Performing Arts

The performing arts industry is ideal for you if you enjoy expressing your creative personality, such as dancing, drama or singing, or playing a musical instrument. However, this sector is not only about performing in front of an audience; there are also great opportunities for those who have creative practical skills who are key to staging entertainment events, such as stagehands, lighting technicians, arts administrators or community artists.

What areas can I work in?

This career area includes working as a performer in dance, drama, music and other forms of entertainment, from stand-up comedy to circus acts. Jobs in arts administration, community arts, music technology and theatre technology are also included in this sector. You can also teach any of these subjects from secondary school through to university level.

To see the routes to getting into each of these sectors, take a look at our Career Pathway.

What kind of companies can I work for?

Working within the performing arts encompasses a wide range of organisations including:

- local government
- theatre, dance and opera companies
- galleries, theatres and art centres
- concert halls, arts festivals and community arts projects
- schools, colleges and universities
- orchestras and professional bands
- TV or radio broadcasting and film companies.

What's the job market like?

In the UK, as of December 2025, the number of people working in different areas of performing arts were: Arts officers, producers and directors - 112,700; Actors, entertainers and presenters - 62,900; Musicians - 50,100; and, Dancers and choreographers - 15,300. [1]

Despite the glamour of this career area, the reality for performers is usually years of hard work in an industry with tough competition. Many people working in performing arts spend time working in temporary unrelated jobs or may have periods of unemployment.

It is not always easy to get into the music industry. There are some full time classical music jobs, but most popular musicians do individual gigs for which they charge a fee.

Most performers, famous or not, are usually highly trained or qualified. The majority of actors have had formal training, almost all classical musicians have qualifications and a large proportion of popular musicians are trained

to a high level. Dancers usually start their training at a very young age.

Competition for non-performance jobs such as arts administration, stage management and theatre technology is also fierce.

Facts and figures

- In the academic year 2022/23, 42.1% of performing arts graduates were in full time employment 15 months after graduating, with 27.4% of those working as art, design and media professionals. 4% went on to further study. [2]
- 20.6% of those going onto further study did a postgraduate teaching qualification. [2]
- The UK music industry contributed £8 billion to the economy in 2024, an increase of 5% from 2023. Employment stood at 220,000, an increase of 2% from 2023. [3]
- The total export revenue generated by the UK music business in 2024 was £4.8 billion. [3]

Want to find out more?

The Discover Creative Careers website also has information on getting into the arts.

Sources

[1] Annual Population Survey - Occupation by sex, employment status and full/part-time UK, Nomis (December 2025)

[2] What do graduates do? Prospects (part of Jisc) and AGCAS (2025/26)

[3] This Is Music 2025 Report, UK Music