to introduce QM to future students: www.careers.qmul.ac.uk/workexperience
- Apply for QConsult. Working in a small multi-functional team to tackle a real business or charity project, will be great experience for the realities of working in the arts, as it involves working with a diverse group to achieve a project goal to a timetable and present a proposal to a client: www.careers.qmul.ac.uk/workexperience
- Volunteer with QMSU volunteering, to perform and/or arrange arts events for example: www.qmsu.org/volunteering
- Join arts related clubs and societies to build practical experience of running events, performances or exhibitions.

Next steps: Getting in
Networking is about identifying professionals who are linked to what you want to do and developing a rapport with them. This will create a group of work-related contacts who may be able to give you help, information and advice. 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.

Make a list of people you know already who work in the arts. This might include university lecturers, former colleagues from work experience or volunteering, or friends of friends. Keep in touch using social media or email. They may have tips and be able to put you in touch with their own contacts, or let you know about future opportunities.

Think about how you will introduce yourself to new contacts. Make a good impression by preparing a quick outline of who you are, what you do and how it relates to the contact. If you meet someone interesting at an event or during work experience, follow up with a short email afterwards. Ask questions or offer responses which show that you’ve listened to and thought about what they’ve said. Students have found work experience by introducing themselves to employers at events, but make sure you do this diplomatically so you don’t cause offence!

Use your Twitter feed to make insightful contributions to ongoing discussions. Don’t focus on obvious self-promotion or job-seeking – the more engaging/entertaining/informative you are, the more followers you will attract and the broader your network will become. Once you’ve interacted with someone online it will give you an opening to talk to them in real life. Search for existing networks such as Young Professionals in the Arts London: www.ypalondon.co.uk and Arts Management: www.artsmanagement.net.

FAQ: Do I need a masters or a professional qualification?

A masters is not required, however as a competitive industry, it may give you an advantage. A masters is not a substitute for work experience (where you develop skills in a professional environment) and will not guarantee you a job. However the university environment can provide rehearsal/performance space and access to networks.

Think carefully before beginning 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. When choosing a course, consider what resources the university has, the experience of those teaching the course, and what their alumni have achieved. Do they have industry links or a placement option? Are they endorsed by a relevant Professional Association?

Don’t feel you have to take a course straight after your undergraduate degree. Gaining further experience is a great way to test whether it really is the right career area for you. It’s also an opportunity to find out which (if any) qualifications are valued by employers in your area of interest. Remember Professional Associations and adult education centres run short courses where you can explore the subject before committing to a longer and more expensive course.

USE THE ARTS COUNCIL'S JOBS BOARD TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

www.artsjobs.org.uk/ offers great scope to build experience whilst you are at university. It looks simple, but has a great search function to allow you to search by art form, paid or unpaid, part or full time and region. Being based in London opens up a wealth of opportunities.

The Arts Council does not allow employers to post long term unpaid internships, so the site does include some great short term volunteering opportunities e.g. for festivals or weekend performances, plus often has flexible, paid, part-time work in London that you can fit around your degree schedule.

For example, you could combine some unpaid opportunities in your area of greatest interest e.g. performance, with paid work front of house in a major London venue. Commercial theatre may not be where you see your future, but working there will give you further insights into the arts, the diverse audiences and allow you to build/evidence skills such as customer service, time management, relationship building and flexibility.

USE THE ARTS COUNCIL'S JOBS BOARD TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

www.artsjobs.org.uk/ offers great scope to build experience whilst you are at university. It looks simple, but has a great search function to allow you to search by art form, paid or unpaid, part or full time and region. Being based in London opens up a wealth of opportunities.

The Arts Council does not allow employers to post long term unpaid internships, so the site does include some great short term volunteering opportunities e.g. for festivals or weekend performances, plus often has flexible, paid, part-time work in London that you can fit around your degree schedule.

For example, you could combine some unpaid opportunities in your area of greatest interest e.g. performance, with paid work front of house in a major London venue. Commercial theatre may not be where you see your future, but working there will give you further insights into the arts, the diverse audiences and allow you to build/evidence skills such as customer service, time management, relationship building and flexibility.
Jobs and work experience websites

The same job title (e.g. Production Assistant) can be used to describe roles with very different responsibilities depending on the employer, so read the job description and person specification for details of what the job entails. Bookmark websites you like and check regularly for new opportunities. Browsing vacancies can help to identify interesting employers to apply to speculatively – particularly if the role being advertised is in a different team or is not entry level.

General

QM JobOnline: www.careers.qmul.ac.uk/jobs
- A range of roles across all industries.

Arts Jobs: www.artsjobs.org.uk
- Jobs and news from the Arts Council. See their main site for funding opportunities & case studies www.artscouncil.org.uk.

Arts Culture Media Jobs: www.artsculturemediajobs.com
- Jobs board for performing arts, culture & heritage, media & new media, and education.

Arts Industry: www.artsindustry.co.uk
- Industry news plus vacancies.

Arts Jobs Online: www.artsjobsonline.com/jobs/
- Jobs board.

Arts Professional: www.artspроfessional.co.uk
- Vacancies, news, events & courses.

Creative Choices: crskills.org.uk/careers/jobs
- Vacancies, plus careers advice articles, industry overviews and job profiles.

Guardian Jobs: jobs.theguardian.com/jobs/arts-and-heritage/
- Use ‘job level’ filter to search for entry level and graduate jobs. Advice section has excellent careers articles.

Creative Access: creativeaccess.org.uk
- Offers paid internships in the creative industries for UK nationals from a black, Asian or non-white ethnic minority.

Eric Festival: ericfestival.com/ericmag/
- News, interviews, features & advice related to working in the creative world.

Community Arts

Voluntary Arts: www.voluntaryarts.org
- Vacancies, news, volunteering and resources.

Performance

Casting Call Pro: www.castingcallpro.com/uk/
- Lists jobs and auditions, as well as a directory and resources.

The Stage: www.thestage.co.uk
- Industry information, advice and vacancies for theatre, performance, backstage, technical, front of house and admin jobs.

Spotlight: www.spotlight.com
- Casting directory (performers need recognised experience to sign up).

To Be Seen: www.tobeseen.co.uk
- UK acting auditions and casting calls.
Top Tips and a Final Checklist

☑ Be proactive with volunteering from year one. As well as giving you vital experience, it will boost your confidence and provide exposure to the range of roles available. It will also give you access to networks and get your foot in the door.

☑ Finding work experience can be challenging, so try small arts organisations or theatres first. Look out for opportunities - are there festivals or seasonal events that are moving that will need extra volunteers to help for example?

☑ Develop your organisation and admin skills – run a society, set up an event and get some office experience. For performance and backstage roles, get as much practical experience in a range of different settings as possible. This will build your portfolio of experience and is an excellent opportunity to make contacts.

☑ Build your online profile. Create or update your profile on LinkedIn and follow organisations and individuals you are interested in on Twitter, to keep up with current trends / industry news, make contacts, develop your understanding of the sector and be the first to hear about work experience / opportunities.

☑ Attend exhibitions or performances to prove your interest in the arts and build your understanding of what is happening in the industry and what makes a commercial success.