

Technical Paper No. 53

Becoming a Professional

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Introduction

'New Performers' Voices' (Galloway and Band, 2004) gave a comprehensive analysis of the issues emerging from in-depth interviews with recent graduates. In this final report we draw on further qualitative research with individuals in 2005, and make links with other components of the evaluation programme. The focus here is on factors affecting the ability of new performers to secure appropriate work and begin to develop a professional track record.

Five specific aspects of becoming a professional performer are highlighted below:

- what interviewees felt their training had given them
- their early employment experience
- the job search strategies which they found useful
- how they went about creating a reputation and
- some of the personal qualities which they saw as important.

These themes enable us to trace some of the features which make an individual employable in this challenging and uncertain labour market.

The methods used

Data collection in 2005 followed the model outlined in the 2004 paper. Performers responding to the postal survey of summer 2004 said if they were willing to be interviewed in the future. We focused on dance and drama students originating from the UK rather than from overseas, selecting systematically from alphabetically listed students who had agreed to participate. This paper is based on in-depth interviews with 31 performers at a time between 18 and 26 months after they left college. All but 5 had held a Dance and Drama Award for most of their time as students.

What the award meant to recent graduates

Although these people were no longer in a student environment, the comments which they made about having the award are telling. Typical are:

If it wasn't for that award I wouldn't have gone to full-time training... there's no way my parents could pay. (Dancer and vocalist)

I could not have gone to drama school so I wouldn't be an actor... or I probably would have been somebody that was doing adverts for a few years and it'd have been lucky if I'd got into other stuff. I wouldn't have developed my voice, I wouldn't have developed movement, I wouldn't have done Alexander, I wouldn't know how to read a text properly, I wouldn't be going anywhere like the Royal Shakespeare Company or the Oxford Playhouse or anything like that... Some actors haven't trained and they're excellent, but personally, I needed to train, to go to drama school. (Actor)

I'd just like to say a big thank you to them because otherwise I wouldn't be doing what I love. (Dancer and vocalist)

All of my spare cash was put towards sheet music, extra singing lessons, dance wear, gym membership – without the award I would not have been able to purchase all these things. (Dancer)

In most cases, the award enabled the student to embark on the course, but it sometimes saved the student from dropping out. One performer, initially self-funded, was so far in debt by Easter of year 1 that he was about to abandon the course. A Dance and Drama award for years 2 and 3 enabled him to complete his training. When interviewed he had been building experience through commercials in the UK and Europe and in a part for a day-time television series.

A Dance and Drama Award makes it possible for a young person to complete a vocational training which prepares him or her for the competitive workplaces which lie ahead. After qualifying, some spoke to us about the exciting first jobs which they secured. However the realities of the labour market and the need to ensure an income of some sort mean that some have to adjust their aspirations. Someone who qualifies without substantial student debt is clearly better placed to take the risks inherent to the performer's 'lifestyle' which we discussed in Galloway and Band (2004). See the analysis of 2005 entrants to training courses (Lindsay, 2006) for more detail on students' backgrounds.

A wider context

A wider context for such comments comes from recent research into the 'Class of 99' (Purcell and Elias, 2005) which tracked higher education graduates from all disciplines who were four years past their first degree. This records that among those with student debt at the end of their studies, the mean total amount of repayable debt was estimated as £6,206. Students in the arts had the highest levels of debt, as against those in mathematics, computing, medicine and business studies who were least likely to have debt at the end of their studies. Our respondents had qualified in 2002 and 2003, so they experienced a more stringent financial environment for study than those in the above research who had begun their higher education courses in the mid 1990s.

The average age of those who completed the Dance and Drama Award postal survey was 23 years (21 for dance and 25 for drama graduates). 56 per cent had held a Dance and Drama Award. However, dance and drama students often start their specialist training younger than undergraduates in higher education and therefore some enter the labour market younger than the typical graduate in the above study. We should also note that certain students who did not hold a Dance and Drama award were allocated other bursaries indicating that they too had been identified as having particular promise. Some students gained a degree, others a National Diploma or Certificate. Such variations point to the complexity of FE and HE student funding, but the main point is that many of those contributing to our study would not have been able to train as performers without the support of the D&D Award Scheme. Those with substantial financial support from their families are of course in a different position.

Some comparison can be made with Art and Design graduates. In research drawing in graduates from 15 specialist higher education institutions, Blackwell and Harvey (1999) found that four years after graduation, only 20% of respondents were in work which was not at all related to art and design. These authors are cautious about the use of first destination data as gained from the Higher Education Statistics agency (HESA) returns, which they see as overstating the unemployment situation: art and design graduates, they say, take rather longer to establish a career than do those from other disciplines. At the time of their survey only 4.9% of art and design

graduates were unemployed and seeking work. (See also Dumelow, MacLennan and Stanley, 2000).

In the Warwick research, at the survey reference point one year after leaving college, 87 per cent of dance and drama graduates were employed, of whom 57 per cent were in performance-related work. Almost 38 per cent were in non-performance work and 6 per cent in teaching (Davies, 2006, p.28).

This survey of new performers records some high earners but many who had so far earned very little. The interview programme reveals others who have worked unpaid (or in a not-for-profit collective group) in order to get performance opportunities. Three recent studies show that low pay for beginners and/or a heavy use of unpaid volunteers are familiar features of other cultural sectors. These are the Workforce Development Plan of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA, 2004); a survey for the Museums Association (IDS, 2004), and research for Arts Council England's Review of the Presentation of the Contemporary Visual Arts: Structure and Leadership (Galloway *et al*, forthcoming 2006).

Focusing on performance professionals, Equity's 2005 survey of 36,500 of its members (www.skillsset.org/research/workforce_survey/article_4294_1.asp) indicates that among the 8,377 who responded, 84% had worked in the performance industry in the year before the survey date. Note that student, youth and overseas members were excluded from this survey. Two-thirds of these people were aged 35 or over, an age profile quite different from that in our research. In the week beginning 7th February, two-fifths of those responding said that they were working in the UK performance industry (men much more than women) with the youngest and oldest members less likely to have been working. This may suggest a tougher employment environment for younger performers like our recent graduates (though we should distinguish between artforms: the Warwick research shows how dance graduates are better placed to secure work soon after graduation than those who have trained in drama). In the Equity study, respondents tended to work longer outside the performance industry than they did within it, and 60% had spent time unemployed and looking for work in the past year.

Section A What the colleges provided

Initial Training

Our interviewees were overall well satisfied with the training provided by their school or college, feeling themselves well prepared for professional career in terms of performance skills. This is supported by data from the New Performers' Working Lives Survey (p.26) which reports that 75 per cent of respondents would again choose the same course at the same institution. (Another 20 per cent said that they would choose to do a different course at a dance or drama school.)

The questionnaire replies which served as a basis for our interviews recorded the prevalence of early training in dance or drama among our respondents. The value of such early training was emphasized by one new performer who judged her dancing to be still fairly weak, though she attached no blame to her college training. She had entered college with little dancing experience, and felt that this would have been essential if she were to achieve competence comparable with anyone who started dancing as a young child. Such early training almost always means private tuition, so such comments point to the importance of pre-vocational opportunities in

achieving equitable access to post-16 training. A full picture of incoming students' prior experience is given in (Lindsay, 2006).

Gaps in training

Mindful of a changing employment market, a number of interviewees felt that students could benefit from additional emphasis upon working for television. This perception was supported by the comments of two television employers or commissioners (Freakley, 2004b), who suggested that schools place theatre at the top of a hierarchy, and regard TV as second-best.

However, that view is challenged by more recent comments from providers that suggest that they are well aware of television as a sound employment destination for graduates, and are increasingly responsive in terms of the training offered. In February and March 2004, four providers were interviewed, discussing first work destinations and early career paths for actors and stage managers. Of these, three identified small television parts in soaps and drama series as one of two predominant areas for early acting work. The other predominant area was fringe or touring theatre (Freakley and Band, 2004b, p.3). This issue has clear implications for graduates' later engagement with the labour market (see Section C below).

There were scattered comments from new performers who felt that more time could be given to preparation for audition. Several students regarded the single session they had received at college as inadequate.

One actor who praised the high quality of training in British schools and colleges nevertheless felt that too much time had been given to skills for radio drama which *'is like 0.01% of the radio; there's no money in it and there's no work in it.. it was utterly pointless... basically teaching us an archaic skill'*.

The few other remarks about perceived inadequacies tended to come from respondents who felt a need for extra tuition in, for example, singing, because of their own relative weakness in this particular core subject. Where some courses are broad-based, other are highly focused towards particular employment routes. Students need when applying to consider how far they want specialist or all-round skills.

Many interviewees found their first encounters with the tax system as self-employed professionals daunting. Most were not in a position to afford the services of an accountant and said that they would have welcomed more advice on this during their time at college. However most reported having received a short session on the subject, and it seems likely that colleges would find it difficult to devote more instruction time to this, bearing in mind heavy training related demands on time. In any case, the problem for the newly employed is in dealing with the specifics of their circumstances, and it is hard to see how the generalities of tax submissions discussed several months in advance would significantly lessen these difficulties when they arise.

Employers' and providers' views on training

A recent consultation of dance employers revealed a lack of consensus as regards suggestions for improving training (Freakley and Band, 2004a, p.12). Contemporary dance company directors wanted more emphasis in training on the care and creative development of the dancer. There were also suggestions for broadening the curriculum, but in specific ways. While two contemporary directors wished for the

incorporation of more choreographic, rather than technical, understanding, there was a preference from four theatre respondents for more emphasis on acting and singing. Only two respondents suggested more emphasis on understanding the industry.

A companion consultation of drama providers showed support for specialisation during training, but alongside broad based training so that graduates could move easily from mainstream into divergent employment contexts. Specialisation could include drama related skills, for example writing, design, teaching and management. Some degree of related skills development would provide alternative career choices as well as supporting sustainability in an unpredictable employment market (Freakley and Band, 2004b, p.15).

Providing the basic tools

While the majority of students were satisfied with the breadth and level of training provided, they pointed out that their time in school could only provide them with a set of tools for employment. In fact many were of the view that nothing could really prepare them for the realities of working life: these could include the stamina needed for doing eight shows a week in a long running show, accepting the absence of a warm-up time, or perhaps working with a director whose approach they found difficult. To some extent too the security of life at college, providing (quite rightly) much encouragement from teachers and a supportive audience for performances shielded them from the disappointments inherent in a highly competitive market.

A lot of people engage in training not really fully understanding what the business is about and how it's worked, and I felt that sometimes we were sheltered at college...it's a lot tougher out there than people actually think. (Actor).

The above comment was made, moreover, not by a new performer unable to find work, but by one who had secured a year long contract shortly after graduation. Another new performer commented that looking back to her college

You can tell that everyone's still there in that whole kind of drama school bubble environment and the realities of the industry, I mean, it's a lot different...And I feel like I'm in Year 7 of drama school at the moment, ...but I'm learning, I'm feeling my own way through it. (New Performer, Musical Theatre)

For many of our interviewees, the kind of learning referred to here involved playing to different audiences, discovering ways of adjusting a performance appropriately, and learning from mistakes.

Several of these recent graduates commented that their training could never prepare them for employment in the sense of the exhilaration which could be experienced in front of a live audience: *they teach you the craft but actually knowing what it's like when it works, when, you know, you get that feeling that you're doing your job well, is sometimes something that you can only get by actually being front of an audience, night after night.*

Advice and support

Many interviewees commented favourably upon their college's efforts in advising how to write CVs, style of photographs, and other aspects of self-marketing. Others

spoke positively about receiving advice on 'looking after yourself' This might include advice on diet and self-presentation, including what to wear at auditions.

For many recent graduates their college showcase had been an occasion to which agents were invited, and there were reports of agents contacting a college afterwards, asking to meet particular students. In a number of cases relationships with agents were initiated in this way, as discussed in Section C.

One interviewee described the help given by her college which '*kind of acted as a little agency when we were in our third year*', putting students forward for jobs as pantomime dancers. This had resulted in many of the students finding work at Christmas during their third, or even their second year.

This college had maintained its efforts, contacting ex students looking for work and passing on news of forthcoming auditions. Others too had built strong links with their school or college which were maintained to some extent following graduation: a former tutor or college director might make contact to pass on information about a possible job opportunity, or conversely a performer might feel comfortable in making enquiries with a former tutor. One returned occasionally for a singing lesson with her former tutor, especially in preparation of a particular, unrehearsed, song for audition.

Those who felt that their former college or school's interest in them finished abruptly with graduation typically felt some degree of disappointment, especially where assurances of continuing support did not materialise, or where they could make unfavourable comparisons between their own institution's efforts to help and reports from new performers elsewhere. One interviewee, noting the practice of many schools and colleges in having an agency, or bringing in agents to see a showcase, was unimpressed by her own institution's advice simply to 'find a job from The Stage'. By contrast, someone who had been very much involved with college life as a year representative for two years felt that a clean break was appropriate as the college would be able to help with access to work only within the institution.

Contacts with agents and directors

Many former students were appreciative of the advice given by their school regarding casting directors and agents. One reported having joined an actors' co-operative group, having invited them to see her performance on the advice of her school. Several others had secured an agent's services through the medium of their college and a number reported that agents had 'talent spotted' them at an end of a training showcase.

Others took a more proactive approach. For example one interviewee explained that he had found an agent by inviting her to see his performance in a show, following her visit to college to talk to students about how agents work. This proactive approach was recommended by other performers, one of whom observed that not all colleges are successful in persuading agents to view a showcase performance.

While those whose colleges were not active in giving advice about securing agents were inclined to see this as a shortcoming, views varied on whether the services of an agent are indispensable to a new performer (See Section C below and the New Performers Survey Report.)

Personal contacts other than those at school or college were frequently mentioned, as for example by a stage manager who had gained several contracts in this way, having needed to go through the interview process for only one job.

Several students expressed positive views about using *Spotlight*, one having noticed on several occasions at audition an edition showing his photo open on the table, another commending the discounts available through the publication. Others were not impressed, having never been called to audition through *Spotlight*. One suggested, however, that someone interested in a *Spotlight* entry might go to a casting director, so that the link was not apparent to the applicant.

Castnet website received a very favourable mention from several students, allowing them to search for job opportunities and apply immediately on line, perhaps following up with a letter. These students felt empowered by the self-reliance and proactive approach enabled by this service.

Section B Early employment experiences

First jobs

Notwithstanding overall satisfaction with their college training, many of the interviewees commented that on leaving college they started to learn important lessons through first jobs in their chosen profession: drama or dance school was just about building the foundations, and the first step on the ladder towards building a career came after graduation: *'just being out there and being part of the profession....'* This new performer felt that her first job broadened her mind as an actress, preparing her for the fact that some work situations would lack the discipline experienced at college, for example a lack of time given for warm up.

Others stressed the importance of observing more experienced performers and learning from their approaches to practice, applying or adapting as desired. Benefits from working under experienced directors were also mentioned.

Challenging work

Many of our interviewees reported satisfaction with their first job in terms of the nature of the work, getting to grips with a solid role in the line of employment for which they had been trained.

One dancer contrasted life in her first job with being *'given everything on a plate'* at college; she felt challenged by the simple fact of having to do shows every night: *'that sort of stretches you and improves you...performance-wise'*. (Dancer).

There were, however, new performers who were disappointed in the nature of their first professional job, and for reasons other than low pay. Among these was an actor who found a first job six months after leaving college in a prestigious regional rep company. He explained that initially he was delighted to be earning some money *as an actor*. *'I felt I had arrived – I was doing what I was trained to do, mixing again with like-minded people'*. This was followed by disappointment as the director turned out to be young and inexperienced, allowing the actors to *'mess about'* and appearing unperturbed by failure to learn lines. Likewise, a young dancer who had enjoyed, overall, her first dance role because of the friendliness of her fellow

dancers, had been disappointed that the work was not more challenging, finding that the choreography fell short of her expectations.

Both dance and drama providers felt that a good start for their students would include work which challenged their abilities, and under the guidance of an experienced choreographer or director (see papers cited above).

Making a good start

One student found the concept of 'making a good start' very difficult to define. He pointed out the difficulty in making a meaningful comparison between one new performer's success in landing a 'plum' job in the West End on leaving college with nothing to follow for a number of years and another graduate's perseverance and eventual success after initial inability to find work.

The success of a new performer in coming out of college and straight into a good agent and a high profile job was described by one interviewee as a '*double edged sword*': the almost inevitable fallow patch to follow could be very painful and unsettling, for it would be only a tiny percentage of performers who would go on to find continuous employment. For this interviewee a good start would mean finding a good agent, and failing this, it would mean going to some auditions, and '*taking it upon yourself to make things happen*', doing showcases, assembling a show reel and working hard at marketing oneself as a product.

Another performer agreed that definitions of a good start could be somewhat narrowly defined. She commented that in the absence of a job in the period immediately following training, a good start must consist in applying for jobs, going to theatres, going to see films, trying to meet arts directors in a social setting, such as bars, and networking. Another ploy for a graduate leaving school without an agent or contacts might be to audition for reputable Fringe directors, and then to self-market by inviting agents or co-operatives to this.

Respondents overall recognised the value of different types of first job, whether a 'plum' job in the West End or a professional job of lesser profile with the capacity to enable a new performer to develop professionally, learning from others by observing their performance and discussing with them ways in which their own practice might improve.

While ideally the first job would challenge and stretch the new performer, many felt that a performance related job, whether high profile or not, could be judged a good start.

Provider perspectives of a good start

Overall, our respondents' views of the characteristics of a 'good start' accord with provider perspectives.

The dance providers included a chance to learn, develop and grow as professionals, network building and reputation building potential among their criteria for a good start (Freakley, 2004a). They also included good pay, a condition less frequently stressed by our new performers (see pay and conditions below). Most dance providers expressed the view that new graduates should accept almost any relevant performance work offered, though they were more inclined than the new performers

to recognise the potential of some early work for damaging reputations, and jeopardising prospects for progression to work thought to carry higher prestige.

All the drama providers interviewed (Freakley and Band, 2004b, p.7) felt that new performers had made a good start if they were in paid work, preferably not below Equity minimum rates of pay. Ideally, a first job should offer opportunities to grow and develop as an actor, preferably in a good company with a good director. These providers considered it important that the first job should give a new performer the chance to opportunities to network and make contacts with individuals who might be able to offer, or give leads into, further work.

The providers interviewed regarded network building jobs as equally important for stage managers in a small sector, where 'everyone knows everybody else'. The providers rated highly the chances of graduate stage managers finding work immediately after training, perceiving them to be in demand as well as highly qualified. (p.8)

The New Performers' Working Lives postal survey shows that about one third of graduates experience some weeks of unemployment immediately following graduation. The data also indicate the disparate fortunes of dance and drama graduates after the initial searching process, with the unemployment rate of actors consistently higher than those with a dance based qualification during the course of the year.

Pay and conditions

Many of these performers had benefited from work that complied with Equity guidelines. However, one interviewee had not renewed her Equity membership, reporting difficulty in finding the money for this during a period of unemployment. She admitted to some confusion, having taken her college's advice to register as self-employed, subsequently de-registering when she found that Equity was asking for payment which she could not afford. This interviewee expressed some doubts regarding rights and rules in relation to Equity membership, and her views received support from another performer who spoke of a lessening of Equity's influence since the government's abolition of union monopoly, and suggested that benefits had become less clearly defined.

A stage manager who had worked in television compared her position under a BECTU contract and the conditions of work as a freelancer. While freelancers are paid overtime, she conceded that her contract as a staff member offered the advantage of security for six months, though calling for her to put in the hours needed for the production.

Among new performers there were divergent views about the advisability of accepting early contracts that were poorly paid, or even without pay, and contracts which offered professional employment which would not ideally have been chosen. Even a respondent who had been very successful in gaining two end-to-end West End jobs straight out of training commented that his agent would put him forward for whatever jobs are available, for in the context of West End musical theatre, shows have different casting times and few roles might be available for casting at the time a job is needed:

You don't always go for the jobs that appeal to you, you tend to go for everything and whatever you get offered you take, as the general rule.
(New Performer, Musical Theatre).

One new performer was unusual in advocating waiting for a job that should turn out to be enjoyable or beneficial. This would mean, even if unemployed, perhaps turning down a job travelling round the world doing a small show for small money, if this had little appeal. More frequently interviewees said that, unless fundamentally unsuitable work was offered, jobs should be accepted because they offered unforeseen learning experiences and new contacts.

Another interviewee had benefited from the experience of 'a good part' with a well known director, but had been paid expenses only, and was asked to work extra days for no pay. While deploring the '*way that actors are exploited*' this performer nevertheless found compensations in that this early job provided material for a CV, as well as exposure to potentially useful contacts. Others agreed that level of pay was not a high priority, for example: '*...it's always a consideration, but it's the job, whether I think it will open any doors for me or whether it's something that I think would, you know, improve my skill base...*'

As might be expected, new employees' assessment of a 'good employer' included the respect accorded to the employee and easy and friendly lines of communication with those in authority.

Irrespective of the intrinsic value of such work, however, one performer pointed out that in order to take on a professional job with no or very low pay, it was usually necessary to take on a second, non-performance related job. This placed a heavy burden on performers' stamina as well as diminishing the time available to attend auditions for future work. One interviewee was concealing spare time working from his West End musical employers, lest they perceive this as posing a threat to his stage performance. (See also Galloway *et al* 2002 for discussion of 'grey areas' and 'back pocket money' especially in music and the visual arts, and the New Performers' Working Lives Survey report on earnings.)

One interviewee saw the low pay situation in terms of a trade off for a performer in the early stages of a career, explaining that one poorly paid job had yielded for her a DVD copy of her performance as well as something to write about on her CV. She had accepted that actors get what they are given in the period following college, being in a poor position to negotiate better terms because others would be available and willing to do the job for no pay.

Paying the rent

Ultimately the '*need to pay the rent*' was a deciding factor for respondents, notwithstanding their preference in principle to forego high levels of pay for '*love of doing the work*'. Practical considerations might mean either turning down a job that was poorly paid though attractive for the experience offered, or taking on additional, non-professional work.

One respondent who had decided to make a career as a stand-up comic was working in a largely unpaid capacity in venues around the country, supplementing this work with writing material for the BBC, working as a street performer and occasionally as an actor. Since leaving college he had secured three theatre contracts, the terms of which were negotiated by an agent.

For a dancer who had received no grant for any of his time in training and had a substantial personal loan to repay, the relatively high pay for a first job on a cruise ship boosted the 'plus' side, alongside the high reputation of this cruise company and the value of the work for a CV.

In the case of one respondent, student debt had influenced his acceptance of immediately available work in a casino. For another, it meant taking work in television commercials. A recently married actor had been given an ultimatum by his wife: that he would have to give up acting in favour of some career with a more reliable income if within a two year period he has not managed to find some sustainability in acting.

The reliance of many of these young people on a supplementary income aligns with data from the New Performers' Working Lives Survey which found that supplementary jobs appear to be a constant characteristic of respondents during the 12 months following graduation: in the survey week, 1 in 4 held a second job (Davies, 2006, p.34). Though their annual earnings from this were modest, these were clearly essential. In the year after graduation, about one third of graduates were employed in non-performance related work, while a half are working in a performance-related job at any one time (p.2)

Clearly, financial pressures are a factor at more advanced as well as at the earliest stages of working life, and we discuss this in more detail in Section C.

Second jobs

From first to second jobs

Some of the interviewees identified a definite sense of progression from their first to second job. This might be in terms of a higher profile role, better pay and conditions or other aspects of the work which could serve as a sound basis for career development.

A prime example here is a new performer who gained a year's contract straight from college as 'swing' in a successful West End musical. He then immediately accepted a year's contract with a second musical, also in the West End. While the former job provided more variety, and provided rewarding work for a dancer, the second job represented career progression as a lead part, and he was confident that his skills in acting and singing as well as dancing would meet the challenge of this role. In a similar vein, another respondent whose first job was a year's contract in the West End followed this with the role of understudy for the main part in a high profile musical. He saw this second job as both a natural step and a progression from his first, less significant part.

A similar sense of career progression was voiced by an assistant stage manager who worked as a production runner. This for her was *'just a starting point...a way into the industry'*. This job was followed by work in a small team on a television drama series, bringing hard work and much more responsibility in setting up filming.

Another interviewee had learned *a helluva lot* from his first job: a nine month Theatre Education tour, and yet his second job, though lasting only four days, was preferred because it drew on his interest in martial arts. Already trained in this field, the

performer progressed by learning about working on films, enjoying meeting and working with people with the same professional focus.

In some cases, new performers were offered a second job having been 'talent spotted' in the course of their first employment, and the move could be serendipitous rather than the result of career planning. Such was the case with an actor who had waited six months after leaving college for his first fixed term job with a major repertory company, then for just one day in a radio play. The radio work had no links, except in the most general terms, with first employment.

For others, the second job was seen to follow naturally from the first, though not necessarily with any sense of career progression. For example, one graduate in Musical Theatre had started work in pantomime at a seaside resort. She had enjoyed this because of meeting '*great people*' from different backgrounds, among whom she had made close friends, and the short nature of the contract meant only a limited time away from home. The next job with a cruise line in the Carribean involved the same kind of dancing work, with evening shows allowing plenty of free time during the day – overall '*a fabulous six months*'. Having been offered a new contract with this cruise line, however, this new performer was considering similar work with the same company but at a fixed base in the Mediterranean, which would allow her to meet a different circle of people and allow family and friends to visit. At this stage in her life, variety of venue, a congenial working environment and continuing links with home and family set the framework for a choice of second (and subsequent) employment.

There were other examples of performers who were, for the present, simply enjoying their jobs, rating highly the flexibility of shifts, friendly employers and work colleagues: they had looked for, and found, in a second job something which would again offer '*really good fun*'. Among these was the dancer who having enjoyed working firstly on a cruise ship and secondly as an actor in a ghost scene at a popular heritage site: she was planning to take a three month singing course in London as a prelude to applying for drama school.

For some, a quickly available second job represented progression from their first job after training, but the second job could for others prove more elusive, as for the actor whose first job in a one week theatre show in the Carribean was followed by '*the worse time since I left school*'. This was several months without professional employment. Disappointingly, too, his high hopes of the second job that eventually materialised were not fulfilled, and he reported feeling '*like part of the machinery: the job didn't extend me or challenge me, and I didn't like being inactive*'.

Sustainability

One interviewee had been delighted to secure a second lead part in a musical on tour and then in the West End, but despite this initial success and the services of an agent in whom she placed great trust, had subsequently done no professional work. Many of our interviewees referred to quite long fallow periods (see also the New Performers' Working Lives survey report).

In a sector where project funding may itself be uncertain, seemingly promising possibilities for further employment can evaporate for reasons outside the control of the performer. As an example, an actor who worked for only four days on a film in a small role was told that he might be brought back in for later filming in another character, and that there might be more work for him involving the martial arts.

These possibilities vanished as the film ran out of budget before completion. Another actor pointed out that even a year long contract is not guaranteed, as a show can close within that period, leaving the cast out of work. It is not surprising, therefore, that job security and sustainability loomed large in the minds of most interviewees. The postal survey too showed how job security is one of the areas with which respondents were least satisfied.

Several recent graduates spoke of the help of their former school or college in providing work during a difficult period. This might be office based work, but it enabled rent to be paid, allowed attendance at auditions, and sometimes provided news of suitable opportunities for professional employment.

Some interviewees reported taking dancing or singing classes to keep up their standard - on a regular basis - or more sporadically as permitted by financial and other logistical considerations such as their work schedule or travel time. Others were taking regular classes in aerobics to keep fit. One was taking up horse riding (as a potentially useful skill for period dramas), and playing the saxophone (as a possible asset in Theatre in Education work).

Another interviewee had found work as a dance teacher, while undertaking a degree, to be followed by a PGCE. She hoped to find work as a dancer, and to base a later career in teaching upon her experience in a performer role. This interviewee found personal fulfilment in both performance and teaching. She was confident that a combination of the two roles would maximise prospects of building a sustainable career, bearing in mind both the short working life of a ballet dancer and the uncertainties of the employment market.

Aiming for sustainability, one new performer worked as a magician in his second job (his first employment on leaving college had been in a casino), intending to alternate lucrative work at private parties and corporate events with working as an actor: the former would provide a fairly reliable income at times when acting work was not available, at the same time preserving his identity as an entertainer.

Performers in all parts of the sector looked to incremental learning from first jobs as a basis for sustainability. This learning could include improvements in skills through practice, and skills improved or added by taking classes. It could be a growing appreciation of ways in which the industry works. For example one young dancer was typical of many interviewees in reporting that experience in her first job had given her both confidence and a growing understanding of the appropriate way to behave and present herself '*around important and different people*'. This kind of learning was proving a good foundation for subsequent job applications and performance opportunities.

Provider views on sustainability

Drama providers emphasized the lack of linear development in acting careers, suggesting that simply sustaining employment in the theatre or related sector should be seen as success (Freakley and Band, 2004b). All the providers interviewed spoke of career sustainability in terms of moving across the full range of acting contexts: theatre, television, film, radio, commercials, small-scale production and touring, theatre in education. This contrasts with the views of two dance providers regarding the care needed in seeking reputation-building jobs: they warned that a first job with a lesser ballet company, in cabaret, on a cruise ship or a lesser musical would severely limit access later on to a large ballet company. Another dance provider stated that initial work in a West End performance and/or acting would not be a

sound basis for a return to serious contemporary dance, no matter how talented the performer. Clearly performers with multi-faceted expertise have difficult choices to make here.

Section C Tackling the labour market

Labour market pressures

There are few 'safe jobs' in the performing arts. In the New Performers Working Lives Survey it was earnings and job security which gave respondents least satisfaction. Some of our interviewees had secured sound contracts with good roles in high profile productions with companies which they respected, but even these did not necessarily give 100% assurance of employment:

I had a job secured... pretty much guaranteed for over a year... You don't know where the next job's going to come from... That still looms over you all the time: there is no security... Even if it was for a year, you know, even in that year the show could have closed... It could have closed at any point. (Vocalist and dancer)

'Secured' and 'guaranteed' work is therefore contingent on the production chiming with public taste and meeting commercial pressures for a predicted run. Perhaps the most secure contracts were those offered by long-standing West End productions, cruise ship companies or leisure firms, often outside the UK. Four successive contracts with a cruise ship company had provided stability for one person:

It's very hard to go back to England and have no money and have to go and audition again, when I could be working... I feel very happy to know that I've worked since I left college and I haven't had to have unemployment and struggles like that. (Dancer)

The New Performers Survey shows that one year after qualifying, 1 in 10 recent graduates were unemployed at any given point and about a quarter did not have any performance-related work during the first year after college, though most students move quickly into paid work at the end of their course and by Christmas 85-90 per cent are working. 30 per cent of dancers go straight from college into performance work, and this rises to 55 per cent in the course of the year. For former drama students, only 15 per cent go straight into performance-related work, and about 30-35 per cent are engaged in a performance-related activity at any one time (Davies, 2006, p.18).

Coping with an unpredictable pattern of employment and income exercised many of the interviewees who were by now well aware of the competition they faced. Most spoke in very realistic terms about employment opportunities, as did a performer who could compare the UK with the USA:

It's very, very tough in the UK. You've got to be exceptionally hard-working, exceptionally focused and determined, and organised. And you've got to be pretty talented, as well. There's just so many good people chasing so little work: it's a simple sort of supply and demand thing. (Actor)

Skills for work

Lack of skills for the work which is available was one issue raised in 2004 by some senior television interviewees (Freakley, 2004b) who suggested that in training the traditional hierarchy of theatre above other media was still being perpetuated rather than giving more attention to film and television work as possible employment. This was not however evident in the way that most of our respondents spoke about their careers to date. Some of these young performers had worked in and had further aspirations for television roles. Some had filmed commercials. One was moving from a strong beginning in musical theatre into television presenting, even though this meant starting on lower pay as a runner.

The general picture of areas of work given in the 2005 Equity Survey of members shows 39% working in a theatre production in the survey week, 20% in variety and 18% in TV. Corporate production and events accounted for 11% and film for 7%. (We should remember that these were more mature people than the new performers whom we interviewed.)

Senior TV commissioners (Freakley 2004b) also pointed to a lack of TV actor preparation and of studio knowledge among beginners. Some interviewees did comment on the relatively limited training given on their course for TV work. One planned to do a three-month course to improve her skills for TV while another could not afford a similar course costing £1,000. Another actor *'would have liked to have done more film and television because I have so many auditions for those and they always ask you to "bring it down"'*.

However some performers had quickly learned much in the studio in their first film jobs, like these two actors:

I was just incredibly surprised at the size of the production as well as ... the amount of people working on it. In terms of the work I did... I felt quite ready and ... prepared to do the job that was required of me. Obviously things were happening ten times faster than in my training, but I found it was a good grounding that I could actually just go for it and trust that it would be fine. (Actor)

It was an action film ... that only lasted four days... a really exciting experience... I didn't learn new skills in a physical sense, I just learned a lot about being on a film set and in a low budget movie. (Actor)

Television work alone calls for many different skills to meet the demands of particular TV producers. We should note also that it would be rare to find a group of employers in any industry which did not identify skills gaps in new entrants to their profession.

Diversity, equity and access concerns

This evaluation programme Phase 1 identified the low level of diversity among the student intake: this is obviously replicated in the cohorts of new performers. The 2005 Equity survey of performance professionals recorded 6% of performers as coming from minority ethnic groups. Overall, 60% of its members had spent time unemployed and seeking work during the year before the survey; this rose to 72% for those from minority ethnic backgrounds. From the 23% of members who responded, 47 per cent said that they had training needs; the figure for performers from minority ethnic groups was 67%.

However, for certain Black or minority ethnic performers, some historic barriers may be shifting. Freakley (2004b) highlighted the commercial need for television companies to meet and to reflect audience needs and interests, and the BBC's 10% ethnicity target for certain programmes had by 2004 been exceeded. An industry expert cited in the above technical paper remarks that talented actors and dancers from minority backgrounds are more in demand and can progress quickly into principal roles. Indeed, one of our male interviewees was confident about the future, having noted that American films now almost always include a Black main part.

For a young actress, matters were not so straightforward. In her view, roles for Black women tended to be stereotypical: *'rude girl or whatever'* and she felt herself less suited to playing such parts:

They find that difficult to take – extremely – that someone of colour can speak the way I speak, which I find amazing in 2004. So casting-wise, it tends to be difficult to place me...

There's very little as a Black actress. They always seem to be working class and loud or they're sort of a side-kick friend who isn't very glamorous, doesn't wear much make-up, but dowdy...

A detailed analysis of ethnicity is given in Lindsay (2006) which uses data on 2005 entrants to the professional schools.

Ethnicity is not the only source of disadvantage. Children from comfortable backgrounds have better chances than those from families with less financial security at the pre-vocational stage, less financial pressure while training and more support in the transitional phase after graduation (e.g. by living in the family home without paying rent). Other socio-economic factors can influence how an individual performer engages with the labour market, and the survey showed that employment was higher among performers from a higher social class background (Davies 2006). See also Lindsay (2006) on the socio-economic status of current students. One actor commented *'It's a difficult industry to work in if you're working class, and I came from a very working class Welsh family'*.

Only one of our interviewees had recorded a disability (with language skills) on the previous year's survey questionnaire. However in interview, four spoke of periods when physical illness had prevented them working for weeks or months. In one case the onset of a more serious condition was prejudicing the performer's future career directions. For a self-employed person a disability or illness likely to limit one's ability to work carries particular pressures which people whose jobs include sick pay are spared.

The 2005 survey of Equity members found that 8% of those working in the UK performance industry reported having a disability (among performers who were older than the recent graduates whom we interviewed). The 2001 Census showed that 17.8 % of people aged 16-64 in the UK had a limiting long-term illness, health problem or disability, with the percentage of people reporting this lower among younger people and increasing with age. In interviewing dance and drama graduates we are dealing with a young population: the New Performers' survey records only 2% of respondents saying that they have a long-term illness or disability which could affect their work. The Census data show that overall, 6.7% of people in work in 2001 reported having a limiting long-term illness. However definitions of disability are a sensitive issue, with different surveys using different definitions and reliance on self-

reporting can lead to under-reporting (Galloway *et al*, forthcoming). Issues concerning disability are addressed in Lindsay (2006) and Band and Freakley (2006)

Agents

Many interviewees recalled that as students they were keen to be taken on by an agent (see Section A) and often the agent became central in the search for work. After one year about 60 per cent of respondents to the New Performers Working Lives Survey had an agent. In interview, performers spoke of agents in terms which ranged from warm gratitude to disappointment:

He's very good at asking lots of questions to make sure you get exactly what you want and he doesn't even bother putting you up for things that you wouldn't want to do 'cos it's a waste of his time and your time. (Actor and vocalist)

Interviewees were often concerned to have an agent with some specialist understanding and position. Some had gained slight increases in pay thanks to an agent's negotiation. However, it could be hard to know what effort the agent was making:

You can't really monitor that – you don't know if they're putting you up for things. You trust them you see. There's people out there that are not actually doing a good job. (Dancer)

Several interviewees also stressed the need to keep proactive oneself and not to rely on an agent entirely. (See Galloway and Band, 2004 for more discussion of the place of agents in the lives of new performers.) One interviewee who found both his first and second job independently, and whose agent had found only two jobs in about three years, had re-appraised his agent's role: *'...the more you learn about the industry the more you realise that agents don't create the work: you create the work and they negotiate it'*.

Overall, opinion diverged on whether acceptance by an agent is crucial or even advisable for new performers. Many of those who took this route were satisfied that their agent acted conscientiously and productively on their behalf, and they had no hesitation in contacting the agent: for some this trust amounted to handing over their careers to an agent. For example one interviewee commented that her agent *'sorted everything out for me, and that's what she does as my agent, just kind of gets you the auditions and she organises you, really'*. By contrast others reported that their agent had been of little or no help in securing audition opportunities and doubted that reminders or other enquiries would be welcomed.

The New Performers Survey (pp 37-39) shows that among dance graduates who had an agent at the survey date, one third were employed straight after graduating – twice the incidence of employment in performance occupations compared with those who had no agent. By the following April, however, this advantage disappears. We can only speculate about the possible reasons for this pattern.

An advantage is apparent in the correlation between having an agent and time spent in performance-related work (24 weeks rather than 20 for dancers, and 16 weeks rather than 14 for actors). Among our interviewees, not all felt that having an agent had increased audition opportunities. Clearly the rate of conversion from audition to job is important for performers and without this, they may question the agent's value.

The clearest advantage of having an agent attaches to the earnings of those who succeed in getting performance-related work. The New Performers survey shows that, taken overall, both dance and drama graduates who have an agent earn £90 more each week in performance-related work.

Other views of agents

Providers have viewed agents as 'a mixed blessing' for representing the interests of their former students. (Freakley, 2004a, p.6). Interview data from dance providers supports the view that an established CV is a preferred precursor to appointing an agent, and suggests that a performer's interests are usually more effectively represented by those agents who take a holistic approach to managing a career, rather than by those who have dozens of dancers on their books.

Drama providers were similarly ambivalent (Freakley and Band, 2004b, p.12), demonstrating some confidence in agents' value for students by inviting them to showcases, but drawing a distinction between those who would work hard for their clients and those for whom the new performer is simply a name on a list.

For their part, theatrical agents for dancers have stated that the principle service they offer is to keep a number of dancers as clients on their books. (Freakley and Band, 2004a, p. 4). From these they suggest a selection to casting directors or producers as and when informed of casting requirements. Only one of the agents contacted did not attend school showcases as recruiters.

Co-operative agencies

A few performers had joined cooperative agencies and spoke positively of them. Typically the individual gives his or her own time unpaid to staff the office, and contributes something towards the overheads of the not-for-profit group. Collectively members of the group represent each other, and that faith in colleagues' professional skills encourages individuals during lean times. They had certainly offered support to those who spoke about this. Younger people can also learn much about the industry from more experienced performers in the cooperative agency, like this actress who, after working in two well-received plays, had been unemployed for eight months:

As a new person in the business I've really been taken care of by the older actors... but it's not something that I will be able to do in ten years' time. I've been very lucky. The co-op I've got is actually excellent and everyone's very supportive and I feel so confident (Actor)

Whatever the views of others might be, these performers did not appear to see such arrangements as second best to having one's own agent. In the technical papers cited above both providers and employers referred to the cooperative agency as a useful mechanism for those graduates who did not get their own agents; some also commented on the tendency for some graduates to sit back and await discovery, when working with a co-op would allow them to seek work directly and with the support of others. In this spirit, one recent graduate reported joining an actors' co-operative group after inviting them to see her performance on her college's advice. The initiative of one college in setting up a co-operative system was commended: any alumni

losing an agent could avail themselves of the system, putting themselves and others forward for jobs, working both as an agent and a performer.

Auditions

The 2004 survey respondents had attended on average 14 first auditions. This figure varies between a minimum of just 2 and a maximum of 150 first auditions. Further variation surrounds different practice in recalls and between musical theatre and other genres, while stage managers attend interviews not auditions. There are differences too between open auditions and those to which one is invited. It is clear that when they are not working professionally, performers expect their agent to put them up for auditions and become nervous in 'dry' periods when few productions are being cast. However, those who are successful in getting work do not need to attend further auditions until their contract nears its end. Taking these complex features into account, interpretation of the actual numbers of auditions attended has to be cautious.

While college productions had offered a particular sort of audition experience, the world of work provided different opportunities and tensions. Becoming a professional meant developing one's own constructive attitude to managing the audition process. At its most acute, audition nerves stopped one actor from giving of his best:

They are judging you on the basis of one performance... for me ... if I have to learn a script for... it may be just experience, and I just need more experience in getting rejected to know that I'll survive, but I crack under the pressure. I sweat and I get shaky and nervous and everything... so nervous I can't really perform well. The only auditions that I've ever done well in have been spontaneous... improvisation in which case I'm well away.

Others had learned to take the experience as a learning process, especially if they could gain feedback on their performance, or saw it as just '*part of your job going to an audition... it's not a nerve-racking experience*'. Many developed a philosophical approach:

They know what they want so... just go along and enjoy yourself: take it as a workshop – do your best. And if you're right, and they like you, you'll get it. (Actress, musical theatre)

The notion of '*if you're right*' came into many explanations of how to handle the fierce competition and the personal exposure in auditions. Performers repeatedly stressed that talent alone does not guarantee work:

It's about who you know and how people view you, as opposed to how talented you are sometimes. (Dancer)

Being aware of one's own casting potential was a useful factor; so also the recognition that whatever the talent, a performer's physical features might just not fit the production. Much depends on the casting frame of a production and the mood of the times and not everyone can look right for the moment. Alongside prevailing fashion, age plays a part as well as individual style: one young actor predicted that more mature years would probably open more possibilities to her in character roles.

One actress who had held three substantial contracts found it helped to research as far as possible before auditions, not just about the character and the show, but also if possible by finding out who would be on the panel and the extent of their reputation.

Location

The 2005 Equity members survey found that 90% of those working in the performance industry were based in England, with 42% living in London and 14% in the South East. The fact that London is the hub of professional work opportunities was an issue for many new performers. To attend auditions they had either to live in the capital and cope on limited incomes with the cost of living, or travel there for auditions, incurring other costs. Living in less expensive towns or areas outside the city did not give access to classes of professional standard, while anyone who was unemployed or on low pay found the classes available in London very expensive. Some interviewees stressed the value of classes at the right level because they provide a competitive standard and one can set a personal target against others who attend.

Particular pressures in the UK labour market provoked two interviewees within two years of qualifying to explore different business opportunities in Europe and the USA. One was in a partnership setting up English productions for specific audiences in Europe. The other had formed a production company in Britain but was also starting to work professionally in America, especially in radio and voice-overs. Both had seen a gap in the market which offered the chance to exploit the English repertoire and/or English accent. One had the ability and confidence to make the investment and take the associated risks after many years experience as a successful businessperson before changing career (this was not a D&DA holder). The obvious risks taken by these two entrepreneurs are echoed in the less acute risks taken by all the recent graduates who were self-employed.

Underpinning performance work: alternative jobs

Galloway and Band (2004) considered the alternative work which those starting a performance career take. For some this will remain an important part of their work history for years to come. For many, it will be essential to develop alternative routes to support them in lean periods which may be:

- Work which is related to performance skills and interests
e.g. front-of-house, administrative work for an arts organisation, charity sales work which calls for acting skills, entertainment industry work.
- Work which is unrelated to performance skills and interests
e.g. market research and promotional work, retail work
- Teaching/instruction
e.g. classes in dance and drama college, children's after school and weekend recreational classes, sports centre classes

Each of these has its strengths and weaknesses. Among the latter was the fact that typically, these jobs *'are minimum wage jobs and they're not very fulfilling because*

*you could only do them for about three months ... supermarket work or bar jobs'.
(Dancer)*

Galloway and Band (2004) and Davies (2006) provide further discussion of alternative jobs.

The relationship between performance and non-performance work is shown in the 2005 Survey of Equity members where two-fifths (43%) of respondents worked outside the performance industry in the survey week (48% of women and 39% of men). Over the previous year, they had on average worked for 28 weeks outside the industry and 18 weeks within it.

Financial pressures

The Dance and Drama Awards enabled some students to train who would not otherwise have been able to afford to do so. With college behind them they faced practical and financial pressures. We reported in Galloway and Band (2004) on the budgetary constraints facing many new graduates in the period directly after leaving dance or drama school and the lifestyle decisions which they were making. While many were philosophical about limited earnings in the short term, the longer term scenario could pose problems. So too for a mature student (not a Dance and Drama Award holder) who had left a financially successful career to train in drama and was now forging a second career:

I'm prepared to do things for a modest amount of money at the moment because I'm building track record and a career profile, but... I'm not doing this as some sort of charitable deal... I want to be artistically successful; I also want to be commercially successful as a product. (Actor)

Equity's 2005 survey of members (two-thirds of whom were aged 35 or older) found that just 6% recorded income from work in the performance industry of £30,000 or more. 4% had no income and 48% less than £6,000. The position of women was markedly worse than that of men. Our New Performers Survey found that respondents earned at a rate of £12,000 - £18,000 per annum. Actual income was much less, because on average respondents were in performance-related work for 19 weeks of the year, so the estimated income from this source was £5,900 per annum. Similarly, the Equity members survey recorded average income from work in the performance industry of £6,000 over the previous year.

An actress who had a sound employment record in the first eighteen months pointed to the absence of financial security and the need now to take account of earnings, though she still gave a higher priority to job quality over pay:

You don't get bonuses for loyalty and you don't even really get bonuses for experience.. you could be on five thousand pounds in the West End and the next week you could be on tour moving scenery at a hundred pounds a week.. it's starting to be a consideration but it's more about the standard of the job, and the quality of the company, and the quality of the show. (Actor and vocalist)

This lack of certainty had stimulated one actress to set up a company which would tour English work overseas:

*I'm only twenty-three but... I want a career out of this at some point... it's got to lead somewhere and that seems to me the only way of doing it, other than... picking a lottery ticket, standing in line and hoping to break into TV.
(Actor)*

Seeking out the good employer

Just as an individual works to build a reputation as a reliable and useful professional performer (see Section D below), employers too have their reputations. Asked what constituted a 'good' employer, interviewees mentioned:

- fair treatment
- respect
- 'proper' pay
- treating you as a critical part of the team
- good quality props
- sufficient time to rehearse
- good communication
- time off
- refreshments
- parties and events for employees/the company
- a readiness to listen to employees
- 'the basic and inexpensive things that make you feel looked after'
- monitoring performers who might overdo things and put their health at risk
- arranging good accommodation (on tours, on ships, and overseas)
- fostering a good rapport within the company

Working contexts – good and bad

Performers described a great variety of working contexts. The examples below come from three areas which offer employment to many recent graduates: theatre in education companies, heritage/entertainment venues and cruise ship companies.

Theatre in education companies

Two actors spoke of two different theatre in education companies which were described as profit-driven, providing minimal rehearsal time, and shoddy props:

It was just the worst end of TIE. We had a day's rehearsal... and it was awful. It was shamefully bad, the script and whatnot.

The primary concern was making money as opposed to giving the schools a good product... They were over-charging for their performances... They were a bit mercenary and the props they sent us out with... they were a bit cheap and nasty really and the kids probably deserved better than that.

In contrast one of these actors had worked for a good company which had the children's experience at heart, and sought to provide a quality production:

It was a very good set... It created a big impression on the children. And the company had a good relationship with the schools... they'd been working in the area for a long time... We also did public performances in theatres.

The script was very well written by an author that the company often commissions to do work... It had a lot of wit in it and I never got bored, despite doing perhaps two or three performances a day for three months. I didn't ever get bored because it was funny... we worked well together as a team. We enjoyed doing the material...

[The company] had the interest in children and... had artistic interests at heart.

Heritage sites and entertainment venues

At a major tourist venue which attracts very high numbers of visitors, one performer reported what she saw as exploitation in the excessive performance level required for poor pay. In contrast, a popular heritage site which called for hard work offered good company and a positive atmosphere to compensate:

It was physically hard work because we did hundreds of shows a day... about ten minutes long, but you didn't have a break in between so it was carrying on all the time... It was really tiring but it was really good fun. (Dancer)

Cruise ship companies

Here too performers reported wide variation in the working environment. The limitations were stressed by this dancer:

I was sharing a tiny cabin with another girl – we couldn't go upstairs and use any of the facilities. It was like being in a prison... You couldn't do anything and you had two shows a week and that was it and everyone got very bitchy.

Elsewhere, performers spoke of a state of the art theatre, welcome time off, exciting travel, the constant opportunity to perform, and good pay:

The amount I get paid for the hours I work... I do six shows every cruise and then a small thing at the beginning. Each show's around forty-five minutes... At the moment I'm on seven day cruises...

With my company, 'cos I've stayed with them, it's quite easy for me to ask to go to certain places, and I normally get what I ask for in terms of contracts. I can say what ship I want to go to next...

How we're treated on board is better than on some ships. (Dancer)

Having encountered this diversity themselves, or having heard from friends about their experiences, performers will of course seek to work for those companies which offer better working contexts and avoid those known to be less professional and supportive.

Understanding these and numerous other aspects of the labour market is a process which starts during professional training but is really born of experience in the workplace. In these years performers are learning as much about the workplace as about how to present themselves. This is what we address in Section D.

Section D Creating a professional profile

In this section we look at other aspects of professional socialisation. These include the routes to information about work, how people go about marketing themselves and how they build a track record. This depends on the chance to perform, and for that some may decide to work without pay. We also consider how people maintain their professional development. (See also Galloway and Band, 2004 on these issues.)

Routes to information

The Stage, Webcast, Castnet, PCR, Production Base and Website search were all mentioned by recent graduates as giving information about work opportunities. Some reported having gained work through monitoring such channels, but others who used them were less convinced of their value.

Several performers were positive about *Spotlight*, and one had noticed at audition an issue with his photo open on a table; another commended the discounts available through the publication. Others were not impressed, having never been called for audition through *Spotlight*. However one actor pointed out that someone interested in a *Spotlight* entry might go to a casting director, and this link might not be apparent to the applicant.

Several beginners mentioned Castnet very favourably, as it allowed them to search for job opportunities and apply immediately on-line, perhaps following up with a letter. They felt empowered by the self-reliant and pro-active approach which this service offered.

Freakley and Band (2004) reported on a questionnaire survey of 22 dance employers, and reviewed the ways in which they normally seek dancers.

Subsidised contemporary and diverse companies and the project producer used a mixture of open advertising through publications, posters circulated to dance studios and organisations to publicise work opportunities. Within this group, there are also indications of 'head-hunting'...

In the non-subsidised (musical theatre) sub-sector there are indications of a supply chain, with producers notifying casting directors of their casting requirements and relying on them for a list of potential performers from which they will make their final selection. They do however use some open advertising through the use of casting websites, press adverts and casting newsletters to reach beyond the network of casting directors. The casting directors... in turn phone or otherwise circulate the theatrical agents with the casting requirements and expect them to propose their selection of performers for audition. However, like the producers, they do not rely entirely on the agents but advertise through a variety of channels, including press adverts, casting websites, casting newsletters, posters to dance studios, organisations and training institutions. One casting director keeps a database of performers from which to select.

The theatrical agents make it clear that they do not advertise for dancers but are by and large approached by dancers seeking their services. The main service they offer is to keep a number of dancer/clients on their books and to propose a selection of these to casting directors/producers when notified of

casting requirements. All but one of the agents attend school graduation shows to seek out new dancer/clients.

Freakley and Band, 2004a, p.4

The wide variety of channels of information outlined here underlines the need for new performers seeking work to be very pro-active.

Marketing oneself

Becoming a professional performer means marketing oneself and building a record for good work. Some interviewees had a sharp sense of the need to make things happen. This could mean being in *Spotlight*, using showcase opportunities, short films, or any similar route to getting oneself seen. Inviting potential agents and others with influence to see a performance was recommended. They spoke particularly of:

- up-dating one's CV
- doing a good show reel
- getting good photographs, cost-cutting being a false economy
- developing the ability to write short effective letters to casting directors
- maintaining contact with directors and others who know your work.

Performers often spoke of how personal contact and word of mouth had led to an opportunity for work: *'People have seen me acting in something and then have recommended me to someone else and I've met a few people now, so I feel lucky in that respect'*.

In the face of such complexity, we can see the wisdom of pursuing many routes to promote oneself, and of not relying on an agent alone.

Building a track record

Building a reputation based on one's own work and on the profile of the companies and directors with whom a performer has worked is important.

I've just been lucky enough to not really be out of work for a long period of time. I've had two jobs where I've been based in central London, in the West End, so I haven't had to go on tour or anything and even now when I'm auditioning, things are looking really positive, and they're seeing me in a different light, because I've got that grounding now. (Dancer)

However, as we saw earlier, a superb first job can be a *'double-edged sword'* as it does not guarantee sustainability at that level. Some think that it is better to have a more sheltered start, for instance among people you know, while still improving one's skills rather than having immediate exposure and pressure. (This view could of course be a rationalisation on the part of those who have not struck it lucky early on.)

In describing their progression, interviewees spoke about the chance to work with a particular director, or at a prestigious venue, or in a role which offered new challenges or more visibility:

This one has been in town, an established show, and the accreditation you just receive from it... it's superb..... I've got a good understudy role within this job... playing one of the leads so this is obviously better for me. (Dancer)

Now I feel like I'm really building a career. Before I felt like 'Oh I'm having a great time. This is excellent – I can't believe I'm doing this job. Now I'm actually thinking, 'God, you can get so much more out of this'. Now that I have grown up and got my head screwed on a little bit more, and can see where I need to go – all you have to do is keep trying...(Dancer and vocalist)

It's a better role and it's a more challenging role and it's more hard work.. it's a big step to take; I feel like I'm moving forward... the part itself is very different and it's good for developing technique.. my voice is getting stronger... (Actress and vocalist)

Others cited particular directors with whom they had been pleased to work and directors with a national or international reputation whose names on their CV would carry weight. Among dance employers too, the track record is important:

The provision of a log of professional work emerges as important. More specifically, the roles played, the productions undertaken, the companies/and the choreographers worked with are all indicators of potential employability.
Freakley and Band, 2004

The chance to perform

The New Performers Survey shows that career satisfaction relates to the length of the performance opportunities and whether the person is working in a performance activity at the time of the survey. Certainly interviewees expressed their satisfaction and fulfilment in having the chance to perform regularly. The New Performers' Survey outlines the relationship between satisfaction in career to date and length of employment during the year after qualifying. See Galloway and Band (2004) for more on new performers' pleasure in their work.

The New Performers Survey shows that a prime aspect affecting people's satisfaction with their career is the 'quality of performance activity' and interviewees too assessed their various contracts in such terms, like this dancer recalling her performance experience to date:

I have done a very, very good show. It came off Broadway, it went into the West End... and then it went on tour... Living out of a suitcase is horrible, but it makes it worthwhile when you get on the stage. I had such a lovely part... one of the leads... and it was such a fun part to play. (Dancer and vocalist)

For a young actress, working on a play by an internationally acclaimed playwright at a high profile regional theatre had been a great step forward:

It's a brilliant play obviously, it's a brilliant writer. It was a chance to meet him; it was a chance to be involved in something that was a really, really good idea... done in a really, really good way. The whole premise of the piece was fantastic... I never expected [the writer] to be involved as much as he was, and as forthcoming as he was... that was a dream job – champagne read-throughs! And a very showbiz job, that one. (Actor)

Working without pay

The 2005 Equity Members Survey found that 94% of men respondents and 91% of women were paid for their work in the performance industry. Those most likely not to have been paid worked in film (22%) and small scale theatre (21%). This workforce was notably older than the population of new entrants with which we worked, and among our interviewees some did take the risk of working unpaid in order to be visible.

One actress had agreed to this because she was offered a very good part and liked the venue and the director. She concluded that as a complete unknown, it had been a good starting point. It had made her more employable and gave her technical skills which she drew on in a later successful audition and the role which she was then offered:

It was worth doing the unpaid work.... I've got to a stage where I can't keep doing it... I've been experiencing now the repercussions of having done six months unpaid work. But sometimes you just have to do these things. (Actor)

Despite Equity guidance, beginners eager for experience and visibility may make such compromises. But unpaid work raised matters of principle and could lead to dissatisfaction:

It's totally unfair the way that actors are exploited... everyone knows that they need the exposure. They will just advertise something in PCR for no money but a show reel... I've just done a short film for a director that I met a year ago... I didn't get paid for it; neither did the other actor... If they can afford to spend five grand, ten grand even on a crew and equipment then they can afford to give you two hundred quid and they don't. (Actor)

The distinction here between the performer and technical crew is telling.

The New Performers Survey (Davies, 2006) did not explicitly record work without pay (p.32) but it does suggest that 1 in 7 of drama graduates were engaged in unpaid or low paid work (p.32).

Some overseas tourist centre contracts were said to offer pay which was little more than pocket-money, though accommodation was provided. However some performers balanced the poor pay against the chance to gain experience.

Continuing professional development

Professional skills gained through work were much valued by interviewees. Several spoke of observing and learning from established performers:

People come in that have been around for a while and you see them, how they work and how they conduct themselves... you just observe... you pick up little things that they do... they say 'Oh I've always done this because it works for me'. You can apply that, or adapt it slightly to suit you. (Dancer)

Everybody else in the company was older than me, very much more experienced and so I learnt a lot from them... they'd done a lot of Shakespearean text and I got a lot of insight... from them. (Actor)

Performers also spoke of learning from the material, from the audience and from the director.

For someone who is not performing, formal classes are necessary in order to keep up one's skills and to develop new ones, but they are pricey. As well as classes, some took private lessons or arranged to work personally with a director for a period of time. The Equity members survey recorded that six in ten of respondents who had sought training said that the fees were too high and 41% were afraid of losing work by committing time in advance to training. 60% had had no training in the previous year; of the 40% who had, 67% said that they themselves or their families had paid for this. The experience of this more mature cohort shows the world into which these new dance and drama entrants are being socialised. In this report the most common areas of training need were said to be

- acting
- audition technique/finding work
- voice/accent coaching
- singing
- ITskills
- language/dialect
- business skills

Of those who did have some training, seven in ten (68%) had attended a formal course, 32% had received structured self-tuition and 25% training on the job (Equity, 2005).

Training on the job was highly important to the recent dance and drama graduates. For those in work, professional development derives partly from the weekly schedule of shows. However if there is no developmental progress, the performer then looks for work elsewhere. So, after two years working on cruise ships, one performer gave her reasons for staying as the salary, the uncertainty of returning to seek work in the UK and a personal relationship with someone working for the same company. It was not that the job was offering new opportunities or development:

It can be very restrictive and get very boring at the same time.. twelve day cruises and then you're working six shows – it gets boring. (Dancer)

However, early jobs provide the chance to extend skills in sometimes unexpected ways:

It was a bit of a shock actually, the lack of discipline... at drama school there's so much discipline and it feels like there's only one right way, but I guess there's lots of ways... It was a good thing to learn... It broadens your mind as an actress to accept that people work differently and not everyone's going to do a warm-up... It's just being out there and being part of the profession rather than being cocooned. (Actor)

Only through working can the individual be sure of having made the right career choice, and some will change direction as a result of their experience.

I could have gone into a lot of other contracts in my first year while I was dancing, a lot of musical theatre contracts but when I did that little bit [of television work] I got a real feel for TV presenting... that is actually where I want to see myself in the future... I enjoyed being behind the camera so much. (Dancer)

Some working environments provide less opportunity to extend one's skills, as a performer on a cruise ship noted:

We're doing the same thing week after week but I don't feel either that I've lost any of my skills that I learned at college because when I go to learn new shows I still feel that I can do that and I still feel I can go to an audition and perform well. So I just feel like I've stayed level but... I do feel I've been able to improve in my performance level rather than my technique. (Dancer)

Equity's survey recorded three in ten respondents having had structured careers advice at some point in their career and 76% said that they would be interested in receiving advice from a practitioner with experience of working in the performance industry. Those fresh from dance and drama school might be thought to have a clear purpose but as we have seen, they too valued advice from more experienced performers whether through a co-operative agency or from other members of the company with which they were working.

Professional skills are not only technical; they also involve getting to understand the industry, and interviewees spoke with a growing awareness of commercial as well as artistic priorities. The need for performers to understand the complexities of the tax system was noted earlier. One pointed to the variety of skills needed from managing one's accounts to choosing music:

You've got to keep on top of a lot of things, you're under pressure a lot of the time. You need to be able to deal with that pressure. You need to do it your way ... you're sort of a bit of a Jack of all trades... One of the biggest things for me is your accounts... I was lucky enough; I did A level Maths, so I have got sort of a numerical background. (Dancer)

Section E Personal qualities

Personal qualities are not easily captured by quantitative methods and the postal survey of new performers did not explore these. However the interviews enabled new performers to reflect on the qualities which had stood them in good stead and those which they thought they had developed during their first months after graduating.

Confidence

Confidence is a quality which many students felt they lacked on graduation. This may seem initially surprising in young people who have chosen to put themselves in the spotlight, sometimes alone on stage in front of a full audience. This can, however, be easily explained by the disjunction, mentioned earlier, between the protective ambience of school life and the critical gaze of an audition panel and later the vagaries of a fee paying audience. In addition, interviewees have mentioned the revelation of encountering working practices outside the norm of training, which may require a quite new approach to their craft.

The confidence gained by most performers from landing a first job derived in part from confirmation of their competence to do the work for which they were trained, also from meeting like minded people, and the feeling of fitting in with them. This has important implications for motivation: as expressed by one actor: *'..it made me feel like I had a lot of reasons for continuing with what I'd started'*.

Tenacity

One student spoke of leaving drama school on a *real high*, only to have her confidence knocked back by a series of failed auditions before finding a first job. Another admitted the difficulty in keeping a level head, in convincing oneself that *'it doesn't matter, there'll be another one'*. It is important that new performers maintain a resilience and positive outlook despite disappointments, bearing in mind that respondents spoke of the value of a confident mien at auditions, suggesting that this is an important factor in securing a job. They spoke of the assurance derived both from the euphoria of landing a first job, and from early experiences in work, explaining that they were able to approach subsequent auditions with renewed confidence. Nevertheless, this confidence was fragile for many, and might wane with a string of unsuccessful auditions for second jobs. We noted above that several respondents admitted that *'nerves'* had prevented them from revealing something of their personality and doing justice to their abilities at audition.

A professional attitude

Performers spoke of the need to cultivate a professional attitude towards work, and to convey this attribute to an audition panel, in addition demonstrating competence as an actor or dancer. Conveying the ability to 'get on well' with fellow performers as well as with the director and other authority figures was mentioned a number of times as a quality which commended itself to audition panels.

A gregarious nature was recommended for the ability to make and build up a network of contacts through casual meetings in a social setting which might bear fruit professionally later on.

A stage manager's comments reflected those made by interviewees on the performance side of the sector: her college had warned of the need to *push yourself*, that professional life post training would not be easy. She and the majority of the other interviewees were aware of this need constantly to prove themselves at college, and had learned to carry this on into their professional lives.

Self-discipline

Self-discipline was mentioned by a number of interviewees. For some this meant taking lessons to maintain their performance level. A performer whose college had recommended taking singing lessons at least every two months had reaped benefits from following this advice. Others acknowledged that singing or dancing lessons would be ideal, but found them too expensive, and a number highlighted the practice of London institutions in charging admission in addition to lesson fees.

For another performer, her college's *'harsh'* attitude to time keeping, with a day's suspension for lateness, had instilled in her a discipline for which she was now grateful, finding prompt arrival at auditions and at rehearsals commended itself to directors.

Many new performers, as we noted above, reported some degree of confusion over completing tax returns and other aspects of their finances. They discovered that they had to be well organised and develop administrative skills, including the ability to write professionally presented letters. One interviewee linked this organised approach to administration with tenacity in following up contacts which she had made at failed (as well as successful) auditions: this extended professionalism beyond her work on stage.

Realism

A number of interviewees emphasized that working in the entertainment industry is not simply a job but a way of life set apart from others. A huge degree of motivation and commitment are required to find job opportunities and maximise their benefits if this way of life is to be to any degree sustainable in an unfavourable employment market. At the same time most performers need to prepare both psychologically and in practical terms for periods when professional work is not available, through developing an alternative source of income. We have seen how the supplementary income may be casual and non-performance related, allowing for withdrawal as and when required to take up a professional opportunity. Alternatively, such work can represent a parallel or ultimate career choice, as in the example of teaching.

While some new performers emphasized a very focused commitment to performance as a way of life, several others commented that for them a balance must be established to allow space for other things in life: from this viewpoint working as an entertainer, though demanding complete commitment at audition and on stage, is simply a job, after all.

Looking the part

One respondent had left college feeling that she should '*try and make an impact*', and gain a first job quickly. However, a period of self-appraisal, taking account of a huge market demand for younger actresses '*almost like models*', left her with a conviction that as a character actress her time for prosperity lay some time in the future. Another actor commented that so much in a successful audition is to do with '*looking right – having the right look for the part..... A lot of it is luck*'. We recorded earlier the optimism of a Black actor who felt that his appearance is now in his favour because of current opportunities for Black actors on television.

Luck

'Luck' was frequently mentioned by students as a factor in their success with obtaining work, and several were aware of the plight of friends in a jobless situation whose talent they rated alongside, or even above their own.

It is difficult to discount the part played by 'being in the right place at the right time' in some of the success stories related, as for example a ballet graduate aiming ultimately to teach: a new dance studio had opened in her town, employing a ballet teacher who taught her as a child. This fortuitous combination of circumstances had given her the opportunity to start up her own programme of 7 weekly jazz classes at the school. It is equally undeniable that many new performers, by tenacity, motivation and all the positive qualities discussed above appear to have made their own luck.

Section F Concluding comments: issues emerging from the qualitative research with new performers.

The interviews with performers give a picture of the successes and concerns they experience in the months after graduation. They enabled us to capture the views of former students for the Phase 2 evaluation as they start to make their way as novice professionals. Alongside this, the postal survey has provided a quantitative assessment of their employment experience. This paper has drawn on the qualitative research with recent graduates, relating this to the survey data, and to earlier papers which summarised the views of providers and employers on particular issues relating to employment.

We highlight below issues which merit further consideration in future policy development.

1. Performers mostly felt that they would do the same course again at the same school or college and that their training had provided them well with the skills needed for the working lives they were trying to establish. Some specific criticisms were noted in Galloway and Band (2004) and in this paper.
2. Comments on auditions showed an increasingly professional approach as with time individuals learn to manage and use it positively as a stimulus for personal development, for making new contacts, or as a source of feedback on performance.
3. The ability to deal with auditions and to make one's way as a performer depends on not only talent and competence but also maturity and prior experience. Those beginning courses with D&DA awards include the 16 year old straight from GCSE, the 18 year old with A levels or equivalent qualification, and someone who already has a first degree (for instance in English and Drama). Alongside these are the occasional mature people who have given up previous careers to embark on training.
4. The transition to working life can also expose beginners to unfair or exploitative practice where a performance opportunity is offered without pay, or with pay at a level which will not cover living costs (especially in London, the major employment location). Issues of equity extend therefore from the pre-vocational stage through to this phase where recent graduates are trying to create a track record as a performer. The D&DA Scheme, neutral on social background in the award of grants, enables certain talented young people to train without building up impossible student debt. In the transition to the labour market it is clear that some have more family support than others. The practice of offering work without pay will therefore hit certain new graduates harder than others. Equity guidelines can readily be disregarded by those engaging performers and by newcomers keen to seize performance opportunities. These wider sectoral features lie outside the operation of the Dance and Drama Scheme as such but are important aspects of the working environment for many new graduates.

5. Very positive responses came from those who had secured work with a high profile show, or for a lengthy period, or with a renowned director or production. Professional identity and personal achievement is built on the chance to perform. The survey data too show that broadly speaking career satisfaction aligns with length of employment i.e. performance opportunities.
6. Many spoke of an exciting start straight from college. However the interviews showed that the second job can be as great a hurdle as the first. The need to develop strategies to sustain their professional identity and income through difficult times is recognised by providers as well as by new performers.
7. Recent graduates are still learning how to manage risk and vary in the degree to which they have developed their own patterns of earning income by alternative means. How broad-based their course was will be an issue for some, in enabling them to pursue opportunities in a range of media.
8. Accessing and paying for continuing professional development – simply in order to maintain a performance standard - is extremely difficult for those who are not working professionally, are employed full-time in 'alternative' jobs, or live at a distance from such facilities. Classes in commercial dance centres, for instance, were sometimes described as prohibitively costly.
9. Both the survey and the interview data offer mixed messages about the value of an agent to represent one's interests. In an area where so much depends on personal rapport, this is understandable: new performers' attitudes ranged from total trust and satisfaction to disappointment. However success in securing (suitable) work depends on individual qualities and attitude, as well as the actions of an agent. Our research suggests a need to identify formally examples of good practice in the ways in which agents represent beginners.
10. The attitudinal aspects of 'becoming a professional' were spelt out by interviewees. There is however no reliable way for the evaluation team to assess either qualitatively or quantitatively how far any individual respondent possesses these qualities. And while tutors can assess their promise as students, this can be affected by the realities of life after college: the potential of a student when starting a course may not always be an indicator of their likely success in employment.
11. Some recent graduates spoke of the 'lifestyle' choice they had made which is felt very acutely just after qualifying. Though the student environment has its own pressures, it also offers protection. As in many professional occupations, the transition to work phase can be stimulating and rewarding but is also very demanding. Coping with the uncertainties of the performing arts labour market gives new dance and drama graduates additional concerns.

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