This project was kindly funded by An Enterprise Educators UK (EEUK) Impact Award

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Uncovering best practice in developing entrepreneurial mindsets in performing arts education in UK secondary school education

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Contents

Executive summary **03**

Overview of project 05

Resources relating to current literature and practice in entrepreneurship education 08

Findings from data collection phases **10**

Study 1 – Interviews with secondary school performing arts teachers 11

Study 2 – A survey of secondary school performing arts teachers 14

ETC toolkit **18**

Illustrations **21**

Overall summary of findings **23**

Executive summary

This study sought to explore enterprise and entrepreneurship education in performing arts education in UK secondary schools. The study was kindly supported by an Enterprise Educators UK (EEUK) Impact Award, and ran from January 2025 to January 2026, led by the Royal Northern College of Music and the University of Leeds.

Existing research regarding entrepreneurship training in secondary school performing arts contexts suggests that entrepreneurship skills are taught, but it is unclear how extensively they are embedded in education, and research which captures and evaluates where and how this is happening, and skills taught, is not extensive.

This project involved a literature review, two data collection phases with performing arts secondary school teachers (an interview phase and a survey phase), and a workshop and networking event to share project findings with those in the performing arts secondary school sector (which also involved a professional illustrator capturing the main themes of the project findings).

The interview study (Study 1) suggested that not all teachers had an immediate idea of what was meant by entrepreneurship or enterprise education, but that entrepreneurship often ‘just happened’ in the arts (i.e., this was built into the essence of arts education, for example, students organizing concerts).

When surveyed, teachers associated entrepreneurship education with terms and concepts including creativity, skills, leadership, future, and careers. Survey results suggested that some entrepreneurial skills are taught frequently and in various parts of the curriculum (in-and extra-), for example 'working collaboratively', but that some other skills are not widely taught, and where they are, they are not necessarily directly in relation to performing arts (e.g., learning about budgeting or money). The entrepreneurship skills that teachers surveyed were asked about were reported to mostly be part of teaching in these 16 schools, with equal categorization of these skills between in-curriculum and extra-curricular activity. Questionnaire responses highlight that performing arts contexts, within curriculum and outside the curriculum, are perceived to provide opportunities for students to develop a full range of entrepreneurship skills.

Overall, data collected as part of this project suggest that there is clear recognition that such education fosters creativity and leadership, and equips students with skills for their future. There are many action words in the participants' descriptions, emphasising the value of enterprise education as an experiential learning pedagogy, giving students practical, multi-sensory opportunities to develop and learn about themselves.

These insights suggest that enterprise education within a performing arts context offers a powerful complement to studies within the general curriculum. The nature of the creative and performance context provides opportunities for students to learn in different ways which prioritise working with others, trying new ideas (even if they don't work out), and managing their time effectively. There is scope for much further work in this area, including working with a larger participant pool, and working with secondary arts educators to explore how decisions are made about which enterprise and entrepreneurship skill are included in and outside of the curriculum, and how best practice may be shared across the sector regarding where these sit in the school system, and how they are embedded.

Overview of project

This project focusses on what higher education institutions can learn from training in entrepreneurship and enterprise (defined by QAA 2018, hereafter 'enterprise') in pre-Higher Education (HE) performing arts education. Our institutions are representative of performing arts training in HE and our collaboration used a review of literature, and relevant policy and guidance alongside empirical data collection to explore the following: existing activities in schools that could be classified as enterprise education; teacher perceptions of, and motivations for, such teaching approaches (in school and HE); the impact of enterprise education (EE) on pupils; and the relevance for current HE agendas (e.g. educational gain).

The project collected qualitative and quantitative data, alongside case study exemplars of best practice from schools in North England which deliver performing arts courses. These methods were used with the aim of providing rich insights and of offering the wider HE sector in demonstration of leading enterprise education. It was hoped that uncovering applied examples from diverse educational settings would provide much-needed insight into how performing arts education pre-HE can incorporate skills important to entrepreneurial mindsets and highlight the potential impact of EE on young people.

By exploring enterprise education in pre-HE performing arts education, we can gain insights into important agendas in HE, such as educational gain, contextual admissions, graduate

outcomes, employability, and accessibility. Developing entrepreneurial mindsets at a young age has the potential to build young people's confidence and self-efficacy in relation to their skills and preferred/desired forms of working in ways that will enhance their career readiness and employability while meeting the needs of employers and the economy (see e.g., Rodriguez & Lieber, 2020). It is hoped that the project would also provide valuable insights for teacher support and associated pedagogies (Hardie et al, 2020).

Specific knowledge about enterprise education in the performing arts is not prevalent. Explorations of enterprise education in secondary school contexts exist in parts of the UK (e.g. work in Wales, Penaluna et al., 2020) and internationally (e.g. Blimpo & Pugatch, 2021; Kim et al, 2020), but little has focused on the performing arts, or looked at secondary education contexts holistically. Insights into this will provide exemplars of how this work can be developed in schools and help creative arts HEIs to enhance their approaches to enterprise education by aligning their in-, co- and extra-curricular content.

It is intended that the results of this project will shape enterprise education in university and conservatoire degrees, to best and better meet the needs and prior experiences of students as they enter HE. The findings of this research will also help educators in creative disciplines to develop their skills and knowledge around EE; plan their admissions processes (including contextual admissions, e.g., a musician applicant may not be from a background which has enabled them to pay for private instrumental lessons, but may have a very developed entrepreneurial mindset, and exciting ideas for the future of the music industry); and inform future research activities.

The rich findings gathered from this project provide insights into effective strategies for EE. We have gathered perspectives on best practice within schools, and tested and discussed this with teachers at a workshop and networking event. Creativity and innovation are central to entrepreneurial mindsets and are at the core of creative arts education. The more the HE enterprise education sector can learn about how these skills are effectively taught in schools, the better we can embed this in HE, and use this knowledge to promote access and inclusion, and design meaningful pathways throughout degree study.

The creative and performing arts sector has much to offer HE regarding how enterprise skills such as creativity and innovation may be taught as part of degree programmes (e.g., the development of design thinking). This study aimed to contribute knowledge to the HE sector regarding how secondary schools support enterprise education, in order to inform how we can more effectively design in-, extra- and co-curricular activities which link to students' previous education. The project is also useful to the enterprise education sector in providing fresh ideas and perspectives regarding how to develop entrepreneurial mindsets in young people.

This report includes the following:

01 A hyperlinked list of the collated resources relating to current literature and practice in EE, uncovered during the project.

02 Findings from the two data collection phases of the project.

03 An ETC toolkit with an example of a technique learned from pre-HE which we feel can be successfully adapted to HE.

04 An illustration which captures the themes from a workshop and networking event for secondary and HE performing arts educators to refine the best practice guide and to allow HE to learn from the richness of knowledge in the secondary education system.

05 An illustration capturing the overall findings of the project as captured during discussion between the three academics running this project.

06 An overall summary of findings, which highlights best practice uncovered as part of the project, and notes on findings relevant to those working in schools, FE and HE.

Resources relating to current literature and practice in entrepreneurship education

01 Bartleet, B.-L., Ballico, C., Bennett, D., Bridgstock, R., Draper, P., Tomlinson, V., & Harrison, S. (2019). Building sustainable portfolio careers in music: Insights and implications for higher education. *Music Education Research*, **21**(3), 282–294. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2019.1598348

02 Foley Smith, C., & Brodie, R. (2024). Modernizing music programmes in higher education with popular music: Students' preparation for music employment. *Journal of Popular Music Education*. https://doi.org/10.1386/jpme_00131_1

03 Highfield, C., Lee, K., & Hardie, B. (2020). Entrepreneurship education today for students unknown futures. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, **4**(3), 401–417. https://doi.org/10.33902/JPR.2020063022

04 Hussain, S., Vershinina, N., & Carey, C. (2024). Defying the odds? Multiple disadvantage as a source of entrepreneurial action. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEBR-12-2022-1118

05 OECD. Entrepreneurial education in practice. Part 2 Building motivations and competencies. https://repository.uwtsd.ac.uk

06 Ofsted report which investigates the availability and effectiveness of enterprise education and work-related learning for pupils in secondary schools (ages 11-16). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/577236/Getting_ready_for_work.pdf

07 Penaluna, A., & Penaluna, K. (2021). In search of entrepreneurial competencies: Peripheral vision and multidisciplinary inspiration. *Industry and Higher Education*, **35**(4), 471–484. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950422220963796

08 Penaluna, A., Penaluna, K., & Polenakovikj, R. (2020). Developing entrepreneurial education in national school curricula: Lessons from North Macedonia and Wales. *Entrepreneurship Education*, **3**(3), 245–263. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41959-020-00038-0

09 Rodriguez, S., & Lieber, H. (2020). Relationship Between Entrepreneurship Education, Entrepreneurial Mindset, and Career Readiness in Secondary Students. *Journal of Experiential Education*, **43**(3), 277–298. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825920919462

10 Schulte-Holthaus, S. (2018). Entrepreneurship in the Creative Industries: A Literature Review and Research Agenda. In E. Innerhofer, H. Pechlaner, & E. Borin (Eds.), Entrepreneurship in Culture and Creative Industries (pp. 99–154). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65506-2_7

Findings from data collection phases

This section presents the aims, method and findings from the **two data collection phases** of the project:

01 A series of interviews with teachers involved in performing arts education. These findings were presented at the International Enterprise Educators Conference (IEEC, run by EEUK) in September 2025 (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK).

02 A survey for teachers involved in performing arts education.

Both studies received ethical approval from the RNCM Research Ethics Committee.

Study 1 – Interviews with secondary school performing arts teachers

Aim: To capture rich individual perspectives from those who teach performing arts in secondary schools in the North of England, regarding the types of entrepreneurship activities that they organise, the impact, value and relevance of the activities on students, staff and the wider community, and the challenges associated with such activities.

Method:

- Semi-structured interviews with 5 members of staff from 4 schools:
  - 1 from a non-selective state school in Sefton (11-16)
  - 1 from a selective state school in Trafford (11-18)
  - 2 from a selective independent school in West Yorkshire (2-18)
  - 1 from a selective day and boarding school in Lancashire
- Analysis: Thematic analysis of interview transcripts

Semi-structured interview questions:

- Tell me about the entrepreneurship activity that currently takes place at your school
  - How long has this activity been delivered in school?
  - How has it changed over the years?
  - Why?

- How much of this entrepreneurial activity takes place in performing arts subjects?

- What has been the impact of these activities? (think shorter and longer term)
  - On students?
  - Staff?
  - Wider school community?
  - Local businesses?

- What are the main challenges in delivering this type of activity?
  - Do you foresee these challenges changing? How?

- How do you emphasise the value and relevance of these activities to stakeholders, for example other teachers, senior leadership, students' supporters and the students themselves?

Findings:

- Not all teachers had an immediate idea of what was meant by entrepreneurship or enterprise education.
- Entrepreneurship education in the arts was not integrated into the schools' main offers. Rather, this consisted of activities such as the following:
  - Young Enterprise
  - Dragon's Den
  - Gatsby Benchmarks
  - Business Studies GCSE/ A level
- Feeling that enterprise "just happened" in the arts
- Enterprise (within and outside of the performing arts) was seen as fostering a range of skills and outcomes for students, particularly in relation to independence, adaptability and determination, working with others, organisation, and creativity. See **Figure 1** below for a word cloud of terms which teachers interviewed associated with enterprise.



Figure 1. A word cloud of terms which teachers interviewed associated with enterprise.

- Our insights highlight that the primary routes for student-led enterprise activities are:
  - Competition (selective schools 2 and 3 only)
  - Fundraising (non-selective School 1 only)
  - Performance “support” (all schools, different ways, e.g., lighting tech, music arranger)
- These insights are interesting within the specific performing arts context as these are all key challenges associated with creating work in music, as a future career. Competition for work is fierce, budgets are often tight, and ‘support roles’ are often underestimated or ignored. This emphasises the value of these kinds of enterprise activities for those wishing for music to feature in their working lives.

Study 2 – A survey of secondary school performing arts teachers

Aim: to obtain broader, sector-wide perspectives on which enterprise and entrepreneurship skills are taught in secondary school education, and where this is taught (whether in the performing arts or wider school, and whether within or outside of the curriculum).

Method:

- Online questionnaire distributed via networks and social media.
  - 16 responses, mostly from non-selective state schools
  - Most responses were Heads, Directors or Teachers of performing arts.
  - Questions gathered information about their particular educational contexts, whether enterprise education took place within performing arts or general curriculum/ co-curriculum contexts, the types of activities typically involved, and their three-word descriptions of what enterprise education means for them.

Findings:

As shown in **Table 1**, the entrepreneurship skills that teachers surveyed reported as taking place in their schools can be ranked in the following order (from occurring most frequently in survey responses, i.e., most commonly taking place in these 16 schools, to least):

- Working collaboratively
- Take risks and / or to fail
- Making decisions
- Working independently
- Navigating differences of opinion
- Sharing and promoting ideas
- Creating, testing and revising ideas
- Leading other people / ideas / projects
- Identifying new opportunities
- Meeting a diverse range of people
- Managing a lot of different tasks
- Creating new value with work or ideas
- Learning about budgeting or money

Activity:	Yes, in performing arts curriculum classes	Yes, in extra-curricular performing arts activities	Yes, in curriculum lessons elsewhere in school	Yes, in extra-curricular activities elsewhere in school	No, none of these	Not sure	Total
Working collaboratively	11	12	8	11	0	0	42
Take risks and / or to fail	11	11	9	8	0	1	40
Making decisions	11	10	10	8	0	0	39
Working independently	11	9	11	8	0	0	39
Navigating differences of opinion	10	9	10	7	0	1	37
Sharing and promoting ideas	9	10	8	9	0	1	37
Creating, testing and revising ideas	9	9	9	8	0	0	35
Leading other people / ideas / projects	8	9	7	10	0	1	35
Identifying new opportunities	8	10	7	8	0	2	35
Meeting a diverse range of people	6	11	6	9	0	0	32
Managing a lot of different tasks	7	6	7	4	1	2	27
Creating new value with work or ideas	5	4	6	3	0	5	23
Learning about budgeting or money	1	1	6	3	1	1	13
Total	107	111	104	96	2	14	

Table 1. This table shows the survey results obtained by asking performing arts teachers in secondary schools which of the entrepreneurship skills in the first column are taught in their school, in one of the following areas: in performing arts curriculum classes, in extra-curricular performing arts activities, in curriculum classes elsewhere in school, in extra-curricular activities elsewhere in school, in none of these, or teachers could state that they were 'not sure'. The shading shows which activities occurred more frequently that others (dark shading = high frequency of occurrence).

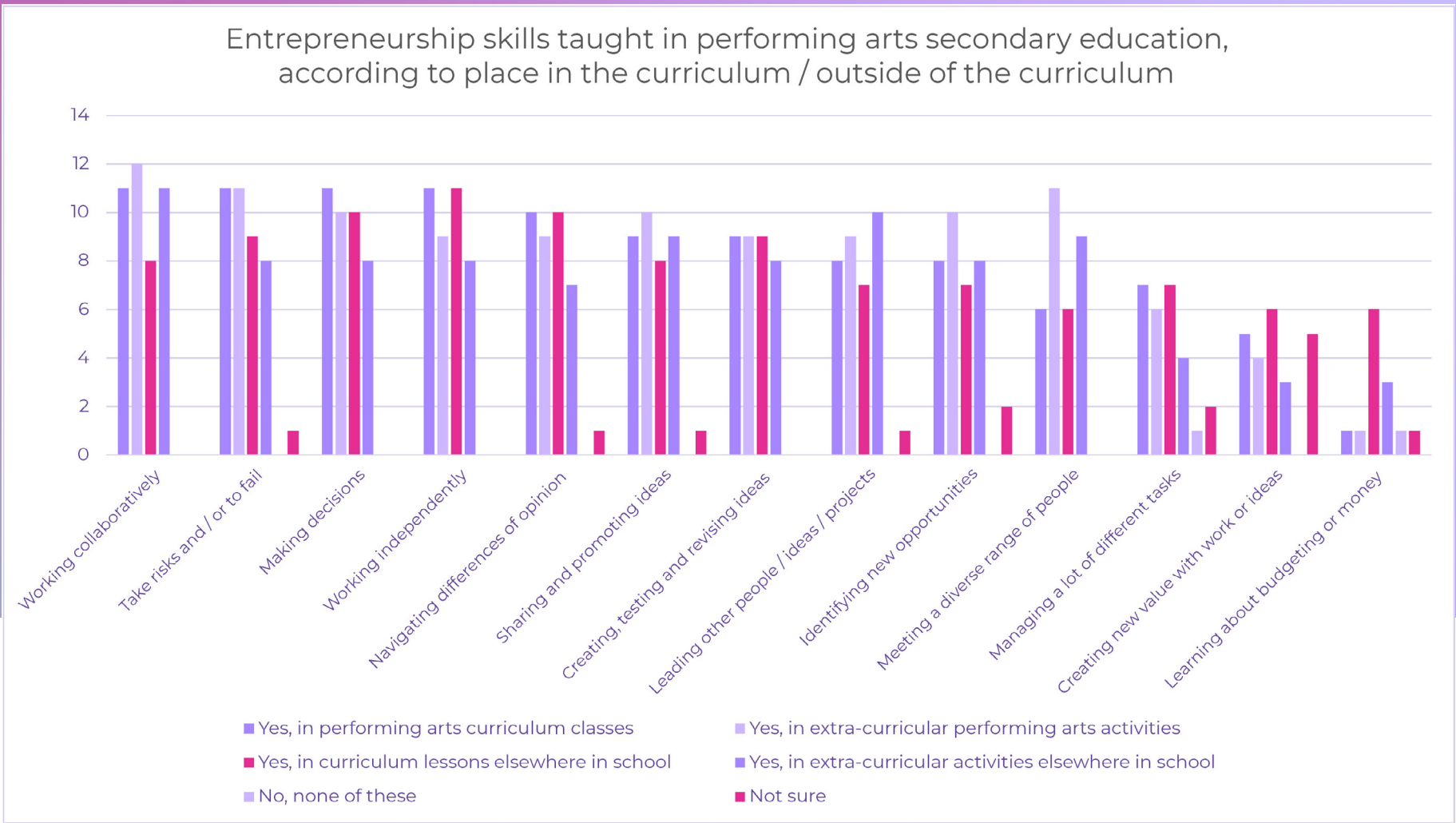


Figure 2. Graph depicting the data in Table 1.



Findings (continued):

As shown in **Figure 3**, when asked the question 'In three words, what does enterprise education mean to you?', teachers most commonly mentioned the words 'skills', 'creativity', 'future', 'leadership' and 'career'.

Figure 3. Word cloud of responses to the question 'In three words, what does enterprise education mean to you?'

ETC toolkit

Table 2. ETC Toolkit, published as part of the EEUK ETC Toolkit resources: www.etctoolkit.org.uk

‘How to Guide’		
Author: Dr Michelle Phillips (RNCM), Professor Karen Burland (University of Leeds) and Dr Kate Blackstone (RNCM)		
QAA Enterprise Themes: (please highlight relevant themes)	**Group:**	**Learning Environment:**
❋ Creativity and Innovation ❋ Opportunity recognition, creation and evaluation ❋ Decision making supported by critical analysis and judgement ❋ Implementation of ideas through leadership and management ❋ Reflection and Action ❋ Interpersonal Skills ❋ Communication and Strategy Skill ❋ Digital and Data Skills	**Indicate stakeholders or if:** ❋ Small group working (4-6 in a team) ❋ Individual task ❋ Large Group ❋ Any	**State context or indicate if:** ❋ Lecture theatre ❋ Presentation Space ❋ Carousel tables (small group working) ❋ Any ❋ Outside ❋ Special
Title:		
Objective: Help learners to develop skills in creativity, innovation, project management, finance, fundraising and event planning		
Overview: This activity involves engaging learners in planning an artistic event, for example a music concert.		

Activity: The activity involves the following steps which can be adapted to suit different timescales of delivery and learner groups:

- Working in small groups, learners should decide which sort of event they wish to plan (e.g., an evening music concert, or, more ambitiously, a local arts festival over a weekend in a local space)
- Groups should be encouraged to be as creative and innovative as possible in their planning, with a focus on:
  - What people may want to attend that may not currently be on offer
  - What fundraisers may like to support
- Learners might be encouraged to discuss each person's role within the team (e.g., marketing, finance)
- Learners should map out what the event will look like, and what resources will be needed
- A budget should then be produced to show how these resources will be acquired or funded (e.g., through ticket sales, fundraising)
- The group should then develop a full fundraising plan, including people who will be contacted, proposal different streams of fundraising (e.g., personal donors vs crowd funding), and any marketing materials (e.g., a flyer giving an overview of the event)
- The group might then present this fully developed plan to the other groups/rest of the class for feedback and discussion

Skill Development: The following skills are developed through this activity:

- Finance
- Teamwork
- Creativity
- Innovation
- Project management
- Communication and networking
- Planning and prioritisation

Resources:

- Performing Rights Society tips on music resources: www.prsformusic.com/m-magazine/features/top-10-free-online-music-resources
- UK government resources on the power of music in everyday life: www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-power-of-music-to-change-lives-a-national-plan-for-music-education/the-power-of-music-to-change-lives-resources
- British Council advice on arts careers arts.britishcouncil.org/resources?conditions
- Susan Eldridge of the company 'Notable Values' and her podcast on music careers: www.notablevalues.com/podcast
- Young Classical Artists Trust 21st Century Musician Toolkit: www.ycat.co.uk/Pages/Category/help-with

ETC toolkit (continued):

References:

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Illustrations

Illustration captured live during a workshop and networking event for secondary and higher education performing arts educators:

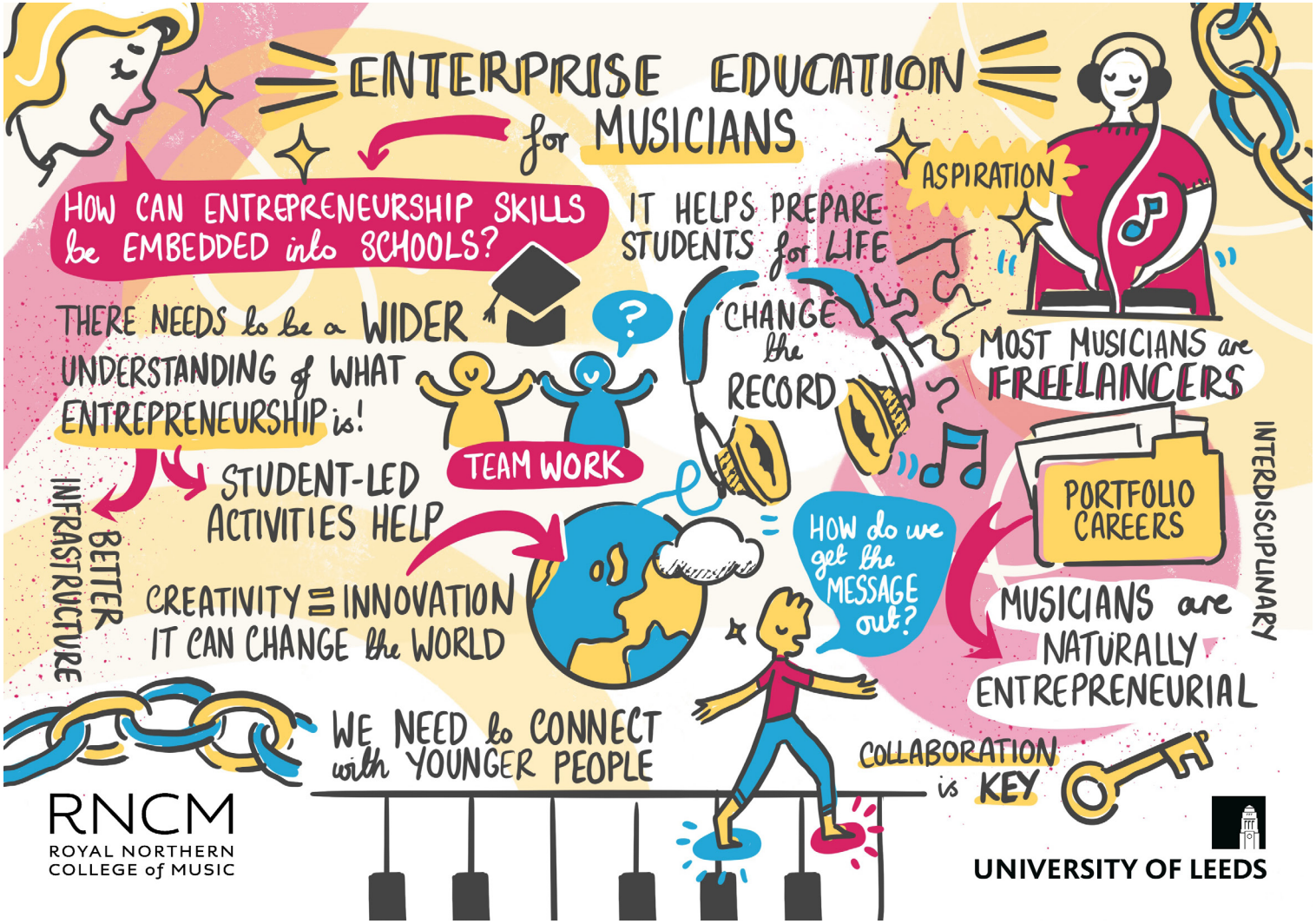


Figure 4. An illustration which captures the themes from a workshop and networking event for secondary and HE performing arts educators.

An illustration capturing the overall findings of the project:

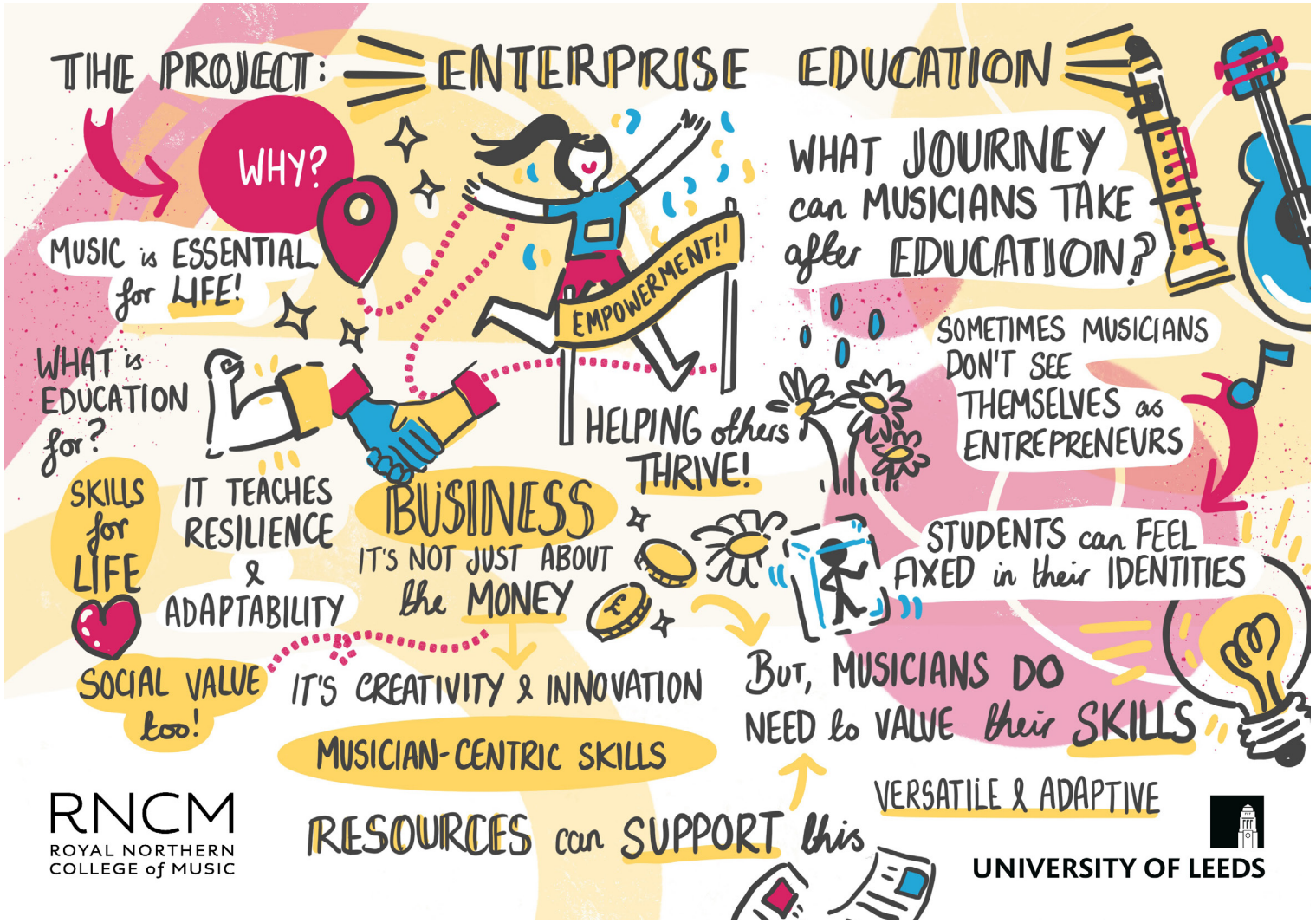


Figure 5. An illustration of the overall findings of the project, captured during discussion between the three academics running this project.

Overall summary of findings

The below summarises the overall findings of the project, and highlights best practice and notes on findings relevant to those working in schools, FE and HE:

- Existing research in this field suggests that entrepreneurship skills are taught in performing arts secondary education, but it is unclear how extensively this is embedded in education (for example, Wales seem to be doing more than England), and research which captures and evaluates where and how this is happening, and skills taught, is not extensive.
- The interview study (Study 1) suggested that not all teachers had an immediate idea of what was meant by entrepreneurship or enterprise education.
- The way in which entrepreneurship education was integrated into the schools included using some of the following models / activities / accredited activities: Young Enterprise, Dragon's Den, Gatsby Benchmarks, Business Studies GCSE / A level.
- Teachers interviewed reported that entrepreneurship 'just happened' in the arts (i.e., this was built into the essence of arts education)
- Words that teachers surveyed associated with entrepreneurship education included: the following (in order of number of mentions, highest first): creativity, skills, leadership, future, career.
- The entrepreneurship skills that teachers surveyed were asked about were reported to mostly be part of teaching in these 16 schools, with equal categorization of these skills between in-curriculum and extra-curricular activity.

- The entrepreneurship skills that teachers surveyed (Study 2) reported as taking place in their schools can be ranked in the following order (from occurring most frequently in survey responses, i.e., most commonly taking place in these 16 schools, to least):
  - Working collaboratively
  - Take risks and / or to fail
  - Making decisions
  - Working independently
  - Navigating differences of opinion
  - Sharing and promoting ideas
  - Creating, testing and revising ideas
  - Leading other people / ideas / projects
  - Identifying new opportunities
  - Meeting a diverse range of people
  - Managing a lot of different tasks
  - Creating new value with work or ideas
  - Learning about budgeting or money
- The previous list and the detailed data in table 1 suggest that some entrepreneurial skills are taught frequently and in various parts of the curriculum (in- and extra-), for example 'working collaboratively', but that some other skills are not widely taught, and where they are, they are not necessarily directly in relation to performing arts (e.g., learning about budgeting or money).
- Questionnaire responses highlight that performing arts contexts, within curriculum and outside the curriculum, are perceived to provide opportunities for students to develop a full range of entrepreneurship skills.
- Questionnaire responses in relation to perceptions of enterprise education aligned well with those provided in the interview study. There is clear recognition that such education fosters creativity and leadership, and equips students with skills for their future. There are many action words in the participants' descriptions, emphasising the value of enterprise education as an experiential learning pedagogy, giving students practical, multi-sensory opportunities to develop and learn about themselves.

- These insights suggest that enterprise education within a performing arts context offers a powerful complement to studies within the general curriculum. The nature of the creative and performance context provides opportunities for students to learn in different ways which prioritise working with others, trying new ideas (even if they don't work out), and managing their time effectively.
- As young people today are more likely than ever to face uncertain working lives, where the future workplace is not really yet in sight, these skills that are provided so effectively by enterprise education, will undoubtedly equip them with abilities to be flexible, adaptable, creative and able to work well with others. Many of these skills have been identified by the recent report from the World Economic Forum Future of Jobs Report (2025) – including creative thinking; resilience, flexibility and agility; and leadership and social influence.
- Logistics of data collection: Obtaining a large number of responses to the survey part of this project (Study 2) proved more challenging than anticipated. This may be due to time and resource constraints in schools, or due to the methods that were used to invite school teachers to complete this survey. Due to the lower than anticipated number of responses, it was not possible to undertake any meaningful statistical analysis of these data.
- Secondary school performing arts teachers showed interest in the project and our findings, as they came along to our session where we shared findings.
- The nature of performing arts education may differ to training in other subjects, as careers in this field often involve freelancing, and skills which are especially important include resilience and adaptability, business skills, versatility.
- By nature, training in performing arts involves training to be entrepreneurial, and core skills such as creativity and innovation are an inherent part of how such students are trained.

Overall summary of findings (continued):

- There is scope for much further work in this area, including expanding the survey to a wider population of teachers, and exploring the reasons for some enterprise and entrepreneurship skills being more present in secondary school teaching and activities than others, and how this may be improved.

Many thanks to Enterprise Educators UK (EEUK) for funding this project with an EEUK Impact Award, and to Buttercrumble for the beautiful professional illustrations commissioned as part of this project. Thanks also to all participants in the two studies involving interviews and a survey, and to everyone who joined us for the IEEC 2025 conference presentation, and our online workshop event at the end of the project.

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