

# The Value of Music

As a specialist music and performing arts higher education provider, Leeds Conservatoire predominantly and successfully trains students for careers and vocations within the creative industries. However, as a responsible educator, the aim is to ensure that all students can thrive post study regardless of what sector they choose to explore. Regionally West Yorkshire is tackling skills gaps and attempting to retain talent with a number of initiatives. Using this as context we created knowledge exchange activity (via UKRI/Research England grant funding) to understand transferable skills through the lens of a music specialist education provider.

In February 2023 we invited a diverse set of stakeholders to attend an open and honest discussion around whether trained musicians and creatives could contribute to a modern and diverse workforce, and what misconceptions and challenges would need to be overcome in order to stimulate change and progression.



## ACTION & APPROACH

Devised and delivered by James Warrender and Professor Jez Willis research discussions took place over three days, advertised as a working lunch, and lasting just two hours.

Each day asked the same set of questions and provocations but to a different selection of stakeholders:

- non-creative-sector employers, including Nuffield Health & DWP;
- the conservatoire community, including students, graduates and staff (academic and support); and
- mixed partners (including Leeds BID, SAA UK, Leeds List etc).

Stakeholders were divided so that strong views or opinions from one group couldn't influence another, ensuring honest debate from the represented sectors and communities.

Each group of stakeholders were shown some musical performance footage. They were then asked to explore their understanding of the skills involved, initial thoughts and perceptions, and whether or not any identified skills could be utilised within their work, now or in the future. These responses were captured and shared with the wider group.

The intention was to analyse both differing and shared opinions/perceptions from across the three days, and use any reoccurring or prominent themes to inform further research in the form of a conference.

## CONCLUSIONS

The format of our event was well received, attracting a diverse range of people to engage in an unusual topic. While it was labour-intensive and repetitive to divide stakeholder groups across three days, it allowed us to make fairly easy comparisons and assessments post the event.

As a result of this initial phase of research, we have progressed to involving a larger number of higher profile stakeholders as part of a conference event called 'Creatives Across Sector' (27th June, Leeds City Museum). We will share and respond to some of our initial findings, and continue debate with change makers, advocates and employers from across West Yorkshire. The aim is to build our network of employer contacts to create opportunities and fulfil skills gaps, improve recruitment practices and build a greater understanding of the training provided at Leeds Conservatoire. As a result we hope the research will inform our own teaching, informing and preparing students for work across sector.

## IMPACT

We received some incredibly insightful responses from this research, which both confirmed our own preconceptions and challenged them simultaneously. Some of the skills that non creative stakeholders valued in trained creatives weren't recognised by the creatives themselves (and vice versa), which helped to demonstrate areas for us to intervene as an educator.

There were recurring themes throughout, including disparaging narratives around performance graduates, showcasing negative preconceptions that begin early in the education system and permeate society itself e.g. the idea that you can have 'a failed musician' despite this sentiment rarely being applied to any other study or vocation. Although tackling this misconception is a huge undertaking alone, it does inform further research within this field.

We learnt that conservatoire training actively taught tacit skills, culture and history, unlike many other HE courses. This in turn creates well rounded humans, who are understanding and accepting of differences, capable of heightened communication, and help to remove barriers to collaborative success.

Many of the stakeholders felt that they had improved their understanding of the tacit skills inherent in trained musicians, and this was across the different groupings (including creatives). As a result many of the employers agreed that there would be benefit to employing someone with these skill sets within their company/organisation.